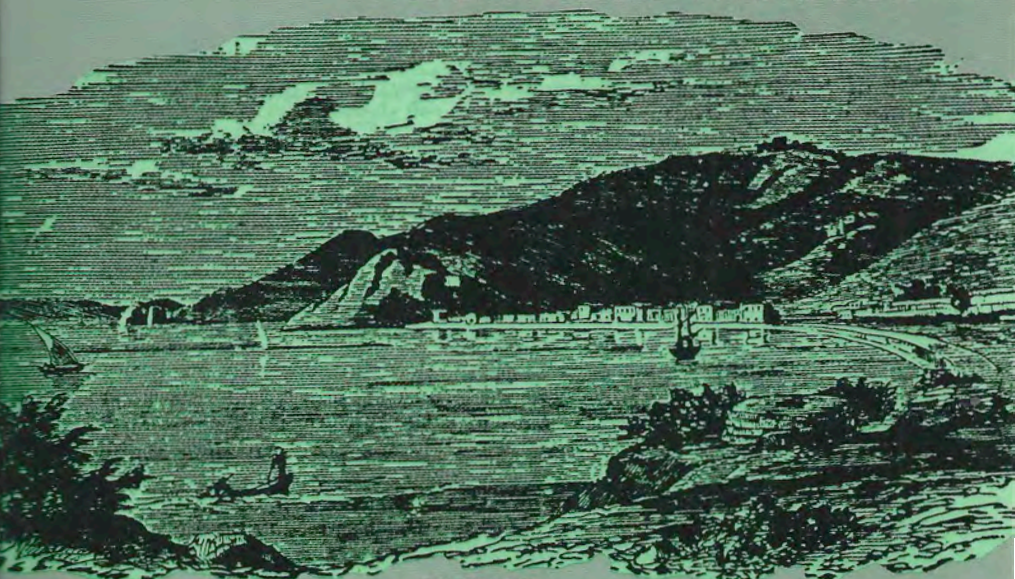


COMMENTARY ON
Revelation

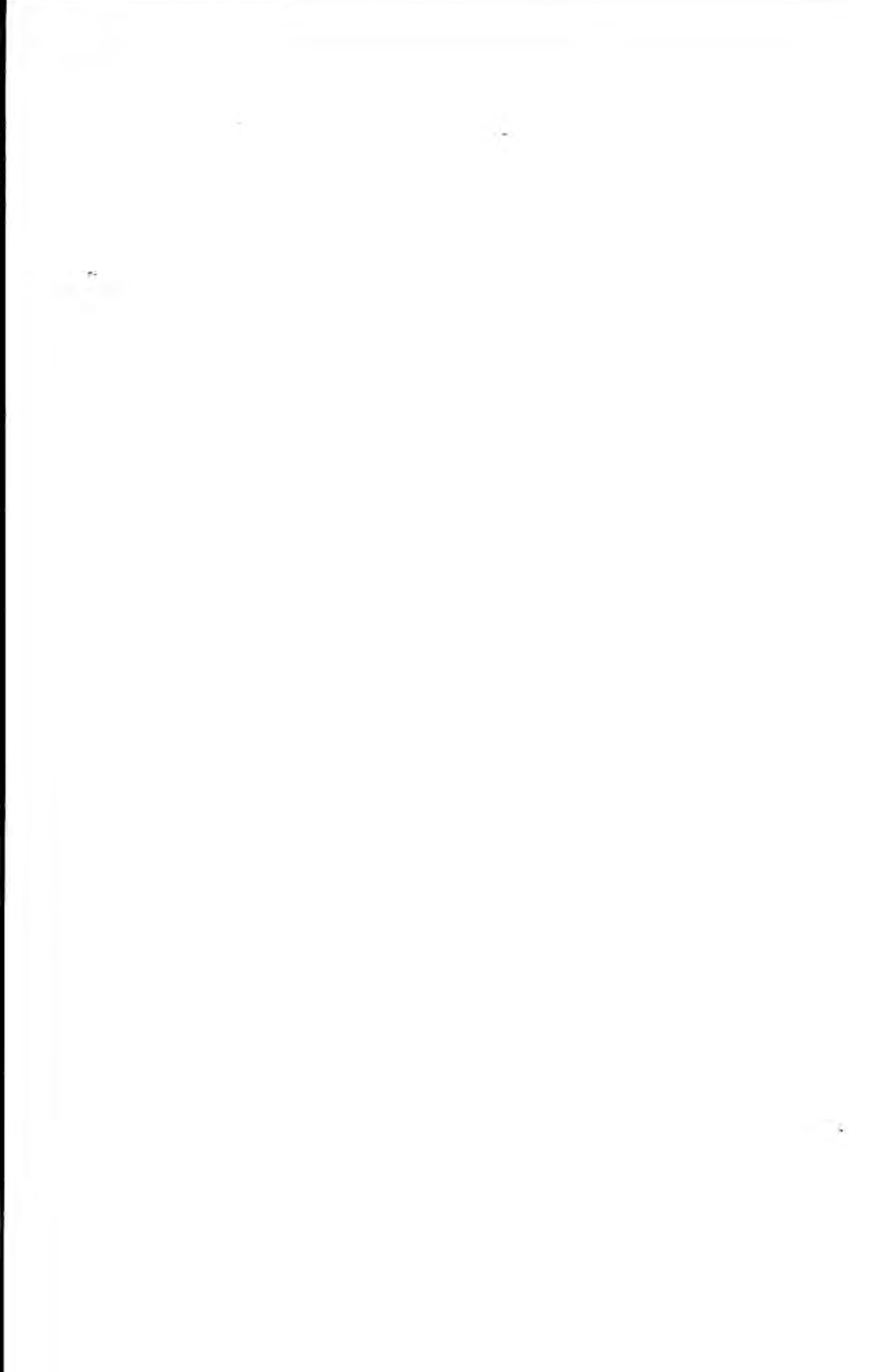
Practical and Explanatory

Howard Winters



PATMOS







COMMENTARY ON **Revelation**

Practical and Explanatory

Howard Winters

“I will follow the Scripture wherever it may lead, and I will renounce the most cherished opinion, rather than shape or alter a single syllable of God’s Book. It is not mine to make God’s Word consistent, but to believe that it is so. When a text stands in the road I drive no further. The Romans had a god they called Terminus, the god of landmarks. Holy Scripture is my sacred landmark: woe is me if I remove it.”

— Charles H. Spurgeon

**CAROLINA CHRISTIAN
P.O. Box 5423, Sta. B
Greenville, S.C. 29606**

**Dedicated
to
DAVID PHARR**

A terrific personality, a powerful preacher, a tireless worker, and to me a true friend who has stuck closer than a brother, especially in times when I most needed a friend.

Copyright © 1989 by Carolina Christian

Printed in the United States of America

MEMORIALS

The following individuals and organizations contributed fifty dollars or more to the publication of **Commentary on Revelation** in memory of Howard Winters.

- Church of Christ, Wilkesboro, NC
- Ashelawn Memorial Chapel and Gardens, Jefferson, NC
- Eugene and Lucille Kidder, Davisville, WV
- Bill and Kay Smith, Greenville, SC
- Mebane Street Church of Christ, Burlington, NC
- Joshua, Timothy, Cynthia and Paige Thompson, Rock Hill, SC
- Mr. and Mrs. Albert Bergeron, Raleigh, NC
- Clyde and Dora Conner, Clemmons, NC
- Agnes Kellam, Burlington, NC
- Charlotte Avenue Church of Christ, Rock Hill, SC
- Calvin, Bessie, Elbert and Walbert Jones, Warrenton, NC
- Church of Christ, West Jefferson, NC
- Fairgrove Church of Christ, Hickory, NC
- Church of Christ, Mooresville, NC
- West Court Street Church of Christ, Hinesville, GA
- Church of Christ, Yadkinville, NC
- Geoffrey and Joanna Sikes, Clarksville, TN
- Everette and Louise Morefield, Lebanon, VA



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abbreviations and Explanations	vi
Introduction	8
Revelation 1	22
Revelation 2	41
Revelation 3	57
Revelation 4	71
Revelation 5	78
Revelation 6	86
Revelation 7	95
Revelation 8	103
Revelation 9	110
Revelation 10	121
Revelation 11	128
Revelation 12	141
Revelation 13	153
Revelation 14	168
Revelation 15	180
Revelation 16	186
Revelation 17	197
Revelation 18	207
Revelation 19	215
Revelation 20	225
Revelation 21	237
Revelation 22	249

ABBREVIATIONS AND EXPLANATIONS

Alford, Henry — **An Exegetical and Critical Commentary**, Vol. IV, Part II
ASV — **American Standard Version**

Barclay, William — **The Revelation of John**, 2 volumes

Beck, William F. — **The New Testament in the Language of Today**

Beckwith, Isbon T. — **The Apocalypse of John**

BV — **The Berkeley Version**

Cox, Frank L. — **Revelation in 26 Lessons**

Goodspeed, Edgar J. — **The Complete Bible, An American Translation**

Hailey, Homer — **Revelation, An Introduction and Commentary**

Hendrikson, William — **More Than Conquerors**

Hinds, John T. — **A Commentary on the Book of Revelation**

HS — **Holy Spirit**

Ladd, George Elden — **A Commentary on the Revelation of John**

Mauro, Philip — **Things Which Must Shortly Come to Pass**

Morgan, G. Campbell — **A First Century Message to the Twentieth Century**

Mounce, Robert H. — **The Book of Revelation**

NASV — **New American Standard Version**

NIV — **New International Version**

Plummer, A. — **The Pulpit Commentary**, Vol. 51, Revelation

Ramsay, William M. — **The Letters to the Seven Churches**

Robersen, C.H. — **Studies in the Revelation**

Robertson (WP), A.T. — **Word Pictures in the New Testament**, Vol. VI

RSV — **Revised Standard Version**

Swete, Henry Barclay — **The Apocalypse of St. John**

Thayer, Joseph Henry — **Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament**

Vine, W.E. — **An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words**

v. — verse; vv. — verses; v. 16 or vv. 16-18 means this chapter. 2:16 means

Rev. 2:16

Wallace, Foy E., Jr. – **The Book of Revelation**

Warfield, Benjamin B. – **Biblical Doctrines**

Weeber, George G. – **The Consummation of History – A Study of the
Book of Revelation**

Williams, Charles B. – **The New Testament, A Translation in the Language
of the People**

INTRODUCTION

When I started writing my notes on Revelation, I did not know precisely where I was going; now that I have completed them, I am far from certain that I know where I have been. But one thing I do know and that is that my concept of its message (stated as clearly as I can state it in this introduction) has been deepened and strengthened in every section, in every chapter, and in every verse. I am now more convinced than ever that its basic message, that which we should learn from the book, is designed to encourage saints and warn sinners — encourage saints to be faithful unto death so as to be crowned with the gold crown of eternal victory, and to warn sinners to prepare to meet God or else suffer the eternal consequences of insulted grace and mercy. I read somewhere of an American soldier, after he had returned home from World War II, who said, "I do not believe I could have gone on but for my convictions that honor and decency belong on top in life." He thus believed that honor and decency would eventually be victorious. This is vitally important for a soldier to believe. But how much more important is it for a Christian, who is in a battle of such magnitude as to make World War II (and all other wars) fade into utter significance, to believe his ultimate salvation is as certain as the word of God and His rule on the throne of the universe; or as the poet put it:

"Truth crushed to earth shall rise again,
The eternal years of God are hers
But Error, wounded, writhes in pain,
And dies among her worshipers."

Regardless of how dark and dreary the present may seem, or how much the forces of evil may appear to be in the forefront, winning the battle over truth and right, the final outcome is not determined by current skirmishes. Christians need to be reminded that God is still in control, that He sits at the steering wheel of the universe, and that the truth is the mightiest force in the world. All who are opposed to Him by being enemies of truth are headed for a fearful and certain defeat. As the whole book depicts, the battle between truth and falsehood is fierce and the enemy often appears to be winning. Under such conditions the saints might despair. However, Revelation urges them to fight on, assuring them that regardless of how powerful the onslaught or how many hardships they may have to bear, they will ultimately win the victory. When

the war is over and the smoke of the battle is cleared, they will be given robes of white, crowned the victors, and be honored to reign forever with their victorious King. This is the divine message of Revelation — the message that victory is as sure as their faithfulness in the battle. That is, Revelation is designed to show Christians they are fighting in a battle they cannot lose if they fight faithfully to the end. This is our hope. And this I believe the Lord has clearly revealed to us in Revelation.

Revelation has probably been subjected to more misuse, abuse, and misunderstanding than all the other books of the New Testament combined — some out of ignorance, some to satisfy curiosity, some to stimulate awe and fear, and undoubtedly some for selfish reasons. While it is generally admitted that it was written in signs or symbolic language (1:1), probably to conceal its message from the enemies of the first-century church, this has not been widely applied in its practical interpretation (expositors literalize the symbolic when the literal best serves their needs, thus ignoring both the context and the overall purpose of the book). But since it is symbolic, it is obviously more difficult to understand and apply than the other books of the New Testament, which are written, for the most part, in literal language. But even so, I am convinced that it is cruel (to both God and man) and inexcusable to mutilate it in the fashion rendered by the class of exegetes who think they have been endowed with special powers to unravel its mysteries, who consider themselves experts in finding things God has successfully hidden from all others. In short, they conceive of themselves as being entrusted with the secrets (hidden by God Himself in remote crevices of the book) by which to decode its prophetic message. The book is thus treated as a deep mystery to be solved rather than a revelation to be received.

But when Revelation is considered a mystery instead of a revelation, hidden meanings are sought in every word, and every movement of man, beast, power, natural event, or unexplained phenomenon becomes a candidate for the fulfillment of some symbolic expression. This method of interpretation has gone on for hundreds of years, applying the symbols to first one event then another; yet man has not learned, or else refuses to admit, the folly of this approach. Every generation produces new interpreters and the new interpreters in turn see the symbols clearly describing events, people, places, and things of his own day. But this is not the unfortunate part (as unfortunate as it is); to add injury to insult, Christians have so long held the book to be so mysterious, so out of reach of the common intellect, so far beyond their comprehension, that they have stood defenseless in the face of abuse, fanaticism, and false teachings. Because they do not know the truth of the book they are at a terrible disadvantage in refuting the false notions that have been built up around it.

While I certainly do not profess to know all the answers, it is my conception that the Lord never intended for Revelation to be literally interpreted — that is, He did not mean for one particular symbol to be applied to one par-

ticular event in history, being then fulfilled and having no future application whatsoever. I believe that its purpose is to depict the never-ending battle between right and wrong, and to show that truth and right ultimately win. There are two sets of symbols in the book, one set representing the forces of evil and the other the powers of righteousness. They meet in conflict after conflict, but in the end, right always overcomes. The battle becomes furious at times and it may appear that righteousness is being crushed and defeated. But read on. Right in the end always triumphs. Or as it is expressed by the book itself, "And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). That right will win the conflict of the ages, that Christ will reign over the defeated kingdoms of this world, is, in my conception, what the Lord wants us to see in this unusual book. But more of this as we proceed. Right now we need to turn our attention to the methods of studying Revelation that are generally used.

APPROACHES TO REVELATION

Many approaches (or methods of study) have been used to interpret the book, and, as strange as it may seem, the approach chosen (and it must be chosen in advance) determines the conclusions reached concerning its purpose. Thus the interpretation must be based on a preconceived or predetermined plan as to why Revelation was written and what it says to us today. The interpretation, therefore, depends upon a predetermined approach, a thing that does not strike me as being commendable; yet, I have nothing better to offer. The three basic approaches that have been adopted by the vast majority of expositors are the preterist, the historic, and the futuristic. Or to simplify them we can state them as past, present, and future. While each approach excludes the others (some intermingling can be granted), Revelation itself seems to embrace in some comprehensive way all three. The Lord instructed John, "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter" (Rev. 1:19). Nevertheless exegetes have approached the book to find its fulfillment all in the past (in some cases by A.D. 70 but usually by the time of Constantine), or being fulfilled over the centuries (starting with some point before it was written and extending to the end of the world), or that it is all, after chapter 3, yet to be fulfilled in the future (the first events starting with the time of the interpreter). This shows why the approach determines the conclusions.

But let us take a further look at each of these approaches by using the past, present, and future tenses.

1. The past tense or the preterist view. According to this approach the message is totally directed toward people and events in the distant past. It makes the message and application almost exclusively to the early Christians. Foy E. Wallace, Jr., who holds that the book was written before the fall of Jerusalem

and that it is concerned with events leading up to and including the fall, says, "The author of the present volume believes that once the chronology of the book of Revelation has been established as belonging to the period of persecution, beginning with Nero Caesar, the harmony of its contents requires all parts and events of the apocalypse to be explained, and not to be mixed with later history; and he has consistently pursued that premise throughout this work" (**The Book of Revelation**, page vi). He parallels the whole book with Matthew 24 and sees its fulfillment in the destruction of Jerusalem. Other preterists, who accept a later date of composition, see it fulfilled during the first three hundred years of the church. With all preterists, the conflicts described in Revelation are symbolic of the persecution of the church by the Jews and Romans. (Incidentally, brother Wallace's commentary, as quoted above, gives a good defense of this approach and it is one of very few books coming out of the Restoration Movement that I feel has made a distinct contribution to the study of Revelation.)

2. The present tense or the historical approach. This view sees the book as continued history. It sees a specific symbol applying to a specific event in history, as does the preteristic view (the difference in the two is in the time-spread covered). The book is thus considered a history of the Christian era, usually covering the time from the first coming of Christ to the second coming, and even beyond. Once a symbolic event has transpired, there is no need to look for a repetition of that in history (except as history might repeat itself). Obviously, then, this approach sends the expositor to world history in search of events that are symbolized in Revelation, and he has a vast amount of material to work with and choose from. John T. Hinds states, "Unquestionably some things John wrote have been fulfilled and are now passed, and some are necessarily future; for the Lord has not yet come and we are nearly eighteen hundred years toward the end of time. The author of this commentary has not allowed himself to be bound by any man's system, or to reject any true statement just because its author happened to have an erroneous plan of interpretation. The historical system is that advocated by Mr. Elliott in his four-volume commentary, adopted by Mr. Barnes and others, and is accepted as substantially correct, though there is room for many differences in details." (Brother Hinds, whose commentary is in the Gospel Advocate's series, has done as well, and in some respects much better, with this approach as anyone I know.)

3. The future tense or the futuristic view. With this approach, most (perhaps all from chapter 4) of the book refers to events yet in the future, and most of those who accept this view see the symbols as literal events that are yet to come, plagues that are to be let loose upon the earth. They generally believe that we are ready, at this very moment of time, to step into that period of time described in Revelation. Every current event is seen as the beginning of the end (and has been for centuries). It seems that everything that happens, regardless of how remote, political or otherwise, is the first in a long series of woe and destruction that is to come upon the earth. It is, therefore, with this

approach that fertile imaginations play most with man's emotions — expositors become merchants of fear.

But with few exceptions, those holding the futuristic view are premillennialists and literalists. John R. Rice says, "Everything in the book of Revelation looks forward to, and clusters around, that marvelous time when Christ shall come with clouds, revealed visibly to every human being on earth. Practically every book in the Bible refers to the second coming of Christ, but the book of Revelation centers altogether around that marvelous event." Then urging a literal interpretation, he adds: "Take God's Word at face value. Do not spiritualize it away. Do not make everything symbolical or figurative. When God says blood, take it to mean blood, even if it is a river of blood, flowing to the bridles of the horses (Rev. 14:20) and for a course of 1,600 furlongs or 200 miles (Rev. 14:20). If God's Word says forty-two months, or 1,260 days, or three and one-half times (or years), then take it as it was meant to be taken, that is, a revelation to be plainly understood. The days mean days, not years. The time element in Revelation is literal. And where symbolical language is used, the key is always given in the Scripture itself. The understanding of the Bible does not take a vivid imagination. It takes a simple, humble, childlike faith, willing to believe what God has said" (**Bible Lessons on the Book of Revelation**, pp. 3-4). While it does not take a vivid imagination to understand the word of God, those who embrace this futuristic, literalistic view of Revelation are the ones who have made it a fertile field for the exercise of their fancy. It is from this group that most of the fantastic theories, woeful forebodings, and gruesome pictures come. According to them, it is truly a time of "great tribulation."

While there are other methods of interpretation (such as the dramatic and the allegorical), one of the three just discussed, or some variation of them, has been adopted by the vast majority of expositors. Yet none of these represent my own views. Charles H. Roberson would probably class my method as spiritual. While I do not, in particular, like the classification, I do see, as he says, "The Revelation as presenting great principles which are working themselves out in actual history." He also adds, which approximates my view, "The Revelation is spiritual. Its symbols stand for the great invisible forces which are manifesting themselves in the history of mankind" (**Studies in Revelation**, pp. 8-9). I shall now try to state my approach and give a few reasons for it.

MY APPROACH

Simply stated, I see Revelation as designed to encourage Christians at all times, regardless of when they may live, in their fight against evil, and the symbols as signifying the constant battle between right and wrong, regardless of when the battle is fought, what form it may take, or who the enemies are.

It seems clear to me that the theme of the book is stated in 17:14: "These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is

Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful." Here war is made with the Lamb (as is always the case — evil is constantly at war with the Lamb) but the Lamb overcomes (as He always does and always will). This can be absolute consolation for the Christian: for he is on the side of the Lamb. He will have to meet and battle with the forces of unrighteousness, but just as the Lamb overcomes, so does he. Christ cannot be defeated; nor can the Christians be defeated unless Christ be defeated first. Both stand together. Revelation thus pictures the great battle between good and evil, right and wrong. At times the battle may appear to be going against the forces of righteousness, good may appear crushed and defeated, but in the end it is always victorious. "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Rom. 8:37). Thus Christians are in a battle they cannot lose if they continue to fight faithfully on to the end. Victory is sure! Evil is doomed! As the message of the book unfolds, I think this conclusion will become more obvious.

However, I am not so naive as to conclude that this approach solves all the problems of properly interpreting Revelation. It does not; and I readily admit that this approach has its difficulties. But it does remove the big question (or at least this one seems to loom the largest in my mind), namely, what specific event in history is signified by what specific symbol? If the symbols for righteousness represent any force for right and if the symbols for evil represent any force for evil, then the symbols can be applied whenever and wherever the forces of right and wrong appear. This makes the book concerned with principles rather than specific events in history. While there may be some specific events of history involved, they are incidental to the overall purpose of the book — they are events that illustrate the principles. There are some tremendous advantages in viewing the book in this way. Here are five such advantages:

1. This approach makes the book practical, sensible, and understandable. Furthermore one's understanding of it will not depend upon his ability to make the exact and proper interpretation of each specific symbol. There are only two classes of symbols: one representing the forces of evil, the other the powers of righteousness. Nor will one's understanding depend upon the truthfulness of some fantastic theory that is predicated upon the proper interpretation of specific symbols.

2. It makes the book useful and practical to all Christians in whatever period of time they may live. This cannot be said, except in some remote sense, for the other approaches. They make it all apply to the past, to the whole spread of history, or to the future. But if it was written for the first-century saints, it is of very little use to those who follow them — its message was fulfilled and its symbols exhausted before they were born. If it covers the whole span of history, only a small part, only a few symbols, can apply to any given time. To cover such a broad time-spread the symbols have to be scattered extremely thin. Perhaps not more than a verse or two, at the most, have to do with the

twentieth century. If, however, it has only to do with the future, it has never had a message for anyone before now (and may not have one for centuries to come). To make it all future is to say that Revelation said nothing to the early Christians (to whom it was addressed) or to any Christian since. Its message is only to those who are on earth during the end-time events.

3. It makes fantastic theorizing powerless, impractical, and nearly impossible (some will exercise their fancy regardless of the approach taken). When the book is seen as picturing the age-old struggle between good and evil, regardless of what form it might take or what symbol may be used to signify it, there is no room for prophetic speculation and fanfare. Any evil force that appears in opposition to righteousness is symbolized. The evil may appear in the form of paganism, atheism, immorality, politics, or even religion, but still it is opposed to the truth and the principle is the same. And so wherever righteousness and unrighteousness meet on the field of battle, whether in the first century, the tenth century, or the twentieth century, the principles involved are depicted in Revelation.

4. It removes the mysterious elements from the book — it makes it a revelation to be received rather than a mystery to be solved. Furthermore, with this view the book becomes a practical piece of encouragement rather than a showcase of curiosity.

5. It makes Revelation a valuable contribution to the New Testament, perfectly filling out the overall picture. The first four books were written to introduce Christ and produce faith in Him (Jn. 20:30-31). The book of Acts was designed to tell believers how to become followers of Christ, that is, how to be saved from their sins. The twenty-one epistles were written to instruct followers of Christ how to live or how to conduct themselves in this present evil world. Revelation fills out the picture by giving comfort and hope, by assuring the faithful followers of Christ that the Lord reigns supreme and that His cause will ultimately be victorious!

Thus my approach makes the book just as applicable to us today as it was to the first-century Christians, and it will be just as applicable to all Christians who follow us as it is to those now living. The symbols signify forces rather than events. While everything in the book is not figurative, the things that require a literal interpretation fit well into the overall purpose.

TIME OF WRITING

While my approach does not necessitate the establishment of a precise date (which cannot be done beyond question anyway), it might be helpful to say a few words about the probable date. With the preterist group (among whom is brother Foy E. Wallace, Jr.) who parallel it with Matthew 24 and say that it was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem, the date becomes extremely vital — in fact, imperative because the whole interpretation depends upon the accuracy of establishing the date. Obviously if the book was fulfilled in A.D. 70 or

thereabout, it had to be written earlier, and to be effective, several years earlier, perhaps as early as A.D. 58 and not later than A.D. 64. When the interpretation depends upon the date, the interpretation can never be more certain than the date itself — if the date is wrong, then, of necessity the interpretation is wrong. The whole business of making the interpretation depend upon the date is therefore built upon a sandy foundation. Consider this fact: if the understanding of the book depends upon the date, then it depends upon something that is not in the book itself, something that is not revealed, and something that it is now impossible to establish beyond a reasonable doubt.

But besides this, the force of the evidence, whether internal or external, is against an early date. While my approach depends in no way on the date of composition (other than in the lifetime of the apostle John), and while I personally have very little interest in such matters (I am more concerned with what the book teaches than when it was written), the following reasons have convinced me that Revelation was written near the close of John's life, probably around A.D. 96:

1. Revelation was almost certainly written after the three general epistles of John, and what evidence is available seems to indicate that they were written between A.D. 80 and A.D. 90. The epistles were written in a time of threat from false teachers, especially from a budding Gnosticism. Revelation, on the other hand, was written in a time of apostasy and persecution. While it is true that the persecution could have been earlier, it seems highly unlikely that the apostasy was (see 2 below). Since the apostasy and the persecution are both a part of the scene in Revelation, it is more likely that the persecution was the late one, under Domitian rather than under Nero.

2. The early date hardly allows enough time for the churches in Asia to have had the experience and reach the state of decadence ascribed to them in Revelation. The Ephesian church had left its first love. Paul had given his farewell address to the elders of this church around A.D. 60, and there is no hint of the Nicolaitans, or of the church's lack of love. While he warns of the danger of apostasy, it is still something that is in the future. Smyrna had proven her faithfulness by enduring persecution and poverty. Usually such judgments are expressed after a considerable length of time. Pergamos had been faithful through the martyrdom of Antipas (which may point back to an earlier persecution; if so, it could well have been that under Nero) and had permitted those holding the teaching of Balaam and the Nicolaitans to remain among them (in all probability the Nicolaitans are a late development; if they had existed during the time of Paul he would have almost certainly refuted them in some of his epistles). Thyatira was commended for her works but had permitted Jezebel to seduce to fornication and make sacrifice to idols (sacrificing to idols seems remote from the time of Paul). Philadelphia had endured with patience (which could imply a long period of time). Sardis was dead, and the church at Laodicea had grown lukewarm and self-sufficient — it did not even need the Lord! Thus both the virtues and the problems seem to point to

churches that have been in existence for a considerable time.

3. Tradition puts John in Ephesus (from which he was in all probability banished by the persecution of Domitian to the isle of Patmos) for a long while before the end of the first century. In **The Antiques of the Elders Preserved in Irenaeus** (in **The Apostolic Fathers**) we have the following statement: ". . . all the Elders witness, who in Asia conferred with John the Lord's disciple, to the effect that John had delivered these things unto them: for he abode with them until the times of Trajan." Another statement made by Irenaeus (quoted in almost all commentaries) says, "The church in Ephesus, founded by Paul, and having John remaining among them permanently until the time of Trajan." Trajan's reign was from approximately A.D. 98 to 117.

4. There was a new wave of persecution against Christians started by Domitian around A.D. 93. Mosheim, one of the greatest of all church historians, says: "Nero being dead, the fury of this first war against the Christians ceased. But in the year 93 or 94 a new assault was made upon them by Domitian, an emperor little inferior to Nero in baseness of character and conduct. The cause of the persecution if we give credit to Hegesippus, was the fear of losing his empire; for the emperor had learned in some way that a person would arise from among the relatives of Christ, who would attempt a revolution, and would produce commotion in the empire. This persecution undoubtedly was severe: but it was of short continuance, as the emperor was soon afterward murdered. The principal martyrs named, are Flavius Clemens, a consul, and his niece or wife, Flavia Domitilla. In the midst of this persecution, John the apostle, was banished to the isle of Patmos" (**Institutes of Ecclesiastical History**, Book I, Part I, chapter IV, pp. 58-59).

5. Tradition assigns the Revelation to the close of Domitian's reign. Irenaeus says, "It [the Revelation] was seen no very long time ago, but almost in our own generation, at the close of Domitian's reign." While tradition cannot always be relied upon, this belief was held almost universally during the second and third centuries. With such a widespread belief among those closest to the time of writing, this becomes a weighty argument, one that cannot be set aside lightly.

The evidence, therefore, while not beyond some question, seems conclusive to me. Thus I accept the late date, approximately A.D. 96, as the time of composition. But if the late date is correct, the whole approach that assigns Revelation as a prophecy fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem is false and must be totally rejected. It seems incredible to me that God would give His people a book, the proper interpretation of which depends upon establishing an exact date of composition, and yet not give to them the means to positively establish that date. I conclude therefore that the interpretation of Revelation does not depend upon the date of composition. Its interpretation must be based upon its contents rather than upon the date when it was written.

THE WRITER

Unlike the date of composition, it is vital to establish the writer. But fortunately there is more to work with here, both internally and externally. The first verse is revealing: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John." Here we see that God is the author. Jesus Christ is the subject — it is a revelation of Him. It was for the benefit of God's servants. It was signified by an angel. And the receiver was John. And thus John says that he bore record or testimony to what he saw (Rv. 1:2). He was later commanded to write what he had seen, what was, and what he would be shown (Rv. 1:19). So the writer was John. But what John? I believe that it can be established beyond a reasonable doubt that it was the apostle John, the same John who wrote the Gospel According to John and the three epistles which bear his name. The following reasons are given to support this view:

1. The evidence against the apostle John being the writer is not convincing. The chief argument against him being the author is that the Gospel according to John and Revelation could not have been written by the same man because of the difference in character and style. But upon closer examination the difference is not as great as it at first may appear. **The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia** says: "Singularly there has been of late in the advanced school itself a movement in the direction of recognizing that this difficulty of style is less formidable than it looks — that, in fact, beneath the surface difference, there is a strong body of resemblances pointing to a close relationship of Gospel and Apocalypse. This had long been argued by the older writers (Godet, Luthardt, Alford, Salmon, et al.), but it is now more freely acknowledged. As instances among many may be noted the use of the term 'logos' (19:13), the image of the 'Lamb,' figures like 'water of life,' words and phrases as 'true,' 'he that overcometh,' 'keep the commandments,' etc." And so it turns out that the similarities far outweigh the differences, so much so that this otherwise weighty argument loses its force.

2. Tradition almost unanimously assigns the book to the apostle John. Eusebius in his **Ecclesiastical History** (one of the most important works that has come down to us from ancient Christian writers) gives us the following interesting account: "In this persecution [that of Domitian], it is handed down by tradition, that the apostle and evangelist John, who was yet living in consequence of his testimony to the divine word, was condemned to dwell on the island of Patmos. Irenaeus, indeed, in his fifth book against the heresies, where he speaks of the calculation formed on the epithet of Antichrist, in the above mentioned revelation of John, speaks in the following manner respecting him. 'If, however, it were necessary to proclaim his name (i.e., Antichrist), openly at the present time, it would have been declared by him who saw the revelation, for it is not long since it was seen, but almost in our own generation,

at the close of Domitian's reign.' To such a degree, indeed, did the doctrine which we profess, flourish, that even historians that are very far from befriending our religion, have not hesitated to record this persecution and its martyrdoms in their histories" (book III, chapter XVIII). Irenaeus lived almost the whole of the second century, and he was acquainted with Polycarp, who personally knew John. A contemporary of Irenaeus was Justin Martyr. Justin sums up the tradition by assigning the Revelation to a "certain man, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ." The traditional view of John's authorship has been almost universally accepted by Bible students, both ancient and modern. And with no sound reason to reject it, the tradition becomes a strong testimony in the case for the apostle John as the writer.

3. While the book itself is ascribed only to John, to accept the authorship of any John other than the apostle would greatly weaken, though not destroy, the claim of inspiration. If the apostle wrote it, no proof of inspiration is necessary. The apostles were the ambassadors of Christ (2 Cor. 5:19-20) — they were His authoritative spokesmen. They had been specially endowed with the baptismal measure of the Holy Spirit (also called power from on high, Lk. 24:49) to aid them in revealing, confirming, and delivering the gospel without error (Jn. 16:7-14). All they wrote is therefore to be accepted automatically as the word of God. Paul said, "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37). But this would not be true with other writers. If another John wrote Revelation his inspiration would have to be proven — that is, it could not be automatically accepted as is the case with the apostles. Of course another John could have been inspired, as were Mark and Luke (obviously by the laying on of the hands of the apostles). But at this late date there would be little or no way to prove it to the satisfaction of everyone. Thus the inspiration of the book would be thrown into question. At best its inspiration would have to be assumed. This could perhaps be a good assumption, based on a likely assumption that the writer had been endowed to write under the direction of the Spirit by apostolic approval, but still it would be an assumption. There is no reason to think that this is the case. I therefore accept the apostle John as the writer of Revelation.

4. The writer, John, gives his name in such a way as to strongly suggest that he was well known by his readers, that he was the best known John among the Christians in Asia. Since it is all but certain that the apostle John had lived in Asia for many years before the Revelation was received, and since we know that he was widely known and respected in that whole area (e.g., other disciples, such as Polycarp, were honored because they had known him personally or had heard him preach), he, and probably he alone, could have been well known enough to have been identified by all with no distinctive qualifying marks attached to his name. Thus because all of his readers would know him he wrote identifying himself only as John (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). The name John, without further identifying marks, would immediately identify him as the most

widely known John. And that could be none other than the apostle John.

Upon the basis of these reasons there seems to be but one logical conclusion to reach, namely, the apostle John, the last of the apostles of Christ to die (and according to tradition, the only one to die a natural death), wrote Revelation.

THE NATURE OF REVELATION

When I speak of the nature of Revelation I mean its inherent characteristics, its basic components, its fundamental constitution, and its type of composition. Its nature is its underlying design or purpose. A failure to grasp this has led to many serious errors, misconceptions, and misinterpretations. The nature of any book must be respected if it is to be studied seriously, and this is especially true of Revelation. For example, if its nature is literal, it cannot be properly interpreted figuratively. The reverse is also true: if its nature is symbolic, it cannot be understood literally. So its nature, its inherent characteristics, must be understood before we can understand the book itself. The following, while not exhaustive, should be helpful:

1. It is symbolic in nature, that is, it was written in symbolic language. The very first verse so informs us. "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John" (1:1). Note in particular the word "signified." It comes from the Greek word **semaino**, which, according to Vincent, means to "give a sign or token." G. Abbott-Smith gives it as "to give a sign, signify, indicate." And Vine adds, "Rev. 1:1, where perhaps the suggestion is that of expressing by signs." In my judgment, the context of the whole book leaves no room for Vine's "perhaps." Here it definitely means to show by signs. Thus Revelation was written in symbolic (sign) language. That is its nature.

It should be kept clearly in mind that in symbolic presentations the symbols always signify something other than that which is literally depicted — a symbol cannot symbolize itself. For example, the candlesticks of 1:13 could not be symbols of literal candlesticks. They are in fact symbols of the churches (1:20). The great whore, or Babylon, of chapter 17 does not signify a literal whore or the literal city of Babylon. The great whore is a symbol of something evil, polluted, or corrupted — a great moral impurity. Thus a symbol must always signify something other than itself. But the very nature of Revelation is symbolic — this is plainly stated in the first verse. It cannot, therefore, be treated as a literal production. To ignore this fact leads to a misapprehension of the whole message because it ignores the basic and fundamental nature of the book.

2. Its nature is apocalyptic. While apocalyptic is also symbolic, and what I have said about symbols would equally apply here, it is a particular kind of symbolism. The apocalyptic style of writing is characterized by presenting its message by visionary means, usually depicting future glories in contrast with

present gloom — a way of saying the present is severe but brightness is just ahead. Its design was usually to encourage and instill hope by highly figurative visions. It thus used symbolic language or bold figures to impress a lesson. Apocalyptic writing is said to have been rather widely written during the period from 200 B.C. to A.D. 100. I must confess that I have done very little reading of it and not much more about it, yet as far as I can determine it was never used as an instrument to predict specific incidents of history. Its sweeping visions were used to picture the glorious future for those who would overcome the present. Revelation partakes of this nature. But it should not be classed with the Jewish apocalyptic literature of the period. While it certainly partakes of the same nature, there is a vast difference. Revelation is inspired. And this ultimately means that God is its author. Unlike the other apocalyptic writings of the time, it did not originate in the mind of an irresponsible visionary.

3. Its nature is that of revelation. The title of the book comes from its very first word, the Greek **apokalupsis**, which means to reveal, uncover, or unveil. It is the unveiling of something previously hidden — a mystery made known. It is not a mystery concealed, but a mystery revealed. Albert Barnes, in his notes on Revelation, says, "It [the word under consideration] would apply to anything which had been covered up so as to be hidden from the view, as by a veil, a darkness, in an ark or chest, and then made manifest by removing the covering. It comes then to be used in the sense of disclosing or revealing, by removing the veil of darkness or ignorance. It may be applied to the disclosing or manifesting of anything which was before obscure or unknown." It should therefore be observed with care that it is not the nature of Revelation to be a mystery (something unknown or unknowable), but rather the revelation of a mystery. Thus to view it now as a mystery is to ignore its very nature.

4. Its nature is practical. While I grant that this may not at first appear to be the case, especially among those who are fond of weaving fantastic theories out of the figurative expressions, it is a fact — a fact that is established within the book itself. How do we know that its nature is practical? First, it was addressed by the Lord to the churches (1:11). The Lord's message is never impractical — He never speaks uselessly. He is concerned with His people and their souls' salvation. When He speaks, it is for some practical purpose, never just to satisfy or pacify curiosity. Second, it was designed to be read, studied, and applied (1:3). While it is true that it is delivered in symbolism and is therefore not as easily understood as literal compositions, it promises a blessing to those who keep the things written in the book (1:3). There is a purpose for the use of the symbolic rather than the literal. The Lord had a message for His own people, one of encouraging them to fight on in the war against evil, one that would likely be misunderstood and misapplied by the enemies of the first-century church. He thus sent it to them by signs which they could understand (with a little study and patience), but which would utterly baffle their enemies. Finally, it has for its purpose the encouragement of the downtrodden saints of the Domitian persecution (and consequently all saints to follow

them). It simply says that victory is certain and sure for the faithful. The battle ahead for them would be long and severe (and this is true of all Christians, regardless of when they live), but those who would remain faithful unto death (2:10) would win the crown of life. Thus the nature of Revelation is practical – it is the Lord’s message to His people, a message they can study and apply in times of trouble to give them hope and encouragement.

REVELATION 1

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

1:1-3 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.

1:1 The Revelation — The Greek word here means to reveal, disclose, uncover, or unveil (cf. Eph. 1:17; 3:3; Rom. 16:25; Gal. 1:12), hence the word from which the book derives its name. It is often called the Apocalypse, a transliteration of this word. It denotes the making known of something previously hidden (Col. 1:25-27; Eph. 3:1-5) — the revelation of a mystery (something unknown because it has not yet been made known). Thus it means a mystery revealed, not a revelation concealed. This concept is vital to a proper understanding of the book. Its nature is that of revelation, uncovering, unveiling, not that of a mystery. The method by which the revelation is made known is seen later in the v. by the word signified. As we study the book we should not search for hidden meanings (mysteries) but for that which has been manifest or uncovered. **of Jesus Christ**, — The divine Son of God (Jn. 3:16), God manifest in the flesh (Mt. 1:23). This means that which was given by Him, the things He revealed, not the revelation of His person. The revelation is the message given by Christ through John (see v. 4 and the notes there). **which God gave unto him**, — God the father, the source of all truth (cf. Mt. 16:17; Jn. 5:20-27). **to shew** — To make known (Williams) or disclose (Goodspeed). We must therefore approach the book as a revelation rather than as a concealed mystery. This may appear to over-simplify an extremely complex system of symbols, but it is what the book claims for itself. One of the difficulties of understanding it is that it is approached as a mystery to be solved rather than a revelation to be received. But it is a revelation — the revelation of Jesus Christ which He received from the Father to show unto His servants. **unto his servants** — Bondservants or slaves. That is, Christians to whom the revelation was sent. **things** — The things revealed. **which must shortly come to pass**; — Which must soon take place (NIV). Things which are about to occur, things which will transpire without delay. It could hardly mean that everything in the book must occur within a short time because there are undoubtedly things foretold (e.g., the

judgment, 20:11-15) which are yet to be. Thus the expression must mean that which is to be revealed is at hand, that it will begin to occur in a very short time. In my judgment John is thinking of the great battle between the church and the world which lies immediately ahead. It is the battle between good and bad, right and wrong, that is seen raging throughout the book. Those to whom John could see the conflict, especially in the persecution of Christians which had obviously led John himself to be banished (v. 10), in the events of their day just as we can see it in the events of ours. The battle lines had been drawn and the conflict would surely come, but they could be assured (by what appears in this book) that the righteous would ultimately be victorious while evil would be defeated. The victory was as sure as the battle. But first the battle, then the victory. **and he sent and signified it** — The method by which the revelation was to be communicated was by tokens or in signs, that is, in symbolic language. But in the face of this plain declaration many, perhaps most, expositors erroneously approach the book as if the symbols were to be taken literally. But John tells us in the first v. that it is written in symbols, a fact that soon becomes obvious. It was never meant to be understood literally. Now since a symbol cannot symbolize itself, we must determine what each symbol was given to signify. This is not as difficult as it may at first appear. There are basically two sets of symbols, one signifying the forces of evil and the other the forces of righteousness. Wherever these two sets of symbols meet, or under what figure they may appear, there is always a conflict. One must ultimately overcome the other. The view presented throughout these notes is that Revelation was given to signify (to every generation of Christians) that a sure victory belongs to the righteous who are faithful to the end (2:10). This should become obvious as the revelation is unfolded. **by his angel** — His heavenly messenger (22:6). **unto his servant John:** — The apostle John (v. 2). Of this there can be no substantial doubt (see introduction). John had been personally chosen by Christ to the apostleship (Mt. 4:21), Christ loved him (Jn. 21:20), he had been with Him in His personal ministry (Mt. 10:2), and had for many years, probably much longer than any other apostle, preached the unsearchable riches of Christ (Jn. 21:21-23). In this time of trial for him he is rewarded (and honored) by being permitted to deliver to the church the final message of Christ.

1:2 Here we have a description of John, a description that fits no other John, living then or later, better than the apostle John, and undoubtedly the original readers, as well as readers down through the ages, so understood it. **Who bare record** — Who bore witness (RSV). It is not easy to determine whether this has reference to the past (witness already borne), to the present (the witness of Revelation), or to his whole life (the witness he always bears). The third seems most likely to me. If so, he is describing himself as a faithful witness. He had established a long record of delivering the word of God without fault, corruption, or compromise. He had written a true account of the life of Christ (Jn. 21:24), had delivered sound doctrine (cf. 2 Jn. 9-11) in his three epistles,

and had proven during a long life to be a faithful spokesman of God and His word. **of the word of God**, — The will of God as communicated to him by Christ during His personal ministry and by the HS after Christ ascended back to the Father (Jn. 16:13). **and of the testimony of Jesus Christ**, — All the testimony written in the book of John, in the epistles, and in all the preaching he had done (cf. Jn. 20:30-31). He will now continue to bear the testimony of Christ in this book, the whole of which is about Christ and His revelation through John. **and of all things that he saw**. — Even of all things that he saw (ASV). He was a witness of all that he saw pertaining to Christ during His personal ministry, after His resurrection, and from the beginning of the church on Pentecost. If my exegesis is correct, the whole point is showing the writer (John) to be a faithful witness, that he has proven himself so, and that he can thus be trusted to faithfully deliver the revelation of Christ that is now to be shown to him.

1:3 **Blessed** — Happy (Beck). The first of seven blessings which are pronounced in the book (14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14). It means a state of spiritual prosperity, a blessed happiness (cf. Mt. 5:3-12), which comes to those who read, hear, and keep the prophecies now to be revealed. **is he that readeth**, — The public reader. At that time very few, comparatively speaking, could read. The majority had to depend upon the public reader to read for them. But even if more could have read, copies of the Scripture (and all other books) were extremely scarce and when a copy was available the widest possible use was made of it. Hence one read while many listened (cf. 1 Tm. 4:13). **and they that hear** — Those who hear the reading. He who reads is singular and those who hear are plural. Thus one reads while many hear. **the words of this prophecy**, — The prophecy given in Revelation. Prophecy is that which is spoken by a prophet, and a prophet is one who speaks for God (Dt. 18:20-23). Hence a true prophet speaks by inspiration. John was the Lord's spokesman; he was thus a prophet (cf. Ex. 4:15-16; 7:1), and Revelation is prophecy, **and keep those things which are written therein**: — This implies that Revelation, as all books of the Bible, imposes God's revealed will as man's duty. Reading and hearing alone are not enough: one must practice what he hears. God reveals His will so that man can learn and do it. The blessing comes in doing. It is a travesty against the whole purpose of revelation (and Revelation) for men to teach that one can be saved, be blessed, without obeying that which is written. God has predicated His blessings, even the blessing of salvation, upon obedience to His will (Heb. 5:8-9; Rom. 6:16-18; Mt. 7:21; 12:50). **for the time is at hand**. — The time period of Revelation was near. That is, the period was soon to begin. See note on v. 1. This should be contrasted with Dn. 12:4 where he was charged to "shut up the words . . . even to the time of the end." John, on the other hand, was to deliver his shortly. What he delivered would have application then just as it would to all Christians in the future. The time of the revelation was at hand. Thus the time was near for John to bear witness, for those to be blessed who would read, hear, and do the things

contained in the prophecy, for Christians to be encouraged and comforted by the message of Christ, and for the revelation (Revelation) to be applied to each Christian in his battle for truth and right.

JOHN'S SALUTATION

1:4-6 John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

1:4 **John** — The writer again identifies himself (see vv. 1, 2). **to the seven** — The number seven obviously has great significance in Revelation. It is the number (symbol) for fullness, completeness, or perfection. There are seven churches (vv. 4, 11), seven Spirits (vv. 4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6), seven candlesticks — lampstands (v. 20), seven stars (v. 20), seven seals (5:1), seven eyes and seven horns (5:6), seven angels (8:2), seven trumpets (8:2), seven thunders (10:3), seven heads and seven crowns (12:3), seven last plagues (15:6), seven vials (bowls, ASV, 15:7), seven mountains (17:9), and seven kings (17:10). **churches which are in Asia:** — See v. 11. **Grace be unto you,** — He wishes divine but unmerited favor to continue with them, that they might remain in a state of full possession of all spiritual blessings (cf. Eph. 1:3). **and peace,** — Harmony, concord, friendship, freedom from disturbance. Peace is tranquility mentally, emotionally, and socially. Both grace and peace are used in the Bible to express best wishes for one's welfare (cf. Rom. 15:33; 1 Cor. 16:23). **from him which is, and which was, and which is to come;** — From Him who is eternally present (Ex. 3:13-14), the one who inhabits eternity (Is. 57:15), God the Father. He is, was, and is to come expresses His eternal nature. While the human mind in its present state cannot fully comprehend an eternal Being, a Being without beginning or end, one who is not confined to time and space, the Scriptures clearly teach that God is such a being. **and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;** — In the context there is left no room to doubt that this means the HS. The greeting is from the Father, the seven Spirits, and the Son (v. 6). For a parallel, see 2 Cor. 13:14, where the three are also joined together in salutation. But why is the HS called the seven Spirits of God? Admittedly this is a difficult question, but the problem is not beyond solution. I suggest three possibilities, the first or second, or a combination of the two, being the most likely. (1) Since the figure seven signifies fullness, completeness, or perfection, the seven Spirits are symbolic of the completeness of the Spirit. (2) For intensity of expression. God the Father is intensified by His eternal nature; Christ is magnified by at least six marvelously descriptive statements. To intensify the HS John calls Him the seven Spirits. (3) To signify His sevenfold work among the seven churches — that is, His work throughout the whole earth (5:6). The expression appears three other times (3:1; 4:5; 5:6) and

the context of each can best be harmonized with the first possibility. While neither explanation may satisfy everyone, the context here seems to confirm that grace and peace are invoked from the Father, the Spirit, and the Son.

1:5 And from Jesus Christ, — The Son of God, to whom and through whom and for whom the revelation (Revelation) is given. To magnify Christ, John now makes six descriptive statements, three about Christ and three about what He has done for us. **who is the faithful witness**, — The witness whom we can trust (Beck). He is dependable, trustworthy, or reliable as a witness — one who never changes (Heb. 13:8). This witness testifies with firsthand knowledge. He knows whereof He speaks (Mt. 7:28-29). What He says is the revelation of God's will. This includes all that He revealed while here on earth, all that He revealed by the HS through His apostles (Jn. 16:13), and all that He is now to reveal in this book. **and the first begotten of the dead**, — The first in His order to be raised from the dead. He is called the first begotten of or from the dead here and in Col. 1:18, the first begotten (Heb. 1:6), the first born of every creature (Col. 1:15), the first born among many (Rom. 8:29), and the firstfruits of them that slept (1 Cor. 15:20, 23). The primary thrust of each statement is to declare the pre-eminence of Christ — to show Him first in rank or superior in position. It cannot mean that He was the first to be raised from the dead (Lk. 7:14-15; Jn. 11:41-44) but rather that He is the first in His order — the first to die no more. All others who were raised died again. But not Christ. His resurrection was a new order, putting Him beyond the power of death and decay. It was therefore the first in the order of the general resurrection (1 Jn. 3:2) when the mortal shall put on immortality and the corruptible shall become incorruptible. **and the prince of the kings of the earth**. — And the ruler of the kings of the earth (ASV). Christ rules by divine right and His rule is over all, even the kings of the earth. While all have not submitted to Him as Lord, they are nonetheless accountable to Him. "Prince" sometimes means one who is heir to a throne, but here it designates Christ who already reigns with full sovereign power. He is already ruling, the first in rank of kings. He reigns now. He reigns over all now. And at His coming He will take eternal vengeance on all who have not submitted to His rule (2 Thes. 1:7-9). **Unto him that loved us**, — To him who loves us (RSV). His unceasing love is beyond human comprehension — a love that, while we were yet His enemies, demonstrated itself in action, the death on the cross (Jn. 15:13; Rom. 5:6-9), a love from which nothing can separate us (Rom. 8:35). **and washed us** — And loosed us (ASV). He set us free from the penalty of sin. **from our sins in his own blood**, — The means by which we have been cleansed or loosed is the shed blood of Christ (1 Pt. 1:18-19). All accountable people have sinned (Rom. 3:9, 23; 5:12). The penalty of sin is death, eternal death (Rom. 6:23). This means that a sinner is lost forever unless some means beyond himself is provided for his redemption. And it is precisely here that grace and mercy enter. Christ came into the world to die in man's stead. His death paid the ransom price — paid the sinner's sin debt. When the sinner accepts Christ, through

faith and obedience, as his sacrifice, God then accepts the death of Christ as the sinner's penalty. The sinner is thus set free, another having suffered the death penalty for him.

1:6 And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father — And has made us a kingdom of priests for His God and Father (Williams). Individually all Christians are priests (1 Pt. 2:5, 9). Collectively they are a kingdom (Jn. 3:5; Col. 1:13). Hence a kingdom of priests. The priesthood of all believers is a fundamental and precious doctrine — a heritage given by Christ Himself. To fully appreciate this one must understand the Scriptural role of a priest. The function of a prophet is to deliver God's message to man; the role of a priest is to present man's service and offerings to God. During the Patriarchal age the father of the family or tribe filled this function (Gn. 8:20; 22:13; 26:25; 33:20). Under the law of Moses all priests were required to be the descendants of Levi. Their role was to present the offerings and sacrifices of all the children of Israel (Lv. 1-6). But under the NT there are no special priests, no one to go to God with another's sacrifice or service. Every Christian fills that role for himself. Christ is the great high priest (the only one of His order) and all Christians are priests by virtue of the fact that they are children of God. **to him be glory** — To Christ be honor, praise, adoration, recognition, and thanksgiving for what He has done, is doing, and will do for man (v. 5). It is His right to receive the glory and it is man's obligation to render it to Him. **and dominion for ever and ever.** — To Him be the power or authority to rule, both now and forever (1 Tm. 6:15; 1 Cor. 15:25). **Amen.** — May it be so. May it be confirmed by our recognizing His power to rule, submitting to His authority, and honoring Him with our whole being, body, soul, and spirit, throughout both time and eternity.

CHRIST IS COMING

1:7 Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.

1:7 Behold, he cometh with clouds; — Look, He is coming in the clouds (Beck). The Lord is coming again! Of this there can be no doubt. He so promised (Jn. 14:1-6) and He is not slack concerning His promises (2 Pt. 3:9). While the time of His coming belongs to the secret things of God (Dt. 29:29) and cannot be known to man, the fact of it is revealed scores of times in the NT (e.g., 1 Thes. 4:16-18). That He is coming on the clouds is reminiscent of His ascension and the promise that He would "so come in like manner" (Acts 1:9-11). **and every eye shall see him,** — His coming will be literal, public, and universal. It will not be in a secretive manner to hide Himself away in some mystic chamber for a selective few. Nor will it be figurative (or "spiritual"). It will be actual and as literal as His first coming when He was incarnated into human flesh (Mt. 1:18-25). **and they also which pierced him:** — Even those who pierced him (NASV). This undoubtedly has reference to those who pierced Him

at the crucifixion (Jn. 19:32-34). Thus the necessary implication is that they will be raised from the dead at His coming. Since they are among the wicked, it is further implied that all the wicked will then be raised (Jn. 5:28-29). There is therefore no separate resurrection of the righteous and wicked. "Every eye shall see him" and "they also that pierced him" taken together means that everyone who has ever lived on the earth will see the Lord at His coming. **and all kindreds of the earth** — All tribes or people who have lived on the earth without filling the purpose (obeying the gospel) for which they were made. **shall wail because of him.** — Shall mourn over it (ASV). They will mourn because they have lived for material things alone and all material things will be destroyed (2 Pt. 3:9-12). They will then see that they have wasted their lives, been unfaithful stewards, trifled with the will of God, and trampled underfoot the blood of Christ, the only means of human redemption. The day of reckoning will then be upon them — they will have no refuge to which to flee (cf. Mt. 25). **Even so, Amen.** — A double expression, probably meant as both affirmation and consent — so shall it be, so may it be.

CHRIST, THE ETERNAL ONE

1:8 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

1:8 **I am Alpha and Omega,** — Or as we would say it, I am the A and the Z. The alpha is the first letter in the Greek alphabet and the omega is the last. Hence the Alpha and the Omega means the first and the last, the beginning and the ending (v. 17; 21:6; 22:13). It is a means of expressing His eternal presence, His divinity, and the fact that He is co-equal with the Father. **the beginning and the ending,** — Omitted here by the best texts but not in 2:6; 22:13. **saith the Lord,** — Saith the Lord God (ASV), the All-Sovereign (BV). Commentators seem to be about equally divided as to whether this has reference to God the Father or Christ the Son. While in the final analysis it makes little or no difference (what is true of one is true of the other), to force it to mean the Father does it a grave disservice by violently wresting it from its context. Christ is the one who shows John the revelation (v. 1) and He is unquestionably the speaker in v. 17 where "the first and the last" means the same as the Alpha and the Omega. Plummer says, "To attribute them [the words here spoken, HW] to the Father robs the words of their special appropriateness in this context." **which is, and which was, and which is to come,** — See v. 4 where the same language is applied to God the Father. Since the same is said of both, we must conclude that both are of the same eternal nature (cf. Ex. 3:13-14; Jn. 8:57-58). **the Almighty.** — This term appears nine other times in this book (4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:15; 21:22) applying to the Father, but to conclude from this that it must mean that here does an injustice to the context. While there is no other passage in this book in which Christ is directly called the Almighty, the concept is in total harmony with its exalted view of

Him (e.g., 2:8; 22:13), plus the fact that in one of his messianic prophecies Isaiah calls Him "the Mighty God" (Is. 9:6). There is no significant difference in the Mighty God of Isaiah and the Almighty of John. Both exalt Christ to His rightful position by showing His eternal nature and omnipotent power.

JOHN ON PATMOS

1:9-11 I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last; and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

1:9 **I John**, — The writer again identifies himself (vv. 1-2). **who also am your brother**, — Your brother (ASV). An endearing term showing ties of fraternal relationship between John and those to whom he wrote. They were all of the same family (1 Tm. 3:15), citizens of the heavenly kingdom (Jn. 3:5), and partakers of the divine nature (2 Pt. 1:3-4). **and companion in tribulation**, — Partners in the affliction that had been brought upon them, that is, they shared in the suffering he had endured for the cause of Christ. **and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ**, — John and all Christians, then and now, were in the kingdom of Christ and together they persevered in or patiently endured the affliction that came upon them as a result of that citizenship. This positively proves that Christ is now the ruling prince or king (v. 5), that Christians are a kingdom of priests (v. 6), that John and Christians were partners in the kingdom, and that Christ is now reigning over His people. The kingdom of Christ is therefore a present reality, not a future utopia. The facts are the kingdom, having begun on Pentecost, was an actual fact (Col. 1:13); Christ reigns over it; John and his brothers were in it. This being clearly established in the outset of the book, nothing to follow in the revelation can be rightly interpreted to conflict with these facts. Any theory therefore that has the kingdom a future hope rather than a present reality is an absolute misinterpretation of John's words (and all other prophecies and promises pertaining to the kingdom in both the OT and NT). John was in the kingdom and so were his brothers (see further discussion under "The Kingdom" below). **was in the isle that is called Patmos**, — A small isolated rocky and windy island off the coast of Asia in the Aegean Sea to which the Romans banished many exiles. Tradition has it that Domitian, the Roman emperor, banished the apostle John to this island from Ephesus about A.D. 95. Eusebius, in his **Ecclesiastical History**, says: "Domitian, indeed, having exercised his cruelty against many, and unjustly slain no small number of noble and illustrious men at Rome, and having, without cause, punished vast numbers of honourable men with exile and confiscation of their property, at length established himself as the successor of Nero, in his hatred and hostility to God. . . . In this persecution, it is handed down by tradition, that the apostle and evangelist John, who was

yet living in consequence of his testimony to the divine word, was condemned to dwell on the island of Patmos.¹¹ John himself now assigns two reasons for his presence on Patmos: **for the word of God**, — For speaking God's word (Beck). That is, he was exiled because he preached the gospel, God's divine message. **and for the testimony of Jesus Christ**. — The testimony he bore concerning Jesus, His pre-existence, His birth, His life, His death, His burial, His resurrection, His ascension, and His promise to come again (cf. 1 Jn. 1:1-4).

THE KINGDOM

To fully grasp and appreciate what John means by being in the kingdom we must have a comprehensive view of the promises and prophecies of the OT and the expectations of their fulfillment as taught in the NT. There is a vast difference in what the NT teaches about the fulfillment of OT prophecies and what people in the time of Christ expected. The Jews had a total misconception of the consummation of OT prophecies. They were expecting Christ to come as a literal king, sit on a literal throne, assemble a literal army, conquer by a literal war, and then rule over the literal world by enforcing His law by literal means and executing it by literal force. In short, they were expecting a material kingdom, identical with or similar to that ruled over by David and Solomon. But when Christ came He refused to be made an earthly king (Jn. 6:15) and announced that His kingdom was to be spiritual in nature (Jn. 18:36; Lk. 17:20-21). A material earthly kingdom was not in the plan of God. The kingdom of Christ would co-exist with the kingdoms of this world, permitting them to function in the material realm while it carried on its spiritual activity. Christ would conquer and rule, but only in the spiritual sphere. His reign was to be over a spiritual kingdom, not a material one.

But the false concept of an earthly kingdom is perpetuated by modern-day premillennialism. While there are numerous theories among premillennialists, they usually agree on the fundamental aspect of premillennialism, namely, that the present order, the Christian system, the church of the living God, the scheme of human redemption, is not God's ultimate and final plan for this world. His plan for the ages calls for a literal rule over the physical earth. This will necessitate a recreating (the premillennialists would say restore, but it has gone out of existence and must therefore be recreated) of the old earthly kingdom of Israel. Christ will then reign on its throne in Jerusalem, and the reign will continue for a peaceful thousand years. This, say the premillennialists, is what God promised in the OT. This is what Christ originally came to establish. But the Jews rejected Him and the establishment was delayed (or postponed according to some) until the second coming. Thus Christ is coming again to finish (and therefore fulfill OT prophecy) what He failed to do at His first coming. At that time He will consummate the plan of the ages. The kingdoms of this world will then become the kingdom of Christ. And, according to the theory, this, rather than the present scheme of redemption, is God's final plan for this

world and His people. The whole system of premillennialism is built on this hope.

But this totally and inexcusably misses the plain Scriptural teaching concerning Christ and His kingdom. The OT foretold the coming of Christ and the scheme of human redemption made possible by the death of Christ on the cross. The period of time in which redemption is offered to the whole world is called the last days in both the OT and the NT (Jl. 2:28ff; Acts 2:14-16; Heb. 1:1). This simply means that the Christian age is the last or final dispensation God has planned for the world. Those who believe in Christ and obey His word are promised a home with Him in heaven. But there is not one solitary thing said about another order for this earth, neither for the Jews nor anyone else. When Christ comes again, the end comes (1 Cor. 15:24-26). There is therefore no place in God's scheme of things for a future earthly utopia. God never planned it. Christ never promised it. The apostles never preached it. The Scriptures do not teach it. It is nothing more than a fantastic human dream — a dream that cushions against the present realities with a false hope for the future.

Redemption is the theme of the whole Bible, from beginning to end, and redemption found its full expression in the Christian system. One must exercise a fertile imagination, rather than a true hermeneutics, to see anything else foretold in OT prophecies. Starting with the fall of man, God promised to send a redeemer, that is, to provide the means for the forgiveness of sins. He said to Satan, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gn. 3:15). This foretells the coming of Christ and the establishment of the Christian system. Beginning then and there, redemption from the fallen state becomes the central theme of the remainder of the Bible. A twofold promise was soon made to Abraham, the land promise and the promise that all nations would be blessed through his seed (Gn. 12:1-3). From this time on the OT repeatedly emphasizes that something wonderful, something out of the ordinary, something that has never happened before nor will it ever occur again, is coming into the world. It is described in glowing terms such as the reign of God on earth (e.g., 2 Sm. 7:12-17; Is. 2:2-4; Dn. 2:44). As the centuries passed, the expectation grew more intense. All hope held out to men in the OT centered in that promise. It would fill every need of man and would be God's final offer to him.

"But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:4-5). After Acts 2, in the NT, the emphasis is changed from that which is to come to that which has already come. The OT pointed forward to something coming; the NT points backward to something that has already come. That which had been promised and was expected had at last arrived. While redemption is the theme in both, the OT pictures it as a future promise and the NT as a present reality. The NT teaches therefore that the OT expectations were fulfilled in the coming of Christ and

the establishment of the Christian system.

To show that Christianity is the fulfillment of OT prophecies, consider an example from Isaiah. He wrote, "For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him" (Is. 64:4). Paul quotes this passage to show that the promised blessing is realized in the gospel of Christ. He wrote, "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2:9-10). That which eye had not seen, nor ear heard, nor had been conceived in the heart is the very thing God has now revealed to us by the Spirit. And that which was revealed by the Spirit is the gospel of Christ, the scheme of human redemption. The conclusion is inevitable: the gospel of Christ, the means of salvation from sin, is that to which the OT pointed. Christianity is thus the fulfillment of all OT expectations.

But furthermore, the NT teaches that the Christian system is the final means by which God will deal with man this side of the judgment. Jude wrote, as the revelation was being completed, "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). The expression "once delivered" in the KJV is rendered "once for all delivered" by the ASV. The faith was delivered once for all and once delivered it was never to be repeated. The word "once" is from the Greek *hapax*, meaning according to Vine, "Once for all, of what is of perpetual validity, not requiring repetition." One of the verses Vine gives to establish this definition is Heb. 9:28, where the writer says, "So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation." Christ was once offered and that once was for all and for all time. And so it is with the faith once delivered. This proves beyond question the absolute finality of the faith.

There is no question about it then: those who are looking to some future utopia for a fulfillment of OT promises and prophecies have absolutely missed the true message of both the OT and the NT. They have misconceived the Scriptural expectation of redemption from sin for a fantastic dream of a future earthly kingdom. And in doing so they have reduced Christianity to an unplanned system in the scheme of God — a spiritual system which replaced the old physical one (the law of Moses) but which in turn will be replaced at the second coming by a restoration of the physical. But the true fact is the kingdom has come and Christ now reigns over it. "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Eph. 2:19).

1:10 **I was in the Spirit** — I came under the Spirit's power (Beck). The Spirit here is the HS, not just a state of spiritual ecstasy, disposition, devotion,

or enjoyment produced by the Spirit. It describes the method by which the revelation was made known to John. The precise means by which this was done is not revealed, but the important thing for us is not to comprehend the exact method of revelation but to understand the message John received while in the Spirit — that is, understand the message that was Spirit-delivered. **on the Lord's day**, — The first day of the week, Sunday, the day the Lord arose from the dead, and the day on which Christians met to worship (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2). While the expression appears nowhere else in the NT, the vast majority of Christians from the first century to the present have understood it to mean the first day of the week. Two things are certain: (1) John considered this day peculiarly associated with Christ — a day pertaining to the Lord in a sense no other day does. (2) Those to whom he wrote were familiar with its peculiar characteristics. No day fills these requirements but the first day of the week, the resurrection day, the day Christ conquered death and the grave, and the day all Christians celebrate His victory by assembling together to take the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:23-34). Further proof of this is the fact that the Greek word for "Lord's" occurs only one other time in the NT (1 Cor. 11:20), where it describes the Lord's Supper. This connects the Lord's day and the Lord's Supper together as peculiarly pertaining to Christ. The Lord's Supper (which is taken on the first day of the week) and the Lord's day (which is the first day of the week) are joined together for a powerful memorial to the death and resurrection of Christ. But there are a few (mostly those who have a dogmatic reason for rejecting Sunday, such as the Seventh Day Adventists) who say it means either the Sabbath day, the annual resurrection day or Easter, the judgment day, or the day of the Lord (the day of the second coming). All of these, however, are strained interpretations and are foreign matters forced into the text (to make it fit into some preconceived theory) rather than a sincere exegesis of the statement itself. Thus I conclude that the Lord's day is the day of the Lord's resurrection, the first day of the week (Mt. 28:1; Mk. 16:2-9; Lk. 24:1; Jn. 20:1). **and heard behind me a great voice**, — The mighty voice of the Son of God (vv. 11-20). **as of a trumpet**, — Like a trumpet (NIV). The voice was loud, like the blast of a war trumpet.

1:11 **Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and**, — Omitted for lack of manuscript support in most modern translations. For my notes on the expressions, see v. 8. **What thou seest**, — What you see (Beck). Write the vision — what he then saw and what he was yet to see (v. 19). **write in a book**, — Write the revelation in a book (or on a scroll). From the time God wrote the Ten Commandments on tables of stone (Ex. 20), His chief means of communicating His will to man has been through the written word. It is as much God-breathed as if it were spoken from His own mouth orally (2 Tm. 3:16; 2 Pt. 1:20-21). The written word retains the same power as the spoken word (Heb. 4:12; Rom. 1:16). From other passages where the Lord charged His prophets to write, we learn that the word was to be written plainly — so plain that one could read and understand it while on the run (Hb. 2:2); that it was

to contain all the Lord would reveal to His people — it was to be complete (Jer. 30:2; 36:2); that it was the commandments of the Lord — the revealed will of God to man (1 Cor. 14:37); that it preserves the word of the Lord for all time to come — it is permanent and unchangeable (Is. 30:8). **and send it unto the seven churches** — Seven is symbolic for full, mature, or complete; hence the seven are representative of the whole church. The seven churches addressed lie almost in a circle, as can be seen by consulting a map of early Christianity. There were other churches in that area but these were probably chosen because they best represented the problems and needs of the universal church. It is thus my judgment that Revelation was meant for the church as a whole, from beginning to consummation, not just fragments to the church in one century and fragments to the church in another, but to the whole church in every century. **which are in Asia**; — Omitted on substantial textual grounds, but the churches here mentioned are all located in the Roman province of Asia Minor. **unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.** — Appropriate comments will be made about these seven cities at the beginning of each of the seven letters.

THE VISION OF CHRIST

1:12-16 And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars; and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword; and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

1:12 **And I turned to see the voice that spake with me.** — I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me (NIV). That is, he turned to see the source of the voice (the voice is put for the person speaking) he heard behind him (v. 10). **And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks;** — Seven separate lampstands. Seven is the number for completeness and gold is a symbol for that which has been purified (3:18). The lampstand signifies the seven churches (v. 20). Thus the churches are depicted as both complete and purified. This cannot mean that they were faultless (as is seen in 2-3), but all imperfection and impurities are on the human side, within the members, not on the divine side or with the church *per se*. The church as God planned it, as Jesus promised and purchased it, and as the apostles constructed it by the preaching of the gospel under the direction of the HS is both complete and pure.

1:13 **And in the midst of the seven candlesticks** — Christ is here seen walking among the churches, just as He had promised (Mt. 18:20; 28:20). Because He is always and everywhere among them, He knows their works, their strength and shortcomings (2:2, 9, 13; 3:1, 8, 15). **one like unto the Son of**

man, — Christ in a royal and glorified form. The exact meaning of Son of man is not easy to ascertain, but there can be no question but that here and in other places (e.g., 14:14; Dn. 7:13) it refers to Christ. It seems to have been the favorite title Christ applied to Himself (e.g., Mt. 8:20; 9:6; 10:23; 12:32, 40; 13:37, 41; 16:13). It may well be designed to emphasize His humanity. Christians (except for a few scattered and minor sects) have had little or no trouble acknowledging His divinity, but all of us have a tendency to forget or overlook His humanity. Thus this expression confronts us with the fact that He is the Son of man as well as the Son of God. He is both God and man — God manifested in human flesh (Mt. 1:23; Phil. 2:5-11). **clothed with a garment down to the foot**, — Dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet (NIV). The fully clothed Christ signifies that He has conquered humiliation, death, and the grave and now reigns in victorious dignity (cf. Is. 22:21). Consider the return of the prodigal son when his father clothed him with the best robe (Lk. 15:22). Also contrast with His garments being taken from Him at the time of His crucifixion (Mt. 27:35). As the ruling Prince, He is now clothed with a robe that cruel men cannot strip from Him. **and girt about the paps with a golden girdle**. — With a golden belt around His breast (Beck). This undoubtedly depicts His royal status. The girdle was a cloth or leather (in this case golden) sash or belt designed to secure the clothing. Since it is around the breast, rather than the waist, it indicates that He is dressed to rule rather than to serve. Hence, a symbol of royalty. If I am correct in saying that the garment represents His victory, then the sash obviously signifies that His victory is secure.

1:14 **His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow**; — His head and his hair were as white as white wool, as white as snow (Good-speed). The head here almost certainly signifies deity (cf. Dn. 7:9) and the whiteness purity (Is. 1:18). Christ is thus seen in all the pureness of deity. He is the Son of man (v. 13) but He is also the Son of God. **and his eyes were as a flame of fire**; — This figure seems to be taken from Dn. 10:6. The flame of fire depicts purity and the eyes, which are at the center of the figure, are a symbol of omniscience (or perhaps better, omnivision). Nothing is beyond His sight or hid from His view (2:23; Heb. 4:12). The eyes see, the flames penetrate, and the fire purifies. His vision is therefore pure and unlimited — He sees all things as they are (1 Sm. 16:7), not as they may outwardly appear.

1:15 **And his feet like unto fine brass**, — Burnished brass (ASV) or bronze (Williams). The word appears only here and in 2:18. Robertson (WP) says, "It is in reality an unknown metal," making its meaning uncertain. But fortunately for us the feet, which are like fine brass (perhaps brass glowing from heat), are the symbol, depicting Him as the one who will conquer and judge (cf. 19:15; Mt. 3:12; Heb. 10:13; 1 Cor. 15:25). **as if they burned in a furnace**; — As if it had been refined in a furnace (ASV) or glowing in a furnace (NIV). The ASV and NIV give the two possible renderings. The ASV sees it as brass already purified in the furnace of fire; the NIV as brass glowing with the heat in the process of refinement. While the difference is insignificant as far as the total

picture is concerned, the ASV seems the correct one to me. **and his voice as the sound of many waters.** — The voluminous voice is the symbol here. In v. 10 it was as the sound of a trumpet; now it is the thunder of rushing water. The trumpet is a blast; the waters are an uninterrupted roar (cf. Jer. 25:30). This suggests the irresistible power and authority of Christ (cf. Mt. 28:18-20), seen both in His word (Heb. 4:12) and His work (Ps. 19:1-3). The sound (His authority as proclaimed in the gospel) goes into all the world (Ps. 19:3; Rom. 10:18). The message is so thunderous and constant, so plain, so certain, so sure that it leaves the world inexcusable in its unbelief.

1:16 And he had in his right hand seven stars: — The stars represent the angels of the seven churches (see note on v. 20). But the vision is of the right hand also. It signifies majesty. It is the hand that holds the sceptre (Heb. 1:8). I believe this is designed to show that the universal church is ruled by His sceptre of righteousness — it is under His majestic power. **and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword:** — The sword is the word of God (2:16; Heb. 4:12; Eph. 6:17). But the mouth is also a part of the symbol. Hence the source of the word is the mouth of the Lord (2 Tm. 3:16; 2 Pt. 1:20-21; Mt. 4:4). This is thus a beautiful picture of the power and inspiration of the holy Scriptures. The sword is also a symbol of divine judgment — the instrument by which judgment is administered (19:15, 21; Jn. 12:48). **and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.** — It is difficult to ascertain whether John has reference to the face alone or the whole person. Usually countenance is shown in the face. But probably here he means the whole person, depicting Christ as the source of light (Jn. 1:9), light so brilliant that it outshines the sun in its full strength (cf. Mt. 17:1-8; Acts 26:13). Christ is thus seen as the light of the world (Jn. 8:12; 9:5; 2 Cor. 4:6). He is also the light of that eternal city yet to come (21:23).

AN OVERVIEW

1:12-16 These vv. give a magnificent and extremely significant description of the appearance and person of the glorified Christ. To see it as a whole (and keep in mind it is symbolic, not literal) is nothing short of amazing. John saw the one like unto the Son of man walking in the midst of His churches, holding the angel of each in His right hand. His clothing (garment and girdle) depicted Him as the victorious ruler. His head and hair signified His deity and purity; His eyes signified omniscience; His feet, the conquering judge; the right hand, majestic power; the voice, His power and authority; His mouth, the power and inspiration of the Scriptures (His divine and eternal word); His countenance, the light of the world. By symbols then Christ is presented as the all-sufficient one, the victorious ruler, deity with omniscience, the judge with majestic power, the voice of authority, inspiration, and power, and the light of the world. It is no wonder then that ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands cry before the throne, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive

power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing" (5:12). See also Paul's exaltation of Him (Eph. 1:19-23; Phil. 2:5-11). "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Eph. 3:21).

THE VISION EXPLAINED

1:17-20 And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and death. Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter: The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.

1:17 **And when I saw him**, — The vision of the glorified Christ (vv. 10-16). **I fell at his feet** — His feet of fine brass (v. 15). This, if it has symbolic significance, depicts John as acknowledging His righteous judgment and recognizing his unworthiness to stand in it (cf. Lk. 5:4-8). **as dead**. — Like a dead man (Goodspeed). The awesome sight of Christ so startled John that it left him breathless (cf. Is. 6:5; Ez. 1:28; Dn. 8:17, 27; 10:8-10). **And he laid his right hand upon me**, — The hand that signifies the sceptre of righteousness (v. 16). John saw his own sinfulness but Christ extended to him His righteousness (cf. Dn. 10:18). This brings John under His righteous rule. **saying unto me, Fear not**; — And said, Do not be afraid (NIV). — With the Lord's right hand upon him there was no reason to fear. While we must always fear God in the sense of awe and reverence (Ps. 19:9; Prv. 1:7; 9:10; 14:27), Christ delivers us from terrifying fear (1 Jn. 4:18). One who obeys the Lord's word, one who is prepared to meet God, never needs to fear: Christ has nothing but blessings for him. But one who disregards His will and tramples underfoot His blood shed on the cross has good reason to be terrified because the Lord's right hand is against him, not upon him — he is not under the righteous rule of Christ. **I am the first and the last**: — The same as Alpha and Omega (v. 8).

1:18 **I am he that liveth**, — And the living one (ASV). The ASV connects this to what precedes (v. 17) rather than what follows, as is done in the KJV. But regardless of its correct connection it expresses His eternal nature — the fact that He was with God from all eternity, before His incarnation into human flesh and His life here on earth (Phil. 2:5-11). **and was dead**; — From life in the flesh He had passed into the state of being dead. This has reference to His vicarious death on the cross for the sins of the world. He who knew no sin died to pay man's sin debt. **and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen**; — But now I live forever and ever (Williams). After His resurrection death had no power over Him. He arose to die no more (Heb. 7:25). The central theme of the gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:1-4). His death provided the means of forgiveness and His resurrection gave a lively hope for life beyond the grave. The message that Christ had arisen from the dead, thereby giving assurance that all the dead will be raised, electrified

the world when it was first preached and it remains, after 2000 years of history, the hope of millions. There are many infallible proofs (see notes on Rom. 1:4) of His resurrection (such as the empty tomb, the eyewitnesses, and the effects it had upon the disciples, especially the conversion and life of Paul) but space forces me to forego a discussion of them here. **and have the keys** — Keys are a symbol of power and authority (cf. Mt. 16:19; Lk. 11:52). This is the first of four appearances of the word in Revelation. Here and in 3:7 Christ has the keys of death and hades and of David and in 9:1 and 20:1 an angel has them to the bottomless pit. This depicts the fact that Christ holds the power over hell and death. **of hell and of death.** — Of death and of hades (ASV). Hell here (Greek *hades*) means the unseen and by NT times it had come to designate the unseen state of the dead — the realm of departed spirits, the place where the spirit of man goes when it departs from the body. In His resurrection Christ conquered both death and hades by breaking the bars of the unseen and making it possible for the captives to be set free. There is therefore no reason for those who follow Him to fear either death or hades (cf. 1 Cor. 15:54-57). They are now under the power of Christ and they cannot hold forever those who belong to Him.

1:19 **Write** — See v. 11. **the things which thou hast seen,** — Things pertaining to the revelation which he had already seen, which would include the vision of the glorified Christ (vv. 12-16). **and the things which are,** — The vision he is presently seeing (vv. 17-20). **and the things which shall be hereafter;** — The things which are still to be seen pertaining to the vision — that is, the vision of the remainder of the book. It seems to me that John is simply commissioned to write *the things he had seen, the things which he then saw, and the things which were yet to be seen.* To see more in it (such as the proper division of the whole book), is, in my judgment, to see more than the Lord meant for us to see.

1:20 **The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks.** — The symbolic meaning of the stars and the lampstands are now to be revealed — that is, the mystery is manifested. **The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches:** — Angel means messenger (usually, though not always, heavenly); hence the stars represent the churches as messengers. While there can be no question about the fact that the stars represent the angels of the churches (this is the Lord's own explanation), just who or what the angels are has been a matter of wide conjecture among commentators. The mystery of the stars has been revealed, but not the mystery of the angels. Hailey summarizes seven such conjectures and I here summarize his summary: (1) men sent by John; (2) angels who are responsible for the spiritual state of the churches; (3) bishop, or the entire eldership; (4) power, character, or life of the church; (5) heavenly or spiritual counterpart of the church; (6) active life of the church; (7) spiritual character, or inward spirit, of the church. While I agree essentially with the seventh view, it seems to me that we must go a step further and identify the angel as symbolizing the

church itself — depicting the church as a divine messenger of Christ and His gospel (see below under "The Angels of the Churches"). **and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.** — The seven churches of Asia (representing the whole church), each of which is now to have a personal message from Christ addressed to it. The lampstands signify the church as a light bearer.

THE ANGELS OF THE CHURCHES

Many views have been advanced as to who (or what) the angels of the churches are, but as stated in the note on v. 20 my own view is that ultimately the church itself is meant. But how could this be when the Lord specifically says that the stars are the angels of the churches and the lampstands are the churches? Are the angels to be taken literally or are they to be understood symbolically? When all the evidence is considered it seems clear, at least to me, that they are symbolic: the angels and the lampstands are both symbols of the churches but each signifying a different aspect of them. The angels are divine messengers; hence, the churches are by them depicted as God's messengers of the gospel. The lampstands are dispensers of light; hence, they signify the churches as light bearers. The angels symbolize the churches as the messengers and the lampstands as the ones who have the message.

The difficulty of this view lies in the fact that if it is true, then here is a symbol (star) symbolizing another symbol (angel) which symbolizes the church. Is this unreasonable or incredible? Can one symbol symbolize another symbol in the same book and in the same context? The answer is unequivocally positive. The HS is symbolized by the seven Spirits (v. 4). Yet in 4:5 it is said that the seven lamps of fire burning before the throne are the seven Spirits of God. The seven burning lamps symbolize the seven Spirits, and the seven Spirits symbolize the HS Himself. Thus one symbol symbolizes another in the same context. But there is another unquestionable example of this in 11:3-4: "And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth." What the two witnesses ultimately represent for us is one of the most difficult puzzles in Revelation. But regardless of what or who they may be, they are symbolized by two olive trees and two candlesticks. Thus a symbol symbolized by two other symbols in the same context.

But what are the internal evidences which support this view? First, the revelation is clearly addressed to the churches (vv. 4, 11). Yet when John addresses each individual church he addresses the angel of that church and consequently everything in the epistle is addressed to the angel. Was John writing to the angels or was he writing to the churches? While this may not prove my view absolutely, it does lay a good foundation for it and points irrefutably in that direction.

Second, and far more conclusively, in the seven letters to the seven churches the angel is addressed but the instructions are given to and for the churches. As far as I can determine, this has always been understood. The message was meant for the churches but it was addressed to the angels. All that is necessary to see this is to look at the use of second person pronouns. Let us take for an example the letter addressed to the angel of the church at Ephesus (and what is true of it is true of all seven churches).

The letter to the church at Ephesus is, like all the others, addressed to the angel of the church, but the instructions given are meant for the church. Notice in 2:2, "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience." The antecedent of "thy" is the angel of the church. Yet it is obvious that the instructions are meant for the whole church, not just for a messenger, whether angel, man, or select group. But further: "Thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars." Did the angel do these things or was it the action of the church? In 2:4, "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." Did Christ have something against the angel only or did He have it against the whole church? In 2:5, "Remember therefore from whence thou are fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." The angel is addressed, but was it the angel or the church itself which had left its first love? The answer is obvious. The angel is commanded to repent or else the church would be removed. Hence, the angel and the church are one and the same. I see no escape from this conclusion.

Third, when the church is addressed it is always addressed as the angel (by means of second person pronouns), but when an individual in a church is addressed the pronouns are changed to third person (2:7, 11, 22, 26-27; 3:5, 12, 20-21). As far as I have been able to determine, the church *per se* has nowhere been addressed in the third person. It is always addressed as the angel. Thus I conclude that the angel is symbolic of the church.

REVELATION 2

THE CHURCH AT EPHEBUS

2:1-7 Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

2:1 **Unto the angel** — See note on 1:20. **of the church** — It is not known precisely when the church was established in Ephesus; however Paul briefly passed through it on his second missionary journey but would not consent to stay because he was eager to be at Jerusalem for the upcoming feast (Acts 18:19-21). He obviously left Acquila and Priscilla there and they soon taught Apollos the way of the Lord more perfectly (Acts 18:24-28). Paul returned on his third journey and baptized about 12 men (Acts 19:1-7), after which he remained at least two years and three months (Acts 19:10). While he was there many obeyed the gospel (Acts 19:18-20) and the church became a powerful missionary center (Acts 19:10). Paul left the city because of a riot caused by Demetrius (Acts 19:23-41) but the church continued to exert a tremendous influence in the whole region (cf. Acts 20:17-38). About A.D. 62 Paul wrote to it the Ephesian epistle from Rome, and tradition has it that John himself had made his home there for many years before the revelation was received. Now, after nearly 50 years of glorious history, its very existence is endangered because it had left its first love and had ceased to do its first work. **of Ephesus** — Ephesus was a seaport city on the western coast of the province of Asia, the closest of the seven churches to Patmos. At the time John wrote it was the metropolis of Ionia, a center where all classes of people met, lived, worshipped, worked, and carried on commerce. It was populous (said to be about 225,000), cultured, wealthy, and corrupt. Until Christianity appeared, it was given over almost totally to idolatry (except for the Jewish population). It was the site of the temple of the goddess Diana (Artemis), whom, according to Demetrius, "All Asia and the world worshippeth" (Acts 19:27). Many considered it the first and greatest city in Asia. After the gospel was first preached there, it soon became an important center for NT Christianity. **write;** — See 1:11. **These things saith he** — The glorified Christ (1:12-20). This assures them that the message to follow was of divine origin (cf. 2 Pt. 1:19-21), that it was more than a fanciful vision of John: it was the revelation of Jesus Christ (1:1). **that holdeth**

the seven stars — See 1:20. **in his right hand**, — See 1:16. **who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks**; — See 1:13.

2:2 **I know** — He has full and complete knowledge — He knows all things, even the secret thoughts of the heart. His omniscience is signified by the fact that He is walking among the churches. He sees all and nothing, good or bad, is hid from His sight (Ps. 139:1-12). The infinite knowledge of God, that He knows every wrong, every shortcoming, every act or thought, every flaw of character, is a fearful thing to contemplate (cf. Acts 15:18; Rom. 16:27; 1 Cor. 1:25). Christians should recognize this fact and conduct their lives in keeping with it. To illustrate this, I read somewhere that when Phidias was working on the statue of Diana, the goddess of Ephesus, for the Acropolis at Athens he was perfecting her hair, bringing out with the keen edge of his chisel every line and filament, when a passerby asked, "What is the use of such painstaking with that part of the work? That statue is to go up a hundred feet high, and the back of the head will be toward the wall, and nobody can see it." Phidias replied to his critic, "The gods will see it." He carved on, perfecting his work for the gods. How much more should the people of God perform their work to the living God who knows all and sees all? But the knowledge of God is more than fearful: it is wonderfully comforting. He knows when we have tried and failed, but He also knows when we succeed in His service, even when no man on earth gives us credit for what we do. He knows the burdens we must bear. He knows the sufferings, heartaches, and persecutions we endure. He knows the disappointments and anguish of mind we meet on every hand. He knows when our hearts are devoted to Him. Not even a sparrow falls to the ground without His knowledge (Mt. 10:29). "Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Mt. 10:31). Nothing will escape His sight (Heb. 4:13), not even an idle word (Mt. 12:36), nor will anything done for Him be forgotten (Mt. 10:42; Gn. 18:25). **thy works**, — Deeds or activities — that which they had been doing in devotion to God, such as carrying out the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20) and being ready to every good work (Ti. 3:1). **and thy labour**, — Toils (ASV) or hard work (NIV). Exhaustive labor and perhaps labor under painful circumstances (cf. the Israelites in Egyptian bondage). It may indicate some form of toil that had been forced upon them because of their faith. **and thy patience**, — Regardless of what the labor was, they had endured patiently. **and how thou canst not bear them which are evil**: — And how you cannot tolerate the wicked (BV). They had been born anew (Jn. 3:5) and had thus learned a better way of life (Eph. 4:20-24; 2 Cor. 5:17). They had had enough of the wickedness of the world (1 Pt. 4:1-5) and had no interest in corrupting their lives again by evil companionship (1 Cor. 15:33, ASV). As Lot, they were vexed with the filthy manners of the wicked (2 Pt. 2:7). They could not endure such disrespect for God, His purpose and His law. **and thou hast tried** — Put to the test (NASV). Precisely how the church had done this is not revealed, but by some means, approved by Christ, it had proven that they were imposters, not apostles (cf. 1 Jn. 4:1, 6). Undoubtedly the church

had followed apostolic instruction in making its determination: for the doctrine delivered by the apostles, under divine inspiration, is the standard by which all such is to be done (2 Jn. 9-11). **them which say they are apostles**, — They either claimed to be of the original apostles, specially called apostles, or in some way successors to the apostles, and as such they claimed to be sent by Christ as His official spokesmen. Evidently such claims were not uncommon in the early church (2 Cor. 11:13-15). **and are not**, — They were not apostles, not what they claimed to be. **and hast found them liars**: — Found their claims to be false. They were untrustworthy and their rejection was just.

2:3 **And hast borne, and hast patience**, — They had persevered patiently in persecution and temptation and had not yielded to the lures of false teachers. They had stood when the standing was tough. **and for my name's sake** — The burden they had borne had been thrust upon them because they were Christians — their hardship was on His account (cf. Mt. 5:10-12; 1 Pt. 4:15-19), that is, because they wore His name (Jas. 2:7). **hast laboured**, — See v. 2. **and hast not fainted**. — They had not grown weary or become exhausted in their service, even though the circumstance under which they lived and worked imposed upon them severe hardships.

2:4 **Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee**, — Although He had commended them for a good many things, root rot had set in and it threatened the very life of the church. The Lord commends them wherein they were right and rebukes them wherein they were wrong. He brought this very serious and grave charge against them: **because thou hast left thy first love**. — That you have abandoned the love you had at first (RSV). Their first love was the love they had for Christ and His cause which motivated their primary obedience (Jn. 14:15; 1 Jn. 5:3; 2 Jn. 6) and became the ruling principle of their early Christian life. A brief look at their history reveals that for a half century they had been proper examples and a powerful influence for truth and right; some of them had been rebaptized (Acts 19:1-7); they had seen special miracles (Acts 19:11-12); they had burned their costly books of curious arts (Acts 19:18-19); they had been blessed with a profound epistle from Paul; and John had probably lived among them for many years before his banishment. But now the honeymoon with Christ was over and their love for Him had begun to wane. Their hearts had beat only for Him at first, but now their devotion was divided. Christ had ceased to be the center of their affections.

2:5 **Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen**, — So remember the heights from which you have fallen (Williams). They were required to constantly keep in mind where they were before they fell from their first love. They had experienced a fall (cf. Gal. 5:4; 2 Pt. 2:20-22; Acts 8:18-24), but the Lord had made provisions whereby they could return to Him (Acts 8:22; 1 Jn. 1:9). Just as the prodigal son who had left his father's house (Lk. 15:11-24) remembered his home, repented, and returned, fallen Christians should remember what it meant to have Christ rule the heart and life, the excitement and joy of the first days after conversion when they were possessed by love,

the church and its remarkable fellowship, the peace that passes all understanding, the days spent in the Father's house under His care and protection, the contentment of covenant relationship, and the consolation of the hope of eternal life. No further motivational stimuli should be necessary to bring them to repentance. **and repent**, — Change their minds about the state of sin they had fallen into and return to a right relationship with the Savior. Thayer defines repentance: "To change one's mind for the better, heartily to amend with abhorrence of one's past sins." Repentance would return the Ephesians to the place from which they had fallen — it would, by the grace of God, restore them to their first love. **and do the first works**; — Do the things they had done before they had fallen. This probably involves every aspect of Christianity, evangelism, benevolence, edification, worship, and morality. When Christians (a congregation as a whole or individuals) depart from this work, the only solution is to remember, repent, and return. **or else** — If they did not remember, repent, and return there would be no escape from the following consequences: **I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent**. — If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place (NIV). This is simply a warning that He will not tolerate sin and apostasy in His church. If there is no repentance, the lampstand (church) will be removed. The Lord would no longer recognize it as His — it would cease to be a lightbearer for Him. Whether the church remained or was removed was conditioned upon their repentance. Its future would be determined by their decision.

2:6 **But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate**. — While the Lord did not approve everything done by the Ephesians (vv. 4-5), they shared a mutual hatred for the deeds (works, ASV, or practices, NIV) of the Nicolaitanes. It should be noted, however, that this hatred was against the deeds and not against the Nicolaitanes personally. While little or nothing is known of them (they may be the false apostles of v. 2), this does not detract from the message. They are probably meant to symbolize false doctrine wherever it is taught. To be sure, there were false teachers in Ephesus known as the Nicolaitanes, as there are false teachers everywhere (2 Pt. 2:1), but they would have received the same rebuke (and thus the same lesson for us) regardless of whether they were Gnostics or some other departure from the truth. Wherever false teaching appears, Christ hates it . . . and so should Christians (cf. 2 Jn. 9-11; Gal. 1:6-9).

2:7 The first part of this v. is an exhortation given to all seven churches. This seven-fold repetition surely must be designed to give it special significance. What is said unto one is said to all . . . both then and now. **He that hath an ear**, — He that is capable of and willing to hear. Capability imposes obligation (cf. Mt. 12:47-48; Jas. 1:19). **let him hear** — Let him accept the responsibility imposed by his capability. Without hearing there can be no believing; without believing there can be no calling (obeying); without calling there can be no salvation (Rom. 10:13-17). **what the Spirit saith unto the**

churches; — Many things and many people clamor to be heard, but the churches of Christ are limited to hearing what is said by the HS. This has primary reference to that which He says in the Patmos revelation, but in principle (and taught throughout the whole Bible) it means all that God has revealed to His people. They are to hear that and nothing more (cf. Jn. 10:4, 5, 27). This eliminates all the opinions and conjectures of men; all uninspired creeds and religious doctrines; all the philosophies and ethical systems of men; the Pope and the false system of Catholicism; all modern or pseudo-revelations. It eliminates everything which the Spirit Himself has not revealed. The only way the Spirit speaks today is through the written word. It is complete and final (Jude 3; Gal. 1:6-9). We can neither add to, take from, nor modify it in any way without heaven's curse (22:18-19). It, and it alone, reveals all that we need to make our life complete and acceptable to God (2 Tm. 3:16-17). Thus when one hears what is said in the holy Scriptures he is hearing what the Spirit says to the churches. **To him that overcometh** — This is a promise to the victorious, those who respond to the Spirit's words and remain faithful unto death (v. 10). **will I give to eat of the tree of life,** — To eat of the tree of life is symbolic of eternal life, life that knows no death or decay. This is the final victory! Man's first home was in Eden where he evidently had free access to the tree of life (Gn. 2:9). But when he sinned he was cut off from it (Gn. 3:22-24). Later in the revelation John sees the tree of life in heaven (22:2) and concludes that all who have their robes washed in the blood of the Lamb have a right to it (22:14, ASV). **which is in the midst of the paradise of God.** — Heaven, the eternal home Jesus has gone to prepare for the soul (Jn. 14:1-6). The word "paradise" (which means a garden of pleasure) occurs only three times in the NT. Once it means the department in hades where the spirits of the righteous go between death and the resurrection (Lk. 23:43; cf. 16:19-31). Here and in 2 Cor. 12:4 it means heaven, the final home of the righteous.

THE CHURCH AT SMYRNA

2:8-11 And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

2:8 **And unto the angel** — See 1:20. **of the church in Smyrna** — The church in Smyrna is not mentioned outside of Revelation. Thus nothing is known of it (from the NT) but what is here said. However it did carve for itself a place in early church history by the fact that Polycarp, an aged disciple of the apostle John, was martyred there about A.D. 155. The city itself was an old coastal town about 40 miles north of Ephesus. Its thriving harbors had made it a wealthy and flourishing city, famous for its beauty, science, literature, medi-

cine, and architecture. It was built on the slopes of Mount Pagus and a ring of beautiful buildings crowned the summit, perhaps giving rise to the Lord's statement concerning the crown of life (v. 10). It was also a city famous for its many pagan temples and had its own Caesar-cult and worshipped Rome as a great spiritual power. The people prided themselves on their achievement and the beauty of their city. It was called the "flower of Asia" and laid claim to being the first city (following Rome, of course) and would tolerate no rivals for this position. In the midst of all this wealth, pride, and paganism a most unusual church existed — a church which drew no condemnation from the Lord of glory. **write**; — See 1:11. **These things saith the first and the last**, — Since Smyrna had conceived of itself as the first city, it was appropriate for the Lord to remind the Christians that He was the first, the last, and all that lies in-between. There may be another thought here: the church was in poverty and faced severe persecution; but the enemies of truth and right would not have the last word. Christ was the first and the last and those who belonged to Him would be victorious. See also 1:8, 17. **which was dead, and is alive**; — See 1:18.

2:9 **I know thy works**, — See v. 2. **and tribulation**, — The persecution which had befallen them and that which was yet to come. **and poverty**, — Physical, not spiritual poverty. This probably has reference to poverty brought upon them because of their faith. The same paganism that had brought fame and fortune to the city had resulted in persecution and poverty for the Christians because they had renounced and denounced everything pagans practiced that conflicted with their faith. **(but thou art rich)** — Rich in heavenly things, the things which count most both now and in eternity. They had Christ, and with Him came all the marvels of redemption and the fruit of Christian living (Gal. 5:22-23). They possessed the true riches, riches laid up in heaven (Mt. 6:20). Their riches were their spiritual heritage, the riches of the soul, such as character, reputation, home, happiness, honesty, peace of mind, etc. This is the exact opposite of the condition in Laodicea (3:17). **and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews**, — They were slandered and abused by some who falsely claimed to be Jews. The Jews had rejected Christ, hounded His people from city to city, and had persecuted the apostles and others in an all-out effort to destroy the Faith. Such bitterness should not have characterized one who was truly a child of God's holy law. Thus they were Jews in name only. **and are not**, — Not true Jews. The true Israel had ceased to be the Jews after the flesh and had become Jews in the spiritual sense — Christians (Rom. 2:28-29; Gal. 6:16; Phil. 3:3). **but are the synagogue of Satan**. — They are the puppets of Satan, doing his work rather than the Lord's (cf. Jn. 8:44). That is, they are not of God.

2:10 **Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer**: — Do not be afraid of the things which are about to come upon you, that is, trial, tribulation, imprisonment, and possible death (cf. v. 11; Mt. 10:28). **behold, the devil** — Satan, the archenemy of Christ and thus the adversary and slanderer of His

people (1 Pt. 5:8; Eph. 6:12). The work of Satan is manifested in many forms throughout Revelation. He is the head of and behind every evil and his work is always depicted in opposition to the Lord and His saints. This whole book is designed to show the intense battle between right and wrong, Christ and the devil, and to assure the saints that, even though they are imprisoned, persecuted, and often put to death, victory belongs to them if they are faithful to the end. **shall cast some of you into prison**, — That is, he was about to cast them into prison for their faith and practice. He would not do this personally but through his agents, probably through those who were called Jews but were in reality the enemies of God (v. 9). To suffer imprisonment was not an uncommon lot for Christians (cf. Acts 12:3-4; 16:23). **that ye may be tried**; — That your faith may be tested. **and ye shall have tribulation** — Suffer severe persecution. **ten days**: — In my judgment it misses the point to interpret the number ten literally (so as to say it signifies the ten traditional persecutions). It seems reasonably clear, when all the numbers in the book are considered, that each one is symbolic in nature, that is, each number (except when it introduces a list of things such as the seven seals, seven bowls, etc., and even then the symbolic significance may not be absent) represents the concept attached to that number during and before the time the revelation was given. For example, the number seven represents completeness or perfection. Thus one should not think of the seven Spirits before the throne (1:4) as seven separate Spirits but as the completeness and perfection of the one Spirit (Eph. 4:4-6). So it is with the number ten here. It is a full or rounded number and is thought to be the number of full testing or trial to the limits of endurance (cf. Gn. 31:7, 41; the ten plagues on Egypt, Nm. 14:22; Dn. 1:12-15). If this is the case (and I think it is) then it signifies a fixed period of extreme persecution which would test them to their full limits. But as with Job (Jb. 19:2; 42:12-13) their time of trial would end in victory if they faithfully endured. **be thou faithful** — When your trial comes, prove yourself faithful to Christ and His cause. They were not to abdicate their priesthood under persecution. But to extend the thought further, every act of life was to be performed in keeping with their pledge of total allegiance to Christ as Lord (cf. 2 Cor. 10:3-5). It was not a requirement to be perfect (in the sense of sinlessness) but a command to be faithful — to stand firm (under all conditions and in every situation) in their commitment to Christ (Mt. 6:33). They were to recognize that as Christians they belonged to Christ absolutely and that they must always be at their post of duty. **unto death**, — Be faithful to the enduring of death. It is certainly true that one is to be faithful as long as he lives, but we would miss the significance of this were we to think only in terms of being faithful until life ends naturally in death. The thought is, "Be faithful even if the price you must pay is death." It is said that Marcus Aurelius, a Roman emperor, was once enraged at 40 Christian men because they would not bow down and worship his image. He commanded, "Strip them to the skin." After they were stripped he ordered them to go stand on a frozen lake until they were ready

to renounce the Nazarene God. But when dawn broke the next morning, 40 nude men were found dead on the ice. They had been faithful unto death. **and I** — The Lord Himself, who is faithful to keep every promise (2 Pt. 3:9). **will give thee a crown of life.** — The crown of life (ASV). Eternal life as the crown (Jas. 1:12; 2 Tm. 4:8; 1 Pt. 5:4), the same as eating of the tree of life in v. 7. Here we can see that it is not the one who starts the race for eternal life that receives the crown, but the one who crosses the finish line (cf. 1 Cor. 9:24-27). Thus the crown is the crown of victory.

2:11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; — See note on v. 7. **He that overcometh** — He who is victorious (Goodspeed) or is faithful unto death (v. 10). That is, one who wins the battle over wrong. **shall not be hurt of the second death.** — Shall not by any means suffer eternal destruction (2 Thes. 1:7-9). Fortunately for us we do not have to speculate about what the second death is. Revelation itself tells us that it is the lake of fire, into which death, hades, and the wicked will be cast (20:14; 21:8). Thus the promise here is that the faithful, who are washed in the blood of the Lamb (1:5; 7:14) and who have part in the first resurrection (20:6), will be crowned with life rather than suffer the vengeance of eternal damnation. When this v. is compared with 20:6 it appears that to overcome and to have part in the first resurrection is one and the same thing. Thus the first resurrection is a symbolic expression identifying those who are victorious — those who are faithful unto death and have won the victory, through Christ, over the devil and all his host.

THE CHURCH AT PERGAMOS

2:12-17 And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is; and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

2:12 And to the angel of the church — See note on 1:20. **in Pergamos** — Pergamum (ASV). Pergamum was a beautiful inland city built on the summit of a mountain. Because it was located about 15 miles from the sea and was not on any of the main trade lines, it was not a powerful city of commerce, such as Ephesus. While many things could be said about it, I will mention only three: (1) The city itself. It was the royal city and the political capital of Asia Minor. Ramsay says, "History marked it out as the royal city, and not less clearly has nature done so. No city of the whole of Asia Minor — so far as I have seen, and there are few of any importance which I have not seen — possesses the same imposing and dominating aspect. It is the one city of

the land which forced from me the exclamation 'A royal city!' I came to it after seeing the others and that was the impression which it produced. There is something unique and overpowering about its effects. . . ." (2) Its library. Two rulers of Pergamum in the second century B.C. were great book collectors. Together they had built up a huge library of 200,000 volumes. This caused jealousy to grow up between it and the library in Alexandria, Egypt. To give Egypt the advantage, Ptolemy prohibited the exporting of papyrus, the material from which nearly all ancient books (scrolls) up to this time were made. This forced Pergamum to the discovery of a new and more durable writing material (parchment) made from animal skins. Since parchment did not work well as a scroll, there was born the concept of sewing the sheets together to form a codex (book). There is no way to measure the blessing that concept has been to every generation since. (3) Idolatry. Pergamum was a pagan culture and thus practiced rank idolatry (which was especially offensive to the Christians). Here was located the famous altar of Zeus and the temple of Athena. It was also the seat of the state religion of emperor worship, which may be the explanation of Satan's seat in v. 13. **write; These things saith he — Christ, which hath the sharp sword with two edges;** — See note on 1:16.

2:13 I know thy works, — See note on v. 2. **and where thou dwellest,** — He knew they lived in a pagan culture and in the midst of great immorality — a culture that had little or no sympathy with pure Christianity. As Isaiah, they lived in the midst of a people with unclean lips (Is. 6:5) . . . and abominable practices. **even where Satan's seat is:** — Where Satan sits enthroned (Moffett). That is, the devil was on his throne in Pergamum. This may have reference to the altar of Zeus and the temple of Athena, as well as the many other altars and temples of idolatry, but more likely to the temple of Augustus or emperor worship. The church had to withstand the powerful influence of Satan in this idolatrous city. **and thou holdest fast my name,** — Even though Satan had been enthroned by the community, they continued to hold to and exalt the name of Christ. As Hailey observed, "The name stands for all that Jesus is: His deity, authority, and Lordship over God's entire universe." On the name cf. v. 3; Jas. 2:7; Phil. 2:5-11; Acts 4:12; 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pt. 4:16. **and hast not denied my faith,** — This may mean their personal faith in Christ but I think it has reference to that body of truth delivered by Christ and His apostles (Jude 3). At any rate they had not renounced it by engaging in abominable things (Ti. 1:16), such as denying Jesus and confessing the emperor as Lord. They had stood true even when their faith and refusal to practice the popular but sinful idolatry exposed them to grave danger (cf. 1 Tm. 6:12). **even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr,** — Nothing more is known of Antipas than is here revealed, but from this we know that he was faithful and that he suffered martyrdom. But even this, a traumatic experience for the Christian, had not caused them to deny either the name or the faith of Christ. **who was slain among you,** — He was put to death for his faith, perhaps the first to die when the current persecution broke out. **where**

Satan dwelleth. — Antipas had been killed right where Satan lived. Where Satan lived and where he was enthroned probably have reference to the same place. If so, then in all probability Antipas had been put to death in the temple of Augustus. He may have been taken there in an effort to force him to confess the emperor as Lord and worship his image. But he had already confessed Christ and would deny neither His name nor His faith. This may have so infuriated them that they killed him right on the spot. At any rate, he is an example of what it means to be faithful unto death (v. 10).

2:14 **But I have a few things against thee,** — Even though they held high the name of Christ and could not be forced to renounce the faith, a minority held to two grievously false doctrines, the teachings of Balaam and that of the Nicolaitanes. While only some were actually guilty, the entire congregation was in some manner responsible for the errors being taught. Were they condoning the false teachers in such a way as to encourage rather than rebuke them? Perhaps so (2 Jn. 9-11). **because thou hast there them** — A minority, not the whole church. **that hold the doctrine of Balaam,** — That is, they held to that which Balaam taught. Balaam was a Baal-cult prophet from Moab, but God used him to deliver some true prophecies (Nm. 22-24). Balac wanted him to curse Israel and thus stop their progress toward the Promised Land. And since he was a prophet for hire (2 Pt. 15-16), he agreed to Balac's terms. But when he opened his mouth to pronounce a curse, behold, a blessing came out instead. But having failed in this, he evidently instructed Balac in a more sure way to stop Israel, namely, to lead them into sin by the following method: **who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel,** — Who taught Balac to entice the Israelites to sin (NIV). The trap set by Balaam's instructions consisted of the double enticement of idol worship and fornication. **to eat things sacrificed unto idols,** — To eat the sacrifice in recognition of the idol as an object of worship. This is precisely what Balac enticed Israel to do (Nm. 25:2-4). It was, however, a violation of both the first and second commandments, and if persisted in would destroy Israel as God's holy nation. This Balaam knew. **and to commit fornication.** — Incredible sexual immorality (Nm. 25:1, 6). This brought a plague upon them which resulted in the death of 24,000 before it was stopped (Nm. 25:5-9).

2:15 **So hast thou also them** — A minority among them, not the whole church. **that hold** — That is, they were believers in and supporters of the false teaching of the Nicolaitanes. **the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes.** — See note on v. 6. **which thing I hate.** — In like manner (ASV). Perhaps in the same manner as some held the doctrine of Balaam.

2:16 **Repent;** — This is addressed primarily to the church but no doubt it would include those who were clinging to the false doctrines. The church should be led by godly sorrow (2 Cor. 7:10) to change its mind about and turn away from the compromising position it had taken toward the doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitanes and for permitting such errorists to go unchallenged and uncorrected. In Ephesus the Nicolaitanes were hated (v. 6); in Pergamum

they were tolerated. See note on v. 5. **or else I will come unto thee quickly**, — He would come to them in judgment, and that with suddenness and swift-ness. **and will fight** — Make war (ASV). This expression is used to complete the figure of the sword, which is an instrument of judgment, punishment, and war. **against them** — Those who hold the teaching of Balaam and the Nicolaitanes. **with the sword of my mouth**. — The word of God (1:16; Heb. 4:12). He would come to them with swift judgment — condemnation of all who believe not the truth (2 Thes. 1:7-9; 2:11-12). The standard of judgment is the word of God (Jn. 12:48), the word that comes from the mouth of the Lord (Mt. 4:4). Thus the judgment comes from Christ and is executed by His authority.

2:17 **He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh** — See notes on v. 7. **will I give to eat of the hidden manna**, — Manna supplied by God. This undoubtedly looks back to the time when God fed Israel in the wilderness for forty years with manna from heaven (Ex. 16:12-35), a portion of which was kept out of view (hidden) by being placed in a golden pot and stored in the ark of the covenant (Heb. 9:4). Jesus claimed that He was the true bread (manna) which comes from God and gives eternal life (Jn. 6:31-35). Thus the manna signifies the supplying of every spiritual need to attain and maintain eternal life. It is therefore (at least in results) the same as the tree of life in v. 7. **and will give him a white stone**, — Give him the vote of innocence. White is the symbol of innocence. The stone may signify the person himself. The whole figure probably refers to a custom used in some courts at that time. The judges were given two pebbles, a black one for a guilty verdict and a white one for acquittal. If this is what John had in mind it is both beautiful and easily understood. The Lord promises to cast His vote of innocence for those who overcome. That is simply another way of saying He will present them justified before God, not by their own work or merit but by the means of forgiveness He provides through His own blood (Eph. 1:7; 2:8-9). When the Lord cast His vote of innocence, no guilt can then be imputed (cf. Rom. 4:5-8) and one's standing before God is as if he had never sinned. The second death will have no power over him (v. 11). **and in the stone a new name written**, — This is an expression that lies beyond my power to explain with confidence. Page after page has been written by commentators, but most offer shadow rather than substance. I doubt that it can refer to the name of Christ or God as in 3:12; 22:4. But if the stone represents the person himself (as I believe it does), and the fact that it is white depicts his state of justification, then it seems reasonable to conjecture that the new name represents the new relationship one receives in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), namely, a personality of innocence or a character free from sin. Robertson (WP) says, "The white stone with one's name on it was used to admit one to entertainments. . . ." Thus the person justified will be admitted into the presence of God, where he will be provided with everything necessary to sustain that right standing with Him for all eternity.

THE CHURCH AT THYATIRA

2:18-29 And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass; I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first. Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works. But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers; even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

2:18 **And unto the angel of the church — See notes on 1:20. in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, —** From Ephesus the circle of the seven churches extended north through Smyrna and on to Pergamum, where it turned southeast. Thyatira is thus located east of and about midway between Smyrna and Pergamum. Because it was built in a valley with no natural fortifications, it was subject to easy and frequent invasions. While it was garrisoned for protection, it never attained the status of a first rate city. But it did bristle with trade (thus growing large and wealthy) and was a center of communication. Ramsay says, "The inscriptions, though not specially numerous, mention the following [trade-guilds]: wool-workers, linen-workers, makers of outer garments, dyers, leather-workers, tanners, potters, bakers, slave-dealers and bronze-smiths." These trade guilds were undoubtedly associated with the worship of idols (which may be symbolized by that woman Jezebel of vv. 20-23) and created for the Christians an intolerable situation. As Hendriksen says, "If you wished to get ahead in this world, you must belong to a guild; if you belong to a guild, your very membership implies that you worship its god. You will be expected to attend the guild-festivals and to eat food part of which is offered to the tutelary deity and which you receive on your table as a gift from the god. And then, when the feast ends, and the real — grossly immoral — fun begins, you must not walk out unless you desire to become the object of ridicule and persecution!" It is not known when the church was established in Thyatira, but it could well owe its origin to Lydia, who learned the truth from the preaching of Paul while in Philippi selling purple (Acts 16:12-15). **who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, —** See notes on 1:14. **and his feet are like fine brass; —** See notes on 1:15. These figures were no doubt of special significance to the people of Thyatira because of the bronze-smith trade. And it may be that every description of Christ as given in 1:13-16 and at the beginning of each letter had special significance to the churches of Asia, and more especially the ones addressed to each particular

church. But if so, the special significance in most cases is largely lost to us today.

2:19 **I know thy works**, — I know what you are doing (Williams). See notes on v. 2. **and charity**, — And thy love (ASV). Their love for both God and man (Mt. 22:35-40) continued to shine brightly — to be the motivational factor in all areas of faith and practice (1 Cor. 13). This is in contrast to the church at Ephesus, where the church had left its first love (vv. 4-5). **and service**, — Ministry (ASV) or helpful ministrations. They had a benevolent spirit and thus served others by supplying their needs (cf. 1 Cor. 16:15; Gal. 6:10; Acts 6:1-8; 11:27-30). **and faith**, — Faithfulness, loyalty, fidelity (cf. v. 10; Ti. 2:10). **and thy patience**, — Perseverance or endurance in time of trial and suffering (cf. Jas. 1:2-4). See notes on v. 3. **and thy works; and the last to be more than the first**. — And that thy last works are more than the first (ASV). The ASV is more accurate here (see Vincent) and should be followed. The good works are probably the ones mentioned, love, ministry, faithfulness, perseverance. The church continued to grow in these, probably both in quality and in quantity, so that its present work exceeded its former (cf. 2 Pt. 1:5-7; 3:18). This is the opposite of Ephesus where the love and works had degenerated (vv. 4-5).

2:20 **Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee**, — See notes on v. 4. **because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel**, — They were tolerating and thereby condoning her evil conduct by letting her have her own way and by not recognizing her for what she was. This is drawn from the Jezebel of the OT. She was the wicked Sidonian wife of Ahab who was known for her seduction of Israel into idolatry and immorality (1 Kgs. 16-21; 2 Kgs. 9). She came to stand for everything that is corrupt and despicable in a woman. I think it is unnecessary to conclude that there was a literal woman living among them whose behavior was such as to cause the Lord to call her Jezebel. It seems more likely (at least to me) that she is a false system of teaching personified (v. 24), a system that seduced to idolatry and fornication, the very thing associated with the trade guilds. Ramsay says, "It was, certainly, hardly possible for a tradesman to maintain his business in Thyatira without belonging to the guild of his trade. The guilds were corporate bodies taking active measures to protect the common interests, owning property, passing decrees, and exercising considerable powers; they also, undoubtedly, were benefit societies, and in many respects healthy and praiseworthy associations." When one was in a guild it would be assumed that he recognized the god of that guild and took part in the feasts celebrated in its honor. This put Christians in a very precarious position. To maintain their trade they had to be in a guild; to be in a guild was almost equivalent to idolatry. Thus this system pertaining to the guilds (not the guilds *per se*) seems to be the best explanation of Jezebel. The name thus signifies a corrupt system of teaching (similar to if not identical with that of Balaam and the Nicolaitanes). The church was tolerating it by trying to co-exist with its evil. They probably rationalized by saying that they had knowledge that an idol is nothing (see notes on 1 Cor. 8 and 10). Therefore their association with the guilds was innocent, even though their membership implied

recognition of an idol as an object of worship, and part of that worship was committing fornication. **which calleth herself a prophetess**, — The system of teaching signified by Jezebel thus claimed to be an oracle, spoken by divine authority. This gave it more appeal. Who could argue with a god? **to teach and to seduce my servants** — She teaches her doctrine by which she seeks to entice the Christian to practice idolatry and immorality. **to commit fornication**, — See notes on 1 Cor. 6:13-19. **and to eat things sacrificed unto idols**. — To eat at the feasts in the sense of recognizing the idol as an object of worship (see notes on 1 Cor. 8:10; 10:7-8, 14-22). Whatever else may be said about Jezebel, the end in view of her teaching was idolatry. Morgan says, "The influence of the teaching of Jezebel was that the separated children of God . . . were forming new alliances therewith, and the spirit of worldliness was spreading because of the toleration of the teaching of Jezebel. The members of the church at Thyatira were finding their way to the feasts in the heathen temple, eating the things sacrificed to idols, and descending even to the depth of the vices that ensued."

2:21 **And I gave her space to repent of her fornication**; — He had allowed sufficient time after the truth was proclaimed for her to change, to turn from or come out of her immoral practices. **and she repented not**. — She refused to change and thus continued her alliance with corruption. While there is no question about the fact that physical adultery (fornication) was involved in pagan festivity, it is more likely that Jezebel was trying to lead Christians into spiritual adultery, i.e., idolatry. This concept is firmly based in OT Scripture (Jer. 3:6; Ez. 23:19; Hos. 9:1). This was the case because Israel belonged to God (as a wife to her husband) and any alliance with other gods was a breach of the covenant with Him. The same is true of a Christian. He is devoted wholly to Christ. He can therefore have no association with idols (cf. Rom. 7:2-4).

2:22 **Behold, I will cast her into a bed**, — A bed of sickness, suffering, or affliction. The bed where she committed fornication becomes the bed where she will suffer anguish. This probably means that her sin is the cause of her sickness. Sin has a way of finding one out (Nm. 32:23). Or to say it another way, one must reap what he sows (Gal. 6:7-8). One cannot sin without becoming a sinner and he cannot be a sinner and escape the consequences of his sin. That is, one cannot lie without becoming a liar; one cannot commit adultery without becoming an adulterer. Every sin carries its eternal penalty (Rom. 6:23), but most also have their consequences in this world. For example, sexual impurity exposes one to many horrible and frightful diseases besides its many other undesirable consequences. It is a pleasure that degrades the body, destroys purity, depreciates character, and disregards God's creative purpose in sex (see notes on 1 Cor. 6:13-20). **and them that commit adultery with her** — Those who follow her teaching and practice. **into great tribulation**, — Being partners in evil, they will suffer punishment together. Their bed of pleasure becomes their bed of pain. **except they repent of their deeds**. — Change their mind about and come out from the evil Jezebel had

led them into. This was the only way they could escape the sorrows of her bed.

2:23 And I will kill her children with death; — And I will strike her children dead (Goodspeed). Her children are the product of her seduction and fornication, the converts to her teaching and practice. This means that they would be utterly destroyed. Since it is highly unlikely that this has reference to literal children, it strongly indicates, as I have concluded, that Jezebel is not a literal woman. **and all the churches shall know** — What happened to Jezebel and her children would serve as an example to other churches of the judgment of God upon wickedness (cf. Acts 5:1-12). **that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts;** — The word translated reins means kidney. Metaphorically it was considered the seat of the will, emotions, or feeling (cf. Ps. 7:9; Jer. 11:20). Heart may mean the will, emotions, or intellect. If the writer means for a distinction to be made in the two it would be equivalent to our expression heart and mind. In any case, it shows that nothing is hidden from Him (cf. notes on "I know thy works," v. 2). **and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.** — He would reward each one in conformity with his own works (22:12; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 2:6). That is, the reward would depend upon the works. Evil would receive the reward of evil; good would receive that which is in keeping with divine approval. Every man will give account for himself, not for another; he will receive the reward of his own labor, not the reward of another's.

2:24 But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, — But to the rest of you at Thyatira (Williams). "And" is omitted by many texts and versions. Only one class of people are under consideration, not two as the KJV implies. It means those who had remained faithful to the Lord by resisting the seduction of Jezebel. **as many as have not this doctrine,** — The teaching personified in Jezebel (vv. 20-23), believed by some but tolerated by most. **and which have not known the depths of Satan,** — The depths of degradation to which the teaching led, namely, to the folly of idolatry and the filthiness of fornication. **as they speak;** — As they call them (NASV). They called their folly the deep secrets of Satan. **I will put upon you none other burden.** — He would lay no further weight upon them than that which they already bore. While it is difficult to ascertain, the burden they were already under was probably the necessity to resist the Jezebel doctrine and to stand for the truth in the presence of her undesirable system. The language here reminds us of the letter sent to Gentiles from the conference in Jerusalem (Acts 15:23-29), and it may have reference to its injunction against eating of meat offered to idols and fornication. At any rate, these are the things that seem to be signified by Jezebel and, because of their close connection with the trade guilds, the things most tempting to the church at Thyatira.

2:25 But that which ye have already hold fast — That which they had was the truth of the gospel. In that they were to stand firm against the Jezebel doctrine (v. 24). **till I come.** — This most likely has reference to His coming in judgment upon Jezebel and her children (vv. 22-23) rather than His second

coming and the end of the world (cf. v. 5, 16; 3:3, 11, 20).

2:26 **And he that overcometh**, — The one who overcomes the system of Satan signified by Jezebel (cf. notes on v. 7). **and keepeth my works** — Continue in obedience to the commands (the Lord's works as they are revealed in the gospel). See notes on v. 10. **unto the end**, — To the time when the Satanic system of Jezebel would be destroyed by the Lord's judgment and the final victory over evil won by the Christian. **to him** — He who overcomes. **will I give power over the nations**: — Over those who are not part of the new Israel of God (Gal. 6:16). This, along with v. 27, is based upon Ps. 2:8-9 where the Son quotes what the Father had said unto Him concerning His Messianic role. Here that same Son uses the words as a promise to all who will overcome. They, because they are His, will share with Him the rewards of victory over His enemies. To see in this (and in v. 27) Christians ruling with Christ in a literal kingdom over material nations in some supposed utopian future reign is to see more than inspiration put there. No such kingdom is known to the Bible. Of course the Scriptures teach that Christ reigns (1 Cor. 15:25) and that Christians share with Him (Mt. 19:28; 1 Cor. 6:2). But the Christian system is that to which the prophets looked forward and it is certainly that which the psalmist had in view. The reward promised is that which results from faithful Christian living. In the final analysis this is simply another way of stating the theme of the whole book, namely, the final victory of Christ and His saints over the enemies of truth and right. The promise is spiritual in nature, not physical or material.

2:27 **And he** — The one who overcomes (v. 26). **shall rule them** — The nations (v. 26). **with a rod of iron**; — This means either a king's sceptre or a shepherd's staff, probably the former. If so, then it signifies an absolute, unerring, and invincible rule, the kind of authority Christ now exerts through His written law. And all those who are His are promised a share in His power and glory, the rewards of victory when the nations are defeated by the sword of His mouth (see notes on v. 26). **as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers**: — He shall break the nations (those who resist His power) as a potter shatters an imperfect jar of clay by striking it with an iron rod. The authority of Christ is final and complete and His redeemed people will be associated with Him in its exercise. **even as I received of my Father**. — Just as I received authority from My Father (BV). As the Father had given Him authority, He would share that authority with those who overcome (cf. Lk. 22:29; Jn. 17:18; 20:21). Christ refused to receive anything at the hands of Satan (Mt. 4:1-11). Thus what He received He received it from God. Just so, all that a Christian rightly receives is from Christ.

2:28 **And I will give him the morning star**. — Not easy to explain but more than likely the morning star is Christ Himself (22:16) and its gift probably signifies that the dark night of persecution and temptation is coming to an end and that the morning of victory is beginning to dawn (cf. 2 Pt. 1:19).

2:29 **He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches**. — See notes on v. 7.

REVELATION 3

THE CHURCH AT SARDIS

3:1-6 And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

3:1 **And unto the angel of the church** — See notes on 1:20. **in Sardis** — As the circle of the seven churches continues southward, the next one is Sardis. It is southeast of Thyatira and almost directly east of Smyrna. It had had a long and glorious history, but it was now a dying city. Ramsay says, "Sardis was a city of the past, which had no future before it. Its greatness was connected with a barbarous and half-organized state of society, and could not survive permanently in a more civilized age. Sardis must inevitably decay. Only when civilization was swept out of the Hermus Valley in fire and bloodshed by the destroying Turks, and the age of barbarism was re-introduced, did Sardis again become an advantageous site." It was located on the northern slopes of Mount Tmolus and was watered by the river Pactolus. The old city was built on a rock hill which rose 1500 feet above the plain. It was inaccessible from all directions except the south and that was easily guarded. Two things pertaining to the city may throw some light upon certain statements in the letter: (1) It had been caught off guard and captured twice. The inhabitants considered it impregnable except from its southern approach. Thus the other points were lightly guarded, if guarded at all. On two occasions, one by Cyrus in 549 B.C. and the other by Antiochus the Great in 218 B.C., a band of soldiers scaled the heights to surprise the city and conquer it by force. The failure to watch, to be on guard at every point, had proven a costly lesson to it. The enemy had come "as a thief in the night." (2) Its history had probably familiarized it with garments. Vincent (WS) says, "Sardis was in very early times an important commercial city. Pliny says that the art of dyeing wool was invented there, and it was the entrepot of the dyed woollen manufactures, carpets, etc., the raw materials for which was furnished by the flocks of Phrygia. It was also the place where the metal electrum was procured. . . . It was at one time known as a slave-mart. The impure worship of the goddess Cybele was celebrated there, and the massive ruins of her temple are still to be seen." **write; These things saith he** — The glorified Christ. **that hath the seven Spirits of God,** — The

HS in His fullness (Jn. 3:34; Col. 2:9). See notes on 1:4. **and the seven stars;** — The angels of the seven churches. See notes on 1:20. **I know thy works,** — See notes on 2:2. **that thou hast a name that thou livest,** — It had a reputation of being a vigorous, active, living church, but in reality the very opposite was true. Appearance does not always tell the whole story. Its name should have corresponded to its character, but it did not. Its name said it was living; its character said it was dead. It had fooled others, as many do now who live in pretense, but the Lord knew its true condition. Lincoln said, "You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time." To this should be added, "You cannot fool God any of the time." **and art dead.** — Like the city itself, the church was in the process of dying (cf. 1 Tm. 5:6). Its dying spiritual condition can be seen from the fact that the Lord has more to say in rebuke of it than any of the seven except the Laodiceans.

3:2 **Be watchful,** — Wake up (NIV) or be alert because the enemy is storming the citadels of your faith. The expression literally means, "Be awake and on the watch; become what you are not." They are thus urged to become a strong fortress, guarded at all points for the Lord (cf. Mk. 13:35; 1 Cor. 16:13; 1 Thes. 5:6; 1 Pt. 5:8). Their history had taught them the value of this. The city had twice fallen because they had neglected to secure the points they thought were impregnable. While they were asleep the enemy found an entrance, caught them off guard, and administered an embarrassing defeat. The church was now suffering from the same neglect and carelessness that caused the city to fall. **and strengthen the things which remain,** — Fortify the lingering bits of truth, faith, and works that have survived neglect and inactivity. While for all practical purposes the church was dead, there were still a few names who had not defiled their garments (v. 4), and thus there was hope of rekindling the flames from the dying embers. **that are ready to die:** — Life was ebbing away but there was a glimmer of hope. The things that remained were, like coals of fire, in danger of death, and they would die unless the embers were revived by adding fuel (by putting vigor back into their work). **for I have not found thy works perfect** — Fulfilled, finished, or complete. They had completed nothing they had started. They had started the Christian race but had slowed their pace almost to a standstill before they reached the finish line. **before God.** — In the sight of God. That is, they did not measure up to His expectation.

3:3 **Remember therefore** — Cf. notes on 2:5. **how** — What (NASV). It is more likely that the message of truth is here meant rather than the manner by which it was received. **thou hast received** — They had received the truth as permanent and final (Jude 3). **and heard,** — The act of hearing at the time the truth was received (Jn. 20:30-31; Rom. 10:17). This means that at the time they heard the gospel preached they received it as God's divine message for the salvation of all men. The truth had not changed; they had. **and hold fast,** — Keep the truth or as Williams translates, "Continue to obey it" (cf. Col. 2:6;

1 Tm. 6:20-21). The charge is for them to hold on to the truth as it had been delivered to them. **and repent.** — Change your mind about the state of affairs which has resulted in near spiritual death. See notes on 2:5. Repentance would return them to the time when they had joyfully and enthusiastically heard and received the truth. **If therefore thou shalt not watch,** — If you refuse to take heed to this warning and thus fail to guard the citadels of your faith. See notes on v. 2. **I will come on thee** — Come in judgment upon their neglect. This has no reference to the second coming of Christ because that is not contingent upon repentance or anything else men might do. **as a thief,** — He would come suddenly and without warning. Just as the city had been surprised and conquered twice by being caught off guard, He would surprise them. See notes on vv. 1-2. **and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.** — His coming would be unheralded. They must therefore be on guard at all times (cf. Mt. 25:1-13).

3:4 **Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments;** — Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes (NIV). Because of the dyeing trade of the city, they would readily recognize the figure of defiled or soiled garments. The metaphor is clear: a few souls had remained faithful (cf. 2:10) even in this dead or dying church. They had kept themselves pure from worldly defilement (cf. Jas. 1:27) and had not spotted their garments with the apathy, carelessness, and spiritual indifference (cf. Jude 23) that characterized the church as a whole. **and they shall walk with me in white:** — Because they are pure and undefiled, they shall receive heaven's highest reward, life eternal. Or to say it another way, they shall walk in perfect purity with their Master in the victory parade. White is the universal symbol of innocence and purity. To walk with Him in white no doubt presented to their minds the Roman custom on the day of triumph when "a cavalcade of nobles, all in white" marched through the streets of Rome. Perhaps no one in Sardis had ever seen that procession itself but all knew about it and what an honor it was to be in that parade. But a greater honor awaited this faithful few who would walk with their Master after the spiritual victory had been won. **for they are worthy.** — Not worthy by their own work or merit but because they have been washed in the blood of the Lamb (7:14; Eph. 1:7; 1 Jn. 1:7), successfully borne the heat of battle, won the victory, are approved of Christ (on whose account they are counted worthy), and are thus fit subjects to share the victory with their Savior (cf. Am. 3:3; 2 Cor. 1:17).

3:5 **He that overcometh,** — See notes on 2:7. **the same shall be clothed in white raiment;** — He shall be dressed in pure robes of eternal life (7:13-14) and shall share the final victory with his Savior (see notes on v. 4). **and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life,** — His name will remain enrolled among those who are the heirs of heaven — that is, he shall remain a citizen of the heavenly or eternal kingdom. The idea of having one's name inscribed in a book is rooted in the OT (Ex. 32:32-33; Ps. 69:28; Dn. 12:1). In the NT when one becomes a Christian his name is recorded in the Lamb's book

of life (21:27; Lk. 10:20; Phil. 4:3; Heb. 12:22-23). This simply means that he has received the remission of his sins and thus stands justified before God. If his name remains written, it means that he will be saved eternally (20:12, 15). On the other hand, the lost do not have their names written there (13:8; 17:8). But even more to the point as it is presented here, once it is written (which means that he is a child of God), it may be erased or taken out (22:19) if one returns to the world (2 Pt. 2:20-22) or renounces Christ as his Savior (Heb. 6:1-6; 10:26). **but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.** — He will acknowledge them as His own, blood purchased, faithful, and true (cf. Mt. 10:32-33). This is in contrast with some He will deny (Mt. 7:21-23; Mk. 8:38).

3:6 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. — See notes on 2:7.

THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA

3:7-13 And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

3:7 And to the angel of the church — See notes on 1:20. **in Philadelphia** — Its name meaning brotherly love, Philadelphia is located southeast of Sardis. It derived its name from its founder, king Attalus II, who reigned 159-138 B.C., "whose truth and loyalty to his brother Eumenes won him the epithet Philadelphia" (Ramsay). Ramsay calls it "The Missionary City" because it was founded primarily to spread Greek learning, language, and manners to the eastern part of Lydia and in Phrygia. In this it was so successful that the Lydian tongue ceased and Greek became the language of the people. Located in the valley of the Hermus River, it was on a main trade route from east to west. This enabled it to grow into a wealthy center for trade and learning. While we know nothing of the church but what is revealed here, it seems that the greatest problem confronting it was those who claimed to be Jews. Unlike the churches at Pergamum and Thyatira, the Christians in Philadelphia had evidently made a clean break with the numerous pagan deities, temples, and festivals which filled the city. No corrections are offered pertaining to idolatry. The only reproof given is against those who lie by claiming to be Jews. No correction or condemnation is directed to the church itself. This within itself is extraordinary. **write; These things saith he** — Christ, the one who walks among the churches and knows their work, even the hidden or secret things of the heart. Four descriptions of Christ and His work

follow: (1) His nature — deity. **that is holy**, — Absolutely holy, one who is completely separated from worldliness and one in whom no evil whatsoever resides. Jesus thus identifies Himself with the absolute holiness of God as it is repeatedly affirmed in both the OT and the NT (e.g., 4:8; Is. 6:3). It is thus an affirmation of His deity (Jn. 1:1-3). (2) His being — reality. **he that is true**, — True One (Williams). Not just true as opposed to the false (although that He is), but true in the ultimate sense (cf. the true light, Jn. 1:9; the true bread, Jn. 6:32; the true vine, Jn. 15:1), that is, genuinely true (1 Jn. 5:20). He does more than just tell the truth; He is the truth (Jn. 14:6). Thus He is the consummation of all Jewish expectation; not just a being among beings, but the true being, the real being, the genuine being. (3) His authority — royalty. **he that hath the key of David**, — In the seed line from Adam to Christ, royalty was established in David. Thus Christ was to sit on David's throne (2 Sm. 7:12-16; Acts 2:30; 13:33). The key of the house of David was to be upon His shoulder (Is. 22:22) and He was to reign over it (Lk. 1:30-33). "Key" is a metaphor for authority (in this case royal authority). Hence this means that Christ is the fulfillment of the regal promise established in David. He now reigns, exercising that authority. And any passage, in Revelation or elsewhere, which is interpreted so as to mean that His royal authority is yet to be given (at the end of the Christian age) is a total misinterpretation. Christ is now King of kings and Lord of lords (17:14; 19:16; 1 Tm. 6:15). (4) His function — to admit and reject. **he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth**; — As pertaining to His kingdom, He alone controls access to it. It is His function, as the divine Savior, to open the doors of citizenship (redemption) — that is, salvation is by His choice because He prescribes the terms by which it can be obtained (Jn. 3:5; Rom. 11). And by His terms He both includes and excludes (Acts 3:22-23). Who He says will be saved will be saved and who He says will be lost will be lost (cf. Mk. 16:16). This determination is His alone, vouchsafed to no other man, living or dead. This could conceivably have reference to the open door of opportunity of v. 8, but more likely it is a statement of His royal authority.

3:8 **I know thy works**: — See notes on 2:2. **behold, I have set before thee an open door**, — An opportunity great and effectual (1 Cor. 16:9). Precisely what that opportunity was, we are not told. But it is certain that it had to do with the mission and work of the church or its eternal rewards, and it seems reasonable to think that Jesus used the expression in the same sense Paul employed, namely, opportunities to preach the gospel of salvation to lost man (1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3). The church, like the city itself, was established for missionary purposes (Mk. 16:15; Acts 8:4; 14:37). **and no man can shut it**: — They had been given an opportunity which no man could take from them. Of course one could fail to take advantage of it and its achievement could be accompanied with hardship and persecution, but man cannot close a door which the Lord has opened. It will stand ajar until He Himself closes it. **for thou hast a little strength**, — Although you have only a little strength (Beck). The KJV rendering means that the church had some power but not much. Beck seems to be more in keeping

with the context. According to him it means that even though the church is weak (either by being small in number, very little influence in the community, or limited in finances) it still had power enough to fill its purpose of being. This shows that a church does not have to be strong (large and influential) to be loyal to its Master and to carry out its mission — that is, to enter the door the Lord opens for it. Weakness should never be used as an excuse for unfaithfulness in life or work. With the Lord's help, only a little strength exercised in His service can result in mighty deeds far beyond the power of unaided man. **and hast kept my word,** — Obeyed His revealed will in all things (cf. Jn. 14:15, 23-24; 15:10, 14; 1 Jn. 2:3-5; 5:2-3). They recognized His word as the revelation of His will for them. **and hast not denied my name.** — They had not denied Christ as their Lord and Savior. Since one must either confess Christ or deny Him, this necessarily implies that they continued to confess Him (see notes on v. 5).

3:9 Behold, I will make — Give or by His providence He would arrange it so it would occur. **them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie;** — See notes on 2:9. **behold, I will make them** — The false Jews who had evidently humiliated the Christians in some specific way known to them but unrevealed to us. **to come and worship before thy feet,** — Do homage before the Christians. This could not mean that they would worship them (if so, it would have been a forbidden act, 22:8-9), but rather that they would either be brought to the acknowledgment that Christians were the true Israel of God (Gal. 6:16) in contrast to the false claims made by the Jews or that they would come to worship in their presence, that is, they would be converted to Christ. I prefer the former but in either case it is simply another way of showing that Christians will ultimately be victorious while their enemies will either be crushed or be brought into subjection to the Lord of glory (cf. Is. 60:14). **and to know that I have loved thee.** — Know that Christians are the favored people of God.

3:10 Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, — They had kept His word by observing it (see notes on v. 8), and keeping it required the patience in them that had characterized Christ when He suffered for them on the cross. **I also will keep** — Protect or safeguard. **thee from the hour** — Time, period, or season. **of temptation,** — They had kept His word of patience and He would now safeguard them in the forthcoming time of trial. This is not a promise to keep them from being tried, but rather to protect them through the trial when it came, to give them strength to endure (1 Pt. 1:7) and provide for them a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13). Precisely what this trial was we are left almost wholly to conjecture. As I see it there are four possibilities (the fourth being impossible if the late date of A.D. 96 is ascribed to the book): (1) Some natural catastrophe such as earthquakes or an outbreak of severe persecution. But if it refers to persecution it limits the next statement, "Which is coming upon all the world," to the world of Christians. I see no reason to impose such a limitation. (2) The day of judgment. While this does not directly conflict with what is said and fits fairly well into it, it does not appear to be what the speaker had in mind. It is an interpre-

tation that is more forced than natural. (3) It is an allusion to the falling away before the second coming of Christ, as foretold by Paul (2 Thes. 2), and the battle between right and wrong depicted in the remainder of the book in which the saints often suffer (e.g., 6:9-10) and are strongly seduced to evil by the adversary of both God and man, that old serpent, the devil (e.g., 13:7-18). This is in harmony with the whole book and therefore appears to me to be the most likely view. (4) The destruction of Jerusalem. This view requires an early date for the composition of the book, and the evidence weighs heavily against that. But in addition to this, it would limit the next statement to the Jewish (or at most the Jewish and Christian) world. And that seems too limited to fit the context. While the destruction of Jerusalem was to have far-reaching results, it is difficult to see how it would affect the churches of Asia to the extent that is here anticipated. Thus to view it as the destruction of Jerusalem reminds me of the proverbial drowning man grabbing for a straw. **which shall come upon all the world**, — All men the world over. That is, the trial would be of such nature as to include all men. **to try them that dwell upon the earth**. — To test the inhabitants of the earth (Williams). This implies a worldwide testing, such as is seen in the constant battle between right and wrong. If this is the case then we have here another promise to safeguard the saints through the battle of the ages, the battle between the armies of the Lord and Satan. It is a promise of ultimate victory.

3:11 **Behold, I come quickly**: — There is no reason to assume that this has reference to His second coming (cf. 2:5, 16; v. 3). It may indicate the suddenness of His coming to afflict the world with the approaching trial (v. 10), but more likely it is a promise of His speedy coming to the saints to safeguard them by His providence and spiritual presence during the time of their trial. To the wicked and unfaithful it would be a fearful warning, but to the righteous it is an encouraging promise. **hold that fast which thou hast**, — They had an open door, faith, works, a little power, obedience, and all that is involved in standing true to His name (cf. notes on 2:25). **that no man take** — So that no one may take away (Williams) or rob you. Vincent notes, "The idea is not that of one believer stepping into the place which was designed for another, but of an enemy taking away from another the reward which he himself has forfeited." **thy crown**. — The crown of victory, that is, the crown of life (2:10, Jas. 1:12), the crown of righteousness (2 Tm. 4:8), the crown which fades not away (1 Pt. 5:4), the crown which they would receive if they remained faithful (2:10). Others may deprive a Christian of his crown if they are permitted to seduce him to unfaithfulness or to influence him to forfeit his Lord's name, faith, and works (1 Cor. 10:12).

3:12 **Him that overcometh** — See notes on 2:7. **will I make a pillar** — The word for pillar appears three other times in the NT. In Gal. 2:9 it means a prominent position in the church. In 1 Tm. 3:15 it means the column which supports the structure, giving it stability. In 10:1 it is descriptive. In all cases, or so it seems to me, whether metaphorical or literal, the idea is that which sustains and stabilizes. Hence the one who overcomes shall have the honor of a permanent, fixed, and important position in the temple. **in the temple of my God**, — The church

(1 Cor. 3:16-17), a structure of which each Christian is a living stone (1 Pt. 2:9). This may have reference either to the victorious church when it survives the trial (v. 10) or the glorified church as it will be in heaven. In either case the temple is the church. The fact that John saw no temple in the new Jerusalem (21:22) does not invalidate this because the whole of that new city (heaven) is the temple, of which every Christian who wins the victory will be a part. To set 21:22 against this v. would be to confuse metaphors. Here the whole city (heaven) is seen as the temple; there God and Christ are seen as the temple of heaven. **and he shall go no more out:** — Never again will he leave it (NIV). The temple will be his permanent and eternal abiding place (cf. 4:8; 7:15). **and I will write upon him the name of my God,** — A name identifies; hence, the name written upon him will identify him as belonging to God. In this world that name is Christian (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pt. 4:16), but what it will be in the world to come has not been fully revealed. **and the name of the city of my God,** — Identifying him as a victorious citizen of the eternal kingdom. That is, he will be given the right to enter the eternal city (22:14). **which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God:** — The eternal city of God. This would be the church now and the glorified church in the world to come (21:1-5). **and I will write upon him my new name.** — A name unknown to all except Christ Himself (19:12; cf. 2:17). As with the name of God, the name of Christ will identify the one who overcomes with Christ and mark him as one who will share all spiritual blessings with Christ as a joint heir with Him (Rom. 8:17).

3:13 **He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.** — See notes on 2:7.

THE CHURCH AT LAODICEA

3:14-22 And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable and poor, and blind, and naked; I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

3:14 **And unto the angel of the church** — See notes on 1:20. **of the Laodiceans** — Laodicea is the final city in the circle of the seven and lies southeast of Ephesus and a short distance northwest of Colossae. Its close proximity to Colossae probably accounts for it being mentioned four times by Paul when he wrote the epistle to the Colossians (Col. 2:1; 4:13, 15-16). The city was founded (actually rebuilt) by Antiochus II (261-246 B.C.) and named after his wife. It was located on the road system from east to west. It became a great manufacturing center. Ramsay says, "There was produced in the valley a valuable sort of wool, soft in

texture and glossy black in colour, which was widely esteemed. This wool was woven into garments of several kinds for home use and export trade." It was also noted for its banking operations, from which it had grown wealthy (so wealthy in fact that it declined governmental help when it was partially destroyed by an earthquake in A.D. 60). In addition to this, it was favored by a medical school in which physicians were taught to treat diseases, which were viewed as compound problems, with compound medicines, as was taught by Herophilos (330-250 B.C.). There can be little doubt, from what is said by Christ in v. 18, but that everyone was familiar with an eye medicine, probably made by a compound in conjunction with the medical school. While the city was proud and favored, the church was in such poor condition that not one commendation is given to it. Its sickness required more than a school of physicians and a compound of herbs and minerals; it required the Great Physician and His saving gospel. Like the Pharisee (Lk. 18:10-12), the church had become self-sufficient and had no need of anything — not even a Savior or the divine remedy for sin. It considered itself rich, increased with goods, and in need of nothing. But it was living in delusion. The Lord said it was wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. While it had the attitude of the Pharisee, its real need was to be as the publican (Lk. 18:13-14).

write; These things saith the Amen, — A proper name for Christ (so used only here in the NT). The function of the Amen is to acknowledge that which is true and valid and to confirm a fact, promise, or statement (2 Cor. 1:20). Here it signifies Christ as the true one, the acknowledgment and confirmation of all God's plans and purposes for the ages. **the faithful and true witness,** — Probably expressing the same concept as the Amen. He is faithful in that His witness is trustworthy (see note on 1:5); He is a true witness in that He incorporates all that a witness should be. He knows the facts, He is willing to state the facts, and He can be depended upon to give the facts accurately and truthfully (see notes on v. 7). **the beginning of the creation of God;** — The origin of God's creation (Moffett). This expression is susceptible of being understood in one of two senses: (1) He was the first to be created. (2) He was the prime source, author, or originator of creation — the active agent through whom creation was accomplished. Of the two senses, the former has no direct Scriptural support and it reduces Christ, who is equal with God (Phil. 2:5-11), to the level of a created being. The latter is everywhere taught in the NT (e.g., Jn. 1:1-3, 10; Col. 1:15-17; Heb. 1:1-4) and means the same as the Alpha and the Omega (1:8, 11; 21:6; 22:13), the first and the last (1:17; 2:8), the beginning and the end (1:8; 22:13). Christ thus speaks with the authority of the Creator, both of the material order (the world) and the spiritual order (the church). If the former were true, it would introduce a doctrine contrary to and in conflict with every concept of Christ presented in the NT. If the latter is true, which it obviously is, it harmonizes perfectly with every concept of Christ presented in the whole Bible. No interpretation of a single passage should ever be accepted which conflicts with the remainder of the Bible, and especially when there is a more reasonable interpretation which perfectly

harmonizes with it. The Bible is a book of harmony, not one of discordant and disconnected doctrines.

3:15 I know thy works, — See notes on 2:2. Nothing commendable is said about the church or its works. Thus the Lord knew that it did not measure up to His divine Standard. **that thou art neither cold nor hot:** — Neither cold nor hot in its spiritual life, which would include its faith, zeal, and work. To be hot (boiling hot) would mean that it was fervent for, active in, and enthusiastic about the Lord's will — on fire for the cause of truth and right. To be cold is the exact opposite of hot and indicates a total indifference — an apostasy from the faith. Hot would signify faith strong enough to lead the church to completely surrender itself in obedience to the will of Christ, to stand for Christ in opposition to Satan. Cold, on the other hand, would signify a church no longer pretending to be the Lord's people — that is, a church that would not be hypocritically pretending to be of Christ while living for the devil. **I would thou wert cold or hot.** — I wish you were either one or the other (NIV). His wish for the church was that it would be either hot (fervently boiling with zeal for Him) or cold (not falsely pretending to be His while it served the devil). Of course it was the Lord's will that it be hot (2 Pt. 3:9), but if it was not going to be what it claimed to be He would rather it be altogether cold. While this may be hard for us to comprehend, during the personal ministry of Jesus here on earth there was no sin that He more severely rebuked than that of hypocrisy (e.g., Mt. 15:1-9; 23:13-33). He would thus rather that a church (or an individual) show its true character, even if depraved, wretched, and apostate, than to pretend to be what it is not.

3:16 So then because thou art lukewarm, — Used only here in the NT, this word means to be tepid, neither cold nor hot. Thayer says it is used "Of the condition of a soul wretchedly fluctuating between torpor and a fervor of love." The metaphor is undoubtedly drawn from the water of the nearby hot springs. After it had cooled or had been mixed with the water from the cool springs it became lukewarm. The word signifies a condition in the church of a divided interest, a halfheartedness, a drifting along without convictions, zeal, or enthusiasm, and thus being characterized by apathy and indifference. It is a condition of faith too shallow for substance (Jas. 2:14-26), confession without commitment (Mt. 6:33), acknowledgment of Christ without self-denial (Mt. 16:24), belonging to Christ without following Him, having the name Christian without the character of a Christian, outward acts without obedience from the heart (Rom. 6:16-18). This reminds me of a little story I read somewhere. A preacher was at a public gathering when a young man came along selling what he said were hot chicken sandwiches. The preacher purchased one, but upon examination found it was a cold fish sandwich. He called the salesman and said, "Young man, this sandwich is neither *hot* nor *chicken*. How do you explain that?" He replied, "It's not supposed to be. Hot Chicken Sandwich is just what it's called." And so it is with a lukewarm church. It presents itself to the public as belonging to the Lord. But a church of Christ it is not; that

is just what it is called. **and neither cold nor hot**, — See note on v. 15. **I will spue thee out of my mouth**. — I am about to spit you out of my mouth (NIV). He would spew them out if repentance did not occur. The word spew means to spit out, vomit up, or eject with extreme disgust. It shows, as Vine says, "The Lord's utter abhorrence of the condition of the church." Those who tasted the tepid, insipid, or lukewarm water as it flowed away from the nearby hot springs found it was not only unpalatable but was for many sickening and nearly everyone who tried to drink it immediately spewed it out. When the figure is changed into literal language it simply means that Christ has no sympathy with or tolerance for a professed but apathetic church which has by its utter indifference rejected Him. He will cut it off from its spiritual relationship with Him. And the fact that He will cast it out necessarily implies that it has been a part of His fold. This proves again, as is done hundreds of times in the Scriptures, that it is possible for a church (which is made up of Christians) to so depart from the faith as to be severed from Christ. And without Christ, this could mean nothing less than that its members would be eternally lost.

Additional note on vv. 15-16. As may be seen by checking other commentaries, these vv. are susceptible to interpretations other than that which I have adopted. But regardless of how hot, cold, and lukewarm are interpreted, the lesson is clear: the Laodicean church was in a state of woeful indifference that disgusted the Lord.

3:17 Because thou sayest, — That which follows seems to show the cause of their lukewarmness. It is a claim made with pride and self-sufficiency, the exact opposite of what the Lord wills for His people (Mt. 5:3-12). **I am rich**, — The banking business had made the city wealthy, and it appears that the church was a partaker of the riches which characterized the city. But there is more to living than wealth alone (Lk. 12:15). **and increased with goods**, — And have become wealthy (NASV). It had in fact obtained so much wealth that it felt no need for outside help, not even from the Lord. **and have need of nothing**; — Its wealth was complete. Like the rich man in the parable of Jesus (Lk. 12:15-23), the church had its coffers full. It could eat, drink, and be merry . . . and show no concern for the lost world for which Christ died. **and knowest not** — It was deluded about its own miserable and pitiful condition. **that thou art wretched**, — A condition of affliction and misery. **and miserable**, — Pitiful (NIV). A condition that excites pity from others (cf. 1 Cor. 15:19). There is no condition more pitiable than self-delusion. **and poor**, — Destitute of life's greatest values. The church at Smyrna was made up of saints who were rich poor people — poor in this world's goods but rich in the things which count most, the kind of riches that rust does not corrupt and thieves do not steal; the Laodicean church was made up of poor rich people — poor in the riches of spiritual blessings but rich in material things. It thought it had no need while in reality it had the greatest of all needs. **and blind**, — Blind to its own spiritual condition and to the true values of life. It had eyes but could not see the love and power of God. **and naked**: — Nudeness of the soul. It

was not clothed with Christ's approval, thus not having on the spotless robe of righteousness and true holiness (Eph. 4:21-24).

3:18 **I counsel thee to buy of me** — He advises the church as to how it may relieve its poverty, blindness, and nakedness. Regardless of the problem, Christ is the answer and the remedy can be obtained only from Him. While it may be obtained without money (Is. 55:1-2), it must still be purchased with the price of submission to the Lord's will (Mt. 7:21; Heb. 5:8-9; Rom. 6:16-18). Three things are to be thus purchased from Him: (1) **gold tried in the fire**, — Gold refined by means of fire, that is, purified. This signifies the true riches — the treasures of heaven rather than the treasures of earth (1 Pt. 1:7; Mt. 6:19-21). **that thou mayest be rich**; — Rich in spiritual blessings, riches that will not perish with all that is material (cf. 1 Pt. 1:18-19). (2) **and white raiment**, — Robes washed in the blood of the Lamb (7:13-14). See notes on v. 5. **that thou mayest be clothed**, — Clothed with the white robe of righteousness (19:8). **and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear**; — And that the shame of thy nakedness be not made manifest (ASV). It should remedy its current spiritual deficiency so that its lack of righteousness, its spiritual nakedness, would not be exposed to its shame. This strongly implies that a public exposure of the human body in nude or near nude form is shameful, a concept that is taught through the whole Bible. Clothing for themselves was made by Adam and Eve after the fall because they recognized their naked condition (Gn. 3:7). From then until now, clothing has been an essential part of modesty (cf. 1 Tm. 2:9-10). (3) **and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve**, — This no doubt is an allusion to a medical compound prepared at Laodicea for weak and sore eyes. The church was blind to its own faults and failures (v. 17) and to the grand opportunities it had as the Lord's church. The remedy for such spiritually diseased eyes was the light of life (Jn. 1:4, 9) or spiritual enlightenment (Ps. 19:8; 119:105, 130; Eph. 1:18). **that thou mayest see**. — That its spiritual blindness might come to an end.

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound!
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see.

3:19 **As many as I love**, — A love that is tender and dear. The word here (**philo**) is more personal, endearing, and emotion-filled than that of 3:9. The Lord loves every soul on earth, past, present, and future (loves them unconditionally, and that with a love that is deeper than the ocean, higher than the heavens, and broader than all outer space), but He has a more endearing and personal relationship with those of His own (cf. Jn. 5:20; 11:3, 36; 16:27). **I rebuke and chasten**: — I correct and discipline (BV). He had sharply rebuked the church but He had done so with a tender love for it. He rebukes by exposing sin and shamefulfulness (cf. Ti. 3:10). Such is designed to lead to conviction and thus to correction. He chastens (which is not synonymous with punishment) by educating and training in the way of righteousness. His tender affection did not prevent Him from ad-

ministering the necessary discipline to prepare the ones He loved to be partakers of holiness (Heb. 12:5-10). That is to say His tender love was also a tough love. **be zealous therefore**, — So burn with zeal (BV). Make it a practice to be on fire for the Lord (see notes on v. 15). **and repent**. — Make an immediate and decisive change; turn once and for all from lukewarmness. Repentance and zeal would restore the church to a right relationship with Him (see notes on 2:5).

3:20 **Behold, I stand at the door, and knock**: — The door of the heart of each individual member of the church. Although they had closed Him out (and He was ready to spew them out), His favor toward them was not exhausted. The knock is the call to repentance, as in v. 19. He is thus calling on them to restore spiritual relationship with Him. Christ should have been dwelling in their hearts (Eph. 3:17), but instead, because of their lukewarmness, He is on the outside seeking entrance. He is thus depicted as seeking permission to enter the hearts of His own people. One of the saddest statements in the Bible is found in John 1:11. Jesus gave up the riches of heaven for the poverty of this world so that the poverty stricken of earth could enjoy heaven (2 Cor. 8:9). Yet when He came to His own (nation), His own received Him not. But a sadder picture still is to see Jesus standing outside His own church, His own purchased possession, knocking and pleading for admittance. While this primarily pictures Christ knocking at the door of unfaithful, uncaring Christians, no harm is done to the text to apply it to all who have heard the truth. He wants to enter every heart and His divine invitation is extended to all (22:17; Mt. 11:28-30). How long will He continue knocking at the heart's door? How many times will He return after being rejected? No one knows. But someday the knocking will cease — someday the Lord of glory will be turned away for the last time. The tables will then be turned and sinful men will be knocking at His door and pleading in vain to be admitted (Lk. 13:25-30). But then it will be too late. Too late! **if any man hear my voice**, — This indicates that He is pleading as well as knocking. The knocking announces His presence; His voice identifies Him as friend and Savior. There is therefore no excuse for Him being turned away. **and open the door**, — "Let the Savior in." That is, receive Him back into their hearts by repentance. It is well to notice here that the door must be opened from within, not from without. Christ does not force His way into any life. Man himself must make the choice (Jos. 24:15). This positively proves the free moral agency of men. **I will come in to him**, — Come into his heart and life with all the attendant blessings of salvation. **and will sup with him, and he with me**. — They would be mutual dinner guests. In the modern world we have lost much of the significance of what it meant to the ancient oriental people to eat together. To them it was an extremely high form of intimacy, recognition, acceptance, companionship, and friendship. Here it signifies the intimacy of covenant relationship. Thus they would meet in full fellowship as covenant friends. The King of the universe would be eating in friendship and fellowship with one who, without Him, was wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. By this reunion He would remedy their earthly condition (v. 18)

and exalt them to share with Him the throne of heaven (v. 21).

3:21 To him that overcometh — He who conquers his lukewarmness and restores fellowship with Christ. See notes on 2:7. **will I grant to sit with me in my throne**, — Those who are victorious will be honored with the privilege of taking a seat with Christ in His throne, that is, they will serve with Him as agents of truth through which He now reigns (cf. Mt. 19:28-30; Mk. 10:40; Lk. 22:29-30; 1 Cor. 6:3-4; 2 Tm. 2:11-12). This reign is, in my judgment, the reign of victory, whether here or in the world to come. As Hailey says, "The faithful share with Him in this life and His victory over sin and in His reign in righteousness, and shall also share in the reign for ever and ever in eternity (22:5)." See notes on 2:26-27. **even as I also overcame**, — Just as He had gained the victory over temptation, sin, death, and the grave (cf. Phil. 2:5-11). **and am set down with my Father in his throne**. — Two thrones are not in view here. The throne of God is the throne of Christ and vice versa. Throne means dominion, power, rule, or reign. The saints are to reign with Christ just as Christ reigns with God. Hinds states the truth pointedly here: "They sit with him in his throne — that is, rule with him. It is called the Father's throne because he gave it to Christ; it is Christ's because he, as a descendant of David, sits upon it; it is David's (spiritually speaking) because the Savior had to be of his family — the 'throne of his father David' being the only one promised him." One thing should now be put beyond question, namely, Christ is now seated on His throne (which is the throne of God). This fact is stated in numerous ways throughout the NT: (1) He is seated now at God's right hand (Acts 2:34-35; Eph. 1:20; Heb. 1:1-3). (2) Being on the throne of God, He is now on David's throne (Acts 2:30-35). (3) He is now King of kings and Lord of lords (17:14; 19:16; 1 Tm. 6:15). (4) He is now head over all things (Eph. 1:22). (5) He now has all authority in heaven and in earth (Mt. 28:18-20). (6) In Him all promises are now fulfilled (2 Cor. 1:20). Thus His reign is not something that is yet to be; it is something that now is and something that will continue until the last enemy is destroyed (1 Cor. 15:24-26). Those born again now enter His kingdom (Jn. 3:5). They now submit to Him as Lord (Acts 2:36). They are now called royalty or a kingdom of priests (see notes on 1:6). They are now citizens of the commonwealth of Israel (Eph. 2:12). Christ is now their all-in-all (Col. 3:11). Those who look forward to a future kingdom, at the end of the Christian age, should ask themselves that if such should occur what would Christ and His people then have that they do not already possess. As far as the promises and blessings of God are concerned, the answer would be nothing, absolutely nothing.

3:22 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. — See notes on 2:7.

REVELATION 4

HEAVEN IS OPENED AND JOHN IS INVITED TO COME UP

4:1 After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.

4:1 **After this** — After the things which had occurred in 1-3. **I looked**, — I saw (ASV). **and, behold, a door was opened in heaven:** — The door of heaven was standing open. This may signify that heaven is the source of revelation. At any rate, what he sees is described in this and the next chapter (cf. Acts 7:54-60). **and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me;** — And the voice I had heard at first speaking to me like a trumpet (Beck). If the KJV is accepted, this means the first voice he heard when he saw the door of heaven standing open was one that sounded as a trumpet. If Beck is the correct rendering, it means the voice of the one he had already heard in 1:10. While the latter has more support among translators and commentators, the former seems more natural to me. **which said, Come up hither,** — The speaker invites John to come up and see things from heaven's perspective. The voice is either that of Christ or an angel, depending on whether the KJV or Beck is accepted. John was thus transported (in vision at least) to the celestial city where he would have the best possible vantage point from which to view the things now to be seen. **and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.** — Things which were still future at that time. This undoubtedly has reference to the great struggle between the saints of God and the servants of Satan. What he was to see is a dramatic presentation of the conflict between the church and the world, and that conflict is the heart of Revelation and shows how the saints are to ultimately overcome. Thus the things to be hereafter are all the things involved in the drama of victory that is depicted in the remainder of the book. The preparatory visions of chapters 4 and 5 lay the foundation of this assured victory in the sovereign God and the redeeming Lamb.

THE THRONE OF GOD

4:2-3 And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.

4:2 **And immediately** — After hearing the voice and seeing the door of heaven opened (v. 1). **I was in the spirit:** — I was in the Spirit (ASV). Not spirit as in the KJV but the HS as in the ASV. John was suddenly brought under the power of the Spirit so as to enable him to see and record the things now to be shown him (cf. notes on 1:10). **and, behold, a throne was set in heaven,** — The throne of God, from which He rules and controls the universe. The throne was the central object in the scene and when John looked it was the first thing to catch his attention. The throne plays a significant role in Revelation. It is mentioned at least 17 times in this and the next chapter and about 40 in the whole book. It signifies the reign and absolute authority of God over His creation (cf. 1 Kgs. 22:19). **and one sat on the throne.** — God, high and lifted up (Is. 6:1), is the One John sees sitting on the throne. This should console every troubled and persecuted soul. If God rules, then ultimately everything must be brought under His reign and control. The heathen may rage but it is the Christian who will ultimately win.

4:3 **And he that sat** — Seated on the throne was God Himself (v. 2). No description of the person of God is here attempted, only the splendor and glory emanating from Him. Had there been a description the folly of man would have run wild in making images to conform to it. God is a Spirit (Jn. 4:23-24) and not visible to the physical eye (1 Tm. 6:16). Thus no physical object can represent Him or be made in His likeness. The effort to make such images was prohibited because God knew that when man makes images in order to aid his devotion to an object he soon transfers his devotion from the object to the image (cf. Rom. 1:18-23). **was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone:** — That is, He had the appearance of jasper and sardius. Jasper seems to be a name covering precious stones of different color but probably here as in 21:11, one that is clear as crystal. Some think, with good reason, that it is the diamond. Robertson (WP) says, "Certainly not the cheap modern jasper." A sardius is blood red and is thought to be the carnelian. **and there was a rainbow round about the throne,** — A rainbow encircled the throne as a halo (cf. Ez. 1:28). The bow may indicate that the storm is over. God rules. Victory is sure. But it was no ordinary rainbow. It was **in sight like unto an emerald.** — An emerald is a clear bright green gem, a variety of beryl. If the bow had other colors, the emerald green was predominant. The symbolism of the three gems is far from clear, but their shimmering beauty and preciousness seem to signify the exalted royalty, the divine majesty, and the dazzling glory of God (cf. Is. 6; Ez. 1).

AROUND THE THRONE

4:4-6 And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold. And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.

4:4 And round about the throne — Also surrounding the throne (BV). **were four and twenty seats:** — Twenty-four thrones: for this is the same word as is translated throne in this and the two previous vv. **and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders** — Twenty-four elders were seated upon the thrones. Why the number 24 is chosen I cannot say, but the usual interpretation is given by Bousset (as quoted by Mauro): "It is the totality of the Old and New Testament saints who are here represented. Those of the Old appeared in the twelve patriarchs and those of the New in the twelve apostles. The same totality of saints is represented afterwards in the twelve gates of the holy city on which were written the names of the twelve tribes, and in the twelve foundations of that city, on which were written the names of the twelve apostles." Thus the 12 tribes of Israel in the OT and the 12 apostles in the NT pictorially present the whole church. If this is the case, and it appears to be the most reasonable explanation, the 24 elders are representative of all the redeemed who have won the victory through faithfulness. Christ promised in 3:21 that all who overcome will sit with Him in His throne (see notes there). Does this not depict that very thing? Furthermore, in 5:9 they themselves sing a new song in praise to the Lamb because He has redeemed them. Thus they are the redeemed. **sitting,** — That is, enthroned (cf. Eph. 2:6). **clothed in white raiment;** — Clothed in the pure robes of eternal life, made white by being washed in the blood of the Lamb (7:14). **and they had on their heads crowns of gold.** — The crowns of gold indicate their reign with God. It is the crown of victory. Or as in 2:10, the crown of life. It indicates, in the words of Peter (1 Pt. 2:9), a royal priesthood. Thus the victorious, both now and in eternity.

4:5 And out of the throne — Out from the throne (Goodspeed). **proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices:** — These awesome sounds are indicative of the presence, majesty, manifestation, and power of God (Ex. 19:15-24; Heb. 12:17-24). This likely signifies the fact that God is the source of all power, that all power proceeds from His throne. Let all the earth hear His voice and be awestruck by His divine majesty. **and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne,** — Standing in front of the throne were seven flaming torches (Jn. 18:3), which probably depicts the HS as not only the light bearer of divine revelation to God's people in the Christian age but also the fact that He intercedes on our behalf before the throne of heaven (Rom. 8:26-27). **which are the seven Spirits of God.** — That is, they symbolize the HS (see notes on 1:4; cf. 5:6). Had the writer not interpreted the seven lamps as the

seven Spirits it is not likely that we could have ever reached this conclusion, and had we done so it could not have been with any degree of certainty, especially since one symbol (the seven lamps) symbolizes another symbol (the seven Spirits, which symbolize the fullness of the one Spirit). This should bring into sharp focus the difficulty in interpreting the many symbols of Revelation which are not divinely explained. It will be well, therefore, to keep this difficulty in mind as we enter upon scores of symbols for which there is no interpretation revealed by the Author. For us to interpret and apply them accurately to specific events in history seems an impossible task. We may apply the symbols to past, present, or future forces of good and evil, and thus learn great and powerful lessons from them, but to try and fit each one into a literal and specific event at a specific time period seems to be beyond the power of man in his present state and goes, in my judgment, beyond the design of the book. Its design, or so it seems to me, is to depict the constant battle between right and wrong, good and evil, Christ and Satan. Thus wherever there is a battle between right and wrong, it is depicted by these symbols. This makes the book meaningful and enables every generation to apply its teaching to its own situation, to its own battles, to its own problems.

4:6 And before the throne — A smooth crystal-like surface spread out between John and the throne. **there was a sea of glass** — As it were a sea of glass (ASV). John did not see a sea of glass but a smooth glassy surface clear as crystal reflecting shimmering light. Undoubtedly the sea has some symbolic significance but what that is may never be ascertained by man this side of eternity. But it could, however, signify the beauty, extent, and peacefulness of God's reign through the gospel of salvation. **like unto crystal**: — As clear as crystal (Williams). **and in the midst of the throne**, — Probably meaning such close proximity with the throne as to appear to blend into it. **and round about the throne**, — Forming a circle around it so that they were seen from all angles. Or as Williams has it, "At the middle of each side." **were four beasts** — Four living creatures (ASV) or living beings (BV). Who or what these living creatures represent is one of the unsolved puzzles of Revelation. Two of the most popular views are: (1) heavenly beings, usually identified with the seraphim of Is. 6 and/or the cherubim of Ez. 1 and 10. (2) Nature or the whole creation other than the redeemed (who are symbolized by the 24 elders). But there are three reasons which prevent me from accepting either of these (or any of a large number of others): (1) The number four is usually considered the symbol pertaining to the earth. If this means anything, it indicates that they are earth beings instead of heavenly beings. They almost certainly represent people, not angels or nature. (2) They are in the midst of and encircling the throne and worship God unceasingly. While heavenly beings do worship, it is hardly conceivable that nature, which is to be destroyed [2 Pt. 3:9-12], would be depicted as singing redemption's song [5:9]. (3) Most weighty of all is the fact that they identify themselves, along with the 24 elders, as the redeemed [5:9]. Putting these facts together it seems the most reasonable conclusion to

reach is that they also represent the redeemed of the earth. If there is to be a distinction, perhaps the elders represent the redeemed who have already conquered and the living creatures those who are still on earth fighting the battle. I doubt, however, that such a distinction is to be sought. It is more probable that they, along with the 24 elders, form a composite picture of the victorious who worship and serve God day and night, forever and forever. **full of eyes before and behind.** — They had eyes in front and in back, indicating their power to see in all directions. This may depict their constant watchfulness or their insight to the will of Him who sits on the throne.

THE LIVING CREATURES

4:7-8 And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle. And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

4:7 **And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.** — The description of the living beings in vv. 7-8 calls to memory the visions of Is. 6 and Ez. 1 and 10, though there are some significant differences. What these faces may suggest is difficult to determine. Swete says, "The four forms suggest whatever is noblest, strongest, wisest, and swiftest in animate nature." Since I do not conclude with Swete that the living beings represent all animate nature, but rather the redeemed, I could concur with him only by changing animate nature to the redeemed. But perhaps Wallace best summed up the message of the faces: "The first beast was like a lion, symbolizing strength; the second beast was like a calf (ox), meaning endurance under yoke; the third beast was the face of a man, signifying intelligence, reason, and wisdom; the fourth beast was like an eagle, representing penetrating vision and swiftness in the execution of judgment."

4:8 **And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; —** Probably signifying their swiftness in and ability to carry out the divine mission. **and they were full of eyes within: —** Are full of eyes round about and within (ASV). This could mean, as Goodspeed renders it, "And they are covered with eyes all over and underneath their wings." See note on v. 6. **and they rest not day and night, —** That is, they never cease their song of praise to God. In their praise for God, the four living beings emphasize and magnify three of His divine aspects: (1) His holiness. **saying, Holy, holy, holy, —** The triple holy expresses the absolute holiness of God, perfect holiness, holiness in the superlative degree (cf. Is. 6:3). It shows their sublime reverence of and praise for God and expresses their attitude of His perfect holiness (His separation from man as it relates to His sacredness and distinct character). His holiness is as far above man's as heaven is from the earth, as the divine is from the human. (2) His omnipotence. **Lord God Almighty, —** The one who made

and rules the world. The design of this seems to be encouragement. The forces of evil may at times appear to have the upper hand (as in times of persecution), but this is apparent only and is not permanent. God is on the throne and His people will ultimately be the victors (cf. Ps. 91:1-10). (3) His eternal presence (cf. v. 10; Ex. 3:14; Ps. 90:1-2). **which was, and is, and is to come.** — The one who exists from all eternity to all eternity. See notes on 1:4, 8.

THE 24 ELDERS PRAISE HIM

4:9-11 And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever. The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

4:9 **And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne,** — And whenever the living Creatures render glory and honour and thanksgiving to him who is seated on the throne (Moffett). Since the living beings render their praise ceaselessly (v. 8), this may imply that they went through cycles of praise, and at the beginning of each cycle the 24 elders joined in with them in the eternal repetition of this act. This most likely signifies the unity of worship among all the redeemed of God. **who liveth for ever and ever,** — The eternally existent one (see v. 8).

4:10 **The four and twenty elders** — See notes on v. 4. **fall down before him** — That is, they prostrate themselves before God to express their devotion and adoration. This should be a natural response of all those who recognize His majesty, glory, and honor. **that sat on the throne,** — Who is seated on the throne (Williams). See notes on vv. 2-3. **and worship him** — Worship is reverence paid. Its fundamental nature involves recognizing and expressing the proper Creator/creature relationship — the creature paying reverence to the Creator. Worship is not an attitude alone. Nor is it acts alone. It is made up of proper attitudes expressed by proper acts. True worship (Jn. 4:23-24) may thus be defined as the sincere devotion or adoration of the heart expressed to God by means of divinely appointed acts. The elders display the proper attitude by falling down before Him. They properly express their adoration by casting their crowns before the throne and by acknowledging Him as worthy of all gratitude, honor, and power (v. 11). **that liveth for ever and ever,** — Again, the eternal and Almighty God (see also vv. 8-9). **and cast their crowns before the throne saying,** — The golden crowns of victory (see notes on v. 4). The casting of the crowns before the throne signifies their total submission to Him who is seated thereon. It also shows that they acknowledge Him as the only one who is worthy of honor and praise, the one who is the source and cause of their victory. That is to say, they recognize that all they are and all they possess (including their thrones and crowns, v. 4) is derived from Him who rules from the throne. He is above all, through all, and in all (Eph. 4:6).

4:11 **Thou art worthy, O Lord,** — Worthy art thou, our Lord and our God

(ASV). They recognize and acknowledge that He deserves the glory, honor, and power that are ascribed to Him. That is, He is worthy to receive the reverence and adoration paid Him by the redeemed. This praise is due Him for many reasons, but three (all relating to His creative power) seem to be in view here: (1) He is their Lord and their God — their Lord because they are totally submissive to Him and their God because they owe their existence to His creative act. (2) He is creator of all things (Gn. 1:1). By His own will and sovereign power He brought them into being. (3) All things owe their existence to His will — they exist by Him and for Him. **to receive** — The only object of worship from His creatures. **glory** — Praise. **and honour** — Respect, fame, distinction, or reverence. **and power**: — Infinite or creative power. **for thou hast created all things**, — He is the source and origin of the world and all things therein (Acts 17:24). This inseparably ties God and creation together. To deny the one would be to deny the other also. One cannot rightly praise God without honoring Him as the powerful cause of his being, the creator and sustainer of the universe. The God who is is the God who created. And His creation declares His glory (Ps. 19:1-3). Man is thus foolish to try to believe in God and ascribe to Him the glory, honor, and power that is His while denying that the things which are are the works of His hand. God is and God created. The profound truth that God is and the undeniable fact of creation by His Almighty hand stand or fall together. **and for thy pleasure** — And because of thy will (ASV), and by thy will (RSV), and since you willed it so (Williams). That is, all creation was by the will of God. **they are and were created**. — They were, and were created (ASV). This is a difficult expression. The rendering of the ASV means that things had their being (perhaps in the mind of God) before they were created. It seems doubtful to me that John had this in mind. The NIV reverses this order and removes the difficulty by rendering it, "They were created and have their being." While this is attractive and makes good sense, it seems to take too much liberty with John's words — it explains them rather than translates them. My own understanding of the expression is that the elders are simply stating both the fact of their existence (they and all things were in existence) and the cause of it (they were created). That is, all things that exist have their existence by the creative act of God.

REVELATION 5

Chapter 5 is a continuation of chapter 4. In chapter 4 the vision is of God the Creator. In chapter 5 the emphasis is on God the Redeemer — the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (Jn. 1:29). One could hardly read chapter 4 without coming to a more profound concept of God as the divine Creator. It is obviously designed to show us that He who is seated on the throne is due the praise, honor, and glory of all His creatures. The lesson, regardless of the exact meaning of the symbols, is clear: God rules and creatures worship. We should be careful not to get so bogged down in the interpretation of the symbols (and it is important that we interpret them) that we miss the lesson the symbols were designed to teach. In chapter 5 Christ is depicted as God the Redeemer. Several pictures of His role emerge: He is seen as the God (the lion) of power — He shares the throne with God, the God of revelation — He opens the sealed book, the God (the Lamb) of redemption, and the God who is worthy of praise from all the host of heaven and earth. Again the lesson is clear: the price of redemption has been paid and the future of the redeemed is secure — God's plans for the future reveal their victory. The redeemed can therefore take comfort. Whatever the future holds, God rules and Christ redeems. Nothing can defeat Christians or cause them to lose their eternal reward . . . if they remain faithful unto death (2:10).

THE SEALED BOOK

5:1-4 And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.

5:1 **And I saw** — A new element is now introduced into the vision. **in** — Or upon. **the right hand of him that sat on the throne** — God, the Almighty, **a book** — A scroll (cf. Ez. 2:9-10). Many different views have been advanced as to the meaning of the book, but it seems obvious to me that it signifies that which is now to be revealed (beginning in chapter 6), first to John and then to all when it is written. Thus the book signifies the future plans of God as they relate to the destiny of His people. **written within and on the**

backside, — With writing on both sides (NIV). The writing on both sides undoubtedly depicts the completeness and vast extent of its contents. It contained the full revelation of the forthcoming battle between righteousness and wickedness. **sealed with seven seals**. — Securely sealed, thus signifying that the future plans of God had not yet been revealed. The future is known only to God and He alone can reveal it. The number seven is the number of perfection. Hence the scroll was perfectly sealed and its contents a profound secret . . . and would remain so until the seals were broken. As with all the will of God, man cannot know what is in His mind until He reveals it (1 Cor. 2:9-11).

5:2 **And I saw a strong angel** — A powerful messenger of God (cf. 10:1; 18:21). Probably strength is ascribed to him because of his loud voice. **proclaiming with a loud voice**, — A voice that sent a challenge throughout the universe. The voice seems to indicate the importance of and the extent to which the proclamation was to be heard. **Who is worthy** — Who is perfectly fit in character and empowered by attribute, authority, rank, and ability. **to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?** — No creature in heaven or on earth or under the earth could be found who was able to do so. Man cannot probe into the secret things of God (cf. Rom. 11:34; Dt. 29:29). He can know the will and plans of God only when they are made known to him by divine revelation (1 Cor. 2:9-11). Thus only God (in this case, God the Redeemer) could open the book and make known its divine contents.

5:3 **And no man in heaven**, — No heavenly or angelic being. **nor in earth**, — No living man on earth. **neither under the earth**, — None in the immediate state, the abode of the dead. The thrust of the statement is that no creature in the universe, living or dead, past, present, or future, could be found who was worthy to make the disclosure of the book's contents. **was able to open the book, neither to look thereon**. — No one had the power or ability to break the seals and reveal what was written inside the book. Christ, and Christ alone, can loose the seals and reveal what the future holds. This means that all those today who (without divine inspiration) claim to look into the future and foretell what is yet to be are nothing but lying spirits and prophets of deceit.

5:4 **And I wept much**, — He cried audibly and profusely. The book obviously contained that which the voice from heaven had promised John he would be shown (4:1). But if the book remained sealed the promise would fail. Without the Lamb (who has not yet appeared) the contents of the book would forever remain a mystery. As John saw it, all the plans and promises of God depended upon the book being opened. In a similar way, the whole Christian system depends upon revelation. Throughout the OT God promised a new system (cf. Is. 2:2-4; Jer. 31ff) that would bring to all the knowledge and blessing of God. But that system remained a mystery (something undisclosed) for ages. Man could not know about it apart from revelation. And revelation was to be made only through the Son of God (Heb. 1:1-4). Thus until the Lamb appeared on the world scene, made the atonement and brought to light the hidden things

of God, no one could know the will and plans of God (1 Cor. 2:9-11) or be forgiven or adopted into His family as children (Gal. 3:26-29). **because no man was found worthy** — See notes on v. 3. **to open** — To break the seals. **and to read the book**, — Omitted in most texts for lack of manuscript support. If retained, it would mean the same as the following: **neither to look thereon**, — To see or make known the contents of the book.

THE LAMB IS WORTHY TO OPEN THE BOOK

5:5-7 And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof. And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne.

5:5 **And one of the elders saith unto me**, — See notes on 4:4. **Weep not**: — Stop weeping. A solution to the problem (the cause of his tears, see v. 4) was available. While no one in heaven, nor on earth, nor under the earth was found who was worthy to open the book, the revelation of the plans of God would not have to be aborted. Another, the Lion, the Root, and the Lamb, is about to appear. And He is worthy! **behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda**, — The lion by reason of his strength and courage is known as the king of beasts. The Lion of the tribe of Judah thus signifies the kingly power and majesty of Christ the Lord. He is the Conqueror, the Ruler, the King whose genealogy is traced through the tribe of Judah (Gn. 49:10; Heb. 7:14). **the Root of David**, — The offspring of David (BV). That is, the promised Messiah who was of the seed of David (Is. 11:1) and heir to his throne (2 Sm. 7:10-14). **hath prevailed** — Has conquered (Williams), triumphed (NIV), overcome (NASV), or won the victory (Beck). The conflict from which He had victoriously emerged undoubtedly included His death on the cross and His resurrection on the morning of the third day. In this conflict He not only won the victory over death and all the powers of the infernal region for Himself (cf. 2 Tm. 1:10) but also over sin and its penalty for all mankind. Because of His victory He is able **to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof**. — That is, He is worthy to open the book and make known its contents. The future plans of God for His saints would not remain a sealed book. They would be revealed by the conquering Lion, the sure Root — the promised Messiah, the slain Lamb.

5:6 **And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne** — Then I saw standing in the center of the throne (Goodspeed). I have no doubt but that this is designed to depict Christ sharing the throne with God. The whole Bible teaches this and it is at the very heart of Revelation. He is God. Not God the Father, but God the Son. And He rules from the throne of God. **and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders**, — His relationship to the throne places Him in the midst of (that is, surrounded by) the living creatures and the 24 elders. Since they surround the throne (4:4-6), to be in the midst (center)

of the throne was to be in their midst also. **stood a Lamb** — The Lamb is Christ. And since the lamb is a symbol of sacrifice, He is now depicted in His gentle role of Redeemer (cf. Is. 53:7; Jn. 1:29; Acts 8:32; 1 Pt. 1:19). The word for lamb (and interestingly enough this particular word is used only one other time in the NT, Jn. 21:15) appears 29 times in Revelation and 28 of them apply to Christ, who is the sacrificial offering for sins. As Vine says, "The symbolism having reference to His character and His vicarious sacrifice as the basis . . . of redemption. . . ." **as it had been slain**, — Still bearing the marks of slaughter. Christ had been crucified — sacrificed for the sins of the world (1 Jn. 2:2) — but was now alive, having won the victory over death. This is rooted in the sacrificial lamb of the OT (cf. Gn. 22:7-8; Ex. 12:3-13). **having seven horns** — Horns are the symbol of authority and power (cf. Dt. 33:17; Jer. 48:25). Seven is the number of perfection. Hence the Lamb is depicted as having perfect or absolute power (cf. Mt. 28:18-20). The seven horns are therefore emblematic of His omnipotence. **and seven eyes**, — Signifying His perfect, penetrating, and unlimited knowledge and vision (2 Chr. 16:9; cf. Heb. 4:13). Hence His omniscience. **which are the seven Spirits of God** — The HS. See notes on 1:4. **sent forth into all the earth**. — That is, sent forth by the Lamb to carry out His operations throughout the whole earth. This is undoubtedly designed to show His omnipresence as well as the work of the HS in the scheme of human redemption. When Christ ascended back to heaven, to take His seat at the right hand of the Father, He sent the HS into the world to complete the Christian system by revealing (Jn. 16:13), confirming (Heb. 2:3-4), and delivering (in written form, Jude 3) the saving truth of the gospel (Jn. 16:7-14; Rom. 1:16). The work He did was the work of Christ — the work Christ sent Him to do. And His primary work was to reveal to lost man the fact that the Lamb has been slaughtered and that God has accepted the shed blood of the Lamb as the atonement for sins. His death paid the penalty (Rom. 6:23). This enables sinful man to be set free — to be justified by the sacrifice of another. We now have that message in its finished form because the HS was sent into the world. Wherever it is proclaimed the HS goes (through the written word). Wherever it is applied (obeyed) sins are forgiven. Wherever sins are forgiven the HS takes up His abode (again through the divine truth He revealed) in the purified heart. And wherever the HS is the all-seeing eye is present.

5:7 **And he** — The Lamb (Christ) who had been slain for man's redemption. **came and took the book** — Took the sealed scroll. **out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne**. — This indicates that He took it with God's approval and with it He accepted the obligation to open it and make known its contents. That is, He had been given the power or authority (Mt. 28:18-20) to break the seals and reveal the future plans of God. God had given Him the revelation to show unto His servants (1:1). The mystery is at last to be made manifest.

UNIVERSAL PRAISE OF THE LAMB

5:8-14 And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before

the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth. And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts 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 that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, 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, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever.

5:8 And when he had taken the book, — See note on v. 7. the four beasts and four and twenty elders — See notes on 4:4-6. fell down before the Lamb, — See notes on 4:10. In 4:10 they prostrated themselves in worship to God the Creator; here they do the same before Christ the Redeemer. Since God is the only object of true worship (22:9-10), this leaves no doubt but that Christ is God, that He is worthy of the same praise and glory as God the Father. In chapter 4 the praise is to God the Creator; here it is to God the Redeemer. **having every one of them harps, — Each holding a lyre (Beck). The natural conclusion (and one that all would no doubt reach if none had a theory to defend) is that the harps are symbolic of musical praise. Barclay recognizes this principle by saying, "The harp simply stands for the music of praise as the Jews knew that music." But more accurately it is the music of praise as the Christians knew it: for John was writing to Christians, not to Jews. And the only kind of music known to Christians in the worship of God was vocal. It therefore seems obvious that the kind of musical praise symbolized is precisely that stated in v. 9 where it is specifically said they sung a new song. They had harps (symbolic of musical praise) but the action of praise in which they engaged was singing. I conclude, therefore, that the harps here signify vocal music. To view the citizens of heaven as playing on literal harps (in order to justify instrumental music in the worship of the church, where it is never commanded by Christ, taught by the apostles, practiced by the early church, or authorized by the NT Scriptures) one must conceive of it as a material rather than a spiritual world. While it is described in terms of the material (just as musical praise is here signified by harps), we must recognize this as figurative language. Heaven is real, but it is a spiritual realm, not a material one. And to conceive of spiritual beings in a spiritual realm playing on a material harp is incongruity at its worst. But regardless of what may be used in praise in heaven, here on earth we are limited to that which the Lord has authorized (Jn. 4:23-24; 1 Thes. 5:21). The NT nowhere authorizes the use of instrumental music in Christian worship. It does, however, authorize singing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Jas. 5:13). Thus to go beyond singing is to go beyond that which is written (1 Cor. 4:6, ASV). **and golden vials full of odours, —** And golden bowls full of incense (ASV). **which are the prayers of saints. —** That is, the incense is symbolic of prayer. The elders (representing the redeemed) were not offering incense as an act of worship (as may be the case in 8:3-4), but the incense represents petitions made by the saints. Thus the harps are symbolic of singing and the incense of**

praying.

5:9-10 **And they** — The four living creatures and the 24 elders, signifying all the redeemed. **sung a new song, saying**, — God was praised as Creator in chapter 4. Now there is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17) and Christ is praised for His mighty work in it in the new song of redemption (cf. Is. 42:10). This song could not have been sung prior to the Lamb's sacrifice, prior to Him paying the purchase price of man's sin debt with His own blood. As Coffman puts it: "Christianity is the truly new thing. In it are the new creation, the new name, the new song, the new heaven and the new earth, the new birth, the new life in Christ, etc." The fundamental contents of the new song follows. **Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof**: — Three things are ascribed to Him which make Him worthy to open the book and reveal its contents: (1) **for thou wast slain**, — As a lamb, He was offered as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. This is the redemptive act. (2) **and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation**; — Redemption is universal. By the shedding of His blood He paid the ransom price of sins for everyone, even to the uttermost parts of the earth. No one, regardless of his nationality, social status, or personal characteristics, is exempted from the purchase price. This is the application of the redemptive act. (3) **And hast made us unto our God kings and priests**: — And madest them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests (ASV) (cf. Ex. 19:6; see notes on 1:6). By His redemptive act, He made the redeemed a spiritual kingdom in which each serves as a royal priest (1 Pt. 2:5, 9). This is the result of the redemptive act. Concerning the word "us" (KJV) or "them" (ASV) I must let scholars argue as to which is the correct rendering. It is a knotty problem that will not soon go away. But in the final analysis it makes little or no difference. If the KJV is right (which I have followed in my notes) it refers to the 24 elders and the four living creatures (and the "us" can be retained in v. 9); if the ASV is accepted the "us" must be omitted in v. 9 and the reference is to the redeemed. But in the vision the 24 elders and the four living creatures symbolize the redeemed. So in either case the meaning is clear: the redeemed are praising their Redeemer. And that is the vital point. **and we shall reign on the earth**. — They shall overcome (cf. notes on 3:21) and be more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37) in the cause of Christ. While the vision is seen in heaven, it is concerned with the saints on earth during the Christian age and their rewards both now and in eternity. The kingdom is a spiritual kingdom (Jn. 18:36) and the priesthood is a spiritual priesthood. This means that the kingdom here spoken of is the present kingdom (1:9; Col. 1:13) and the priesthood is that composed of all Christians (1 Pt. 2:5, 9). Since the reign is in the kingdom and during their priesthood, it must therefore be a spiritual reign — that is, the reign which pertains to the Christian system.

5:11 **And I beheld**, — Then I looked (NIV). A new voice of praise now appears. **and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders**: — The angels were all around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders. Thus the heavenly hosts now join in to sing the worthy

praise of the Lamb. **and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands;** — Literally, according to Robertson (WP), "myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands." John did not mean for these numbers to be computed and taken literally. Rather they are indefinite and signify a number so vast that the human mind cannot conceive of it. It simply means that the angels are innumerable (Heb. 12:22).

5:12 **Saying** — Cf. Luke 2:13-14. **with a loud voice,** — The voice of ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of angels, all lifting their voices together in praise of the Lamb. **Worthy is the Lamb** — An expression of praise to the Lamb recognizing that He deserves (it is His by right of His redemptive sacrifice) the seven attributes which are now ascribed to Him (cf. vv. 9-10). **that was slain** — Who was sacrificed for the sins of man. For this reason all the praise and adoration ascribed to the Creator also belong to the Redeemer (cf. 4:11). **to receive** — That is, He is worthy to be praised for the attributes which He already possesses. Beckwith says, "The analogy of other doxologies, e.g., 1:6; 4:11; 7:12, show that the meaning here is not that Christ is worthy to receive what God has given him, might, etc., but as in 4:11 to receive adoration for the might, etc., which he possesses." He is thus praised for what He is as well as for what He has done. As a background to what follows, one should read Phil. 2:5-11. **power,** — The power (ASV). Absolute or omnipotent power; authority (1 Cor. 1:24; Mt. 28:18). That is, He has the power to accomplish redemption. **and riches,** — The wealth of the universe, both material (Ps. 24:1) and spiritual (Eph. 3:8). He has the resources to assure redemption. **and wisdom,** — He is all wise (1 Cor. 1:24; Col. 2:3). Wise enough to devise the only means (His substitutionary death) whereby redemption could be obtained (cf. Rom. 11:33). **and strength,** — Might (ASV). The ability to exert His power in the accomplishment of His plans and purposes, to meet death and conquer it by His resurrection (cf. Lk. 11:22). He had the enabling power to do what was necessary to provide the scheme of redemption. **and honour,** — Adoration, esteem, and praise. Ascribed to Him because He made redemption an accomplished fact. **and glory,** — The brightness of God's glory (Heb. 1:3), the glory of the only begotten of the Father (Jn. 1:14). His glory derives from the fact that He did the work the Father assigned Him (Jn. 17:4), namely, the work of redemption. **and blessing.** — A state of happiness, peace, and gratitude. He has every right to rejoice in that the sacrifice He made is efficacious for redemption.

5:13 **And every creature** — Every created being from the four spheres of existence now join the universal chorus to sing the praise of the Creator and the Redeemer. While all creation praise and honor God (Ps. 19:1-6), I do not think the vision has in view any creature other than intelligent and responsible beings, namely, men and angels. **which is in heaven,** — The heavenly host. **and on the earth,** — Living beings who inhabit the land area of the earth. **and under the earth,** — Those in the hades world (cf. Phil. 2:10). **and such as are in the sea,** — And on the sea (Williams). Living beings who sail the seas. **and all that are in them,** — All in heaven, on earth, under the earth, and on the sea. This

simply reemphasizes the universal nature of the praise. **heard I saying**, — I heard saying (NASV). John heard this swelling chorus as all created beings offered joint praise to both God and His Son. **Blessing, and honour, and glory**, — See notes on v. 12. **and power**, — Might (RSV) or dominion (ASV). The power or authority to jointly rule as Creator and Redeemer. **be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb** — The occupant of the throne was first praised as Creator (vv. 9-11); then the Lamb as the Redeemer (vv. 8-12); now the praise is directed to both. Thus the Redeemer is equal with the Creator (cf. Phil. 2:5-11). **for ever and ever**. — The praise is to continue for all eternity.

5:14 **And the four beasts** — See notes on 4:6. **said, Amen**. — Amen means let it be so. They thus give their approval and consent to all the attributes of praise ascribed to the Rulers on the throne (v. 13). **And the four and twenty elders** — See notes on 4:4. **fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever**. — See notes on vv. 8-10; 4:10.

REVELATION 6

Here begins the most symbolic, and thus the most difficult, part of Revelation. Scores of explanations have been given to the symbols, most of which are nothing short of fanciful flights of imagination. It seems almost presumptuous for me to think that I could be of help where so many of the world's best minds have offered such varied thoughts. What do I have to offer of value? Maybe nothing. But on the other hand I might be able at least to point in the direction which I believe the Author intended for us to go in understanding the book. It must be remembered that my view of Revelation does not require each successive vision, such as the opening of the seven seals, the blowing of the seven trumpets, etc., to be understood as specific events in history, each following the other in successive order. Rather, as I see it, the symbols are designed to give a panoramic overview of the constant battle between Christ and Satan, right and wrong, truth and falsehood. As we observe this overview it may appear at times that truth is forever on the scaffold and wrong forever on the throne. But not so when the picture is completed. Wrong has wrongly usurped the throne and will ultimately be defeated. The final victory, in every case in Revelation, belongs to truth. The message of chapters 6 and 7 seems to establish the pattern of the whole book. The order of events are: (1) Christianity (the church or the cause of truth and right) goes forth conquering and to conquer (for the glory of God). (2) Then comes war or persecution. (3) Famine (gloom and despair) follows. (4) Death and hades result. (5) The saints are seemingly defeated. (6) Judgment is brought upon the wicked. (7) The saints are victorious. Seen against this background, the message of chapters 6 and 7 seem relatively clear: While the saints may be under the altar pleading for God to avenge their blood (v. 10), the God of all the earth will do right (Gn. 18:25). The great day of His wrath will surely come (v. 17) and the saints will reign with Him robed in white (7:13-14). Keep in mind that the book to be opened is the future (from the perspective of John's vision) plans of God for His people (that is, the book reveals what is to follow in Revelation). The design of its contents is to reveal to them the sure victory which is theirs if they remain faithful (2:10). It thus appears to me that the opening of the first six seals sets the stage for a proper understanding of the whole book. With the opening of the first seal Christianity (or the church) is seen going forth under the bloodstained banner of Christ on its heavenly conquest, namely, to win

the hearts and devotion of men to the Lord of glory. But hard on its heels come the second, third, and fourth seals, war, famine, and death. The fifth seal then shows the apparent defeat of the saints — they have been slain (sacrificed) for conquering through the word. But the sixth seal brings defeat (judgment) to the wicked. Then in chapter 7 we see the triumph of the saints. They have at last won the victory. The lesson depicted: wherever Christianity goes, the forces of Satan are not far behind with war, famine, and death. The saints, however, cannot ultimately be defeated. Victory is theirs and they will reign robed in white. But the forces of evil will be destroyed. There will always be a struggle between good and evil in this life, but for those who are faithful the final outcome is not in question.

THE FIRST SEAL — CONQUEST

6:1-2 And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.

6:1 And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, — I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals (NIV). **and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder,** — That is, the voice had such volume that it sounded as thunder. As Wallace observes, "It signifies the ominous import of the announcement, the awesome note of what was about to be revealed." **one of the four beasts** — See notes on 4:6. **saying, Come and see.** — Come (ASV). The KJV has the voice of the living creature saying to John, "Come and see." But by almost universal consent the words "and see" should be dropped. Thus the ASV is correct. The living creatures address the horsemen and charge them to come out or be on their way. The time had come for their secrets to be made manifest.

6:2 And I saw, and behold a white horse: — White is the symbol of innocence or purity and the horse signifies majesty in battle (cf. Zec. 1:7-11; 6:1-7; 10:3; Job 39:19-25). When the vision as a whole is viewed it clearly depicts a conquering force that is both pure and victorious. **and he that sat on him** — While there are many different interpretations as to who this rider is, most of them fall into one of two broad categories: (1) Christ or His church (cf. 19:11). Or (2) the forces of evil, which are opposed to Christ and His cause. Since it is totally unfitting for that which is white to be associated with evil, I conclude that this represents the church militant. This view seems to best fit the context both immediate (vv. 1-17) and remote (the whole book). **had a bow;** — The gospel or his instrument of conquest. **and a crown was given unto him:** — The crown of victory. **and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.** — That is, he went forth conquering because his purpose was to conquer. Jesus charged His disciples to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature (Mk. 16:15). With the message of truth (the bow) and crowned with

success (the crown), Christianity, during the apostolic age, spread throughout the whole Roman world (cf. the book of Acts). It conquered because its purpose was to conquer. It had no other mission in the world.

THE SECOND SEAL — PERSECUTION

6:3-4 And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see. And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.

6:3 **And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see.** — See notes on v. 1.

6:4 **And there went out another horse that was red:** — Another horse came out, fiery red (Beck). As the remainder of this part of the vision shows, red is the symbol of bloodshed. This could include both war (physical war) and persecution (spiritual war) but more likely here it has in view the suffering and death of the saints brought on by persecution — the war instigated and carried out by the enemies of truth and right. **and power was given to him that sat thereon** — The rider here is unnamed but could represent any force which mounts the red horse of persecution against the church of Christ (cf. Saul of Tarsus who had authority from the court to persecute Christians, even to distant cities, Acts 9:1-2). **to take peace from the earth,** — If I have correctly identified the first horse and its rider as the church (Christianity), its message was the gospel of peace (Mt. 5:9; Rom. 10:15; 14:17; Eph. 2:14-17). The second horse and its rider follows with persecution to eliminate that peace. As Hendrikson says, "No century is without its rider upon the red horse: the world is ever persecuting the church. Christ always brings the sword! Peace is taken from the earth, Mt. 10:34." **and that they should kill one another:** — They would destroy peace by engaging in the slaughter of persecution. But persecution often backfires and the persecutors fight and devour one another, as is characteristic of all wicked powers. **and there was given unto him a great sword.** — A huge short sword, not the sword of authority or war but the sword of sacrificial slaughter (cf. Gn. 22:6, 10). A different word for sword is used here than in v. 8, which makes it all but certain that sacrificial killing is involved (cf. vv. 9-11). It is called great to indicate the extent of its use in slaughter.

THE THIRD SEAL — FAMINE

6:5-6 And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.

6:5 **And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see.** — See notes on v. 1. **And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him** — The black horse and his rider represent gloom, sorrow, desolation, famine, poverty, and hunger (cf. Jer. 14:2-5; Lam. 4:8-9; 5:10), as the remainder of this part of the vision clearly indicates. These are the natural results of war. But not alone of literal war: they stalk the whole earth in one form or another and often as a result of religious persecution. These conditions usually come about because some try to hoard God's gift of the earth and all that therein is and thus deprive others of what rightfully belongs to all. Probably here the black horse and his rider are an effort to deprive Christians of their spiritual right by cutting them off from material things (cf. notes on 2:18, 20). **had a pair of balances in his hand.** — A pair of scales (NIV). The intensity of the gloom, sorrow, desolation, famine, poverty, and hunger is signified by the balances and the exorbitant prices of v. 6. Food would be measured out (Ez. 4:16). This may indicate the difficulty Christians would have in studying and practicing the living word of God.

6:6 **And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say,** — The speaker is not identified, but the voice comes from among the four beasts, who surrounded the throne (4:6). It was obviously not one of them speaking. The voice describes the poverty-stricken conditions that would prevail in the wake of the black horse and his rider. **A measure** — About a quart, the minimum allowance of food for a day. **of wheat** — Staple grain food. **for a penny,** — The wages a laborer earned by a day's work. This represents the famine being so severe that one would have to work the whole day just to sustain his own life. There would be nothing left to share with his family or with those in need (Eph. 4:28). Thus the BV renders it, "A quart of wheat for a day's wages." **and three measures of barley for a penny;** — Barley was cheaper but it probably took more of it to sustain life. The point seems to be that a worker would only earn enough to support himself, whether he purchased a quart of wheat or three quarts of barley. **and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.** — Probably the more luxurious food, over which the famine had no power or effect. This may signify that the oil and the wine were simply beyond the power of the poor to purchase. If so, then it almost certainly indicates that the famine was not in the scarcity of food, but in the inability of the poor (most likely Christians) to buy. And this inability may have resulted from Christians being forced out of work because of their refusal to worship the emperor, as in Pergamum (see notes on 2:13), or to maintain membership in the trade guilds when to do so was interpreted as honoring a pagan god, as in Thyatira (see notes on 2:18-20). When people are forced from work for conscience's sake, whether it be by the trade guilds of the ancient world or by modern unions or social prejudices, they find themselves in famine and poverty in the midst of plenty. Such conditions ought not to prevail. It is a sad state of affairs when a person, any person, is forced from honorable work because he chooses to be true to his conscience.

THE FOURTH SEAL — DEATH

6:7-8 And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see. And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.

6:7 **And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see.** — See notes on v. 1.

6:8 **And I looked, and behold a pale horse:** — Beck renders the color as pale green, but more likely here livid or ashen, that is sickly pale, the color (or rather the absence of color) of a human corpse. The pale horse and its rider are universally understood to be the symbol of death. **and his name that sat on him was Death,** — Death personified. **and Hell followed with him.** — Hades (ASV). Hades is the place of departed spirits (Lk. 16:19-31). It always follows death (1:18; 20:13-14). **And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth,** — Indicating the wide extent of their dreadful and destructive power. **to kill** — Put to death one-fourth of the earth's population. There are four ways given by which this gruesome task is to be accomplished (cf. Ez. 14:21): (1) **with sword,** — The sword of war, not the sword of sacrifice as in v. 4. (2) **and with hunger,** — Mass starvation as the result of famine (cf. vv. 5-6). (3) **and with death,** — With pestilence (NASV) or plagues (NIV). Probably meaning death by severe and agonizing diseases. (4) **and with the beasts of the earth.** — Wild animals. While certainly not the full extent of this destructive force, one cannot help but be reminded of the death of many Christians who were forced to fight with wild and hungry beasts for the entertainment of pagans in their amphitheaters (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:32).

THE FIFTH SEAL — SLAUGHTERED SAINTS

6:9-11 And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were 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, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.

6:9 **And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar** — The altar signifies sacrifice. That they are underneath the altar is symbolic of the fact that they are martyrs, the sacrificial victims of the great sword of v. 4 (cf. Lv. 4:7). They have paid the supreme price for their faith. **the souls** — The life blood (cf. Gn. 9:4; Lv. 17:11). This is a forceful intimation that life does not end at death. **of them that were slain** — Slaughtered as a sacrificial victim. **for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:** — For living faithful to God's message and the testimony they bore to it (Williams). See 1:9. This depicts the saints as in apparent defeat, as they often are in Reve-

lation. The enemies of truth have the upper hand, at least for the moment. And the end is not yet in sight: for more must join them in martyrdom (v. 11) before the opening of the sixth seal, which brings judgment upon the wicked and victory to the saints. The final victory, however, is not reached until chapter 20, when the souls are no longer under the altar but on the throne. Then the battle will be over. Victory is theirs forever. But why have they been slaughtered? Because of their success in conquest (vv. 1-2) with the word of God, the preaching of the soul saving message of the gospel, for which they both lived and died. Their lives had been sacrificed for the cause of Christ. They had been faithful unto death (2:10).

6:10 And they cried with a loud voice, — The great volume signifies a huge number (see 5:12). Thus many had suffered martyrdom. **saying, How long, O Lord,** — How long, O Master (ASV). The slain souls recognize themselves as servants (or slaves, purchased with a price, 1 Cor. 6:20) of the Lord, their Master. **holy and true,** — Holy because He is totally separated from evil (Hb. 1:13) and always does right (Gn. 18:25); true because He can be depended upon to reward the righteous and punish the wicked (see notes on 3:7). **dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?** — God will avenge His own in due season (Lk. 18:7-8). Contrary to what some try to make it, this is not a cry for personal revenge (Rom. 12:19) but rather a call for judgment against the enemies of the cause for which they had died. How many more deaths would have to occur, how much more suffering would the saints have to endure, before the earth people would be called to account before the judicial bar of heaven?

6:11 And white robes were given unto every one of them; — They were clothed in festive and victorious robes of white, symbolic of purity and innocence. That is, they were given the eternal rewards of the faithful (see 3:5). **and it was said unto them, that they should rest** — They were instructed to wait in peace. God is still in control. He will avenge in His own good time. **yet for a little season,** — A little while, probably meaning until the final battle has been fought, that is, until the second coming of Christ. **until their fellowservants also and their brethren,** — Until the number of their fellowservants and brothers (NIV). Are there two sets of persons here, one fellowservants (as in the KJV) and the other brethren, or is the same group of persons addressed from two different aspects (as appears to be the view of the NIV)? The former is possible but it does not seem likely to me. But if it is the case, the distinction would be that of faithful Christians who stand for the truth but will not suffer martyrdom and those who are yet to be killed in the Master's service. As indicated, I lean heavily toward the latter possibility. **that should be killed as they were,** — Who were to be killed as they had been (Good-speed). **should be fulfilled.** — That is, they should rest until the final Christian is sacrificed, until the number of the martyrs is completed. The point is that there are still others in the service of the Master who would be offered upon the altar of martyrdom before the day of accounting came.

THE SIXTH SEAL — JUDGMENT

6:12-17 And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens 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 that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

As we have seen, under the Great Commission the people of God go forth conquering the hearts of men for Christ because their purpose is to conquer (vv. 1-2). This arouses the hatred of the enemies of truth to the point where they persecute and slaughter the saints (vv. 3-8). The blood of the slain saints cries from under the altar for judicial vindication of their cause (vv. 9-11). Now the time has arrived for judgment to be administered to the wicked — the great day of God's wrath has come, as is shown when the sixth seal is opened. This does not necessarily mean the final judgment, although that is undoubtedly included. It has reference to any visitation of the wrath of God upon the enemies of His people. One may reject the truth and seek to destroy all its effects upon both men and the world, and in that appear successful for a little season, but sooner or later he must face the justice of the holy and true God (Gal. 6:7-8). Man cannot continue to flout God and His divine law without being called to account, often in this world and most certainly in the judgment of that great and final day when all will be judged according to their deeds. This fact Revelation depicts over and over again.

6:12-14 **And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, —** When the sixth seal was opened John saw six upheavals in nature (12-14) and seven classes of men (15-17). First the six upheavals: (1) **and, lo, there was a great earthquake;** — A great shaking of the earth, one of nature's most fearful phenomena (cf. Ex. 19:18; Heb. 12:18-21). (2) **and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair,** — A coarse garment made from black goat's hair. The whole world is thrust into darkness. (3) **and the moon became as blood;** — Probably signifying bloodshed, calamity, and distress. (4) **And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.** — This depicts an unparalleled end of the systems ruled by the persecutors. (5) **And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together;** (6) **and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.** — While this will all undoubtedly literally happen at the end of the present order of things, it is my judgment that the commotions in the natural world here are used to describe the awesome and dreadful effects of the judgment of the Almighty, whether in this world or before the judgment bar of God in the day when all men will be judged (cf. Gal. 6:7-8; Acts 17:31). This type of figurative language (and for this purpose) is not unusual

in the Scriptures (cf. Is. 13:9-13; Jl. 2:30-31; Acts 2:16-20; Mt. 24:29). Its design is to depict in a highly figurative way extraordinary changes which will have far-reaching effects. Fortunately for us we have a divine interpretation of one of these passages. Peter, on the day of Pentecost, quoted Joel and said, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16). Joel had said, "And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord come" (Joel 2:30-31). Joel is speaking symbolically and his words were never meant to be understood as a literal darkening of the sun, the moon turning to blood, and signs of blood, fire, and smoke in the heavens and earth. Peter said, with unmistakable clarity, that that which was happening on Pentecost was precisely what Joel had foretold. He had used a great commotion in nature to figuratively describe what took place on Pentecost — that is, natural objects were used symbolically for the tremendous change in religion which occurred when the law of Moses ended and the NT came into effect. We should, therefore, not look for a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy in natural upheavals, but rather in the religious upheaval which was signified by them, namely, the change in the religious system. And so it is here: John is symbolically describing the great and dreadful judgment of God upon the wicked, not a time when the six upheavals in nature will literally occur. That is to say that the judgment of God is as great and terrible as if the earth did tremble and quake, the sun did become black, the moon did turn to blood, the stars did fall from heaven, the heavens did depart, and every mountain and island did move from their place. He who seeks for a fulfillment of John's words in natural calamities, that is, in the literal events described rather than in the awful and dreadful judgment of God, misses the point absolutely.

6:15 Seven classes of men are listed as those upon whom the judgment of the Almighty has come. The seven classes may indicate the full or perfect number of the enemies of the slain saints (vv. 9-11). (1) **And the kings of the earth**, — Rulers of earthly kingdoms. (2) **and the great men**, — The princes (NIV) or nobles (lords), that is, officials of state. (3) **and the rich men, and the chief captains**, — Those who possess wealth or the means of commerce. (4) **and the mighty men**, — The powerful (Beck). Men of great influence. (6) **and every bondman**, — Every slave, everyone who is in bondage to another. (7) **and every free man**, — Those not in bondage to another, whether the master of slaves, those who have never been slaves, or slaves set free. **hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains**; — They sought refuge from the judgment that had come upon them by hiding in caves and rocky mountain crags. They had cruelly persecuted the chosen people of God but now that the tables have turned on them they are terrified to face the consequence of their heartless and senseless deeds. To them anything, even death, appears easier to endure than the presence of the holy and true God and the wrath of the Lamb, now to be administered to avenge the blood of the martyrs. They have

now learned (but alas, too late) that regardless of who they are, whether great or small, rich or poor, king or slave, they cannot escape the consequences of their deeds. All men are under God, are subject to His law, and they thus must give an account to Him for the way they have lived. Every thought, every motive, and every act will be brought into judgment.

6:16 **And said to the mountains and rocks,** — In which they were seeking to hide (v. 15). **Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne,** — They could not bear the thought of facing the Creator with the blood of the slaughtered saints on their hands. Death was a more desirable alternative. But let everyone know, let everyone learn from the whole thrust of Revelation, that each must account to God when he lays hands on His people. **God will vindicate His saints. and from the wrath of the Lamb:** — His judgment upon their wicked deeds (cf. Jn. 5:22; Acts 17:31). The time of sowing is past. The time of reaping has come . . . and what a fearful harvest is before them (Heb. 10:31).

6:17 **For the great day of his wrath is come;** — For the great day of their wrath is come (ASV). The wrath (or retribution) of both God and the Lamb (as in the ASV). Both are joined in the vengeance against wickedness (cf. Is. 13:9). **and who shall be able to stand?** — A rhetorical question to which the mind automatically responds, "None." None would be able to withstand His awful judgment (cf. Na. 1:6). The question of v. 10 has now been answered; the wicked are judged, and the righteous are victorious.

REVELATION 7

Chapter 7 is composed of two visions, the sealing of the 144,000 (vv. 1-8) and the blessedness of the innumerable multitude (vv. 9-17). It is an interlude between the opening of the sixth and the seventh seal, but belongs to neither one of them in particular. As Weeber says, "Reading its contents, it is quite evident that it does not belong to the sixth seal nor is it an introduction to the seventh. It has as its theme the assurance of God's protective and redemptive care of the faithful in the midst of the judgment of the ungodly." Thus its design seems to be to reveal the victory of the saints without chronological consideration. The fifth seal saw the martyrs under the altar crying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood?" The sixth seal brings judgment upon the earth (that is, earth people, including the persecutors of the saints). But here the earth is not to be hurt (v. 3) until the servants of God are sealed with an identifying mark (probably meaning until the number of the saved is completed). And those sealed are the victorious — they are dressed in their eternal robes of white while their enemies are brought to judgment for their wicked oppression. The sixth seal shows the panic-stricken ones who must face the holy and true God with the blood of the redeemed on their hands; this shows the blessedness and peacefulness of the victorious saints. What a contrast!

DESTRUCTION AND JUDGMENT RESTRAINED

7:1-3 And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. And 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 given to hurt the earth and the sea, Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.

7:1 **And after these things** — Probably means after John had seen the opening of the first six seals (6:1-17), he saw the vision he is now to record. Chronologically this seems to coincide with the time frame of the first six seals, especially the fifth and sixth. **I saw four angels** — Messengers of the Lord, carrying out their mission of restraining the four winds of destruction. **standing on the four corners of the earth**, — Standing at the four points of the

compass: east, west, north, and south (Is. 11:12). Equivalent statements are: "The uttermost parts of the earth" (Is. 24:16); "From one end of heaven to the other" (Mt. 24:31); and "The four quarters of heaven" (Jer. 49:36). It simply means that the restraining angels were controlling the winds from every direction. **holding the four winds of the earth**, — Restraining the destructive forces of judgment against those who have rejected God and His people (cf. Jer. 49:31; 51:1-4). The angels are in control of the winds, so that they cannot blow until released by them. The patience of God is not easily exhausted (2 Pt. 3:9) but His judgment will not be withheld indefinitely (2 Pt. 3:10). **that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree**. — That is, the angels were to restrain the destructive forces, signified by the winds, everywhere until the sealing of the servants of God (v. 3). The earth, sea, and trees probably signify the whole material realm, including man, which would be affected by the coming judgment.

7:2 **And I saw another angel** — Another of the same class as the four in v. 1. That is, another heavenly messenger. **ascending from the east**, — Ascend from the sunrising (ASV). Probably means rising as the sun from the east. This may signify the fact that he carries a message of light, consolation, and hope rather than a message of destruction. **having the seal of the living God**: — The instrument (or authority) with which to seal (see v. 3; cf. Gn. 41:42; Est. 3:10). The seal was the identifying mark that would set them apart from those upon whom the destructive winds were to blow (v. 1). **and he cried with a loud voice** — The voice of authority. **to the four angels**, — Who were holding the four winds of destruction (v. 1). **to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea**, — See v. 1.

7:3 **Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees**, — See notes on v. 1. **till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads**. — The destructive forces were to be restrained until the servants of God were sealed. This almost certainly means that they were to be held back until the full number of the saints were attained, that is, until the second coming of Christ and the end of the world. The servants of God were to be sealed to identify them as God's peculiar possession and thus to protect them from the judgment that was to come upon the wicked (cf. Ez. 9:1-8). The mark was not given to enable them to escape tribulation (1:9; 2:9-10, 22; v. 14) but retribution. Perhaps the first thing we need to do is to dispense with the idea that this means Christians would be stamped with a literal seal upon their foreheads. This is not God's way of marking His people, nor the means by which they can be identified. Rather it is symbolic of the distinctive mark of God in the lives of His people. There can thus be no doubt but that the seal here is that by which one is marked as a Christian, a child of the living God. Anyone who sees this mark will know immediately that here is one who belongs to God and one upon whom the judgment of the world is not to come (2 Tm. 2:19). Undoubtedly then the seal is to be identified with the seal of Eph. 1:13, and the seal there is most certainly to be identified with being a Christian (Acts

2:38; Rom. 8:9). This then identifies the seal as that by which every child of God is marked. The thrust of vv. 1-3 is that judgment for the earth (earth people) would be restrained until the full number of Christians has been brought to completion — until the harvest has been reaped, and the last soul brought into the fold. If this view is correct, then everyone who becomes a Christian, who is born again (Jn. 3:5), has the seal of God in his forehead (cf. 14:1; 22:4). This then identifies for us both the 144,000 and the innumerable multitude — all are Christians.

SEALING OF THE 144,000

7:4-8 And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel. Of the tribe of Juda were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Reuben were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Gad were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Aser were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Nephthalim were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Manasses were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Simeon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Levi were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Issachar were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Zabulon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand.

7:4 **And I heard the number of them which were sealed:** — He did not see the sealing itself but from some unnamed source (probably from the angel) he was told the number. **and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand** — This is the number of those who received the mark of God's seal upon their foreheads. Is it to be taken literally? Or is it symbolic? It seems incredible to me that anyone could conceive of it as a literal number of all the saved from Israel for several reasons: first, it is set in a context of symbolism; second, exactly the same number from each of the twelve tribes is given; third, ten of the tribes did not exist by NT times; fourth, all the tribes are not named (Ephraim and Dan are omitted, unless Joseph is put for Ephraim); fifth, if literal, then it is necessary to conclude that all the tribes of Israel literally means fleshly Israel and nothing more. But this cannot be because all the servants of God were to be sealed, regardless of their nationality (cf. vv. 9-17). All the tribes of Israel must therefore be a symbol for the lost of the earth, that is, unbelieving Israel signifies all unbelievers. Hence the number 144,000 is symbolic of all the saved who are called out or separated from the unbelieving world (Mt. 19:28; Gal. 6:16; Jas. 1:1). This is further substantiated by the fact that in the next section (vv. 9-17) the same group is seen as a great multitude from all nations. Thus the 144,000 here symbolize the completed number of the servants of God, that is, every Christian or the whole church. **of all the tribes of the children of Israel.** — The tribes of the whole earth are signified by all the tribes of Israel. While many see this as literal Israel and the 144,000 as the number of the Jews who were to be saved and the great multitude of the next section as the saved from among the Gentiles, this does not take into account three very weighty matters: first, in 14:1-5 the 144,000 are the redeemed from the earth, meaning all the redeemed from among men,

not from the Jews alone. Second, it limits the sealing of the servants of God to the Jews alone: for nothing is said of the sealing of the great multitude. Third, it makes two different groups of the 144,000 and the great multitude when it is all but certain that the author was describing the same group from two different perspectives. Since the 144,000 are the saved from the twelve tribes, and since they are symbolic of all the saved, it seems imperative to me that we see all the tribes of Israel here as symbolizing the world of unbelief. This interpretation is necessitated when we see "of the tribes" meaning "from the tribes" (NIV), that is, a part of the tribe rather than the whole tribe. To see all the tribes as spiritual Israel is to fail to observe that the 144,000 (who are in reality spiritual Israel) is sealed from or out of the 12 tribes. Thus I conclude that from this perspective, John sees the 12 tribes as the unbelieving world from which the saints are called out and the 144,000 as the called out or sealed — those who are marked as Christians. I know of no way to explain the sealed as the children of God and still see the 12 tribes as spiritual Israel. The fact is, the 144,000, not all the tribes, is depicted as the true Israel of God.

7:5-8 Of the tribe — From the tribe (NIV). Not all in the tribes were sealed, only a part, namely, 12,000 from each one. **of Juda** — Probably put here first (although he was the fourth son) because the Lamb was the Lion of the tribe of Judah (5:5). **were sealed twelve thousand.** — The number 12 is a sacred number (12 tribes, 12 apostles, etc.). To add infinitely to its sacredness it is here multiplied by itself and then by a thousand (another sacred number). So what we have is a symbol for absolute completeness, the total number of the servants of God. Thus the 144,000 from the 12 tribes represent the new Israel of God (Gal. 6:16), the church of Jesus Christ, which He purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28). It is important to remember that the 12 tribes mean the whole of Israel, not 12 literal tribes. This must be the case here because the list does not include all the tribes (Ephraim and Dan are omitted) and both Manasseh and Joseph are listed, when the former would ordinarily be included in the latter, or else the latter is put for Ephraim, which is highly unlikely. Beckwith observes, "Nineteen different arrangements of the names are found in the O.T., with none of which does this list agree." With this in view, we can be all but certain that all the 12 tribes must be taken symbolically to mean the whole of Israel and the whole of Israel is symbolic of all the tribes of earth from which the servants are called and sealed. **Of the tribe of Reuben were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Gad were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Aser were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Nephthalim were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Manasses were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Simeon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Levi** — The priestly tribe which received no land inheritance. It is usually not listed with the 12. There were more than 12 tribes when Ephraim and Manasseh were both counted. Thus Levi was usually omitted. This shows conclusively that the 12 tribes meant the whole of Israel, not exactly 12 tribes. And so it was with the 12 apostles in the NT. **were sealed**

twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Issachar were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Zabulon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand.

THE GREAT MULTITUDE

7:9-12 After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.

7:9 **After this I beheld**, — After the vision of the 144,000 he sees another vision, now to be recorded. **and, lo, a great multitude**, — The vast concourse of the saved (cf. Heb. 12:22-24). That this is the same group as was previously seen as the 144,000 (see notes on v. 4) is shown by three facts: (1) Both groups represent all the saved, each from a different perspective. The first depicts those who are called out of the world and sealed with the mark of God and the second shows that the faithful are finally victorious. (2) Both groups are said to be before the throne (see below and 14:1-3). (3) Both are the redeemed, those washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. **which no man could number**, — The number of all the saved, a number so vast that it was beyond human power to compute. **of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues**, — The saved had been called and chosen from every nationality, from every race or tribe, from every mass of people, and from every language. No one is excluded on these grounds — the grace of God, which brings salvation (Ti. 3:10-11), is extended to all. This proves beyond any doubt whatsoever that God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11), that He does not favor one nation, race, group, or language over another. Heaven will be populated with the victorious saints from every part of the earth. The nationalities, the races, and the languages which now separate us will be no more. We will all stand together as one before the throne of God and the Lamb to praise them forever as Creator and Redeemer and for the glorious victory won in their service (vv. 10-12). The conflicts and strife we know now will then be over; all the children of God will be gathered to their eternal home. **stood before the throne**, — Before God, who was seated upon the throne (4:2). **and before the Lamb**, — Christ, who was in the midst of the throne (5:6). **clothed with white robes**, — The symbol of purity, righteousness, and victory (see notes on 3:4-5; 4:4; 6:11). **and palms in their hands**; — Signifying festive joy. It no doubt looks back to the Feast of Tabernacles (Lv. 23:26-44). On the first day of the feast the branches of palms and other trees were used in their rejoicing before the Lord (Lv. 23:40). When Jesus made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Mt. 21:1-11) the multitude who welcomed Him showed their fes-

tive spirit with branches from the palm tree (Jn. 12:13). The thrust here is to show that the people of God always rejoice in His presence.

7:10 And cried with a loud voice, — See notes on 5:12. **saying, Salvation to our God** — Our salvation is due to our God (Williams). That is, they ascribe their deliverance and preservation to God who designed the plan and to the Lamb who paid the sacrificial price of redemption. **which sitteth upon the throne,** — (see notes on 4:2), **and unto the Lamb.** — (see notes on 5:6).

7:11 And all the angels stood round about the throne, — (see notes on 5:11), **and about the elders** (see notes on 4:4) **and the four beasts,** — (see notes on 4:6), **and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God,** — (see notes on 4:9-11). The meaning here seems to be that the great multitude, the angels, the elders, and the four living creatures all joined together in praise and adoration to God the Creator and Christ the Redeemer.

7:12 Here we have the praise ascribed by the great multitude and the heavenly host to God — that is, their adoration expressed. **Saying, Amen:** — This word gives assent to a truth uttered, or, in this case, yet to be uttered. It affirms that which is said by a "so may it be." Here it affirms that the sevenfold ascription of praise is sincerely expressed by all those who surround the throne. **Blessing, and glory, and wisdom,** — See notes on 5:12. **and thanksgiving,** — It is interesting to note that in both 5:12 and here there is a sevenfold ascription of praise to God (and the Lamb). The list is the same (though not in the same order) except that thanksgiving is here substituted for riches there. This leads me to conclude that the two are to be viewed as one. The riches are the wealth of the universe, both material and spiritual. Thanksgiving involves both the recognition that God is the source and giver of all things plus the attitude of gratitude for that which He has given. Thus one cannot recognize God as the source and giver of all blessings (riches) and gratefully receive them as from His bountiful hands without thanksgiving. **and honour, and power, and might,** — See notes on 5:12. **be unto our God** — Be ascribed to God as the source and giver of all things. **for ever and ever.** — For all eternity. **Amen.** — Repeated here from the beginning of the sentence to intensify the emphasis on the ascription of praise.

THE GREAT MULTITUDE IDENTIFIED

7:13-17 And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

7:13 And one of the elders — One of the 24 elders (see notes on 4:4). **answered,** — Addressed me (Goodspeed) or asked me (NIV). **saying unto me, What** — Who (NIV). **are these which are arrayed in white robes?** — Who

are those robed in white who make up the great multitude? See v. 9. **and whence came they?** — Where did they come from?

7:14 **And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest.** — John does not answer the question (v. 13) but instead states that the elder already knew. The whole expression should probably be understood as something similar to, "No, Lord, but please tell me." As Swete says the words "thou knowest" "is at once a confession of ignorance, and an appeal for information." **And he said to me, These are they which came out of** — That is, emerge from the great tribulation. While Hailey says, "The verb tense here indicates continuous coming, not a past or completed act," it seems to me that Beckwith is more likely correct in saying that it is without reference to time and concludes, "The time is determined by the context, which in this case shows the act to have already taken place at the time anticipated in the vision." **great tribulation,** — The great tribulation (ASV). They had come through or emerged from the great trials, distresses, and persecutions that had plagued them on earth (cf. 1:9; 2:9-10, 22; Mt. 24:21, 29; Jn. 16:33; Acts 14:22; 2 Tm. 3:12). This most surely has reference to all the tribulations they had passed through or endured in this life and not to a period of time called the Great Tribulation, which some place between what they call the rapture and the revelation of Jesus, a period of time of which the Scriptures know nothing. To this Beckwith adds his testimony by saying, "There is nothing which points to one particular distress." **and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.** — One would have to be blinded by a threatened human theory not to see that this has reference to the salvation of the soul from sin — a salvation which is achieved by being washed in the blood of Christ (Eph. 1:7; 1 Pt. 1:18-19). The washing, of course, is metaphorical for whatever is done on the part of the sinner to bring about his salvation. Christ shed His blood to pay man's sin debt. That is, He provided the means of salvation — the means that would save all men if they would but wash and be clean. But man also has a part in the forgiveness of his sins. He must appropriate the blood through obedience to the divine will, as is revealed in the gospel (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom. 6:3-4, 16-18). Christ freely shed His blood (that is, by grace He provided the plan to save) to set men free. But to be free, man must wash his robes (cleanse his soul) in that blood. And the only way that can be done is by believing in Christ as Savior (Jn. 8:24) and submitting to Him as Lord (Acts 2:36) by absolute obedience to His revealed will. The blood of Christ saves (Rom. 5:6-9) but it saves only those who appropriate it to their sins by obedience. In short, the victorious are those who have believed in Christ, obeyed His word, and lived faithfully through all the troubles and trials of life.

7:15 **Therefore** — For this reason (BV). **are they before the throne of God,** — Because they have washed their robes in the blood of Christ and have faithfully emerged from great tribulation (v. 14) they are now privileged to be numbered with the host of heaven. **and serve him day and night** — Since there is no night there (21:25), this means that they unceasingly praise Him

(cf. 4:8). **in his temple:** — This is metaphorical for the place where God dwells and where He is worshipped, praised, and served (see notes on 1 Cor. 3:16), that is, heaven itself. **and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.** — He who is seated on the throne will shelter them in His tent (Williams). That is, He will overshadow them with His presence and protection. They will never again have to fear the enemy or face the cruelty of persecution: for God Himself will tabernacle with them.

7:16 **They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more;** — In the intense trials they had come through they had no doubt suffered with both hunger and thirst. But all that is now behind them. They have won the victory. They would never again be hungry or thirsty in the service of God (cf. Is. 49:10). While this is stated negatively, it has a positive implication, namely, God had supplied all their needs. Just as the physical body is adapted to this world, the spiritual body will be adapted to the world to come (1 Cor. 15:35-54). Heaven is not a physical sphere designed for physical bodies, nor can it be inherited by flesh and blood (1 Cor. 15:50; cf. Rom. 14:17). The strongest of bodily appetites known here will be unknown there because God will supply every need of man. **neither shall the sun light on them,** — And never again will the sun strike them (Williams) in the sense of beating down upon them. **nor any heat.** — Nor any scorching heat (NIV), that is, painful or burning heat, such as one is exposed to when wandering in a desert. John himself may have suffered hunger, thirst, and burning heat while he was exiled on Patmos, away from a daily source of food and shelter. But now he sees the saints, himself included, in a place where their suffering will be no more. All this means that the victorious will enjoy perfect and eternal peace around the throne of God.

7:17 **For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne** — See notes on 5:6. **shall feed them,** — Shall be their shepherd (ASV). That is, He shall shepherd them with constant care, protection, and provision. As He is here and now, so shall He be there, the good shepherd of the sheep (Jn. 10:11-14). **and shall lead them unto living fountains of water:** — And will lead them to springs of the water of life (Beck), to fountains of pure running water in contrast to stagnant pools (Jn. 4:13-14). Remove the figurative language and this simply means that He will supply them with every need that relates to their eternal well-being and security (cf. Ps. 23). No more will they be despised and rejected. **and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.** — There will be no more tears because God will remove all the causes of sorrow (such as death) from that blessed land (21:1-5; cf. Ps. 126:5).

REVELATION 8

From all appearance the design of 4-7 was to depict for us the battle between right and wrong through time to the beginning of eternity. The saints endured the incredible hardship of persecution, famine, and death; they had been slain and placed under the altar to wait until all the martyrs were gathered in. Then came the judgment of God upon their enemies. The saints were then vindicated, and those who were faithful unto death were at last brought home and crowned with eternal victory. This therefore seems to be a sweeping survey of time to show how the children of God, though persecuted and despised, are at last the victors. They could not be defeated. The opening of the seventh seal begins another dramatic episode which seems to be designed to show us the fierce judgment of God, brought upon the world because it rejected the truth and despised and persecuted the faithful. This judgment is symbolically depicted by what is revealed when the seven angels sound the seven trumpets.

OPENING OF THE SEVENTH SEAL

8:1-6 And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets. And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand. And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake. And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.

8:1 **And when he had opened the seventh seal,** — The final seal of the book was opened by the Lamb. That which follows is quite different from that of the other six seals. In the first six, each one is an integral part of the whole, but the seventh introduces a whole new episode all its own, the blowing of the seven trumpets. The drama of the trumpets does not follow chronologically the events which occurred at the opening of the first six, but instead seem to depict events simultaneous with them, at least in some respects, giving us a sweeping account of the judgment of God upon the wicked because of their persecution of the saints. **there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.** — The silence of waiting suspense. The praise of the heavenly

host, the cries of those fleeing from the wrath to come, the thunder, lightning, and the fearful earthquakes all came to a halt while this dramatic silence of awe and reverence prevailed. It may be that the silence came so the prayers of the saints would stand out and thus receive emphasis. The space of about a half an hour is indefinite and seems to signify a short time. At any rate, it is an interlude in the suspenseful and fast moving drama of Revelation. It is probably designed to heighten anticipation in what is to follow when the seven angels sound the seven trumpets.

8:2 And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; — The seven angels are introduced as if they had been a part of the previous visions, but, unless they appeared under another figure (such as the seven Spirits, 1:4, which is highly unlikely), this is the first mention of them. John seems to have spoken of them in this way in anticipation of their appearance in that which is now to be revealed. A drama often opens with a scene of which much of (and occasionally all of) the action of the play anticipates — that is, much of the drama is used to bring one up to the opening scene. This may be what John does here. And certainly we will soon know the seven angels and their role in the judgment which is about to come upon the earth. **and to them were given seven trumpets.** — The trumpet is the alarm to warn of the approach of the woes which are to fall upon the world when the seven angels sound.

8:3 And another angel — Not one of the seven, but a heavenly messenger who serves at the altar as a priest. **came and stood at the altar,** — Came and stood over the altar (ASV). He positioned himself above the altar in such a way as to minister at it. **having a golden censer;** — The censer was a firepan in which hot coals from the altar were placed, and on the coals grains of incense were burned so as to produce a sweet smell before the Lord (cf. Lv. 10:1; 12:16; Nm. 16:6-7). Here the altar, incense, and prayers are indicative of heavenly worship. **and there was given unto him much incense,** — A vast quantity of incense, since it is offered with the prayers, signify a great many prayers, prayers which ascend from all the saints in contrast with prayers only from the martyrs in 6:9-10. **that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints** — In 5:8 (see notes there) the incense is said to be the prayers of the saints. Here the figure is different: the incense is offered with (in addition to) the prayers. All of this is designed to depict heavenly worship, not to identify the literal items that will be employed in that worship. To see this as meaning that there will be a literal altar, coals of fire, and incense in heaven would be as materialistic as to conceive of literal instruments of music in that eternal and spiritual city (see notes on 5:8). **upon the golden altar which was before the throne.** — Apparently recalling the altar of incense from OT worship, where in both the tabernacle and temple it was overlaid with gold (cf. Ex. 30:1-10; 1 Kgs. 6:22; Heb. 9:4).

8:4 And the smoke of the incense, — The smoke which resulted from the burning of incense. This undoubtedly symbolizes the fact that the prayers of the saints ascend to the throne as a sweet fragrance to God (cf. Eph. 5:2),

that is, God is pleased when His people pray. **which came with the prayers of the saints**, — See notes on v. 3. **ascended up before God out of the angel's hand**. — The angel was ministering at the altar from which the coals were taken to burn the incense. As he burned the incense the sweet smell ascended along with the prayers of God's holy people up to the throne. This surely indicated that God hears the cries of His people, even when those cries are for judgment upon a wicked world.

8:5 **And the angel took the censer**, — See notes on v. 3. **and filled it with fire of the altar**, — In vv. 3-4 the censer was used in which to burn the incense (and the implication is that the fire was taken from the altar). Here, however, both the censer and the fire are used for an entirely different purpose. The fire is symbolic of the judgment or wrath of God (cf. Ez. 10:2-7). **and cast it into the earth**: — The earth is the object of God's wrath, symbolized by the fire from the altar. **and there were** — And there followed (ASV). **voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake**. — And there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake (NIV). Each of these four phenomena symbolizes the awesomeness of the presence of God in His judgment (cf. Ex. 19:16-25). As I have observed before, it is not necessary to search the pages of history to find a specific time, place, or event when the coals of fire were hurled upon the earth. To try to do so would be to miss the point. When the proper time comes, God's wrath is always manifested against sinful people and nations, as it was against the Jews in the destruction of Jerusalem (Mt. 24:1-36). The wicked may appear to prosper and be free from accountability to the Creator, but sooner or later judgment will come, and woe to the person or the nation not prepared for it. That is the point here.

8:6 **And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets** — See notes on vv. 1-2. **prepared themselves to sound**. — They set themselves in order to blow the trumpets and thus to bring the fearful judgment of God upon both the earth (first four) and wicked men (last three). As Barnes observes: "The last seal is opened; heaven stands in suspense to know what is to be disclosed; the saints, filled with solicitude, have offered their prayers; the censer of coals has been cast to the earth, as if these judgments could be no longer stayed by prayer; and the angels prepare to sound the trumpets indicative of what is to occur."

THE FIRST TRUMPET

8:7 The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.

8:7 **The first angel sounded**, — The first of seven. The sounding of the trumpets, like the opening of the seven seals, falls into two divisions: the first four bring judgment upon the natural world, the land, sea, fresh water, and the heavenly bodies; the final three bring woes upon man. **and there followed**

hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: — And there came hail and fire mixed with blood falling on the earth (Moffett). Swete says, "The storm flung itself on the earth." The vision as John saw it is easily understood, but what it symbolizes is a more difficult matter. The hail and fire (probably lightning) are natural forces which evidently serve as emblems of the frightful and destructive judgment of God (cf. the seventh plague brought on Egypt, Ex. 9:22-32). Hinds thinks the blood means the hail and fire produced bloodshed, but this is hard to harmonize with the fact that all three were cast upon the earth. I conclude, therefore, that the blood is designed to reveal the cause of judgment — the persecution and death of the saints. The blood they had shed was now falling upon their own heads (cf. Gn. 9:6; Nm. 35:33; Is. 26:21). **and the third part** — A large but limited part. That is, a great part of the earth was affected, but not the whole. The ASV inserts here, "And the third part of the earth was burnt up." **of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.** — Judgment was executed upon a large part of the earth. No effort should be made to identify an event in history with the blowing of the trumpets (a task too difficult for even the most skilled among those holding the historical view). Their design is to show that the judgment of God is sure against all those who reject His gracious offer of salvation. No one can hope to escape it, regardless of how long it may be delayed (cf. 2 Pt. 3:9-10). God made the world and everything therein, and someday all accountable beings will be called upon to account to Him for their failure to fill their divine purpose and mission. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:31). Lenski states my views much better than I can: "We do not think that the first four judgments are to be dated, one in an early century, the second in a later century, and the next two still later. The four effects are a gradation: bad, worse, still worse, and worst of all. Where and when these effects set in, and how soon the climax of the four is reached in any place or at any time cannot be definitely stated. Judgments always depend on wickedness and on God's longsuffering. The description pertains to the whole world. Yet we do not think that these judgments strike the whole world with one blow, but that they strike where and when judgment is due."

THE SECOND TRUMPET

8:8-9 And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood: And the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed.

8:8 And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: — A huge mountain-like mass, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. Thus terrible calamities in the sea are now added to help paint the picture of judgment. In this vision the mountain-like mass is the instrument of God's judgment, and the size indicates its magnitude. Usually the sea is a symbol for the masses of humanity, but here I think

we are to see the vision as a whole rather than to make each part a separate symbol. This is true of the first four trumpets. Thus I have concluded that they are designed to display God's judgment upon the wicked as it is administered through the natural world. As an example, punishment was administered to the Egyptians through earthly things (such as frogs, flies, lice, hail, darkness, and finally death); so it is here. The sea is thus only a part of the total picture of God's terrible judgment. **and a third part of the sea became blood:** — As in the first plague upon the Egyptians (Ex. 7:14-21).

8:9 And the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; — As with the Egyptians, they could not survive in the water turned into blood. This would limit the world's supply of food. **and a third part of the ships were destroyed.** — Commerce would be greatly reduced. All this is designed to depict the horrors of judgment against those who have persecuted and killed the saints. But it is more: it is also a means of encouragement to God's people to be faithful unto death. It says in essence, as sure as God reigns, the righteous will be victorious and the wicked will be brought to judgment.

THE THIRD TRUMPET

8:10-11 And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters: And the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.

8:10 And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, — As with the burning mountain-like mass of vv. 8-9, so it is here: the star is the symbol of divine visitation in judgment. **burning as it were a lamp,** — Blazing like a torch (Williams). It was in appearance like a meteorite streaking across the sky. **and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters:** — The judgment of the first trumpet was upon the earth, trees, and grass; the second was upon the sea, the life therein and the ships thereon; the fourth will be upon the heavenly bodies, sun, moon, and stars. Here it is upon fresh water, rivers and fountains.

8:11 And the name of the star is called Wormwood: — Wormwood is a bitter plant or herb and here signifies the offensive effects of judgment upon the rivers and fountains of water. As the remainder of the vision shows, it produced intense suffering and death. Thus the bitterness of judgment is indicated. **and the third part of the waters became wormwood;** — That is, they became bitter from the wormwood (cf. the opposite effect on water in Ex. 15:25). **and many** — Probably meaning a third part, since that is the part throughout the whole context. **men** — This is the first time men were mentioned in the trumpet judgments, but no doubt they are implied in the destruction of one-third of the earth in the first and one-third of the ships in the second. **died of the waters, because they were made bitter.** — The waters evi-

dently were a poisonous bitter or else they were so bitter that they produced sickness and death in those who drunk from them; probably the latter is meant. We should be reminded again that neither the Lord nor John intended for us to look for a time in history when one-third of fresh water would literally be so contaminated by a falling star that a large number of people would literally die from it. It is not the purpose of the vision to describe literal events, but rather to picture the judgment of God upon the wicked, both as it occurs from time to time in this life and as it will occur in the great day of judgment yet to come. The message is simple: there is no security for the wicked.

THE FOURTH TRUMPET

8:12 And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise.

8:12 **And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and a third part of the stars;** — A third part of the heavenly bodies now become the object of judgment as a plague (Williams) or blight (BV) of darkness strikes them. The instrument by which they are struck is not revealed. Thus Alford observes that this absence "perhaps teaches us not to attribute too much import to the instruments by which the previous judgments are brought about." **so as the third part of them was darkened,** — Darkness is the symbol for fearful calamities, gloom, and disaster (cf. Jl. 2:1-2; Am. 5:18), and is therefore a fitting symbol for judgment, whether it be in this life or in that great day when all men will be called to account to their Maker. **and the day shone not for a third part of it,** — That is, there was no emission of light from the sun for a third part of the day. **and the night likewise.** — The moon and the stars did not shine for the third part of the night. Beck renders it, "And there was no light for a third part of the day and for a third part of the night." This means total or absolute darkness. What a terrifying experience that would be (cf. Ex. 10:21-23). This depicts the fears and horrors that man feels when he faces the judgment of the Almighty. The judgment here depicted may be repeated time and time again as a warning to man to repent and thus prepare for the final judgment, from which there is no escape nor appeal.

WORSE WOES ANNOUNCED

8:13 And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!

8:13 Here we have a transition between the plagues of judgment brought on by the sounding of the first four trumpets, which have now been brought

to completion, and the worse plagues which are to befall man with the sounding of the remaining three. **And I beheld**, — Saw in the vision. **and heard an angel** — I heard an eagle (ASV). As to whether the true reading is angel or eagle is a textual problem that must be argued by others. While nearly all modern translations and commentators agree that eagle is the correct reading, I personally think angel would be more in keeping with the whole vision (angels are messengers). But the meaning and message is the same whether angel or eagle. **flying through the midst of heaven**, — Flying in midair (Williams). **saying with a loud voice**, — A voice loud enough for all to hear, shrieking enough to arrest attention, and intense enough to be instantly heeded. **Woe, woe, woe**, — That is, three woes of tremendous proportion. The repetition is designed probably to add intensity and certainly to indicate that a new woe is to be released upon the wicked at the sounding of each of the three remaining trumpets (cf. 9:12; 11:14). **to the inhabitants of the earth** — Earth people in contrast with the saints, God's people. **by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!** — Woe, woe, woe to the people of the earth because of what will happen (the judgment of the Almighty which will be heaped upon them) when the three remaining angels sound their trumpets. That which had happened at the sounding of the first four trumpets was terrifying indeed. But that which is now about to occur is even worse — it will bring vengeance that will extend to the very limits of human endurance.

REVELATION 9

The three woes, announced by the angel (8:13), are now to be visualized by John as the three final angels sound their trumpets. The woes are: (1) The torture of wicked men by hellish locusts; (2) the death of a third part of men by the forces released from the Euphrates; (3) and the final judgment. As Barclay says, "The picture of terror mounts in its grim and awful intensity. . . . (It is the kind of picture in which inevitably horror mounted upon horror." And it is this terrifying judgment against the wicked we are to see depicted rather than to expect a literal plague of locusts and horsemen to invade the earth. Hailey states my sentiments precisely: "The student of Revelation must be ever conscious that he shares with John signs and symbols of a vision which God showed to him. He has not been dealing with literal trumpets, hail, fire, a burning mountain, a sea of blood, etc., or now with real locusts, scorpions, or horsemen, but with symbols which convey ideas and reveal messages from God to man. Therefore, in the following vision of the three woes we need not look for some specific time in history when terrible locust hordes invade a land, bringing a scourge upon it. Rather, we need to see spiritual forces at work in the world of unregenerated, wicked men — forces which are symbolized by these monsters of the infernal realm."

THE FIFTH TRUMPET

9:1 And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit.

9:1 **And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth:** — John saw a fallen star (ASV), not a star falling. The star is the instrument, whether Satan, angel, or man, by which the bottomless pit is opened; hence it is the means of releasing the terrifying powers of the infernal region upon the wicked (those not having the seal of God in their forehead, v. 4). This seems to be a symbol of some satanic power or force (but not likely Satan himself since it is more likely that he is the king of the host coming out of the pit, v. 11). **and to him** — The star personified. **was given the key** — The power or authority to open the abyss. Since Christ Himself has the keys (1:18), this must indicate that the star has his authority from heaven — his actions are by God's permission. **of the bottomless pit.** — The abyss

[ASV] or the shaft of the abyss (Beck). The abyss is the infernal region, the abode of Satan and his hosts.

THE BOTTOMLESS PIT

9:2 And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.

9:2 **And he opened the bottomless pit;** — That is, the fallen star unlocked the abyss with the key that was given him (v. 1) in order to release its horrible hosts. **and there arose a smoke out of the pit,** — Smoke gushed from the pit as from an erupting volcano. Or as John describes it: **as the smoke of a great furnace;** — The gigantic size of the pit is indicated by the vast amount of smoke coming from it (cf. Gn. 19:28). There was so much in fact that John says, **and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.** — The smoke in the atmosphere was so thick that the sun could not shine through it. As terrifying as the smoke (and the darkness resulting from it) must have been, it is not the point of emphasis here nor is it the means of judgment. It is only the converter of the means (the locusts) which are now to be released upon the world.

THE JUDGMENT OF LOCUSTS

9:3-6 And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads. And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man. And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.

9:3 **And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth:** — In the vision, the locusts are the means by which destructive judgment is administered to the wicked (for a description of the locusts, see vv. 7-11). It is the judgment, not the locusts *per se*, that should concern us most: for the plague of locusts is not to be taken literally. But it will perhaps be helpful to impress on our minds the severity of the judgment if we understand something about an invasion of locusts upon a helpless people in the ancient world. Few if any plagues were more dreaded or terrifying than a swarm of locusts. This can be gathered from the eighth plague brought upon the Egyptians (Ex. 10:4-15). Joel also uses the locusts to impressively emphasize God's judgment (Jl. 1:1-2:27). Dr. William M. Thompson, who spent 45 years as a missionary in Bible lands, has left us a graphic description of a locust invasion, the devastation they inflict and the terror they cause. He says, "Early in the spring the locusts appeared in considerable numbers along the seacoast and on the lower spurs of the mountains. They did no great injury at the time, and, having laid their eggs,

immediately disappeared. The people, familiar with their habits, looked with anxiety to the time when those eggs would be hatched, nor were their fears groundless or exaggerated. For several days previous to the first of June we had heard that thousands of young locusts were on their march up the valley towards our village, and at length I was told that they had reached the lower part of it. Summoning all the people I could collect, we went to meet and attack them, hoping to stop their progress altogether, or at least to turn aside the line of their march. Never shall I lose the impression produced by the first view of them. I had often passed through clouds of flying locusts; but these we now confronted were without wings, and about the size of full-grown grasshoppers, which they closely resembled in appearance and behavior. But their number was astounding; the whole face of the mountain was black with them. On they came like a disciplined army. We dug trenches and kindled fires, and beat and burnt to death heaps upon heaps, but the effort was utterly useless. They charged up the mountainside, and climbed over rocks, walls, ditches, and hedges, those behind covering up and passing over the masses already killed. After a long and fatiguing contest, I descended the mountain to examine the length of the column, but could not see the end of it. [Others have told us that the place they occupy may be as much as 10 or 12 miles long and four or five miles wide, HW.] Wearied by my hard-fought battle with that devastating host, I returned, and gave over the vain effort to stop its progress for that day. By the next morning the head of the column had reached my garden, and, hiring eight or ten people, I resolved to rescue at least my flowers and vegetables. During the day we succeeded, by fire, and by beating the locust off the walls with bushes and branches, in keeping our little garden tolerably clear of them; but it was appalling to watch that irresistible army as it marched up the road and ascended the hill above my house. At length, worn out with incessant skirmishing, I gave up the contest. Carrying the pots into the house, and covering up what else I could, I surrendered the remainder to the conquerors. For four days they continued to pass on towards the east, until finally only a few stragglers of the mighty hosts were left behind. In every stage of their existence the locusts give a most impressive view of the power of God to punish a wicked world. Observe the pioneers of the host, those flying squadrons that appear in early spring. No power of man can interrupt them; thousands on thousands, with most fatal industry, deposit their innumerable eggs in the fields, the plain, and the desert. This done, they vanish like morning mist. But in six or eight weeks the very dust seems to waken into life, and begins to creep. Soon the animated earth becomes minute grasshoppers, and, creeping and jumping, all in the same general direction, they begin their destructive progress. Whilst on the march they consumed every green thing with wonderful eagerness and expedition. A large vineyard and vegetable garden adjoining ours was as green as a meadow in the morning, but long before night it was as bare as a newly ploughed field or dusty road. The noise made by them in marching and foraging was like that of a heavy shower falling upon a dis-

tant forest" (*The Land and the Book*, Vol. II, pp. 296-298). **and unto them was given power**, — That is, power to torture man. The terrible torture they administered can be better conceived when it is understood that men would rather die than to endure it (v. 6). **as the scorpions of the earth have power**. — That is earthly scorpions in contrast to the infernal locusts. In Palestine the scorpion was a well-known lobster-like insect of the spider family. Its stinger was in the tip of its tail, through which its secreted poison was injected into its victim. Its sting was intensely painful but rarely, if ever, fatal. The power of the scorpion was thus to torment, not to kill. The point here is that the forces of hell that are let loose upon the earth are for the purpose of tormenting man (vv. 5-6).

9:4 **And it was commanded them** — They were told (Goodspeed). **that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree**; — This undoubtedly shows that they were not literal locusts: for the very things that locusts devour are prohibited to them. **but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads**. — The sealed ones are the servants of God (7:2-4). Hence the mission of the infernal creatures was to torment the wicked, those not marked with the seal of forgiveness through the shed blood of the Lamb, God's sinless Son. Thus it is abundantly clear that the people of God will escape the judgment here symbolized. It belongs only to those who have not been sealed with redemption.

9:5 **And to them** — The infernal locusts. **it was given that they should not kill them**, — They were to torment but not kill the men who were the object of their mission (see v. 4). Thus their power was limited. **but that they should be tormented** — Punished or tortured. **five months**: — Precisely what the five months symbolize I am unable to determine. But most likely it is a period of time designed to represent a definite end or an incomplete judgment. Ten is usually considered a complete number and five is one-half that, hence incomplete. It therefore probably signifies the fact that the wrath of God will not reach its full end in this woe. More, and even worse, is yet to come. **and their torment** — The agony they inflicted. **was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man**. — Was like the torture of a scorpion when it stings a man (Williams). See notes on v. 3.

9:6 **And in those days** — The five months in which the locusts were let loose to torture men. **shall men seek death**, — The anguish was so great that death was preferable to the torment of the locusts (cf. Jb. 3:20-22; Jer. 8:1-3). This does not mean that they would try to produce death by self-infliction but rather that they longed for it as a means of release from their misery. While this may often characterize those who have not the seal of God in their forehead, one thing should be remembered: death does not free one from divine judgment. What follows death will be worse than anything one can conceive in this life. The Scriptures draw a sharp contrast between the death of the righteous and the death of the wicked. The former is viewed as a great blessing (14:13; Phil. 1:21-24; 2 Tm. 4:6-8), which even the wicked wish to attain (Nm.

23:10), while the latter is horrible to contemplate (Mt. 25:46; Lk. 16:19-32; 2 Thes. 1:7-9). To die the death of the wicked is certainly not the means of escaping the wrath of God, as depicted here by the locusts. **and shall not find it;** — It was not the mission of the locusts to kill, but to torment. Hence, the severity of the pain did not bring death. **and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.** — Death eluded them.

THE LOCUSTS DESCRIBED

9:7-11 And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men. And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions. And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle. And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months. And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon.

9:7-12 The graphic descriptions here given of the locusts seem to be designed only to enhance the picture of judgment and its severity. Consequently, they were never meant to be taken literally or identified with a particular event, people, or period in history. They depict the terror of God's judgment against sin whenever and wherever it may occur, and one will search in vain for anything in history, either ancient or modern, which is even remotely similar to them. We should therefore see them as descriptive of the infernal forces that engulf sinful men, regardless of when and where. In the final analysis, they show the tremendous cost one must pay when he rejects God and His marvelous scheme to redeem, especially when that sin is against the saints of the Most High. It, therefore, seems to me that any effort to interpret the descriptions as historical events (such as the Mohammedan conquest) results only in missing the writers intent and purpose and in weakening the vision by darkened counsel. For this reason I am making no attempt to specifically apply each detail. One should keep in mind, as Lenski observes, "The imagery is not that of insects that are a few inches long but that of powerful, terrifying creatures, millions of whom come upon defenseless human beings with a roar." I think when you see the fact that they symbolize judgment and that the descriptions are designed to heighten the sense of its severity you will have the picture as the writer intended you to see it. Anything beyond this would be superfluous.

9:7-10 **And the shapes of the locusts** — John now gives an eightfold description of the locusts as they appeared in the vision. (1) **were like unto horses prepared unto battle;** — They appeared as horses properly equipped and powerful enough to carry out their mission. (2) **and on their heads were as it were crowns of gold,** — On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold (NIV). Not actually golden crowns (which ordinarily symbolize royalty and victory) but something that appeared as such. They were probably imitation crowns, and may signify their temporary power to torture. (3) **and their faces were as the faces of men.** — Indicating that they were guided by in-

telligence, not by instinct. (4) **And they had hair as the hair of women,** — Long hair (cf. 1 Cor. 11:15), which may symbolize strength (cf. Sampson, Jgs. 16:15-19). (5) **and their teeth were as the teeth of lions.** — Depicting their fierce power and voracious appetite to strike terror in their victims. (6) **And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron;** — The sign of protection. Men were defenseless against them. (7) **and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle.** — The sound is the emphasis here and it is designed to show the vast number of the pit creatures. (8) **And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails:** — Showing their power to inflict pain (see notes on v. 3). **and their power was to hurt men five months.** — See notes on v. 5.

9:11 **And they had a king over them,** — This is in contrast with literal locusts, which have no king (Prv. 30:27). **which is the angel of the bottomless pit,** — The king or angel probably symbolizes Satan, the master spirit of the infernal regions. He may be called the angel because he is the undisputed leader of the host of hell. But whether it symbolizes Satan or some other hellish leader, the design is to show us that the punishment for sin is not left to happenstance. It is planned and directed. One not only reaps what he sows (Gal. 6:7), he reaps more than he sows — he sows the wind and reaps the whirlwind (Hos. 8:7). This is more especially true of sin, the failure to submit one's life to God as Creator, Sustainer, Ruler, and Judge. Such rejection, when it is unrepented of and final, always brings destruction. **whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon,** — Meaning destruction. **but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon.** — Meaning destroyer. Both names are a fit description of Satan since he is the ruler of the destructive hosts.

TWO MORE WOES YET TO COME

9:12 One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter.

9:12 **One woe is past;** — The vision of the first trumpet, the vision of torment or the physical and mental anguish suffered by men as a result of their sins (vv. 1-11), now fades from John's sight. **and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter.** — The woes of the sixth and seventh trumpets, the sixth, that of death to one-third and punishment by the horse-like creatures for the remainder, and for the seventh, the final judgment, the most terrifying for the wicked of all events (Heb. 10:31), is yet to come.

THE SIXTH TRUMPET

9:13-14 And 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 which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates.

9:13 **And the sixth angel sounded,** — As the fifth trumpet vision fades

and brimstone. By these three was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths. For their power is in their mouth, and in their tails: for their tails were like unto serpents, and had heads, and with them they do hurt. And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk: Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.

9:15 **And the four angels were loosed,** — The four angels (probably signifying the universality of the judgment of death and anguish which are to be brought by the infernal horsemen of vv. 16-17) who were bound in (or at) the Euphrates (v. 14) are now released to perform their work. **which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year,** — Who were held in readiness for that hour and day and month and year (Goodspeed). As an army kept in readiness for battle, the four angels had been held ready or prepared for this very moment of time (the exact year, month, day, and hour of God's timetable). **for to slay the third part of men.** — A large but not the greater part. In the vision of the first four trumpets, judgment was against the land, sea, rivers, and heavenly bodies; man was involved only indirectly. In the fifth, man was the direct object of the locusts, but they were only to torment man, not kill him. In the sixth, the picture intensifies by adding death, the king of terror, to man's judgment. The picture thus progresses from plagues which affect men, to locusts which hurt men, to horses of war which kill men.

9:16 **And the number of the army of the horsemen** — When the angels are loosed (v. 15) a vast army of horsemen appears. This indicates that the angels were the leaders (which may symbolize only one leader) of the army or else they signified the army itself. As my previous notes show, I have adopted the former as the most likely view, though with less certainty than comfort demands. **were two hundred thousand thousand:** — Twice 10,000 times 10,000 (Goodspeed) or two hundred million (NASV). This immense number makes it obvious that we should not look for a literal army as its fulfillment. Wallace correctly says, "This was not a numerical count of conscripts composing this army, but the symbolic description of immensity so overwhelming as to make human resistance impossible." **and I heard the number of them.** — The number was not his own computation, but it was told him, possibly by the voice from the altar, as in v. 13. It seems clear to me from the following vv. that the horsemen are, as were the locusts of vv. 2-11, the powers of darkness personified. Their mission is to administer God's judgment of death and suffering upon all who are not sealed with redemption (cf. v. 4).

9:17-19 As with the locusts of vv. 7-10, the description of the infernal cavalry here is designed only to enhance our sense of the severity of judgment. Consequently, no effort should be exerted to identify the descriptive words with some particular event, people, or period in history. To do so is to miss the writer's point. **And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them,** — The horse-like creatures had riders, but in the vision they seem to function as a unit. Nothing further is said of the riders unless the breast-

plates belong to them. **having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone:** — Their breastplates were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulfur (NIV). I cannot certainly ascertain whether the breastplates belong to the horses or their riders, but it seems more likely to me the former, although many others think the latter. As far as the vision is concerned, it makes no material difference. The NIV is undoubtedly right in assigning the three descriptive words of the breastplates as colors. Thus they were the color of fire, the color of jacinth (hyacinth, ASV), and the color of brimstone, red, blue, and yellow. **and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions:** — Indicating their ferocious nature. **and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone.** — The means (called plagues in v. 18, ASV) by which they killed the third part of men. **By these three** — By these three plagues (ASV). **was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone,** — Brimstone is a yellowish sulphuric and highly combustible substance, the vapors of which are noisome and suffocating. It is invariably connected with present judgment (cf. Gn. 19:24; Is. 34:9) and the fires of eternal damnation (20:10; 21:8). **which issued out of their mouths.** — The horrible and destructive fire, smoke, and brimstone poured from their mouths. **For their power is in their mouth,** — Their mouths were the source of the plagues which killed men. **and in their tails: for their tails were like unto serpents, and had heads,** — That is, their snake-like tails had heads. **and with them they do hurt.** — With their mouths they killed; with their tails they tortured. Woe to the men who must face the judgment depicted by this terrifying army of destructive and tormenting creatures.

9:20 **And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues** — Worldly or evil men. The righteous are not under consideration in this vision. The two-thirds remaining had escaped the plague of death (v. 18) but not the plague of punishment. **yet repented not** — They had not had a change of mind toward sin that would lead them to a change of conduct pertaining to their relationship with God. That is, they were not about to give up the licentiousness of their false worship for the purity of worship in spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:23-24). They were so wedded to their idols that God's terrible judgment (as depicted in the first six trumpets) could not shake them loose from them. This reminds us of a statement made long ago by Hosea: "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone" (Hos. 4:17). But there is another side to the picture: while it does depict man's hardness and impenitent heart, it also reveals the love and forbearance of God in that He is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Pt. 3:9). Thus the purpose of these severe judgments was not to punish man *per se*, but rather that its infliction might lead him to repentance and thus to salvation, not that he might be forced to suffer the torment of the first six trumpets but that his suffering might lead him to flee from that awful judgment yet to come (the third woe or the final judgment). **of the works of their hands,** — Works their hands had done (Williams). This has reference to the worship of demons and all other forms of idol-

atry, as the remainder of the v. shows, and their wicked practices toward other men (v. 21). **that they should not worship devils**, — Demons (ASV). See my notes on I Cor. 10:20. **and idols of gold, — Idols made of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood:** — In true religion God is the Creator of man (Is. 45:5-13); in idolatry, man takes the material made by God and makes his gods, thus worshiping the creature rather than the Creator. To see the vanity and stupidity of this, read Is. 44:9-20; 45:20; 46:5-7. **which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk:** — They are both lifeless and powerless — they are as dead and as helpless as the material from which they are made (cf. Dt. 4:28; Ps. 115:4-7). But the sad part is that those who worship idols soon become like them (Ps. 115:8).

9:21 **Neither repented they** — See notes on v. 20. There they had not repented of their false worship; here they have not repented of their immorality. This is just another way of saying that they were in love with and wedded to sin. In this, however, they are not alone. It seems to characterize men in every generation. They so love the ways of unrighteousness and so despise the authority of God's divine rule over them that they blind themselves to the horrible consequences of sin. They see daily what it does to others (and even to themselves), in such things as drug addiction, alcoholism, broken homes, shattered lives, imprisonment, and even capital punishment, and yet they continue to hug this deadly serpent to their breasts, receiving into their hearts and minds a constant flow of its poisonous venom. Although both nature and revelation teach them that they must reap what they sow (Gal. 6:7-8), they delude themselves into thinking that they can somehow sow to the flesh and reap of the Spirit — that they can sin without being judged as sinners. How can the devil so blind the eyes of rational beings? Why will they not see that God has inalterably decreed that all must repent or perish (Lk. 13:3, 5), that they must turn to God or suffer the torment that results from sin? One simply cannot live a life of sin and die the death of the righteous. And before one can stand righteous before God he must have the cancer of sin removed from his soul by the blood of the Lamb. And before that can be done he must repent (or turn) from his sinful ways and thrust himself, by absolute submission to the Lord's divine plan, upon the grace and mercy of the God who made him. **of their murders**, — Maliciously taking human life. It may have specific reference here to the martyrdom of saints. But whatever form it takes, murder always manifests an utter disregard for human life. **nor of their sorceries**, — Probably meaning their deceptive practice with magical acts, ascribing them to occult powers. See 18:23 and Gal. 5:20 where a cognate carries the idea of drug-induced spells for the purpose of communicating with the unknown, especially as it related to idolatry. **nor of their fornication**, — Sexual immorality. **nor of their thefts**. — Their stealings (Beck). Stealing is surreptitiously taking the property of another without his knowledge or permission (Eph. 4:28). It always reveals a woeful disregard for the property rights of others. As we come to the end of the sixth trumpet and the second woe, it should be noted that, even though

they have gone through terrifying judgments, evil men are still in a state of impenitence, refusing to turn to God and His Lamb for deliverance.

REVELATION 10

10:1-11:14 As the sixth seal was followed by an interlude, so it is here with the sixth trumpet. The judgment of the sixth trumpet ended in 9:21, and that of the seventh does not begin until 11:15, when the ultimate victory is won for the saints (11:15-17) and the wicked are called to face the terrible judgment of that great and final day (11:18). The interlude gives two preparatory visions (that of the little book and seven thunders, 10:1-11, and the temple and the two witnesses, 11:1-14) for the final consummation of the battle of the ages. The six trumpets of judgment had not brought the wicked to repentance (9:20-21), and now the last woe, the final judgment, will be delayed no longer. The design of the interlude is therefore to prepare us for the great and final day of His wrath, the third woe, or the seventh trumpet. Whatever else may be signified by the events of the interlude, I believe its basic message is to intensify for the impenitent the terror of judgment (which is the results of wicked and degenerate living) and heighten for the saints the sweetness of victory (which is the results of being faithful to Christ unto death). When the interlude is over, the seventh angel sounds and Christ is seen as the conqueror, reigning supreme, and the enraged nations are suffering the vengeance of His retribution. The interlude thus has the effect of saying, "The Lord will not bring man to the final judgment until He has once again assured the saints of the certainty of their final victory."

A STRONG ANGEL WITH A LITTLE BOOK

10:1-3 And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire: And he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth, And cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth: and when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices.

10:1 **And I saw another mighty angel** — Another is probably in comparison with the only other strong (mighty or powerful) angel that has been mentioned up to this point (5:2). His exact identity is a matter yet unresolved. Many, because of John's description of him, see him as either Christ or His personal representative (that is, symbolic of Christ). This can be argued with some force, but it seems better to me to see the angel as a special messenger of God and His Lamb, a messenger robed with all the dignity and power of heaven. His mission seems to be to begin the process that will wrap things up once and for all for this old world. **come down from heaven**, — The place

from which he descends, indicating that he is a heavenly messenger and that the message he brings is from God. **clothed with a cloud:** — Probably indicating the majesty of his mission (cf. 1:7; Acts 1:9-11). **and a rainbow was upon his head,** — Encircling his head as a halo, the rainbow may signify that he has come in fulfillment of the promises of God — promises to deliver the redeemed and punish the wicked (cf. 4:3). **and his face was as it were the sun,** — His face was like the sun (NASV). As in the transfiguration of Christ, his face had the brightness of the sun (Mt. 17:2). This may indicate that he was the dispenser of heavenly light. **and his feet as pillars of fire:** — Perhaps depicting his glorious power to fill his mission (cf. 1:15).

10:2 **And he had in his hand a little book** — A little scroll (RSV) or booklet. The booklet undoubtedly symbolizes the gospel (Rom. 1:16; cf. Ez. 2:8-3:8). **open** — Unrolled (Beck). This seems to be in contrast to the sealed book of chapter 5. There it was sealed and its contents could not be known until the Lamb opened it; here it is opened, indicating that its contents could be known by all. The Christian religion is the religion of an open book, the Bible. It has no mysteries to hide; only precious truths to reveal. Some years ago I read **The Life of St. Francis Xavier**, a Catholic missionary to India during the early days of the Reformation. His biographers tell of his confrontation with Brahmins, who considered themselves superior to all other men. He so gained the confidence of one of them that the Brahmins confided to Xavier some of the deep secrets of that religion. The Brahmins then requested Xavier to hold the "revelations" in the strictest confidence, promising at the same time to do the same if Xavier would confide in him some things which pertained to Christianity. But Xavier wisely replied, "No, no: I will only unfold our mysteries to you on condition that you do your best to publish them." That gets to the heart of the matter: men become Christians to proclaim the message of Christ, not to hold it in secrecy. The Great Commission is the marching orders of the Great Commander to proclaim the gospel to every nation, to every individual in every nation (Mt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15-16; Lk. 24:47). Paul charged Timothy to commit it to faithful men who would in turn teach others (2 Tm. 2:2). The gospel was written that all might know the mysteries of God (Eph. 3:2-4). In the NT the word "mystery" means things unrevealed. Before God makes them known they are a mystery (unknown); after He makes them known, they are a revelation. Thus an open book signifies that which is revealed, not that which is concealed. **and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth,** — The enormous size of the angel made this possible, and it signifies that the message he is about to proclaim will affect the whole world.

10:3 **And cried with a loud voice,** — The loud shout is in keeping with his gigantic size and is indicative of the universal extent of his message. **as when a lion roareth:** — The shout was as awesome and voluminous as the roar of a lion. **and when he had cried,** — What he said is not revealed unless it was the message of v. 6, namely, that judgment would not be further delayed. **seven thunders uttered their voices.** — The seven thunders spoke with voices of

their own (Beck). Thunder is associated with God's presence [Ex. 20:18; Heb. 12:18-21], warning (2 Sm. 22:14; Ps. 18:13), and retribution (8:5; 11:18-19; 16:17-18). While I have cited Beck to indicate the presence of the article before the seven thunders, I am, along with many others, unable to ascertain its exact significance. Whether it is "merely deictic," as Lenski says, or designed to point to the message of the seven thunders as a unit of the total revelation is a problem I will leave for others to solve. But the latter seems more likely to me. While their message is, and will remain, unrevealed to us, they spoke so that John could hear and understand and what they spoke is a part of the consummation of the mystery of God (v. 7), a part of God's plan to bring the present order of things to an end.

THE VOICE OF THE SEVEN THUNDERS

10:4 And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me. Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.

10:4 **And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices**, — See v. 3. **I was about to write**: — I was going to write it down (Williams). The Lord had commanded him to write what he saw (1:11, 19). Thus when the seven thunders spoke (and most likely this included a series of visions which followed their words, as in the opening of the seals and the sounding of the trumpets) John made preparation to record that which he had seen and heard. **and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me**, — Probably the voice of Christ, since He was the one who had commanded John to write in the first place (1:11, 19). **Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered**, — Place a seal on them at once (cf. the sealed book of chapter 5) so as not to reveal them, so they will remain concealed from the mind of man. It is clear from this that there are some things of God that do not fall into the realm of revelation. They are things that we, as dwellers in the flesh, are forbidden to know (cf. 2 Cor. 12:1-4). They are the private property of God and we must learn to respect their secrecy. To speculate on what the seven thunders uttered would be the heights of folly — a waste of time in the performance of an exercise in futility. There are some things we can know because God has revealed them to us. These we need to know for our own good and for the salvation of our souls. And these we can know because they belong to us by means of divine revelation (Dt. 29:29). But there are other things we cannot know because they remain hidden in the mind of God. They are secret things and belong to Him alone (Dt. 29:29). These we have no need or right to know because they are not necessary to our salvation from sin or to the performance of our Christian duty. While it is impossible for anyone to know the things of God until they are revealed to him (1 Cor. 2:11), one of the strange characteristics of men in general is a thirst to learn the secret things while ignoring (or rejecting) the things that are revealed. They desire that which they cannot have while re-

jecting that which has been freely given. God reveals all we need to know, all that pertains to life and godliness (2 Pt. 1:3-4), and conceals only that which pertains to Himself or that which would be harmful or superfluous for us. Thus when God seals a thing we must respect His decision and leave it sealed. To speculate or dictate on secret things is to desecrate holy grounds. **and write them not.** — Let them remain as the secret things of God.

THE ANGEL'S ANNOUNCEMENT

10:5-7 And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, And sware by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer: But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.

10:5 **And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth** — See vv. 2-3. **lifted up his hand to heaven.** — Raised his right hand to heaven (NIV). This is the usual stance of one making a solemn oath (cf. Gn. 14:22-23; Dt. 12:7 and our own courts of law).

10:6 **And sware** — And swore (NASV). That is, the angel affirms with an oath. This indicates that the announcement he is about to make is vitally important. **by him that liveth for ever and ever,** — The eternal (Ps. 90:1-2) omnipotent (4:8; Gn. 17:1; Ps. 8:3) God, who by His own power and being created all things that are. This is essentially calling the Almighty God to witness that what he is about to say is the truth and is as certain to come to pass as God is everlasting and all powerful. **who created** — By His own will, power, and word called into existence (brought something from nothing) things which previously had no existence, both visible and invisible (Gn. 1:1; Ps. 33:9; Is. 45:18). The denial of creation, in whatever form it may take, is absolutely irrational. Every material thing must have originated by a power outside of and greater than itself. To say that the vast universe in which we live just happened, that it is the results of an accident, with no cause, design, or purpose, is the most unreasonable proposition ever proposed to thinking man. Only a mind blinded by hatred for God and trained to ignore rationality could accept such a preposterous concept. The universe is and it has a maker, and its maker is God. Reject this and there remains no foundation for existence, science, reason, or faith. **heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein,** — That is, God created everything in the universe, whether physical or spiritual. All things, therefore, owe their existence to His creative power. **that there should be time no longer:** — There should be no further delay (BV). The KJV has given the more literal translation of the word for time here, but it is all but certain that the BV has more accurately captured its meaning. Vine says that in this v. the word has the meaning of delay. I therefore conclude that the meaning is that while God has been extremely patient and tolerant with

the wicked, giving them opportunity after opportunity to repent (9:21; 2 Pt. 3:9) and delaying final judgment upon them until delay could be no more (cf. 6:9-11), that period of grace must inevitably come to an end. The mystery of God (v. 7), the consummation of His divine purpose for both man and the material universe, must be brought to full fruition, that is, fulfilled, partially in the preaching of the gospel before many people, and nations, and tongues, and kings, signified by the eating of the little book (vv. 9-11), but more completely in the approaching judgment of 11:15-19 (cf. Dn. 12:5-9). While the thought here is undoubtedly delay rather than time, we must not forget that the finished mystery of God involves and includes the end of time. And in this sense we may, with the grand old version, see the mighty angel proclaiming, in the words of William Marsden, "The mystery now is o'er; Time was, time is, but time shall be no more." For that proclamation every man should spend his life in preparation.

10:7 But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, — The seventh of seven angels. Six have already sounded; the seventh is yet to sound. When the time comes for him to sound his trumpet, it will mark the final stage of this vision and signify the consummation of all things, which will include the judgment of all the wicked, **the mystery of God should be finished,** — That is, His divine purpose for all created things will be accomplished, fulfilled, or brought to completion during the period of the seventh trumpet (11:15-19). The mystery was that which had been hidden in the mind of God and unknown to man. When it was proclaimed by the prophets it ceased to be a mystery (except in the sense that it had been unknown) and became a revelation. Thus the meaning here is that the divine purpose of God, the end He had in view, the purpose for which all things were made, is now to be consummated or brought to full fruition (see notes on v. 6). Or in other words, the purpose of God for man and the world is now to be accomplished. Toward that end both man and the material universe is steadily marching and nothing can stay its progress. **as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.** — According to the good tidings which he declared to his servants the prophets (ASV). A prophet is one who speaks for God, one who receives from Him divine revelation and delivers it by inspiration to man. This probably has reference to all "holy men of God who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Pt. 1:21) in both the OT and the NT, but, placed in the context of the little book, it seems certain that NT spokesmen would have the highest consideration. They miraculously received the gospel and faithfully delivered it to the world, first orally and then in its permanent or written form.

THE LITTLE BOOK

10:8-11 And the voice which I heard from heaven spake unto me again, and said, Go and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel which standeth upon the sea and upon the earth. And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey.

And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter. And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.

10:8 And the voice which I heard from heaven spake unto me again, — See v. 4. **and said, Go and take the little book** — Undoubtedly signifying the gospel as received by the apostles by the HS and delivered to us in the NT. **which is open in the hand of the angel** — In contrast to the voice of the seven thunders, which was sealed up (v. 4), the little book is opened. This fact surely indicates that the gospel is a universal revelation, concealed to none who would seek its divine message (see notes on v. 4). But, as in the vision, the revelation is not given apart from the book and the book must be eaten or absorbed into one's whole being (Heb. 8:8-13) by both the messenger and by those who receive the message. That is, the message is not effective apart from its assimilation and digestion. **which standeth upon the sea and upon the earth.** — See vv. 5-6.

10:9 And I went unto the angel, — John now enters into the vision and becomes a part of the action. **and said unto him,** — Said to the angel standing on sea and earth (vv. 6, 8). **Give me the little book.** — That is, give him the contents or the revelation given therein. **And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up;** — Assimilate it into your being by reception and digestion. This was a necessity for all inspired spokesmen and indirectly for all who sincerely appropriate the word of truth to their hearts and lives. The message of God is in the Book of God and the only way to receive or appropriate that message is to "take it and eat it." **and it shall make thy belly bitter,** — This surely depicts the sorrow the messenger would encounter as he saw the judgment, and judgment pronounced upon sin and disobedience by the gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:18), come upon those who rejected the offer of divine mercy. Perhaps the most difficult part of being a messenger of truth is to experience time and again the heart-rending fact that most people to whom it is preached reject it (turn from the merciful Lord of glory to serve self, sin, and Satan). Day in and day out the faithful worker brings candidates for salvation to the point where they must decide either for or against eternal life. One of the highest joys known, both in heaven and on earth, is to see one surrender his life to the Lord, die to self and sin (Col. 3:1-6), be buried with the Lord in baptism (Rom. 6:1-6), and arise therefrom as a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17) to walk in a new life. This makes the work a pleasure, the earth richer, hope sweeter, and heaven a little nearer. But many reject the message and continue to plunge headlong toward the outer darkness of the bottomless pit. How heartbreaking it is to thus see a human close the blinds and thus shut out the light of the saving truth of the gospel — to choose eternal darkness rather than the city where God himself will be the light. For this reason the gospel is a bitter-sweet message. **but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey.** — By comparing this with Ps. 119:103 we can be almost certain that the little book is the word of God, also called the gospel (1 Pt. 1:25). As the bitter stomach depicts the sorrow resulting from

the judgment pronounced upon those who reject the word, the sweetness in the mouth indicates the joy which results when the gospel is received and obeyed (cf. Ez. 28-3:3).

10:10 **And I took the little book out of the angel's hand**, He followed the instruction given to him by the voice from heaven (v. 8). So should every man on earth, even though the instructions come today by means of the written rather than the oral word. **and ate it up**; — Thus following the instructions of the mighty angel (v. 9). **and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter.** — See notes on v. 9. As Swete says, "Every revelation of God's purposes, even though a mere fragment . . . is 'bitter-sweet,' disclosing judgment as well as mercy. The Seer, if he would be admitted into a part of God's secret, must be prepared for very mixed sensations; the first joy of fuller knowledge would be followed by sorrows deeper and more bitter than those of ordinary men."

10:11 **And he said unto me**, — And they say unto me (ASV). A textual variant results in the difference in the KJV and the ASV. If the KJV is adopted, it means the angel; if the ASV, then both the voice from heaven and the angel spoke to John. But more probably Alford correctly concludes that it leaves the speaker indefinite and amounts "in fact to no more than 'it was said.'" Or as the NIV renders it, "Then I was told." **Thou must prophesy again** — Again seems to necessarily imply that John would return to the work he was engaged in before his banishment. If so, he did not die on Patmos but was permitted to leave the island and continue his mission. Prophecy is that which is spoken by a prophet, and a prophet is one who speaks for God (cf. 11:3; see notes on 1:3). That is, he speaks by inspiration. Revelation itself is called prophecy (22:7, 10, 18-19). Why? Because it is a revelation of God given through a prophet, an inspired man. As far as I can determine no Scripture calls an uninspired man a prophet, except when he is identified as false (16:10; 19:20; 20:10). **before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.** — He was yet to contribute to the carrying out of the Great Commission. The fourfold expression is undoubtedly designed to show the universal scope of both the commission and the work of John as an apostle. This gives some credence (at least to my mind) to the theory that John returned from Patmos to Ephesus and wrote the fourth gospel and through it prophesied to the whole world.

REVELATION 11

THE MEASURING OF THE TEMPLE

11:1-2 And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.

11:1 **And there was given me a reed like unto a rod:** — There was given me a reed like a measuring rod (BV). In 10:9 John entered into and became a part of the vision. He is still active in the vision seen here. The reed was probably like a rod in that it was a unit of measurement, about nine feet long. But symbolically it represents the divine message of truth, that by which all religious things and acts must be measured. It thus has the same significance as the little book of 10:8-11. **and the angel stood, saying,** — And one said (ASV). While the speaker is not identified, the KJV is probably correct in identifying him as the mighty angel of 10:1. **Rise, and measure** — The purpose of measuring is to define the boundaries and reveal the limits. The sealing of 7:2-4 has basically the same symbolic significance as measuring. It is the design of both to define or mark the true Israel of God. Since the reed (rod) is the message, we should see the measuring as the work of the messenger and thus the same as prophesying of 10:11. **When seen in all its splendor,** this presents a beautiful picture of how the church and everything pertaining to its ministry must be revealed or authorized (measured or marked) by the Bible, God's revealed will (cf. Mt. 7:21; 2 Jn. 9). **the temple of God,** — The inner sanctuary, consisting of both the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. Here it undoubtedly signifies the church of Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 3:16-17). Some see the temple here as the old Jewish temple in Jerusalem, but they overlook the fact that John is seeing and acting in a vision — a vision designed to depict the true church, its worship, and those who worship in it. **and the altar,** — The altar signifies Christian worship, the worship of the church. **and them that worship therein.** — Christians who render the worship. Since the worship itself was measured in the altar, this must have reference to their character and conduct. The basic thrust depicted here is the fact that everything pertaining to the church, its worship, and those who worship in it must be measured by the word of God. The fundamental purpose of the Scriptures is to reveal the will of God to the mind of man; the fundamental purpose of man is to do the will of God as it is revealed in the Scriptures. What is revealed man can and must do if he is to please God; what is not revealed must be left

undone — left in the outer court unmeasured. This is a truth the religious world needs to learn, believe, and practice. It seems self-evident to me that everything we do in service to God must be authorized (measured) by a "thus saith the Lord." To leave something undone that is revealed is to do too little; to do something not revealed is to do too much. The will of God is revealed in the Bible and when we study it we should study it in view of learning what it teaches. There are those who adopt the attitude that the Scriptures permit all they do not specifically condemn. But this opens Pandora's box and permits more than anyone is willing to consistently accept. It would mean that every innovation introduced into religion since apostolic times must be acceptable and pleasing to God. Silence (or no revelation) has the same force and authority as revelation, and everyone is left free to devise his own form of worship and service. Human opinion and conjecture becomes the standard — every man does that which is right in his own eyes. But there is another attitude (and I believe the correct one) which says that the Scriptures condemn everything (in the service of God) which they do not authorize, either by word or principle. When this attitude is adopted, we can do nothing in the service of God but that which the Bible reveals. We follow its instructions by doing what it says. Every act is an act of obedience to God because He has revealed it as His divine will. Nothing is done that is not the will of God, and nothing can be known to be the will of God except that which He has revealed in His word. Thus where there is no word from God there can be no obedience (service) to God. God has revealed His will in His word (cf. 2 Tm. 3:14-17; 2 Pt. 1:3-4). What is not revealed is therefore not His will (Dt. 29:29). This approach to the Scriptures is the one the Scriptures themselves teach (e.g., 2 Tm. 2:5; 1 Thes. 5:21).

11:2 **But the court which is without the temple** — The uncovered yard outside the sanctuary. In the vision it represents all other than the true church, all those not having the seal of God (9:4), that is, the Gentiles (or nations). **leave out**, — Leave without (ASV) or exclude from the measuring. **and measure it not**; — Those excluded from the temple have rejected the rule of God over them and consequently recognize no standard of divine authority by which to live and worship. While they are accountable to God's law and will be judged by it in that great and final day (Jn. 12:48), they have, by virtue of the fact that they are outside the temple, rejected it as their standard of measurement. They are excluded or thrust out from God's measured or sealed people. Or as Lenski says, "Throw it out; reject it as profane, and to draw no boundary to mark any part of it as sacred." **for it is given unto the Gentiles**: — The nations other than Israel. Since in the vision the temple is the new Israel of God, the Gentiles here must mean everyone who is not a Christian. **and the holy city** — In my judgment this is simply a change of the symbol from temple to city: for the holy city could hardly be anything but God's people (cf. 21:2; Heb. 12:22). **shall they tread under foot** — Trample upon or desecrate by opposition and persecution. **forty and two months** — An indefinite peri-

od of time which may be designed to cover the period between the sixth and seventh trumpet, but more likely the whole Christian era (13:5). A statement meaning the same things appears in Dn. 7:25; 12:7. It is also called 1260 days (v. 3; 12:6) and a time, and times, and half a time (12:14). The literal meaning is three and a half years. But whether it is to be understood literally (three and a half years), prophetically (1260 years), or symbolically (an indefinite period) is something commentators have never been able to agree upon. It seems to me, however, when all the known facts are considered, we have no choice but to accept it as symbolic of an indefinite time, probably covering the whole Christian period (cf. Lk. 21:24; Rom. 11:25).

THE TWO WITNESSES

11:3-13 It is the common consent of commentators that this is the most difficult section for the expositor in the whole book of Revelation, if not in the entire Bible. If one has in mind the exact identification of the two witnesses, then I concur. I must confess to having accepted at least a half dozen different views of them and then have had each view break to pieces when I tried to apply it to all the stated facts in the chapter. Each time I have had to return to the drawing board empty handed to start all over again. And to make matters worse, nothing I have read has helped much (though I have profited some by nearly everything I have read). But the time has come for me to either tackle the problem and offer my thinking on the subject or fold up my tent and move elsewhere to write notes. As I begin I feel as a man launching out in a rowboat against gales which have destroyed vast ocean liners. At present I believe the two witnesses are symbols of the same fundamental concept as seen in the eating of the little book (10:8-11) and the measuring of the temple (vv. 1-2). Thus they signify the source and the revelation of truth. Or to state it more specifically, they represent Christ and His chosen apostles. Christ is the source of saving truth and the apostles are His means of revealing it to man. I have reached this conclusion for the four following reasons: (1) The function of the witnesses was to prophesy (v. 3). To prophesy requires two things: first, the source of prophecy (Christ), and second, the prophet (apostles) to whom the message is revealed. In short, prophecy involves the whole process of revelation. (2) They are called the two olive trees (v. 4), which most likely symbolize the source from which the light of the candles comes, and the two candlesticks (v. 4), which depict the dispensers of light. This better fits Christ and His apostles than anyone or anything of which I have been able to conceive. (3) They had extraordinary power, power to perform miracles (v. 6). While others were given this power at the hands of the apostles, in the NT only Christ and His apostles could bestow such power. They thus better fit the description here than anyone or anything else. (4) The enemy of the witnesses is the enemy of Christ and His apostles (vv. 8-13) — the enemy of truth and right. The same concept might be expressed in other ways (as it is done under other

symbols in 10:8-11 and vv. 1-2), such as the message and the messengers, the gospel and its proclaimers, etc. But regardless of how it is expressed, the same fundamental idea will emerge — Christ and His apostles, the source of truth and the means by which it is revealed, are confronted by their enemy, symbolized by the beast from the bottomless pit (v. 7). A severe battle between them ensues. We thus have here a microcosm of the message depicted by the whole book. As right and wrong confront each other in battle it appears that the two witnesses (right) are being defeated. They are killed and their bodies are left in the street to suffer shameful indignities. But the end is not yet. As the vision continues, their bodies are raised from the dead, a new respect (fear) for them is manifest, and they ascend up to heaven, victorious over all their enemies. What is depicted here is that the truth and her supporters may suffer in battle, but their ultimate victory is as sure as the throne of God. This is most certainly the message of the total picture. To miss this in an effort to try to explain all the details would be an injustice to the divine Author and His purpose for making the revelation. In this, as in all visions, the total picture is the vital message, not the explanation of the minute details used to compose the picture. One must not get so bogged down in a chemical analysis of the paint used in a great work of art that he fails to see the art itself. The paint is an essential part of the painting, but the art is more than the paint. So it is here. The symbols used to make up the picture are complex and perplexing, but the picture itself is a masterpiece, an epitome of the whole book, the message of Revelation in a nutshell.

11:3-6 And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth. And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will.

11:3 **And I — God, will give power unto my two witnesses,** — Taken individually, as they are obviously seen in the vision, the witnesses seem to be Christ (involving His message of saving truth) and His apostles (the means by which the truth is made known). But even if this is the case, collectively they undoubtedly signify the Christian system, its source and proclamation (which is to say the same thing in another way). **and they shall prophesy** — That is, they shall proclaim the will of God to lost man (see notes on 10:11). **a thousand two hundred and threescore days,** — The same period as the 42 months (see notes on v. 2). The two witnesses prophesy during the same time the Gentiles are treading underfoot the holy city (the people of God). Thus the enemy may trample the holy city (the church) under his feet but he cannot destroy the truth.

Truth, crushed to earth shall rise again;
The eternal years of God are hers;
But error, wounded, withers in pain,
And dies among her worshippers.

clothed in sackcloth. — Sackcloth was the garb of humiliation, mourning, and penitence (Jb. 16:12-15; Ps. 30:11; Mt. 11:21) and indicates here the severe conditions of suffering and sorrow under which the two witnesses lived and prophesied.

11:4 These are the two olive trees, — The source of the oil for the lampstands (cf. *Zec.* 4). In Zechariah, the two olive trees are identified as the two anointed ones who stand before the Lord. But, in my judgment, the two here are to be seen symbolically rather than literally as two and they thus primarily signify Christ as the source of all saving truth. But this would necessarily imply the divinity of the whole Christian system. Hence the divine source of the gospel message. **and the two candlesticks** — And the two lampstands (NIV). The dispensers of light. The two lampstands could give off no light without drawing from the source, the two olive trees. For this reason I conclude that the apostles, the original proclaimers of revealed truth, are the primary witnesses symbolized. But this would necessarily involve the whole church as proclaimers of the apostolic message. Hence the proclamation of divine or saving truth (cf. 1:12, 20). There is never a time, in persecution or otherwise, but that we need to be reminded that the gospel message is divine (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18-2:16), and there is never a time when that message does not need to be preached. **standing before the God of the earth.** — The two witnesses are standing in the presence of God, indestructible, signifying their constant service to Him in the revelation and proclamation of His will.

11:5 And if any man will hurt them, — If any man desires to harm the two witnesses or do them an injustice before they have fulfilled their mission. **fire** — The fire of truth and judgment. **proceedeth out of their mouth,** — Indicating that the power (both to convict and to condemn) comes from their mouth (cf. Jer. 5:14). Hence the power of gospel truth is meant (cf. Rom. 1:16-18). The primary purpose of the gospel is to reveal God's power or means to save believers. But the same gospel pronounces the wrath of God upon all who reject its divine offer (Rom. 1:18). The touching story of Christ dying on the cross, by the cruel hands of unbelievers, melts some hearts and bring them to accept the proffered salvation. But the same gospel hardens others, as the word of God through Moses hardened the heart of Pharaoh (Rom. 9:14-18). In this sense the power to save is also the power to destroy. **and devoureth their enemies:** — Consumes them with the fire which proceeds out of their mouth. This almost certainly has reference to the fierce judgment of the Almighty — that the enemies of the witnesses will ultimately be destroyed while they themselves will be the victors. **and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed.** — That is, he must suffer the vengeance of the wrong which he has done in the way specified, namely, by fire.

11:6 These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not — They have the same power that was entrusted to Elijah to restrain the rain from falling upon the earth (1 Kgs. 17-18). **in the days of their prophecy:** — During the time they are prophesying (NIV). That is, for the period of 1260 days. **and have**

power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, — Undoubtedly drawing on the miracles of Moses in his effort to persuade Pharaoh to release Israel, as is recorded in the early chapters of Exodus, **as often as they will.** — They could perform the miracles at will or whenever they desired. This shows that they did not necessarily exert their power at all times, but that it was constant and they could exercise it any time they wished. Some conclude from the fact that the miracles mentioned here are the ones which characterized Moses and Elijah, the two witnesses are therefore identified as these two OT prophets. While Elijah did shut up the heavens so that it ceased to rain for three years and six months (Lk. 4:25; Jas. 5:17) and while Moses did turn water to blood and strike the earth with ten plagues, it is my judgment that the vision draws on these two incidents, not to identify the witnesses, but to show their miraculous power. But if they had miraculous power (and surely the vision means to convey this concept), and if that power was to continue for the period of 1260 days (probably the whole Christian era), and if we are to identify any two persons or things with them, no one would better fit the description than Christ and His apostles, who revealed, confirmed, and delivered the word of truth by miraculous means. And while it is true that miracles ceased when the apostles had finished their work (1 Cor. 13:8-13), the miracles performed by both Christ and His apostles remain recorded on the pages of inspired history and will thus remain as long as time lasts (cf. Heb. 2:1-4). The miraculous (whether it be the virgin birth, the resurrection of Christ, or the second coming of Christ and our own resurrection from the dead) remain an essential part of the Christian system. Miracles recorded are no less real than miracles performed in one's presence.

SEEMING DEFEAT OF THE WITNESSES

11:7-10 And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves. And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwell on the earth.

11:7 **And when they shall have finished their testimony,** — When they shall have completed or accomplished the deliverance of their prophecy. Does this mean at the end of the 1260 days? Hardly, because there is more yet to come pertaining to the witnesses (vv. 8-13). Their completed testimony could well symbolize some vitally important event which would be followed by an onslaught of the enemy. If my concept is correct that basically the two witnesses signify the work of Christ and His apostles (the source and proclamation of saving truth), what could better be depicted here than the completed NT? Their active witnessing would be completed (finished) but the results would continue to the end of the 1260 days. With this in view, consider the facts of

history. When the NT was completed (probably around A.D. 96), the enemy struck with devastating force to lead men away from the authoritative word (the two witnesses) toward what would eventually become the authoritative church (human witnesses). According to the fully developed theory, Christ and His apostles were not the sole witnesses of truth. In fact, for all practical purposes, they were not witnesses at all, except as they were manipulated in the hands of crafty men. They had been slain as the divine standard and the apostate church rejoiced to see them (the Bible) banned and burned and suffer the indignities of dead bodies lying in the street. The divine witnesses were replaced with human laws and rules – with man-made creeds or some other source of human authority. As the people in the OT made their own gods (gods of wood, stone, or metal crafted by their own hands) and worshipped them as the true God and proclaimed that the works of their own hands were the gods who had made them (Is. 44:9-20), people began as soon as the NT was completed to write their own religious laws and rules and declare them to be divinely authoritative. They thus chose to follow a human standard rather than the divine one. This change in authority (witnesses) was completed by early in the seventh century. **the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit** – The beast that comes up from the abyss (NIV). This identifies the beast as the king of the locusts or the angel of the bottomless pit of 9:11 (cf. 9:2-11). He is the embodiment and thus the leader of the forces of evil, the enemy of the two witnesses, that is, the enemy of revealed truth, and ultimately Satan himself. **shall make war against them,** – The representative of Satan will make war with the witnesses, the representatives of Christ and His apostles. The picture here is a microcosm of the whole message of Revelation. The forces of truth and the forces of evil come face to face in a great conflict. A battle ensues. The forces of evil appear to be winning. But when the end comes, truth reigns victoriously. **and shall overcome them,** – Appear to defeat them. **and kill them.** – The divine witnesses are rejected (figuratively slain) and replaced by human standards. Truth thus appears to be killed. But this is not the end. It will rise again (vv. 11-13), victoriously, while all its enemies will be eternally crushed.

11:8 And their dead bodies – The dead bodies of the two witnesses, who had been overcome by the beast (v. 7). **shall lie in the street** – Upon the city's Broadway. This shows the contempt the enemies of truth had for the witnesses. **of the great city,** – The city is not to be taken as a literal city, such as Jerusalem or Rome (except as they represent world wickedness), but is symbolic of sinful degradation. It is the epitome of those who are so depraved that they rejoice when truth is crushed to earth and the falsehood of human systems rule over them. The great city is therefore a city without God, the embodiment of every foul and evil spirit; a city under the domination of the beast. It is mystery Babylon, the mother of all abominations (cf. 14:8; 16:19; 17:5, 18; 18:2, 10, 16, 18-19, 21). **which spiritually** – Mystical (Moffett), figuratively (Goodspeed), allegorical, Robertson (WP), or symbolically. This almost certainly means that the three following statements made in regards to the city are symbols and thus designed to describe its utter moral degradation

rather than to identify it as some literal city. **is called Sodom** — Abominable corruption. **and Egypt**, — Oppressive slavery. **where also our Lord was crucified.** — Rejection and apostasy. What is depicted here is the condition of any people, city, nation, or world that rejects Christ and tramples truth under its feet. The crucifixion is thus figurative — that is, He is crucified by apostasy, by counting the blood of the covenant and unholy things, and by doing despite unto the Spirit of grace (cf. Heb. 6:6; 10:29). The point is that those who crucify Him afresh are as morally corrupt as were the people of Sodom, in abject slavery to sin as the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, and as much truth rejectors and apostates as were the Jews who crucified the innocent Lord of glory.

11:9 And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations — Some from the whole wicked world or from among all peoples of the earth (cf. 5:9; 7:9). This seems to make it conclusive that the great city (v. 8) is far more extensive than a literal city. **shall see their dead bodies** — The defeated witnesses, the apparent defeat of truth and the exaltation of human authority, shall be seen and gloated over by representatives of all people. **three days and an half**, — An indefinite time, but far shorter than the 1260 days. This may indicate that, while human authority would reign supreme for a while, the word of God would eventually be brought back to its rightful place. And so it was, in theory in the 16th century Reformation and in practice in the 19th century Restoration. **and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves.** — They kept them on public display, exposing them to the worst kind of indignities (cf. Jn. 11:38-39). This shows their contemptible attitude toward truth and to what indignities they were happy to subject its source and proclamation.

11:10 And they that dwell upon the earth — The wicked truth rejectors of the world. **shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another;** — They would be so delighted to see the indignities administered to the dead witnesses that they would have a grand celebration. They thought they were free from divine authority. The witnesses could torment them no more. But, as is always the case, their joy was premature and short lived (vv. 11-13). **because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth.** — As Barnes says, they tormented them, "By bearing testimony to the truth; by opposing the prevailing errors; and by rebuking the vices of the age. . . . There is no evidence that they tormented them in any other way than by the truths which they held forth." Whenever and wherever the word of God is proclaimed as the sole authority in all matters pertaining to religion it is a thorn in the flesh to Satan and all who follow his wicked ways. The world can be at ease only when the voice of divine authority is silenced, when there is none to cry, "Repent or perish."

THE WITNESSES RESTORED

11:11-13 And after three days and an half the spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them. And they heard a great voice

from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them. And the same hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand: and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven.

11:11 And after three days and an half — See notes on v. 9. **the spirit** — Breath (ASV; cf. Gn. 2:7). **of life from God entered into them**, — If their death was figurative (see notes on v. 7), so is their resurrection. The fact that they were restored to life signifies the restoration of the message the witnesses proclaimed. The authority of the word of God, in contrast to human authority, which had ruled supreme, is now restored to its rightful place. **and they stood upon their feet**; — This shows that they were living again and probably indicates that they were bearing witness or prophesying again (cf. 2 Kgs. 13:21; Ez. 37:10). If so, they stood up to deliver God's message. **and great fear fell upon them which saw them**. — The joy of v. 10 is now turned to fear. It is a fearful thing to find oneself face to face with the just administration of divine wrath. But those who oppose the source and proclamation of saving truth can hope for nothing better. Make no mistake about it, the day of reckoning is coming. Who shall be able to stand?

11:12 And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, — The voice of God or His authorized representative. **Come up hither**. — Come up to heaven in order to receive the reward of faithful service. The battle was over for them. The victory had been won. **And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud**; — Just as the Lord of glory had done (Acts 1:9-11). **and their enemies beheld them**. — Their humiliation had been open to the public (vv. 9, 11); so now their exaltation. That which is symbolized here is the final triumph of truth over its enemies (human systems, both secular and religious).

11:13 And the same hour — The very same time the witnesses were received up into heaven. **was there a great earthquake**, — A great upheaval in political, social, or spiritual powers (see notes on 6:12), signifying the judgment of God. **and the tenth part of the city fell**, — The great world city of v. 8. The tenth part indicates a partial or limited judgment. **and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand**: — Since seven is a perfect or complete number, this may indicate a full judgment. That is, none escapes God's judgment when the time of reckoning comes. Neither the tenth part of the city nor the seven thousand were meant to be taken literally. Both signify the devastation resulting from the vengeance of God upon the wicked. All men should learn from this that when they reject God He shall reject them. Man's only hope is to turn to God while there is time — to be on the winning side of truth rather than on the losing side of evil. **and the remnant were affrighted**, — And the survivors were terrified (NIV) or stricken with awe (Williams). **and gave glory to the God of heaven**. — They recognized God as God, the rightful ruler of heaven and earth. I doubt that this means that they glorified Him in the sense of turning to Him in repentance and making Him the Lord of their lives. Rather when they were faced with the consequences of their sinful con-

duct they saw the folly of rejecting God, were filled with terror because they were now to face the Judge of all the earth, and they recognized Him as the creator and rightful ruler of all things, both material and spiritual. That is, they had learned that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:31).

THE THIRD WOE

11:14 The second woe is past; and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly.

11:14 **The second woe is past;** — The second woe has passed (NIV). The second woe was revealed in the events which occurred following the sounding of the sixth trumpet, as is recorded in 9:12-11:13, and was brought to an end by the ascension of the two witnesses. **and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly.** — It comes with no further delay. The third woe, while not much is said about it: for John attempts no description of this terrible event, is the final judgment before which all the wicked must appear. It is the administration of the wrath of God upon those who have persecuted His people and rejected His plan to save. The thing that makes the judgment so fearful, so terrible beyond description, for the wicked is that they will receive justice because they have rejected truth, hardened their hearts against the gospel, and trampled under foot the blood of the cross, having thus rejected the remedy for sins freely given by divine grace. They will receive the just recompense of their deeds. On the other hand, the righteous, because they are in Christ and have their sins covered by His blood, will receive mercy — mercy not because of their own work or merit but because of the merits of Christ's death for them. It is therefore not for justice (at judgment) but for mercy we plead. And that plea is made not on the basis of what or who one is but on the grounds of whose he is. The wicked belong to Satan; the righteous belong to Christ. The wicked will stand only on their own merit and will therefore be condemned — they themselves must pay the penalty for their sins; the righteous are judged, not by their own work or merit but by being in Christ and are thus justified (have their sin debt paid) by the deed of another, Jesus Christ the Lord.

THE SEVENTH TRUMPET

11:14-19 The sounding of the seventh trumpet marks the closing scene of time — the end toward which the whole drama of Revelation (up to this point) has been moving. It depicts the final victory of the saints (vv. 15-17) and the ultimate defeat of their enemies (vv. 18-19). The final scene is a victory scene because it concerns itself with the reign of Christ and the victory of His saints rather than the ultimate fate of their enemies. After having seen the terrible judgment of God in the first two woes, we are left almost totally to use our imagination as to what the final one must be. But we are not left to conjecture

as to the end of the wicked after the judgment (20:10-15).

11:15-19 And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come: because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned. And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth. And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.

11:15 And the seventh angel sounded; — The final angel sounds the final trumpet to bring the conflict of the ages to a close (10:7), to introduce the final judgment (implied but not described), and the ultimate triumph of Christ and His saints over worldly powers (1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thes. 4:16). **and there were great voices in heaven,** — Great because of the volume. A great heavenly host were proclaiming the glad tidings of victory. This may be contrasted with the silence in heaven which followed the opening of the seventh seal (8:1). **saying, The kingdoms** — The kingdom (ASV). **of this world** — Kingly dominion over the world. Wicked men, under the control of Satan, have usurped dominion over all created things, a dominion which belongs to God alone. Satan and all who serve him are intruders. That is, they have by usurpation removed God from His throne and placed themselves thereon. It is this dominion that the seventh trumpet brings to an end. **are become the kingdoms** — Is become the kingdom (ASV). **of our Lord,** — God the Father. The sovereign rule has now passed back into the possession of Him to whom it always belonged. It is His by virtue of the fact that He is the source and creator of everything that is. The intruders have now been cast out. They have lost the battle. **and of his Christ;** — His Son who came into the world to save lost man — to give each one a choice as to whom he would serve. Those who had accepted and followed Him had recognized God's sovereign right to rule over them. Now all who had not accepted Him have been destroyed and the rule of the whole world is returned to God never again to pass into wicked hands. **and he shall reign for ever and ever.** — God shall be sovereign ruler for all eternity. This obviously has reference to the time when "shall have been put down all rule and all authority and power" that "God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:24-28). It is the time when all the children of God shall have been gathered home; the time when all the enemies of truth shall have been brought to utter ruin; the time when all the plans and promises of God shall have been consummated; the time when the eternal order shall have begun.

11:16 And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, — See 4:4, 10-11; 5:8-10, 14 along with the notes. Here they burst forth in praise to God because by His power Christ and His saints have successfully obtained the victory and because the eternal and everlasting kingdom has been delivered back to Him

(v. 15).

11:17 **Saying, We give thee thanks,** — The 24 elders express thanksgiving to God because He has brought the saints through the turmoil of the wicked world and has Himself become the ruler of all things (v. 15). This is the end toward which the world has been moving since Satan entered upon the scene soon after creation (Gn. 3). **O Lord God Almighty,** — The eternal self-existent One — the omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent Creator of heaven and earth (cf. Ps. 139). **which art, and wast, and art to come;** See 1:4, 8; 4:8 and the notes there. The ASV and other translations omit "and art to come" on textual grounds. If this is the true reading, the expression is probably dropped here because He has, at the time depicted, already come — come in His eternal reign. **because thou hast taken to thee thy great power,** — He had asserted the power (rule), which was His from the beginning, by making the kingdom of this world His own kingdom (v. 15). Satan had, by winning the hearts and devotion of man, been the ruler of worldly kingdom by usurpation. But it never belonged to him by right. God had permitted it only because man was a free moral agent and God would not deprive him of his right of choice. But now all those who served Satan are destroyed and God takes back His reign (cf. 4:11). The elders, representing the redeemed, are thankful that He has done so. There would be no more war against them. Victory has been won and peace is assured. **and hast reigned.** — God has now begun His reign in the new order of things.

11:18 **And the nations were angry,** — The nations got angry (Beck). This may refer to Ps. 2:1 and thus mean the raging of the nations against God at all times, but more likely the reaction of the wicked nations (probably the same as the kingdom of this world of v. 15) when they lost the struggle with the saints — they got angry because their cause was lost and because they must now face the judgment of the God whose love they had rejected, whose law they had disregarded, and whose grace (offer of salvation) they had spurned. **and thy wrath is come,** — The day of God's indignation and retribution was now to be realized. They had raged against God and now the time had come for their indignities to receive the just recompense of reward (cf. Heb. 2:2). **and the time of the dead, that they should be judged,** — The time has come for judging the dead (NIV). Obviously the dead, both good and evil (Jn. 5:28-29; 1 Cor. 15:52), had been raised, and both classes are to be judged according to their work (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10; Acts 17:31), the righteous to be rewarded and the wicked destroyed (20:11-15). **and that that shouldest give reward unto thy servants** — Reward the righteous with the crown of victory, eternal life (2 Tm. 4:8). **the prophets,** — Those who miraculously received and delivered the will of God to man (see notes on 1:3; 10:11). **and to the saints,** — All who are saved or sanctified by the blood of Christ (see notes on 1 Cor. 1:2). **and them that fear thy name,** — Honor, reverence, or stand in awe of the holy name of God. The righteous fear His name; the wicked profane it or take it in vain (cf. Ex. 20:7). **small and great;** — Every saint, from

the lowest to the highest. At judgment everyone will be rewarded, not for the quantity of his abilities but for the quality of service rendered with them (Mt. 25:14-30). The one talent man was not condemned because he had only one talent, but because he did not properly use the one talent he had. The ten talent man was not blessed because he had ten talents but because he had used the talents which had been given him. The issue at judgment will not be how much we had or how much we had done, but how much we had done with what we had. **and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.** — They had destroyed the earth, not in the sense of causing its extinction, by corrupting it or changing it from its creative purpose — by making it a hole of evil, under the control of Satan, rather than a place of righteousness, under the rule of God. The destruction (by God) of the destroyers is the culmination of the third woe in the final judgment and eternal punishment, more fully described in 20:11-15 (cf. 2 Thes. 1:7-9).

11:19 And the temple of God was opened in heaven, — In 4:1 the door of heaven was opened; here the temple is opened in heaven. The temple (no doubt retaining the figure as in v. 1) symbolizes the worship and praise of God. The fact that it is opened indicates the ready access His people have to Him. **and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament:** — The ark of the covenant. This picture is drawn from the OT tabernacle (later the temple) where the ark of the covenant was kept in the Holy of Holies, where none was permitted to enter except the high priest, and that only once a year. It signified the presence of God. Undoubtedly that is its significance here (cf. Heb. 9:1-18). The covenant depicts the NT (Heb. 10:19-25). In the vision we see heaven, the temple opened in heaven, and in the temple the ark of the covenant, all of which are designed to assure us that God will keep His covenant with His people — that they will have eternal access to Him, to His worship and His presence. (What is briefly stated here is expanded upon in chapter 21.) **and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.** — The commotions in nature are symbols of the awesome power and presence of God (see 8:5 and the notes there).

REVELATION 12

While numerous schemes of dividing Revelation into sections (for the purpose of study) can be and have been advanced with much profit, the book clearly divides itself into three major sections: 1. Introduction and letters to the seven churches (1-3). 2. The conflict of the ages — victory for the saints and destruction for their enemies (4-11). 3. Detailed or specific conflicts between the world and the church and how the saints emerge victorious while the diabolical powers are brought to utter ruin (12-22). The first section depicts Christ's concern for the welfare of all congregations of His church. He is seen walking in their midst, instructing, correcting, commending, and condemning them. The second section gives a sweeping survey of the conflict between the church and the forces of evil, covering the whole battle of the Christian period. It culminates with the seventh trumpet and brings us to the resurrection of the dead, the judgment, the saints being rewarded with eternal life, and the wicked being destroyed. The third section considers in more detail some of the conflicts between the church and the world. It zeroes in on specific enemies and specific battles, such as the woman and the great dragon, the beast and his image, Babylon the great, etc., which obviously occur during the same time frame as the second section. The third section also reaches a more detailed climax by giving a more extended description of the destruction of the forces of evil and the final victory of the saints. Or to say it another way, the second section is a sweeping panoramic view of the total battle and its outcome. The third covers the same time period but gives a more detailed account of some of the confrontations between truth and error and details more of the rewards of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked. We should be reminded again that the revelation is given in symbols and thus does not describe literal events *per se*. Because of this we need to see each picture (vision) as a whole and ask what it is depicting for us rather than trying to explain minutely every detail of the picture. For example, the woman and the dragon in this chapter are designed to depict the conflict between the church and the forces of Satan. The church is in the world teaching the truth and thus making converts (children) to Christ. But Satan and his forces are there to destroy all the good she does. The woman, the man child, the dragon, the wilderness, the flood, and all the rest are simply components with which the picture (the symbol) is drawn. See the picture as a whole and you get the intended message, even if you can never interpret or apply every minute part.

THE WOMAN AND THE DRAGON

12:1-6 And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: And she being with child cried, travailling in birth, and pained to be delivered. And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and beheld a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days.

12:1 **And there appeared a great wonder in heaven;** — A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven (NIV). John now sees a new vision, one designed to show the glory and work of the church and how her enemies seek to destroy both the church and her work. The word sign (wonder) here means that what is seen in the vision is symbolic (cf. 1:1). There can be no doubt, then, that this vision is to be taken figuratively. **a woman** — There are many views as to who or what the woman symbolizes, but when the overall design is considered, there can be no doubt but that she represents the glorious church (cf. 19:7; 21:2, 9; Eph. 5:22-27), of which Christ is the builder (Mt. 16:18), the purchaser (Acts 20:28), the foundation (1 Cor. 3:11), and the head (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). Some see difficulty with this view because they consider the man child (v. 5) as Christ and correctly conclude that the church, which was built by Christ after His birth and ascension into heaven, could in no sense be His mother. But, as we shall see, the man child is not Christ personally but Christ as He is represented in struggling Christians who are confronted with persecution and threats of destruction by the forces of Satan, both secular and religious. **clothed with the sun,** — The sun covered her body as a garment, thus signifying the brightness, glory, and purity of the light emanating from her. **and the moon under her feet,** — Showing her exalted dominion or position in God's order things. **and upon her head a crown of twelve stars:** — Signifying the royalty heaven has bestowed upon her (cf. 1 Pt. 2:5, 9). No one could read this with an open heart without seeing the church as an honored and glorious institution. It is the consummation of God's purpose, promises, and plans for His people. It is therefore not just an accident or an interim. Rather it is the very thing which was foretold by OT prophets. But because men, in their folly, have rejected the NT church and substituted in its stead human denominations, they have absolutely failed to see it as God meant it to be seen — a spiritual kingdom resulting from the salvation of human souls from sin. The prophets described the church in such glowing terms (e.g., Is. 2:2-4; Dn. 2:44) that men (blinded by their love of a material worldly kingdom and by the humanism of denominationalism) say that nothing fitting the description given has ever come to this world. But quite to the contrary, all NT writers (including John in this passage and throughout Revelation) saw the

church, the Christian system, as the very thing all the prophets foretold (cf. Acts 2:14-39; Rom. 1:2; 1 Cor. 2:9-10). The church is therefore that which God promised from the very beginning. The Christian age is the last age God has in view for man and the Christian system is His final means of dealing with man (Jude 3). God has promised nothing beyond this but the new heaven and the new earth (21:1), which is heaven itself. Christianity fills all the promises and prophecies of the OT as they relate to the coming Redeemer and what He was to do for man. He came to deliver man from sin and that deliverance is found in, and only in, the present scheme of redemption. Those who are redeemed with blood make up the church (Eph. 1:7; Acts 20:28). This is and was God's purpose and promise from the beginning (Eph. 3:10-11). It is little wonder then that John depicts the church in such glory and splendor as he does here. The church (the woman) is the object of the dragon's (Satan) enmity, all the time and everywhere. Because many have failed to comprehend the divinity, the beauty, and the purpose of the church, they are erroneously looking for a future earthly kingdom to be yet established to fulfill OT prophecies. They thus suppose that it will be established in the literal city of Jerusalem and will be ruled over by Christ for a literal thousand years. At that time an earthly material kingdom will replace the present spiritual and heavenly reign of Christ. That is, the material will replace the spiritual and the earthly the heavenly. Unfortunately much of the proof of such farfetched theories are, by faulty and fantastic exegesis, lifted from Revelation. But Revelation does not teach such. Nor does any other book in the Bible. It is nothing but a utopian dream, a dream based upon the false notion that the church, the scheme of human redemption through the shed blood of Christ, is not that which God purposed, planned, and promised and not that which Jesus came to inaugurate. But the fact is, God planned and promised the church and Jesus came to build it. It is therefore fiction (falsehood) to say that the church is not what God planned and not what Christ came to build. Such theories may be consoling to material minded people, but to spiritual minded, truth loving, Bible believing people they are a rejection of God's eternal plans and purposes as revealed through Christ Jesus our Lord.

12:2 And she being with child — She was pregnant with the man child (v. 5). This signifies the fact that the church was producing results, that is, making converts to Christ (cf. v. 17). **cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.** — And she cried out in anguish in giving birth to a child (Williams). That is, she agonized in the pangs of delivery. This seems to signify the struggle of the church in times of distress, trial, and persecution, and is certainly an apt description of her growth in all periods of tribulation. The truth (the only means by which the church can reproduce) has never been popular with the masses and it is indeed a rare thing for her to make new converts (bare children) without suffering the anguish of persistence on her part and the terror of persecution on the part of her enemies.

12:3 And there appeared another wonder in heaven; — And there was

seen another sign in heaven (ASV). Another symbol. **and behold a great** — Great because of both his size and power (his size being a symbol of his power). **red** — Red as fire (Williams). Signifying his murderous character (Jn. 8:44). **dragon**, — The word appears numerous times in the OT (from three different Hebrew words), but in the NT only in Revelation, seven times in this chapter and in 13:2, 4, 11; 16:13; 20:2. Barnes and others give a rather lengthy discussion of dragons, but such is not necessary to the point here. We are not to seek for the particular creature as a fulfillment of the vision but rather its symbolic significance. And upon this point we are not left to conjecture. It signifies "that old serpent, called the devil, and Satan" (v. 9). The woman depicts the beauty and productivity of the church (vv. 1-2) as she does the Lord's will; the dragon depicts the ugly character of evil as it tries to crush and destroy the Lord's work. **having seven heads** — Seven is the number of perfection and head is the symbol of power. They here indicate the devil's complete control over wickedness. He is the undisputed ruler of the darkness of this world (cf. Eph. 6:12; Col. 1:13; Jude 3). **and ten horns**, Indicative of his extended power over the infernal regions and all those who serve him (cf. 13:1; Dn. 7:7; Jn. 8:44; Rom. 6:16). **and seven crowns upon his heads**. — Regal crowns, showing the authority he exercises over his kingdom. A different word is used for the crown of the woman and the crown of the dragon: the former is that of victory; the latter is that of sovereignty — in this case, as Hendriksen says, "arrogated authority." We are not to suppose from this vision that the dragon's manifestation will be the devil in person. Rather he is the instigator of all the efforts to destroy the seed of the woman. Undoubtedly his work will be done through some kingdom or institution or false religion. What is depicted here is the enmity between the church and the world, the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. Beyond this the vision was not designed to go.

12:4 **And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven**, — It seems to me that the purpose here is to do no more than to enhance the picture of the dragon's great power. It is therefore not necessary to see the stars symbolizing angels, mighty men of the earth, or great leaders in the church (though this seems to be their usual symbolic significance, cf. Dn. 8:9-12). What an awesome display of power it must have been to see the great dragon lashing his tail across the sky and dashing a third part of the stars to the earth. The object, however, is not the destruction of the stars or what they represent but to display the awesome power that is to be exercised in the effort to destroy the man child that the woman is about to bring forth. **and did cast them to the earth**: — He dashed them to the earth, which may signify his rage and enmity against the woman and her seed. Literally it would be impossible to cast a third of the stars to the earth because any given star is many times the size of the earth. Thus it is imperative that we keep in mind that this is a vision, depicting the size, power, and influence of the church's archenemy. This we should have no trouble understanding, but to see more in it than this is to distort the picture. **and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be de-**

livered, — She was ready to give birth. The church's mission was to preach Christ and thereby bring the lost to a saving knowledge of the truth as it is revealed in the gospel (Rom. 1:16-17). The vision presents the church as carrying out her mission in the midst of suffering and persecution. The threat of Satan has never stopped the growth of the church. **for to devour her child as soon as it was born**. — Devour the new-born Christians and thus prevent the increase of the church by additional members. Wallace correctly observes, "The woman's child was here employed not in a singular sense but in the collective use of the word." See v. 5 and the notes there.

12:5 **And she brought forth a man child**, — She gave birth to a son, a male child (Goodspeed). As noted on v. 4, I believe the term child is used collectively, thus meaning Christians. The figure is of the church producing after her kind. It seems, however, that most commentators, including Coffman, Hailey, Cox, and Roberson who are associated with the restoration movement, conclude that the child is Christ. While conceding that there are enough similarities to make this view attractive, I reject it for the following reasons: (1) The double expression "A son, a male child," if not redundant (and I do not believe it is, or at least not totally so), may indicate a son who is a man in strength and courage. The Living Oracles translates it, "A masculine son." Hailey says that it means he was not a weakling, "but a virile man who would wage war vigorously against His enemies and exercise his rule with firmness." This better describes Christians after the new birth than the babe in Bethlehem. (2) If the child is Christ then it seems logical to conclude that the woman is the virgin Mary. But this few if any (except Catholic authors) are willing to admit. In fact, the symbol will not permit Mary being the woman, and because of this it is highly unlikely that the child is Christ. Why would the vision signify the literal birth of Jesus without signifying His literal mother? Or in other words, why a literal birth from a figurative mother? (3) The woman is unquestionably the Church. But who gave birth to whom? Christ built the church (Mt. 16:18) rather than being born of it. (4) That which is produced by the labor of the church (which is aptly described as a birth) is additional Christians. This no one can doubt. (5) In v. 17 the dragon makes war with the remainder of the woman's seed. There can be no question but that this means Christians. **who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron**: — A figure drawn, no doubt, from Ps. 2:9. In 19:5 it clearly refers to Christ, but it is equally as clear that it applies to victorious Christians in 2:27. Here I think it is parallel with 2:27 rather than 19:15 (see notes on 2:26-27). This means that the dragon would not be able to defeat the church by destroying her children. Rather the church would prevail and increase throughout the whole earth (cf. Dn. 2:44-45). That is, the woman's seed would rule with Christ through the power of His word. **and her child** — The increase of her labor. **was caught up unto God, and to his throne**. — This signifies the protection God would provide for His people and their ultimate triumph over their enemy, the dragon.

12:6 **And the woman fled into the wilderness**, — Fled to an uninhab-

ited region, not for the purpose of obscurity, but unto God's protection (see vv. 14-17). This may be reminiscent of Israel's escaping from Egypt into the wilderness, where God provided for His wandering people. After Jesus was baptized, He was led into the wilderness where He was tempted of the devil, but where He was also sustained by angels (Mk. 1:13; Mt. 3:13-4:11). **where she hath a place prepared of God**, — Where she had a place of safety made ready by God (Williams). **that they should feed her there** — Where she might be taken care of (NIV). **a thousand two hundred and threescore days**. — An indefinite time but probably meaning the whole Christian period (see notes on 11:2). The thing that is signified here is God's care for and protection of the church. This is shown more fully in vv. 14-17. It is folly to try to fit this into a period of history when the church was in relative obscurity. The wilderness should be seen as symbolizing God's protective care rather than a place of hiding — a means of battling evil under God's protection rather than a flight from the battle to a solitary peace. A faithful church, reproducing after its kind, can never know peace in this world because it will always be confronted with hostile enemies (Satan and the world).

WAR IN HEAVEN

12:7-9 And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

12:7 **And there was war in heaven:** — The vision now changes from the dragon trying to devour the man child to a battle with the angels. He is no longer the huge monster who sweeps the stars out of heaven with his tail but the leader of his infernal army fighting against the angels of God. While the author may draw from the actual fall of Satan from angel to devil in some remote past (of that subject I know nothing), it seems incredible to me to conclude, as Coffman and others do, that this is an account of the actual historical event which occurred in heaven before the fall of man. To so conclude is, in my judgment, to completely ignore the symbolic nature of the book of Revelation in general and this context in particular. It should be remembered that in ordinary writing a word or sentence is to be taken literally unless the literal meaning involves an impossibility. But the opposite is true when a production is symbolic in nature, such as Revelation. In this case the figurative is the norm unless the sense or context prohibits it. Here, however, both the sense (the purpose of the picture presented) and the context favor it being a symbolic war rather than a literal one. Thus I conclude that the reference is not to the original rebellion and therefore not to be taken literally, but a vision depicting a conflict between the faithful of God and the forces of Satan. The figure is changed but the meaning is the same as it has been all along: right and wrong are constantly meeting on the battlefield, but right always wins in the end.

Michael — Called the archangel in Jude 9. **and his angels** — The angels of God. **fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,** — The angels of God fought against the angels of Satan, Michael being the leader of the former and the dragon the leader of the latter.

12:8 **And prevailed not;** — Satan and his angels were defeated, as they always are when they are in conflict with the saints. **neither was their place found any more in heaven.** — They were completely overthrown and cast down from the position held in the previous vision. This symbolizes the utter defeat of Satan and the loss of power over God's people. When the gospel is received and obeyed, he no longer has a place in their hearts (cf. v. 11), that is, he can no longer control them or rule over them.

12:9 **And the great dragon was cast out,** — Cast down from his position in heaven (vv. 3, 8). The character of the dragon is now identified by a three-fold description: **that old serpent,** — The ancient serpent (Goodspeed). That is, the tempter who deceived Eve in the garden of Eden (Gn. 3). This leaves no doubt but that the original tempter was Satan, though he took the form of a serpent. **called the Devil,** — Slanderer, the title by which he is most commonly known (see notes on 2:10). **and Satan,** — Adversary or accuser (v. 10; Jb. 1:6-11). Another name for the archenemy of God and His people. **which deceiveth the whole world:** — Who leads the whole world astray (NIV). That is, the one who seduces all men (the whole inhabited earth) into sin (cf. 1 Jn. 5:19; Jn. 8:44). **he was cast out into the earth,** — He was cast down from his former high position to a lower one. The earth, instead of heaven (vv. 3-4), was now to be the scene of his foul activities (v. 12). Roberson notes, "The earth was no new sphere of his working — see Job 1:7, but now he is limited to it until the time comes for him to fall lower." Whatever else may be in the background of this vision, it most assuredly depicts the defeat of Satan and his infernal army and thus shows the saints of all ages that no enemy can ultimately prevail against them — that Satan is doomed for defeat and that saints are destined for glory. **and his angels were cast out with him.** — That is, they shared his fate.

CELEBRATION OF VICTORY

12:10-12 And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.

12:10 **And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven,** — When the war with the dragon had been won (vv. 7-9), a voluminous voice spoke in heaven (cf. 11:12). The voice is not identified but it may be that of the angel of 10:13 or any other heavenly being. Or, more likely, it may simply be the voice of heaven

— a voice speaking the will of heaven or for all heavenly beings. **Now is come salvation**, — The salvation long awaited during OT times and then provided for by the death of Christ has at last become a reality. This not only includes redemption from sin and eternal life but also deliverance and freedom from persecution and every snare of the devil. Satan and his forces have lost their hold upon those who are under the rule and blood of Christ. **and strength**, — The manifestation of the power of God by which the enemy has been overthrown. God is now their only refuge and strength (cf. Ps. 46:1). **and the kingdom of our God**, — The reign of God has come in the sense that its archenemy has been defeated. This refers to the coming of the kingdom to its rightful place under the sovereign rule of God. **and the power of his Christ**: — The authority of Christ (cf. Mt. 28:18). **for the accuser** — Satan (cf. Jb. 1:6-11; 2:1-6; Zec. 3:1-2). Barnes says, "The meaning here is, that one of the characteristics of Satan — a characteristic so well known as to make it proper to designate him by it — is that he is the accuser of the righteous; that he is employed in bringing against them charges affecting their character and destroying their influence." **of our brethren** — Christians, members of the Lord's body, the church. **is cast down**, — He has lost his power over them (see notes on v. 9). **which accused them before our God day and night**. — The devil was constantly at his work, always making false and railing accusations in the presence of God against His people. The picture here is that of Satan's downfall in the path of advancing Christianity — the downfall of Satan and the exaltation of the followers of Christ. This happens every time one in the kingdom of darkness is transplanted into the kingdom of light (Col. 1:13) — every time a lost soul is born anew (Jn. 3:5) and thus changes his allegiance from Satan to Christ. Satan is thus cast out; the soul is victorious because of blood, the word of God, and proper priorities (v. 11).

12:11 **And they** — The brethren of v. 10. **overcame him** — The dragon. **by** — Because of (ASV). Three reasons or grounds for their victory are now given: (1) **the blood of the Lamb**, — The blood of Christ, shed for the sins of the world (see notes on 1:5). The blood is the means by which salvation is secured. But here the means is not the concept in view. It is the reason or grounds for their victory. The blood had motivated them to endure to the victorious end. (2) **and by the word of their testimony**; — And because of the message to which they bore testimony (Williams). That is, the reason they overcame was that they bore faithful testimony to the truth of the gospel, both in their faith and practice (cf. 1:9). Their belief had guarded them through all the pitfalls of the battle with Satan (cf. 1 Pet. 1:5; Heb. 3:14; 10:23) and no persecution could stop them from proclaiming His good news (e.g., Acts 4:19-20; 5:29, 41). (3) **and they loved not their lives unto the death**. — They did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death (NIV). Their loyalty to Christ meant more to them than life itself. That is, they were willing to die martyrs before surrendering to Satan (cf. 2:10).

12:12 **Therefore** — For this reason (NASV). **rejoice**, — Celebrate your vic-

tory and the dragon's downfall, as stated in vv. 10-11 (cf. Is. 49:13; Ps. 96:11-13). **ye heavens**, — The only time the word appears in the plural in Revelation. It is set in contrast to the earth and sea and thus seems to indicate that John has in view the heavenly kingdom in contrast with the kingdom of darkness (cf. the heavenly places of Eph. 1:3-4; 2:4-7 where the language is less symbolic). **and ye that dwell in them**. — Those who have won the victory over Satan and thus have their relationship in the heavenly realm secured (this may and probably does include heavenly beings as well as those redeemed from sin, although the primary thrust is to encourage the church in times of persecution with a vision of certain triumph). **Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea!** — Those who are still in the kingdom of darkness and thus under the control of a raging, furious, hate-filled, and angry devil. **for the devil is come down unto you**, — Humiliated and cast down from his previous position. His sphere of activity is now among earth dwellers. **having great wrath**, — Inflamed with anger because of his discomfiture in the battle with Michael (vv. 7-8) and **because he knoweth that he hath but a short time**. — A limited time left before he would be cast into the lake of fire (20:10; cf. Mt. 8:29). The struggle between right and wrong is not an eternal one. It will end shortly and Satan knows it . . . and he knows the end to which he will come.

THE WOMAN PROTECTED

12:13-17 And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child. And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent. And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood. And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth. And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

12:13 **And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth**, — Completely routed from his exalted position by the power of God through Michael and hurled down to his lower sphere of activity (see notes on vv. 8-9). **he persecuted** — That is, persecution became the method of his attack, and it has been so since the beginning of Christianity. And while the devil has made life and service difficult for the saints, he has never been successful enough by this means to destroy the church. In fact, it seems that the more intense the persecution the more the church grows. The explanation (or fulfillment) of this symbolic picture is not to be sought in one historical period of persecution but the persecution of the church throughout the whole time of her existence. As Coffman says, "There has never been a time, nor will there ever be, when Satan does not persecute the righteous." Soon after the establishment of the church Satan began his persecution and he will continue it until Christ receives her unto Himself at His second coming. The Jews were the first instruments of Satan to be used in his furious effort to destroy the saints (Acts 7:59; 8:1; 9:1), but in the end the church lived and thrived while the Jewish

nation perished in the destruction of Jerusalem. The Roman empire was her next great enemy (undoubtedly depicted by the sea beast of 13:1-10). And while Christians endured incredible suffering during the Roman persecutions, which continued on and off for 400 years, the Romans went the way of all the earth but the church remained. And so it is in every case: the church lives on; her enemies are dead. So it has always been; so shall it ever be. Thus wherever or whenever persecution arises this vision assures us that the church will be protected by the divine providence of the living God. **the woman** — The church (see notes on v. 1). **which brought forth the man child.** — See notes on v. 5.

12:14 **And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle,** — The wings signify the provision God has made for His church to escape from or overcome the persecution of the dragon (cf. Ex. 19:3-4; Dt. 32:11-12; Is. 40:31). **that she might fly into the wilderness,** — The wilderness is symbolic of God's protective care. It says that when the church is under the shadow of His wing (Ps. 36:7) she is out of the dragon's destructive reach. No historical flight of the church into solitary hiding is to be sought in fulfillment of this part of the vision. It is simply designed to assure the persecuted saints of their protection and ultimate victory. **into her place,** — The place God has prepared for her (v. 6). **where she is nourished** — Provided for. This has reference to the fact that during the present dispensation, from Pentecost to the second coming of Christ, God has made provisions to fill every spiritual need of those who are in Christ (e.g., Eph. 1:3; 2 Tm. 3:14-17; 2 Pt. 1:3-4). Nothing needed for their spiritual well-being is lacking. **for a time, and times, and half a time,** — Three and a half years, the same period as mentioned in v. 6. In my judgment the expression means the whole Christian period. Thus Swete says, "To the end of the present order the Church dwells in the wilderness." Her place of protection is in Christ. **from the face of the serpent.** — From any fatal attack of Satan (cf. 1 Cor. 10:13).

12:15 **And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman,** — This may signify the numerous methods (such as persecution and the lure of lust) used by Satan in trying to drown the church and render her fruitless, but more probably it has specifically in view, since it comes from the serpent's mouth, the rivers of false teaching with which the devil has flooded the earth in every century (Prv. 15:28; 18:4; 2 Pt. 2:1). It should be noted that the woman had two great wings (v. 14) so that she could soar in safety above the flood. The only way she could be engulfed by it was to submit to the lure of the serpent (as did Eve in the garden of Eden). That is, she could be overcome only by choice, never by necessity. **that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood.** — That she might be swept away in the torrent of false teachings which are devised by him to seduce the church to depart from the truth and thus to follow voices other than that of the Savior (cf. 2 Thes. 2:10-12; 2 Tm. 2:17-18; 4:3-4, 10).

12:16 **And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth,** — The earth signifies the people of the earth, or earth (worldly) peo-

ple. They helped the woman by absorbing the false teachings which streamed from the serpent's mouth, thus making the difference between the church and the world stand out distinctly. Hailey expresses this thought beautifully: "From the viewpoint of Satan and the world, the earth's help was incidental and unintentional; but from the viewpoint of the church, it was providential. As long as the world absorbs the river of Satan's lies, and the church drinks from the fountain of divine truth, the separation between the two will remain clear and distinct. But when the woman begins to compromise with Satan and his lies, becoming submerged in his river of falsehood, tragedy follows." **and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth.** — The unrighteous swallowed up the flood of infernal teachings which came from the mouth of Satan. This is always the case, and it is nothing short of absolutely amazing to observe with what ease people are led away from the true doctrine of Christ by false philosophies and erroneous religious teachings. They seem to long for falsehood rather than truth, and when it is presented to them they are as gullible as baby birds being fed by their mother. It seems that the false has a more powerful appeal to the mind of man than the true. Most would rather follow self-proclaimed leaders than Christ; accept the pope as the final authority in religion rather than the Bible; be in human organizations (denominational churches) rather than the one true body of Christ; believe in chance development (evolution) rather than in divine creation; accept the words and demands of a cult leader rather than the words of revelation delivered by the HS; believe in the fanciful dreams of a premillennial utopia rather than in the reality of the spiritual kingdom of God; practice the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21) rather than produce the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). In short, they would rather believe and follow the devil's lie (Jn. 8:44) than the Lord's truth (Jn. 8:32).

12:17 **And the dragon was wrath with the woman,** — He was furious with her because he had been defeated (v. 9), his strategy against her had failed (vv. 15-16), and God's protective care (v. 14) put her beyond his reach. As with Job (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6), Satan's power had been greatly limited over her. He can entice the church through persecution, lust, and false teaching to enter his service, but he cannot force himself upon her nor touch her fatally without her consent. **and went to make war with the remnant of her seed,** — That is, he now turns all his foul and impish efforts toward the destruction of individual Christians. He failed in his effort to destroy the man child (those in the church who have already won the victory, probably through martyrdom) and the woman (the church in the aggregate). So he turns away from the woman and declares war on each individual member of the church. **which keep the commandments of God,** — Those who obey the will of God (Mt. 7:21; Rom. 6:16-18; Heb. 5:8-9; 1 Jn. 2:3-5) as revealed in the gospel of Christ. This unmistakably identifies the seed of the woman as the saints of God. **and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.** — Most translations omit Christ for lack of textual support. The genitive here may be subjective (the testimony which Jesus

bore) or objective (the testimony which they bore of Jesus). It is probably objective, meaning those who bear the testimony of Christ and His divine message (see notes on v. 11; 1:2). I take the two expressions together to mean those who obey and teach God's will. Hence all faithful followers of Christ.

REVELATION 13

In this chapter two more powerful enemies of the church are encountered, the beast from the sea and the beast from the earth. The first derives his power or authority directly from the dragon (v. 2). The second seems to have his from the first (v. 12). From the overall picture, I have concluded that the first beast represents worldly or antichristian governments (atheistic secular systems) and the second false and apostate religious institutions, which serve or derive their authority from worldly powers (or in some cases, act as the civil governments themselves). In John's day there can be no doubt but that the first beast finds its expression in the pagan rule of Rome and the second one in the apostate Roman church, an apostasy which had already begun to eat away at the vital of the church even before the death of the apostles (2 Thes. 2:7). But the representation is not limited to these two systems alone. The beast is not the overt expression or the form it takes, but the spirit which results in worldly institutions and false religious organizations. Thus the beast arises anywhere in history where civil and religious institutions arise to oppose Christianity. In our day that evil spirit is manifest in communism and Catholicism and any other system, civil or religious, which is an avowed enemy of Christianity in its pure apostolic form. The picture to be seen here is that when the dragon failed to destroy the church through persecution, lust, or false teaching (chapter 12), he turns his attention to ungodly civil (vv. 1-10) and religious (vv. 11-18) institutions through which to accomplish his diabolic ends. But they too are destined to fail, as is clearly seen in chapter 14. The church, as always, emerges with the eternal victory.

THE BEAST FROM THE SEA

13:1-10 And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority. And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast. And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him? And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations. And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the

world. If any man have an ear, let him hear. He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

13:1 And I stood upon the sand of the sea, — And he stood upon the sand of the sea (ASV). The translations are about equally divided on the difference reflected between the KJV and the ASV. The ASV has the dragon standing on the seashore. Most who accept this as the true reading connect it with 12:17 (or insert it as an additional v. to chapter 12). The KJV has John himself standing on the sandy shore. In this case it connects to what follows. I know of no certain way to determine the correct view, but fortunately for us the meaning of the vision is the same either way. I usually stay with the KJV unless there are good reasons to depart from it . . . and there seem to be no demanding ones here. But this does not mean that the dragon is out of the picture: for the beast coming up out of the sea receives his power and authority from him. That is to say, the dragon now works through the beast. **and saw a beast** — A wild beast, ferocious and savage in nature (see notes on 11:7; cf. 17:3, 8-12; Dn. 7:3-12, 16-27). Since it rises out of the sea (people), it is all but certain that this beast signifies antichristian, pagan, atheistic institutions and governments. Richardson says, "This beast is primarily the symbol of the Roman world power by which the Church in John's day was persecuted. In a wider sense it represents all godless governments, empires, and political forces arrayed against Christ and His Church in any age." **rise up out of the sea,** — The sea is a symbol of people, probably in turmoil and upheaval (17:15). Beastly institutions arise when worldly minded people are troubled by unrest or have their position or state of wickedness threatened by a righteous cause. **having seven heads and ten horns,** — See notes on 12:3. **and upon his horns ten crowns,** — For crowns, see notes on 12:3. The beast had crowns on his horns while the dragon's (12:3) heads were crowned. If there is significance in the difference, it may be designed to show that the authority of the beast is delegated (and thus not as extensive) from the dragon. That is, the crowned heads exercise their authority through the crowned horns — the institutions and kingdoms of this world. **and upon his heads the name of blasphemy.** — The heads dishonor, desecrate, and demean the God of heaven (cf. v. 6) by opposing Him and exalting themselves above all that pertains to Him. Worldly rulers have often required their subjects to recognize them as deity (cf. Dn. 6:7-9) and demand for themselves the worship which belongs only to God (v. 4; 22:9-10; Lk. 4:8). They thus blaspheme the holy name of God by their unholy claims to be God — they dethrone God in the deification of themselves and their secular systems.

13:2 And the beast which I saw — The one coming up out of the sea (v. 1). **was like unto a leopard,** — That is, it had the characteristics of a leopard, swift, ferocious, and bloodthirsty. **and his feet were as the feet of a bear,** — And his feet were like those of a bear (BV), cruel instruments for crushing and tearing. **and his mouth as the mouth of a lion:** — Fierceness (espe-

cially in its roar) of rule. It seems certain to me that John's beast here is an aggregate of the four beasts of Daniel (Dn. 7:3-8, 15-27). Daniel had seen four beasts come up out of the sea. The first was like a lion, the second like a bear, and the third like a leopard. The likeness of the fourth beast is not given, but it was "great and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth . . . and it had ten horns . . . and a mouth speaking great things." Daniel himself received the interpretation of the beasts. They represented four kings (kingdoms, Dn. 7:23) which would arise one after the other to rule the earth, that is, four world political empires. The four kingdoms correspond precisely with those symbolized in the four parts of the great image of Nebuchadnezzar's dream as recorded in Daniel 2. The head of the image was of fine gold, his breast and arms of silver, his stomach and thighs of brass, and his legs of iron and his feet a mixture of iron and clay. The head of gold was the Babylonian kingdom over which Nebuchadnezzar ruled; the second kingdom was the Medo-Persian kingdom which followed the Babylonian; the third was the Macedonian which reached its peak under Alexander the Great; and the fourth, more terrible than the others in devouring, breaking down, and tearing to pieces, was the Roman Empire, the one in power when Christ came (Dn. 2:36-44). It seems obvious then that John's beast is a composite of all four of those in Daniel and one that readily found its full expression in the Roman Empire of John's day. Barclay says, "For John the Roman Empire was so satanic and terrible that in itself it included all the evil terrors of the evil empires which had gone before. It was, as it were, the sum total of all evil." I think Alford is correct in saying that it does not represent the "Roman Empire merely but the aggregate of the empires of the world as opposed to Christ and His kingdom." This being the case, it becomes clear that John's beast is a symbol of all the evil found in the four beasts of Daniel. While the Roman Empire is an epitome of this wicked and evil spirit of opposition to righteousness, and while it is an embodiment of that foul and hellish work visualized (and may in this sense be called the beast), it alone does not exhaust or end the work of the beast. The beast will remain an enemy of the church as long as the world stands (v. 5). Wherever there is corrupted civil government, promoting evil instead of good, the beast lives on. **and the dragon gave him his power,** — The strength he had from the civil state, with its vast resources and force of arms. **and his seat,** — **And his throne** (ASV) or dominion. The devil claims the prerogative of appointing the rulers in the kingdoms of this world (Mt. 4:8-9; Lk. 4:6). And this claim is not totally unfounded: for the Scriptures call him the god (or prince) of this world (Jn. 12:31; 2 Cor. 4:4). He can, however, have no power but such as God allows him to exercise. **and great authority.** — The power or right to command. All this shows (and that is its basic purpose) that the beast is the agent through which the dragon works.

13:3 **And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death;** — Smitten, as with a sword, and in appearance mortally wounded. That is, its wound would have been fatal had it not been healed. A great deal of ingenuity has

been expanded on trying to find some king or empire which fits the description of this slaughtered head. But it has all been in vain because the heads of the beast are not to be identified as seven kings or seven successive antichristian empires but as a unit representing the power and authority of the beast. It is my judgment that all that is signified here is that the beast (and the wound is to the beast, not just to one of its heads alone) may, and often does, receive near mortal blows to its power, throne, and authority by advancing Christianity. I think to see more here is to see more than the author intended. (The beast of chapter 17 is another vision altogether, even though it is the same in the sense that both represent the church's archenemy but under different forms, and should not be used as the key to properly interpret this one.) **and his deadly wound was healed:** — The beast was able to survive the deadly stroke administered by Christianity. **and all the world** — The whole earth (BV) or all earth (unregenerated) people. **wondered after the beast.** — They were so amazed at its recovery that they devoutly followed it, even more readily than before.

13:4 **And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast:** — Marveling at his recovery from the deadly wound (v. 3), they paid homage to the dragon, reverencing him as deity. Since the beast (ultimately the deification of secularism) finds expression in godless civil authority, empire or emperor worship is necessarily implied, and that wherever it is found (whether in ancient paganism or modern communism). The aim of worldly power, which expresses the spirit of the beast, is to dethrone God from the hearts of people and thus replace Him with Satan as the supreme object of worship. **and they worshipped the beast,** — They worshipped the beast as the dragon's (Satan's) representative. As Robertson (WP) says, "Emperor-worship, like all idolatry, was devil worship. The same thing is true today about self-worshipping (humanism or any other form of it)." **saying, Who is like unto the beast?** — Their answer would have been none. They thus concluded that no god had the almighty power, throne, or authority of the beast. This led them to worship him as their god (cf. Ex. 32:1-6). **who is able to make war with him?** — Again their answer would have been none. They concluded therefore that his power was invincible and that resistance would be futile.

13:5 **And there was given unto him** — John does not reveal who gave him the mouth, but undoubtedly it was the dragon (v. 2): for it was given him for the purpose of speaking great evil. **a mouth speaking great things** — A mouth to utter proud words (NIV). His haughty attitude toward God and holy things is manifested by the arrogant and boastful words of his mouth (cf. Dn. 7:8, 20). **and blasphemies;** — See notes on vv. 1, 6 (cf. Dn. 7:25; 11:35). **and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months.** — He had power to actively carry out his work or exercise his authority throughout the whole Christian period (see notes on 11:2).

13:6 **And he opened his mouth in blasphemy** — The very purpose for which he opened his mouth was to blaspheme God, His name, His tabernacle

(dwelling place), and the heavenly host. Blasphemy is to speak evil of, rail against, slander, revile, profane, or defame the holy; to speak of injuriously, reproachfully, disdainfully, and disrespectfully; to speak in such a manner as to show the attitude of mockery, ridicule, rejection, and denial; that is, to speak in such a way as to insult divinity by the use of profanity. Speech is a gift of God for the purpose of communicating good. Its proper use is therefore a blessing to man and a glory to God. But to use it for evil purposes (cf. Ex. 20:7, 16; Jas. 3:2-13), especially to ridicule the God who gave it, is a violation of its creative intent — a total disregard for its proper use. And when one reaches the bottom line, the violation of creative intent is the very nature of sin, all sin. Blasphemy is, however, the vilest form of language abuse because it is done in sheer defiance of God and makes a contemptuous and malicious joke out of all that is sacred. As Hailey observes, "This reveals the true character of the beast." **against God**, — See notes on v. 1. **to blaspheme his name**, — To blaspheme the name of God is to blaspheme God Himself, all that He is, all that He has done, and all the promises that He has made. **and his tabernacle**, — And his dwelling place (Goodspeed). Whether this means the church or heaven depends on whether the next clause is an additional statement (as in the KJV) or appositional (as in the ASV). The translations are about equally divided, but it seems to me that the KJV is more likely to be the correct one. It is a fact, even if this v. does not so state it, that the church is the temple (1 Cor. 3:16-17) or tabernacle in which God dwells (Eph. 2:21-22). **and them that dwell in heaven**. — The host of heavenly beings (angels). The point of the whole v. is that the foul mouth of the beast continues to spue out blasphemy against God and everything that pertains to Him, whether in heaven or on earth.

13:7 **And it was given unto him** — See notes on v. 5. **to make war with the saints**, — To fight against them with all the forces at his disposal. **and to overcome them**: — He would overcome them momentarily (that is, during the whole struggle of the Christian period he would be able to drive some to retreat, defeat some of their work, and even kill some) but not ultimately (11:7-11). As a parallel, Christ was overcome when the unbelieving Jews joined the beastly Romans to put Him to a cruel shameful death. But that was not the final end. Ultimately He was triumphant when He broke the bars of death and rose to everlasting victory. So it is with the saints: the beast would overcome in some battles but they would ultimately win the war (cf. Dn. 7:21-22 where the little horn prevailed against the saints only until the Ancient of Days came). **and power was given him** — See notes on v. 2. **over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations**. — He who gave him the foul mouth to blaspheme God also gave him the authority or dominion over all the people of the world (see notes on 11:9; cf. v. 8).

13:8 **And all that dwell upon the earth** — All inhabitants of the earth (NIV). That is, every person on earth except the saints of God. Thus the sinful of the world. **shall worship him**, — Do homage to the beast, honoring him

as a god (see notes on v. 4). **whose names are not written** — Who have not been born again (Jn. 3:5) and therefore not enrolled as members of the family of God (1 Tm. 3:15). This means that only sinful people worship the beast or his manifestation (civil or secular governments). **in the book of life** — "Written in the book of life" is a figurative expression meaning those who are recognized by God as His children (Gal. 3:26-29), His heirs (Rom. 8:17), His family (1 Tm. 3:15), in His church (Acts 2:47), and thus enrolled in heaven (Heb. 12:23, ASV; cf. 3:5; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; 22:19; Phil. 4:3). God knows His own (2 Tm. 2:19), now and forevermore. **of the Lamb slain** — Slaughtered to pay man's sin debt (1 Jn. 2:2). His sacrifice frees from the penalty of sin and thus enables those who are free to have their names written in the book of life. **from the foundation of the world.** — Christ was slain in the purpose and mind of God from the very inception of His scheme to redeem. Although used frequently by inspired writers, this is a difficult expression to explain, regardless of whether it applies to the death of Christ or to the salvation of saints. Does it go back beyond the creation of the universe as most seem to think? Or does it only mean, as I have concluded, from the beginning? If the former, God obviously planned to save man before He made him and thus before he sinned. To my mind, this gets the cart before the horse. Thus I have concluded that the latter is the case. The first intimation of redemption in the Bible is after the fall of man (Gn. 3:15). And it is here that we have the first promise of Christ (the seed of the woman) as the deliverer. This is the beginning of sin and the beginning of revelation pertaining to redemption. To go back beyond this would be to leave the light of revelation for the darkness of human speculation. Thus I conclude that the expression means no more than that from the beginning God predetermined (it was His intent and purpose) to save man by the blood of Christ, the one absolutely indispensable ingredient in the salvation of human souls from sin (1 Pt. 1:18-20). There is yet another problem with this expression in this v.: some scholars and translators (e.g., ASV, NASV) connect it to written rather than to slain. While both concepts are true (for the former see 17:8), the rendering of the KJV seems more natural and I follow it as the correct one.

13:9 **If any man have an ear, let him hear.** — See notes on 2:7. This could possibly refer to what has already been said concerning the beast, but more than likely it is an alert to prepare the mind to give special attention to the proclamation which follows.

13:10 Some difficulty faces us here. Two different interpretations are possible, as will be seen by checking translations and commentaries. First, it may be understood as those who lead others into captivity and death will themselves suffer the same violence they administer. The second interpretation sees it as saying the saints who are marked for captivity and death should accept their lot without resistance. If the first is the true sense, it is designed as a word of comfort and encouragement to the faithful who are persecuted and down-trodden by the beast; if the second, it is an exhortation to accept captivity or

death, if either or both are their lot, without using the world's method of resistance. I think the first possibility is the correct one. If so, then it is saying to the faithful, "With the beast so powerful and so widely worshipped the picture is extremely gloomy, and it will get gloomier still when the second beast appears, but do not despair. The day of reckoning will come to the enemy and he will have measured out to him the same judgment he measures out to you" (Mt. 7:2). **He that leadeth into captivity** — Whoever leads others into captivity (Williams). The Christians would suffer greatly at the hand of the beast, who had been given power to overcome them (v. 7), and he would appear to be their captor. But to encourage them to be faithful in their time of trial, the Lord says to them that the captor **shall go into captivity**: — He will be led into captivity (BV). That is, their captor will ultimately be the captive. **he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword.** — That is, the killer (of Christians) will be killed (cf. Gn. 9:6; Mt. 26:52; Gal. 6:7). This has no reference to one who takes the life of another in carrying out the legitimate function of government, whether in capital punishment or in war (see notes on Rom. 13:1-7), but rather to unlawful acts of violence against the innocent. My mother used to express this principle by saying, "Every dog has its day." Ladd expresses it well: "Persecution is not the last word; there is divine retribution, and the final punishment of those who kill with the sword will fit the crime. The last word is not with the persecutor." **Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.** — This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints (NIV). Until the time comes for the beast to be overthrown, the saints must remain steadfast and faithful, knowing first that the ultimate victory is theirs and second that vengeance belongs to the Lord and He will repay (Rom. 12:19; 2 Thes. 1:6).

THE BEAST FROM THE EARTH

13:11-18 And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon. And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live. And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred three score and six.

13:11-18 This is, by common consent, the most difficult section in Revelation, if not in the whole Bible, to explain to the satisfaction of all. The difficulty with the text itself is enhanced a hundredfold because so many false and fearful theories have sprung from it, many of them wild and unrealistic and most of them the pure invention of human imagination (it seems that the

carnal mind would rather feed on fantastic theories than to face the realities of life, God, and the world to come). False and fanciful theories have so filled the minds of people that the facts of the narrative (the purpose for which it was written) leave them cold and non-responsive. That is, the theories of bloody battles to come appeal more to the mind than solid foundational facts. A strange twist of the modern mind is that it would rather dwell on the fearful things that may happen to other in the future (in which none of us may live) than to face the hard realities of the present (where we do and must live). But the desire to feed on the strange, the unusual, the unknown, the fantastic should not be permitted to sidetrack us from our search for the truth, even though the truth may not be as attractive as the high drama conjectured up by the overly inflamed imagination of theorists and speculators. Here, even more than elsewhere, it is vital that we keep before us the principle that has guided our steps thus far in this highly symbolic book and promises to take us safely to its end, namely, to see the total picture involved in each vision and determine what is signified by the whole (all the parts taken together). When we know what the whole picture depicts we will know what the Master wants us to know, whether or not we can explain each minute detail which makes up the picture. What we have here is a great work of art designed to depict to our minds a central message. The picture is drawn by the use of numerous parts. Each part is vital to the total picture, but as in a great painting one does not need to know the composition of all the colors used in order to appreciate the work as a whole and understand the message it seeks to convey. With this in view, it seems clear to me that the land beast signifies the dragon's unscrupulous use of religion (including no doubt secular religion, such as humanism) to seduce the saints away from their Lord and Savior. The land beast carries out his mission by making an image of the beast and demanding that all, great and small, worship it or be killed. He also causes all to receive a mark identifying them as beast worshipers. Without that mark, none can buy or sell. That is, they are cut off from all commercial exchange. Thus one must either worship the beast or else be cut off from all means of livelihood. Such arrogant and unholy tactics (trying to force men to act against their convictions) have been used in every century since the beginning of the church and no generation of Christians have totally escaped them [e.g., Catholicism during the middle ages and communism in many countries today]. So it appears to me that what we see here is the fact that Satan uses false and secular religions in an effort to deceive Christians and thus force them into his service. With both civil (vv. 1-10) and religious (vv. 11-18) powers directed against the children of God, it is no wonder that their steadfastness and fidelity are sorely tried (v. 10).

13:11 And I beheld another beast — He saw a second beast, the first being that of v. 1. **coming up out of the earth;** — The first beast came up out of the sea, probably signifying that he arose up from a stormy and turbulent people. This one comes up from the land, indicating that the source of his origin is more settled or stable, as the land is in contrast to the sea. This indicates,

at least to my mind, that the former was secular and the latter religious. The sea and the land are designed to depict the conditions out of which the beasts arose, not their character. The beast himself depicts the role of institutional religion in opposition to Christ and His saints. Coffman states my views precisely: "It is the whole organized structure of false religion, especially as manifested in the hierarchical apparatus of the Roman Catholic church, and in many other nominally Christian churches also. It is the human control of sacred office perverted to serve secular, worldly, material, political and other unchristian ends. He is that beast who was already working in Paul's day (2 Thes. 2) and has continued ever since, and who will continue till the end of time. It is a shortsighted mistake indeed that would limit this to any particular church or to some specific time in history." **and he had two horns like a lamb,** — Not ten horns as the first beast, but two, and they were the small horns of a lamb rather than large dangerous horns of ferocious beasts. The fact that he has the appearance of a lamb (probably a parody of the Lamb which was slain for the sins of the world, 5:5) identifies him as having religious characteristics, such as appearing innocent, harmless, and docile. Since the first beast signifies ungodly civil powers, it seems but natural to conclude that the second indicates a false but powerful religious organization. **and he spake as a dragon.** — His speech was harsh, impious, and deceptive (e.g., 2 Thes. 2:4), similar to that of the first beast (see v. 5 and my notes there). He thus appeared as a lamb (religious) but his speech betrayed him as a dragon — that is, his speech showed his true nature (cf. Mt. 7:15; Acts 20:28-30; 2 Cor. 11:13-15).

13:12 And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, — He exerts the full authority of the first beast in his presence (Moffett). That is, his infernal work (that of bringing the whole world to worship the beast) was by the authority and under the supervision of the first beast (whose authority was from the dragon, v. 4). The first and second beast have the same goals in view. The approach of each is different (the former secular persecution and the latter religious deception) but the aim is the same, namely, to bring the saints of God under the dominion of Satan. It is simply the age-old battle between right and wrong seen from another perspective. **and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein** — All earthly institutions and the people who compose them — all, except the saints of God (vv. 16-17). **to worship the first beast,** — To do homage to him as the only god who could save them (see notes on v. 4). **whose deadly wound was healed.** — See notes on v. 3.

13:13 And he doeth great wonders, — And he performed great and miraculous signs (NIV). Those who interpret this literally usually expect the beast, when he comes, to actually perform miraculous signs. But in this they overlook the fact that only God can work a true miracle. The devil and his representatives may perform marvelous things or false miracles (crafty acts designed to deceive people into thinking they are supernatural) as did the sorcerers in Egypt when Moses by the power of God turned his rod into a serpent and they by some magical means (enchantments) produced serpents (Ex. 7:10-12). But it did not take them

long to admit that the act of Moses was miraculous (done by the power of God) while theirs was only trickery (Ex. 8:16-19). If Satan and his servants could truly perform miraculous wonders it would destroy the whole Biblical purpose of miracles. A miracle, in the Bible sense of the term, is a direct act of God — an observable act or event in nature produced by God without His natural means of production (cf. Mt. 14:15-21). It is thus God acting other than by natural means or through established laws. In the NT miracles were performed for the purpose of proving that Christ was the Son of God (Jn. 20:30-31) and that the message preached (and written) by the apostles was the word of God (Mk. 16:15-20; Heb. 2:3-4). They were thus the credentials of the messengers of God and the means by which all can know that the message they delivered is from God. But if the devil had the power to duplicate their work in a true sense of the term we would have absolutely no means of determining the true message of God from the false doctrines of men. God's message is confirmed by miracles; the doctrines of men have nothing more than the mere and illusive claims to divine power. A failure to understand the meaning and purpose of miracles have made it easy for the devil to deceive men into thinking he is performing extraordinary wonders when in reality they are nothing but sorcery. What he does may be a marvel (as with any magical act and with many occurrences in nature) but a marvel is not a miracle. When the apostles went forth preaching the will of God under the Great Commission, many of the facts they revealed and proclaimed were necessarily strange to the unbelieving world and would have seemed incredible without some sign from God that they were the revelation of His will. It was therefore imperative that the message be confirmed to such a degree and in such a manner as to leave no room for doubt that the gospel was from heaven and not from men — confirmed by means that could not be duplicated by anyone, anywhere, anytime. The vital question for every person, both then and now, was how to distinguish between the revealed will of God and the false claims of men. How could they, and how can we, distinguish between truth and error, between right and wrong, between the real and the counterfeit? The answer: God confirmed His word with miracles. Thus all the miracles of Satan are lying wonders (2 Thes. 2:9) designed to deceive (cf. Mt. 24:24; 2 Thes. 2:9-12). While they are accepted as miracles by his worshipers, they are in reality nothing but the well disguised trickery of the beast. All counterfeit systems of religions must deceive the masses (cf. 2 Tm. 3:13) and one way many do it is by claims to miraculous powers. They play on the ignorance and gullibility of men by doing extraordinary things (by the sly of hands) and thus identify them with Biblical miracles, thereby enhancing their own power while at the same time creating a false concept of Biblical miracles. By the time they are through, the Biblical miracle has been reduced to nothing more than the unusual but ordinary happenings in man and nature. V. 14 shows that the wonders and miracles of the beast were instruments of deception. **so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men,** — That is, he pretends to duplicate that which God had done to Nadab and Abihu (Lv. 10:1-2) and through Elijah

(1 Kgs. 18:17-40; 2 Kgs. 1:10; cf. Lk. 9:54). The point here is that he had become such an expert in his deceptive claims that he performed openly and publicly, as all sorcerers do.

13:14 And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth — Those who dwell on the earth (in contrast to the saints of God) seem to thrive on delusion. It is strange but true that the vast majority of people will turn away their ears from hearing confirmed truth (that which is clearly revealed in the Scriptures and thus as certain as God Himself) and eagerly accept the false claims of false teachers promoting false causes. The purpose of real miracles was to confirm the word of truth, and their range and nature were such that all who sincerely study them must exclaim, "No man can do such things without the direct help of God most high." But the delusions which the beast is allowed to do are limited in scope and are designed to deceive — that is, they are lying wonders craftily performed so that men who are willing to be deceived may believe a lie and thus be damned (2 Thes. 2:9-11). **by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast;** — See notes on v. 13. **saying to them that dwell on the earth,** — Those deceived by the false miracles of the second beast. **that they should make an image to the beast,** — He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast (NIV). Not a literal *imagae* (such as was seen by Nebuchadnezzar in his dream, Dn. 2, or idol gods, or the images venerated by Catholicism) but something to represent the beast. Some who might not worship the beast directly could be seduced to worship it indirectly through its image while ignoring the fact that it represented the beast and to worship it was to worship the beast. If we are correct in concluding that the beast is a symbol of unchristian and persecuting civil powers, such as the Roman empire, and if the second beast represents the spirit of false religions, it seems but natural that the image be seen as the form of organization or structure common to both. Thus the earth beast utilizes a system which claims spiritual dominion over the will of man and the right to dictate his actions (vv. 15-16). **which had the wound by a sword, and did live.** — See notes on v. 3. This may indicate that the image gave new life to the beast which had been delivered a near fatal blow by the success of Christianity.

13:15 And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, — The earth beast was given power to make animate (make to live, breath, and act) the organizational structure assumed by his false religion. Or to say it another way, by his power the image lived and thrived. **that the image of the beast should both speak,** — Promote the cause of the beast by the means of speech. This probably indicates the method of making converts by persuasion (which was and is the only method used by true Christianity). But the image of the beast used a second method which is in direct conflict with the spirit of Christ: **and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.** — This signifies "conversion" by coercion. All were given a choice: either worship the beast and his image or be put to death. "Death" here may be either physical or "spiritual" (or both) because

both methods have been used by arrogant and self-conceited religions all down through the centuries, the former being murder or martyrdom and the latter excommunication with the threat that no salvation could be had without the consent of the institution. Thus it seems certain that the earth beast and the image represent all religious doctrines and organizations which use their claims of universal power to coerce patriotism to and worship of governing powers (both civil and religious) set up as enemies of Christ and His cause. When properly used, both civil and religious systems are a divine blessing to man — both were given by God for man's good, but when they are abused, and their abuse is represented in this chapter by the two beasts, they become man's worst enemy because they lead him away from the God who made him. Or as Roberson puts it, "The light has become darkness, and how great is the darkness!" In their abuse, that which was designed to serve man is so woefully distorted that man becomes its slave. This abuse, this sin of grave magnitude, is what is depicted here.

13:16 **And he causeth all,** — He also forced everyone (NIV). That is, all except the saints of God. One having the seal (mark) of God (7:3) cannot at the same time carry the mark of the beast. **both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond,** — Everyone regardless of his political, financial, or social status. This indicates the universal nature of the power claimed by the beast and his image. For this and other reasons I have concluded that they represent the arrogant claims of antichristian and persecuting institutions, both civil and religious. **to receive a mark** — Characteristics which identify those who worship the beast and his image. The fact should be recalled here that we are dealing with a symbolic vision, not a preview of literal occurrences in history. Forgetting this, many have concluded that there will come a time (if it has not already been) when every person will be literally marked (branded) either in his right hand or on the forehead. But this cannot be the symbolic significance here: a symbol simply cannot signify itself. I believe, as stated above, that the mark is a symbol of the characteristics which identify those who have embraced the wicked antichristian spirit of the beast and are therefore his avowed servants and thus the avowed enemies of Christ. The mark itself, according to v. 17 (NIV), may be either the name or the number of the beast. But since the number adds up to the name (v. 18), we may safely conclude that the mark identifies one with the name (or the authority) of the beast. And since the beast and his image are the evil spirit of opposition to Christ and His cause, the all-out effort, through both civil and religious institutions, to bring all under the dominion of Satan, we can see that the mark is having that spirit of evil which identifies one with the aims and purposes of the beast. As v. 17 shows, if one is not identified as a beast worshiper (if he is not devoted to the wicked destruction of saving truth and all who embrace it), he is cut off from all commerce and thus deprived of all means of livelihood. We have encountered this concept before in the trade guilds of Thyatira, where to work at a trade one had to be in the guild, but to be in the guild identified one as

an idol worshiper (see notes on 2:18, 20). We also saw that the seal (or mark) of God identified one as a Christian (see notes on 7:3). So it is here: the mark is not a literal brand stamped into the hand or forehead, but a symbol of the means by which people are identified as servants of the beast and his image. Just as the seal of God (being a Christian in attitude and conduct) identifies God's people, the mark of the beast (the antichristian spirit) identifies the people of Satan. On a practical level, every person is either in the kingdom of darkness or the kingdom of light, the kingdom of God's dear Son (Col. 1:13), and each is marked with the characteristics of the kingdom of which he is a citizen. Thus if one does not have the seal of God, if he is not God's peculiar possession, he must be identified with Satan and the wicked world, and, in the final analysis, this is what the mark of the beast is (although in this vision it is specifically concerned with the characteristics which identify one with the evil and oppressive institutions claiming universal dominion over all men). And this brings us to another strange fact: many are terrified at the very thought of someday being branded with the mark of the beast, but, at the very same time, they bear in their bodies, minds, and character the undeniable evidence that they are the servants of sin and thus marked for eternal ruin. They are thus terrified at the thought of being the very thing they are willfully permitting themselves to be, namely, a sinner separated from and in opposition to God and His holy word. **in their right hand**, — This may indicate all their work or all physical activities. That is, the spirit of wickedness is in every thing they do. **or in their foreheads**: — Evil is branded into all their mental or intellectual pursuits. Take for example the attitude of scientists and intellectuals pertaining to the godless and groundless theory of evolution. The theory stands in direct conflict with every known law of production (e.g., life comes only from life, every seed produces after its kind). Furthermore not one solid piece of evidence can be found that even remotely indicates that higher life (humans) is the results of innumerable moves upward from lower life (which, if true, some time in the past something other than human gave birth to human, a thing that is contrary to all known facts of reproduction). But more than this: evolution must be believed contrary to many established facts of science. For example, to believe it one must believe that life had its origin by spontaneous generation. Yet no reputable scientist today believes in the possibility of spontaneous generation. But in the face of all these facts antichristian intellectuals arrogantly claim that one would have to be an absolute ignoramus to believe in divine creation. With them evolution permeates every aspect of their intellectualism and thus marks them as rejectors of God as man's creator. Thus it seems to me that hand and head here means that the mark will permeate both the physical and mental activities of those who worship the beast — that is, the spirit of wickedness will be at the heart of both their work and their intellectual pursuits.

13:17 **And that no man might buy or sell**, — Without the mark, none could engage in commercial trade (see notes on v. 16) and would therefore be

cut off from all ordinary means of livelihood. This undoubtedly signifies the unholy tactics of the earth beast to force all men into the worship of the sea beast, which is ultimately the service of Satan. He thus seeks to reduce all to such dire economical need that they will be forced either to worship the beast or die of starvation. This could hardly mean anything but that both beasts taken together claim absolute control over every aspect of man's life, both civil and religious. They seek to obliterate every fragment of one's duty to God and bind him totally to the wicked institutions of Satan. **save he that had the mark,** — Unless he bears the mark (Williams) or has the characteristics which identify him with the beast and his image (see notes on v. 16). **or the name of the beast,** — Even the name of the beast (ASV). That is, the mark is the name. This indicates that one who is branded with the mark is living under or acting by the authority of the beast. **or the number of his name.** — That is, the number stands for or corresponds to his name. While his name is not given, if my exegesis is correct, his name signifies his authority and the number which corresponds to his name (authority) is the equivalent of his name. My own judgment is that the name and number are symbolic means of expressing the extreme wickedness of the antichristian institutions represented by the two beasts.

13:18 Here is wisdom. — This calls for wisdom (NIV). That is, to correctly decipher the number of the beast, which when decoded is the same as his name (v. 17), will require much study and great wisdom. No one who has tried to find the solution will be foolish enough to deny this. **Let him that hath understanding** — Let the discerning (Moffett) or everyone of intelligence (Good-speed). This necessarily implies that while the road to the solution is difficult it is not impossible. **count the number of the beast:** — Arrive at his name (or nature) by a calculation of the number. That is, by calculating the number one can arrive at the identity of the beast. **for it is the number of a man;** — For it is man's number (NIV). The millions of hours that have been spent and the vast amount of mental energy exerted trying to calculate the number so as to make the converted ciphers spell out the name of some particular man in history should have long ago shocked us into the realization of the folly of this approach and thus shown us beyond the shadow of a doubt that it is not the number of a literal man's name. It is rather the means by which, with the wisdom given by God through contextual study, one can arrive at the identity of the institutions represented by the beast. The number of man should be considered in contrast to deity. It thus signifies that which pertains to man (evil) in contrast to that which pertains to God (holiness). **and his number is Six hundred three score and six.** — His number is 666 (NIV). With the exception of John 3:16, this is without doubt the widest known expression in the Bible. It (or the prospects of receiving it as a mark) has stricken terror to the hearts of millions. Every teacher of the Christian religion has been asked time and again to explain the mark or give the significance of the number or to identify the name it represents. Many have been the efforts, ingenious the methods, and tedious the tasks to unravel its mystery and to identify it by attaching it

to some specific individual or historical event. By practicing (and sometimes juggling) the art of cryptography it has been found that the numerical ciphers which add up to 666 can be converted (decoded) into letters spelling out scores of names, all the way from the first century to the present (see Barnes for a partial list of these). A few have a small degree of plausibility (see for example Alexander Campbell's argument in the **Campbell-Purcell Debate**) but most are pure imagination, having no hint of either reason or Scripture in them. If my view is correct (and of course I think it is) the number was not designed to spell out the name of a particular man but rather to identify the beast, which is, if I have concluded rightly, an antichristian spirit expressing itself in secular and civil institutions which claim the right to force the whole world into Satan worship. This the beast does by means of restrictive civil laws and ungodly persecution (the second beast has basically the same end in view except he acts in the religious sphere; thus when the first beast is identified, the second beast is also identified). The mark, the name, and the number are all the same, and they all add up to the characteristics which identify those who worship and serve the beast. With this in view, and with the fact before us that the number is human in contrast to the divine, it seems all but certain (at least to my mind) that the number 666 reveals the very nature of the beast. Cox states the matter well: "Among the Jews there was a doom upon the number 6, even when it stood alone: for it fell hopelessly short of the sacred number 7. The number 6, therefore, is the world's number. The number 666 represents worldliness at its zenith, 'expressing all that it is possible for human wisdom and power, when directed by an evil spirit, to achieve.' " As an opposite, the threefold repetition of holy (Is. 6:3) is designed to intensify the emphasis and show holiness in its superlative degree — that is, absolute holiness. So it is here: if 6 means worldliness or evil, then its threefold repetition means worldliness or evil in its ultimate form. Thus 666 is equivalent to saying evil, evil, evil [evil which has reached its final human degree]. If this is the case, then the number 666 is symbolic and therefore identifies the beast and his worship as man's ultimate evil — the deepest degradation to which fallen man can descend. Essentially it is to accept and embrace that arrogant claim of universal dominion over the hearts and lives of all men. It is thus to replace the rightful rule of God with the arrogated rule of Satan. It is to replace the authority of God with the devil's authority. In short, it is the dethroning of God by man (under the control of Satan) exalting himself above God and thus by his actions proclaiming himself as God (cf. 2 Thes. 2:4). Only God, the divine Creator, has authority over man, and the ultimate evil, authored by Satan and practiced by evil men, is for man to build an institution and claim for it the right of absolute devotion from all. But this is precisely what men have done and continue to do (e.g., atheistic communism) and this is the evil here symbolized by the number 666. It is antichristian in nature and demands absolute control over the lives, actions, and faith of all men.

REVELATION 14

Chapter 14, like chapters 7 and 10 and 11, is consolatory in nature, designed to reveal to suffering saints the certainty of the victory that awaits them if they remain faithful unto death. The dark and gloomy period that has just passed over them in which the dragon, the sea beast, and the earth beast have exerted great force to bring all the world under their dominion (chapters 12 and 13) now gives way to the breaking of a new dawn wherein the Lamb stands on Mount Zion with the whole company of the redeemed in triumphant victory. The chapter as a whole depicts two things: (1) The certain defeat of the beast and all those who have received his mark. (2) Absolute assurance to those who have the seal of God that they will overcome — they will be the final victors. The 144,000 are seen with the Lamb on Mount Zion (v. 1) while their enemies are thrust into the winepress of the wrath of God (vv. 19-20). This part of the vision, therefore, carries us to the consummation of the ages, to a glorious end for the saints but to a terrible judgment for the wicked. As Richardson says, "This whole section is a symbolic representation of the final judgment when Christ comes to receive and reward His own, to destroy at last all His enemies; and to reign forever over a redeemed people."

THE LAMB AND HIS REDEEMED

14:1-5 And I looked, and lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God.

14:1 **And I looked, and lo,** — And I saw, and behold (ASV). A further aspect of the vision suddenly breaks into view. **a Lamb** — See notes on 5:6. **stood on the mount Sion,** — Heaven, the stronghold of the Lamb and the final site of spiritual Jerusalem. Zion seems to have first meant one of the hills on which Jerusalem was built, but by association it came to mean Jerusalem, the city itself (Is. 2:3; 40:9). It was sacred to the heart of every Jew because it stood at the very center of his religion. Prophetically it was the church or

spiritual Jerusalem (Is. 28:16), the holy hill of God (Ps. 2:6), the place where the ransomed of the Lord would be gathered (Is. 35:10). Here it signifies the final abode of the victorious saints. **and with him an hundred forty and four thousand**, — A complete number signifying the whole company of the saved (see notes on 7:4). **having his Father's name** — Having his name, and the name of his Father (ASV). That is, the means by which they were identified with both the Father and the Son. **written in their foreheads**. — See notes on 7:3. There all had not yet been sealed but when they were (7:4) their number totaled 144,000, the completed number of the saved; here the same number represents the same group, the total number of those redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.

14:2 **And I heard a voice from heaven** — From the Mount Zion of v. 1. The voice was rhythmic (as many waters), voluminous (as great thunder), and melodious (as harpers harping on their harps). This leads me to the conclusion that the voice is that of the vast concourse of the redeemed singing praise to their redeemer (v. 3) — praise that is rhythmic, voluminous, and melodious. **as the voice of many waters**, — In 1:15 the emphasis is on the sound of the water, hence volume. But here the natural flow of water seems to be what John has in mind, hence rhythm. **and as the voice of a great thunder**: — Signifying volume, the voice of all the saints of all the ages joined together to sing their Redeemer's praise. **and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps**: — And the voice which I heard was as the voice of harpers harping with their harps (ASV). That is, the voice was musical (or melodious) in nature. It was not water, thunder, or harps which John heard, but the voice sounded as water, as thunder, and as harpists playing on their harps. All three statements have the **as** before them in the original (as the ASV and most other translations render them) and those who see in the last one the redeemed making music on literal instruments in spiritual Zion (heaven) see more in it that John saw, heard, or recorded (see notes on 5:8).

14:3 **And they sung** — They were singing (Williams). The voice heard by John, which had the sound of many waters, great thunder, and harpers harping, was the vast concourse of the redeemed singing — singing the praise of Him who had redeemed them from the earth or saved them from the power of the beast and from the fate which awaits all those who received his mark. **as it were a new song** — The song of salvation eternally won. In 5:9 the new song is in praise of the price of redemption which had been paid by the slaughtered Lamb; here it is that of salvation gained by faithful endurance to the end. The song is new because it could not have been sung until the final victory had been won (see notes on 5:9). **before the throne**, — The throne of God (see notes on 4:2). **and before the four beasts**, — See notes on 4:6. **and the elders**: — See notes on 4:4. **and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand**, — None but the redeemed had won the victory and none but the victorious could sing the song of victory — none but the saved could sing of the blessings of salvation. How could one sing of sal-

vation from sin if he is still in his sins — if he has never been saved from sin? How could one sing the praise of the Redeemer if he has no appreciation of redemption? How could one sing the song of victory if he had never fought in the battle? How could one sing the song of triumph if he had not struggled in the conquest? Only the redeemed can sing of the finished work of redemption, **which were redeemed from the earth.** — Purchased or ransomed from the sins of the world. That is, they had been bought with the price of the Redeemer's blood (1 Cor. 6:19-20; Acts 20:28).

14:4-5 **These are they** — These are the men (Williams). This introduces a sixfold description of the 144,000 (v. 1) those redeemed from the earth (v. 3). (1) **which were not defiled with women;** — This must be taken figuratively, for in no sense is sexual relations in marriage a defilement (Heb. 13:5), and surely no one would conclude that all the redeemed from the earth consisted only of unmarried male virgins. This, therefore, obviously means that they were not guilty of spiritual adultery (Jer. 3:1-11). They had been faithful to the Lord, not defiling themselves with the sins of the world (1 Jn. 2:15-17), especially that of idolatry and the worship of the beast. **for they are virgins.** — They were the promised bride of Christ (cf. 21:9) and had kept themselves pure for Him alone. That is, they were true to His cause and the vows made to Him when they became Christians. They had not shared their devotions for Him with another (cf. 2 Cor. 11:2 where essentially the same thought is presented). (2) **These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.** — They followed Him by complete submission to His will as revealed in His word (Mt. 7:21; 16:24; Jn. 10:27-28; Heb. 5:8-9; 1 Jn. 2:3-5), and by making Him their example in all things (1 Pt. 2:21). (3) **These were redeemed from among men,** — Redeemed from sin by the blood of the Lamb (see notes on 5:9). (4) **being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.** — The firstfruit, while it also had the significance of being the first of that which was to follow (see notes on 1 Cor. 15:20), was devoted to God while the remainder was for man (Ex. 23:19; 34:26; Lv. 2:12; 23:9-21; Nm. 15:17-21; Dt. 26:1-11). Hence the figure here is that all Christians, all the redeemed, belong to the Lord (Jas. 1:18). (5) **And in their mouth was found no guile;** — And in their mouth was found no lie (ASV). That is, they were sincere and truthful (cf. Ps. 15:1-2). All liars will find themselves in a place other than heaven (21:8; 22:15). (6) **for they are without fault** — They are blameless (NIV) or without blemish (ASV). The animals of OT sacrifice were to be without blemish (Ex. 12:5; 29:1; Lv. 1:3; Dt. 17:1). This was typical of the perfection of Christ as our sacrifice for sin (1 Pt. 1:19; Heb. 9:14). In keeping with this concept, Christians are to be without spot, wrinkle, or blemish (Eph. 5:27; Phil. 2:15) both now and when their salvation is finished. **before the throne of God.** — Omitted by the ASV and others for lack of manuscript support.

THE EVERLASTING GOSPEL

14:6-7 And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach

unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.

14:6 And I saw another angel — Who this angel is contrasted with is not clear, but the contrast is not essential to the point anyway. He is a heavenly messenger, probably symbolizing all proclaimers of the saving truth of the gospel of Christ. **fly in the midst of heaven**, — Flying in mid heaven (ASV). His favored position enabled him to be seen and heard by all. **having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth**, — And he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on earth (NIV). Here we must choose between two interpretations: (1) The gospel the angel has to proclaim is the gospel of Christ, the power of God to save (Rom. 1:16), which was revealed by the inspired apostles and recorded in the NT. (2) It is the single aspect of the gospel which is to be proclaimed near the end, namely, that of the coming judgment as announced by the angel in v. 7. I firmly believe that it is the former. This, it seems to me, is necessitated by the very nature of the gospel. It was to be preached to all nations (Mt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15-16), had as its fundamental center the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:1-4), was the power of God to save (Rom. 1:16), no other could be proclaimed without the curse of heaven (Gal. 1:6-9), nothing could be added to it or diminished from it (22:18-19), and it was complete (2 Tm. 3:16-17) and final (Jude 3). The gospel is man's last and only hope of salvation. If he rejects it and spurns its divine offer of grace and mercy, there is nothing left for him but the sure judgment of God. **and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people**, — That is, the angel had the gospel that was to be preached to the whole world (Mk. 16:15).

14:7 Saying with a loud voice, — His shout was loud enough to be heard to the ends of the earth. His message is twofold: (1) Fear God because the time of His judgment has come. (2) Worship God because He is the Creator of all things. (1) Fear God, — Reverence God by recognizing His person, His power, and His authority. God is the Creator; man is the creature. The recognition of this fact is imperative for a proper attitude toward God (see notes on Rom. 3:18). **and give glory to him**; — One glorifies God by paying Him due honor and respect, by acknowledging Him as Creator and Sustainer of all things, the one and only true God, and by filling His creative purpose for man by doing His will in every aspect of life (see notes on 1 Cor. 10:31). **for the hour of his judgment is come**: — The hour when all men will be brought before His judgment seat to give an account of their life and conduct, of every word and attitude, especially as they relate to the Creator/creature relationship (20:11-15; Mt. 25:31-46; Acts 17:31). This is a judgment all the impenitent must face — one for which every life should be lived in view of escaping (cf. Mt. 25:1-13). It should further be observed that the preaching of the gospel not only extends God's gracious and merciful offer of salvation to all who are willing to accept it by faith (Rom. 5:1) and obedience (Heb. 5:8-9), it also warns of certain judgment

upon all who refuse it as the divine means of escaping from sin and its penalty (cf. Rom. 1:16-18). (2) **and worship him** — See notes on 4:10. **that made** — Originated or brought into being (see notes on 4:11). Nothing is here by chance. Creation is the vast design of a wise architect, the handiwork of a master craftsman, the construction of a powerful builder. God first purposed in all in His own infinite mind and then brought it into being by His omnipotent power (Gn. 1:1; Is. 43:7; Heb. 1:1-4). No folly is worse in man than that of denying creation and thus denying the Creator. Can a house deny its builder? Can a book deny its author? Can a child deny its parents? Yet foolish man denies his Maker! **heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.** — A fourfold division of creation, heaven, earth, salt water, and fresh water.

THE FALL OF BABYLON

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

14:8 **And there followed another angel, saying,** — A second angel announces the fall of that immoral, corrupt, and wicked spirit symbolized by Babylon, "That great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth" (17:18). **Babylon** — "The great whore" (17:1) and "The mother of harlots and abominations of the earth" (17:5). Babylon was the center and political capital of the Mesopotamian empire, and was known for its moral corruption and oppressiveness and for taking into captivity the ancient people of God. It thus became the symbol of all that was hateful, foul, and corrupt. No doubt it was extremely good news to the captives to read Isaiah's announcement that Babylon would fall (Is. 21:9). By the time John wrote, she who had led into captivity had long since herself gone into captivity (13:10). Babylon, therefore, no longer existed, except in memory and in symbol. It should thus come as no surprise to find here the evil spirit of moral corruption that so often hold the people of God in captivity is symbolized by the name Babylon. This cruel and wicked city, as with the dragon, the sea beast, and the land beast, represents another form of opposition to truth and right — it is another battlefield upon which the saints must confront a powerful enemy. It, in the final analysis, is the spirit of ungodliness which lures men away from the purity of Lord's way to live for and fulfill the lust of the flesh, **is fallen, is fallen, that great city,** — This looks to the final end when the judgment of God is passed upon wickedness. Evil is overthrown. The saints are again victorious. **because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.** — Which made all nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries (NIV). This nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries (NIV). This is difficult to interpret. I am inclined to follow the NIV and make it mean her lure of all nations with her wine glass of wrath (the excitement of her passionate sins) and the intoxication which follows the practice of her corrupt immoralities (cf. Jer. 51:7). But there is good evidence to the effect that it means both the enticement of

the wine and the judgment (wrath) which follows the indulgence of submitting to its lure. Alford says, "Two things are mingled: (1) the wine of her fornication, of which all nations have drunk, ch. xvii. 2; and (2) the wine of the wrath of God which he shall give her to drink, v. 10, and ch. xvi. 19. The latter is the retribution for the former: the former turns into the latter: they are treated as one and the same."

JUDGMENT UPON THE BEAST AND HIS WORSHIPERS

14:9-11 And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out with mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.

14:9 **And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice,** — A third angel proclaims his message. It is a declaration of doom upon the beast and his image and all who worship them. It is designed to show the final end of all those who are the enemies of righteousness. **If any man worship the beast and his image,** — See notes on 13:4, 15. **and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand,** — See notes on 13:16. In 13:17 we saw the price those had to pay in this life who refused to worship the beast or receive his mark (they could neither buy nor sell); now (in vv. 10-11) we are to see the terrible price to be paid in eternity by those who did (they would drink from the cup of God's undiluted indignation).

14:10 **The same** — The one who worships the beast and receives his mark (v. 9). **shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God,** — Replacing the figure, this means that he will suffer the vengeance of eternal destruction, shut out from the presence of the Lord (2 Thes. 1:7-9). **which is poured out without mixture** — That has been mixed undiluted (BV). The BV brings us a little closer to the original, which is, "having been mixed unmixed." Mounce says, "The adjective ('unmixed') refers to the practice of diluting the wine with water. When taken in its literal sense, the clause says that the wrath of God is mixed (so as to increase its strength) unmixed (not diluted with water)." Hence the judgment of God, which had been restrained for ages while gospel proclaimers urged sinful men to repent (cf. v. 7; 2 Pt. 3:9), will now be administered in its full strength and to its full measure, unmingled with grace and mercy. When seen in its full force, it is doubtful if a more terrifying statement than this appears in all the Bible. **into the cup of his indignation;** — His undiluted wrath is blended with His anger. **and he shall be tormented** — Suffer the punishment of an endless hell. Since he has no rest day or night (v. 11), this necessarily implies a conscious existence: for there can be no punishment without consciousness. **with fire and brimstone** — Fire and sulfur (Beck) or burning

sulfur (NIV). This describes the method of the punishment. And while it is most likely that fire and brimstone are symbolic expressions depicting the awful and terrible fate of the enemies of righteousness, no one should take consolation in the fact that the fire of hell is figurative. Figurative language is used only when the literal is less forceful or when it breaks down in the effort to communicate the proper concept. Thus if fire and brimstone are figurative, the fearful and final reality of hell is beyond the power of literal language to describe. This means that it is worse, not better, than fire and brimstone. Consider other Biblical statements which describe the state or condition of the lost: it is eternal punishment (Mt. 25:46); punishment worse than death (Heb. 10:26-31; Mt. 10:28); worse than being maimed for life (Mt. 18:7-9; Mk. 9:43-49); existence without hope (Lk. 16:19-31); outer darkness (Mt. 8:12; 22:13); wailing and gnashing of teeth (Mt. 13:42, 50); the second death (20:11-15); and, perhaps worst of all, separation from God (2 Thes. 1:7-9) — separation from grace, mercy, and hope, from the pure and holy and right, **in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb**: — This is admittedly a difficult expression because it seems incredible to us for the wicked to be punished in the presence of Christ and the angels or for them to keep the punishment constantly before their eyes. It thus seems to me that the design here is to inform us that by their presence they concurred with the judgment which is poured out upon them without mixture. Hinds thinks that the point "need not be pressed to signify anything more than that they were present when the wicked are sent away to their punishment." Beckwith could be right in suggesting that "the most poignant factor in the pain of the wicked would be the sight of the triumph of the Lamb, against whom as worshipers of the Beast they had made war." While I am not fully satisfied with either point (mine, Hinds', or Beckwith's), they are the best I have to offer.

14:11 **And the smoke of their torment** — The smoke connected with their torment, that is, the smoke from the source (the fire and brimstone) of their punishment (cf. Gn. 19:28). **ascendeth up for ever and ever**: — Showing the eternal duration of the punishment. The same expression is used in 4:8 in relation to the never-ceasing praise of God rendered by the four living creatures. **and they have no rest day nor night**, — No relief from or cessation of the punishment. There can be no serious question but that the third angel's proclamation necessarily implies endless punishment as the fate of the wicked. This is a horrible thing for a sensitive being to contemplate, but contemplate it we must if we are true to the word of God. While the modern mind may be repulsed by it, and while the religious liberal may declare it "sub-Christian" and totally out of harmony with the compassionate spirit of Christ, there is no escape from it for those who love and accept the truth as it is revealed in the divine Scriptures. If we believe the Bible, it simply cannot be explained away nor even softened by euphemistic redefinition, regardless of how hard we may try or how much we may resist it or try to wish it were not so. It stands as an impregnable part of God's immutable word. But there is one consolation: it is

not the inevitable fate of any man. Everyone has been given an invitation from heaven to escape its horrors. God has graciously provided the way of salvation through the applied blood of His Son. We may all accept His offer and be saved or we may reject it and be lost. The choice is ours. But those who reject the Lamb and worship the beast have no alternative but to drink the dregs of this foul and horrible cup. **who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.** — Repeated from v. 9.

REST FOR THE RIGHTEOUS

14:12-13 Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.

14:12 **Here is the patience of the saints:** — Here is encouragement to patient endurance for the saints (see notes on 13:10). When the final and terrifying state of those who surrender to the beast (vv. 9-11) is contrasted to the rest which awaits the saints (v. 14), the people of God have a powerful motive to patiently endure all the trials of life, to be steadfast in battle until the time they shall stand victoriously with the Lamb on Mount Zion. **here are they that keep the commandments of God** — Those who keep the commandments of God (RSV). As the RSV indicates this statement is in apposition to saints. The saints are those who keep the commandments of God **and the faith of Jesus.** — That is, the faith in Jesus, the faith of which Christ is the object.

14:13 **And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me,** — See notes on 12:10. While the voice is not identified, it nonetheless carries the weight of divine authority, as is seen in the command given to **Write,** — Cf. notes on 1:11. **Blessed** — See notes on 1:3. The remainder of the v. gives three fundamental reasons why the dead are blessed: (1) they die in the Lord; (2) they rest from their labor; (3) their works accompany them. **are the dead** — Those whose physical lives have ended, either by natural causes or by martyrdom. They are described as blessed or happy. What a startling concept: the happy dead! But it is not just the dead: it is limited to those **which die in the Lord** — To be "in the Lord" means to be in spiritual union with Christ. Or to say it another way, it means to be in right (covenant) relationship with Him. Only those who are in Christ, who have established their union with him in Scriptural baptism (Rom. 6:3-4; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27), can die in Him. And only those who die in Him are among the blessed dead. **from henceforth:** — From now on (NIV). While commentators have found this an exceedingly troublesome expression, I think its obvious import is that any who die in the Lord from the time John wrote until all the saints gather with the Lamb on Mount Zion would be blessed. But if so, what about Christians who had died before that time? Of course they too were blessed, but they were already and consequently beyond the need of the kind of encouragement John is here giv-

ing. He was addressing Christians who were still in the struggle with the forces of evil to encourage them to be faithful until the end. When we quote this passage today and say, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth" (looking to the future), we by no means eliminate those from the blessing who are already dead. Neither did John. **Yea, saith the Spirit,** — The HS, through whom all revelation has been revealed and delivered. **that they may rest from their labours;** — Let them rest from their toils (Williams). The griefs, toils, and labors of this life, especially those imposed upon them because they believed and practiced the truth (cf. 13:17). They would have rest from such painful experiences as persecution and martyrdom. This certainly does not mean the cessation of all constructive activity. Unless our makeup then is entirely different from now, we could not be content with doing nothing. We were made to work (Gn. 1:28; 2:15; 3:19). This then is the rest from wearisome opposition and persecution; the rest of having achieved the goal; the rest of having run the race and crossed the finish line; the rest of having fought the battle and won the victory. It will be rest in the superlative degree, the very best God has to offer to His people. **and their works do follow them.** — For their works follow with them (ASV). This means righteous works, that of doing the will of God. That is, service to God will not cease at death. While it is true (as the KJV leads us to conclude) that God knows the works of His people (2:2, 9, 13, 19; 3:1, 8, 15) and He does not forget them, not even a cup of water given in the name of Christ (Mt. 10:42) — all will be faithfully rewarded and their consequence continued, this does not seem to be the point here. As the ASV renders it, the undesirable toils will be left behind but their good works (services rendered to God) will accompany them to their home beyond the grave. Thus when one dies in the Lord, his struggles will be over but his service to God will continue.

INGATHERING OF THE RIGHTEOUS

14:14-16 And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped.

14:14 **And I looked, and behold a white cloud,** — White signifies purity and holiness (see notes on 1:14) and is here symbolic of the unadulterated glory of Christ (cf. Mt. 25:31). The second coming has been from the very beginning associated with clouds (1:7; Acts 1:9-11; 2 Thes. 4:17). **and upon the cloud one sat** — And on the cloud I saw one sitting (ASV). He was seated on the cloud as judge (cf. Is. 19:1; Mt. 26:64). Plummer says, "He who, as Man, redeemed the world, comes as Man to judge the world." It is interesting to note that the same division is made here as in Mt. 25:31-46: the vision depicts the judgment (rewarding) of the righteous in vv. 14-16 and the judgment (punishment) of the wicked in vv. 17-20. **like unto the Son of man,** — See notes

on 1:13, where the same expression obviously means Christ. It was the title He most often applied to Himself (e.g., Mt. 8:20; 11:19) and there is no question but that it was meant to identify Him as the Messiah (e.g., Mt. 12:8, 32, 40; 13:41; Jn. 3:13). I think the same is true here. **having on his head a golden crown**, — The crown of victory. This further identifies Him as Christ — or if symbolic, representing Christ. **and in his hand a sharp sickle**. — The instrument of harvest and here indicates the means by which Christ will gather the righteous up from the earth (cf. 2 Thes. 4:14-17).

14:15 **And another angel** — Not another in comparison to Him who is seated on the cloud, but in addition to the three mentioned in vv. 6-9. **came out of the temple**, — Came out from the presence of God, who dwells in the heavenly temple (see notes on 7:15). **crying with a loud voice** — Signifying, I think, the voice of God. He is God's messenger, speaking not for himself but for God. This removes the difficulty many commentators see in the angel giving Christ the following command. **to him that sat on the cloud**, — Christ (v. 14). **Thrust in thy sickle, and reap**: — Gather the ripe grain (the faithful saints) from the earth. The remainder of the v. gives two reasons for this command: (1) The time has come and (2) the harvest is ripe. **the the time is come for thee to reap**; — That is, the time of the end, the time of the consummation of the Christian system, when all the saints will be rewarded for their faithful service. The time of the second coming, which has never before been revealed (Mt. 24:36; Mk. 13:32). **for the harvest of the earth is ripe**. — Is very ripe (Beck), or, as Alford says, "Perfectly ripe" (cf. Jn. 4:35), so that it must be harvested without delay. Harvesting is a figure that has often been used by NT writers to indicate the gathering of the saints into the kingdom, both in its present and future state (Mt. 9:37-38; 13:39; Lk. 10:2; Jn. 4:35-38).

14:16 The command to reap the ripe grain of the earth was given (v. 15). **And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth**; — The command was obeyed — the Lord of harvest (Mt. 9:38) swung His sickle (His blade of harvest) into action. **and the earth was reaped**. — The grain (the righteous) was gathered in. For them the battle is over; the victory has been won; and the war-worn soldiers of the cross now have peace, glory, and eternal salvation.

WRATH AGAINST THE WICKED

And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe. And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs.

14:17 **And another angel** — The fifth to appear in this chapter. **came out of the temple which is in heaven**, — Indicating that he is a messenger of God (see notes on v. 15). **he also having a sharp sickle**. — With his sickle

he was to reap the vintage and cast the fruit into the winepress of God's wrath (v. 19) — that is, he was to gather the wicked of the earth and deliver them to their eternal destiny (cf. Mt. 13:25-30), the place prepared for the devil and his angels (Mt. 25:41).

14:18 And another angel — The sixth of this chapter. **came out from the altar**, — The golden altar which was before the throne of God (see notes on 8:3; 9:13). **which had power over fire**; — Probably meaning that he had charge of the fire of the altar, but may signify the fire of judgment (8:5). **and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle**, — See v. 15. **saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle**, — Cf. v. 15. **and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth**; — That is, reap the ripe clusters of grapes (cf. Is. 6:23; Jl. 3:13), or gather the wicked for the fearful judgment which awaits them. **for her grapes are fully ripe**. — Sin has reached its full limits and was therefore ripe for the judgment of God.

14:19 And the angel — The fifth angel (v. 17). **thrust in his sickle into the earth**, — He swung his sickle into action. **and gathered the vine of the earth**, — He gathered the wicked in order to bring them to the final judgment. **and cast it** — The fruit, which symbolizes the wicked. **into the great winepress of the wrath of God**. — He delivers them to the judgment due their unrighteous deeds. The wrath of God here depicts His indignation against sin in the ultimate administration of its penalty. God made man in His own image and likeness (Gn. 1:26-28). Whatever else this may mean, it includes the fact that man is a free moral agent and is thus accountable to God for his actions. God has given man just and humane laws which are designed for his own benefit, pleasure, and eternal goods, laws that when obeyed bring innumerable blessings but when disobeyed result in hurt and ruin here and eternal damnation in the world to come. Man, therefore, has a choice: he can obey God and be blessed, or he can disobey Him and be cursed. But from the very beginning man has rebelled against God as his ruler and refused to honor His laws. Such rebellion has always resulted in separation (Is. 59:1-2), which means that man is lost, lost eternally. But God in His infinite love, grace, and mercy gave a plan, through the death of His only Son on the cross, by which He paid the penalty of man's sin, whereby all men can be saved and thus escape His wrath. But again, the majority have rejected that plan and have even persecuted those who have accepted it. This is the ultimate insult to God, the Creator, and the ultimate degradation of man. What is depicted here and in v. 20 is the severe judgment that awaits those who so insult God and degrade themselves — degrade themselves to the lowest limits of sin by rejecting the divine plan to save.

14:20 And the winepress was trodden — They were trampled in the winepress (NIV). The wicked were brought to the judgment, symbolized here by the crushing of the grapes. **without the city**, — The place of their punishment was outside of or away from the heavenly city, the new Jerusalem (21:2) — that is, they were separated from God and His people (cf. Heb. 13:11-12; 2 Thes. 1:7-9). This proves conclusively that vv. 14-16 pertain to the saints

while vv. 17-20 to the wicked. **and blood came out of the winepress, — This depicts the crushing nature of their judgment. even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs.** — Up to the horses' bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles (NASV). The blood flowed from the winepress until it formed a sea (or river) 200 miles long. This symbolizes the severity, magnitude, completeness, and finality of the judgment. Swete says, "The point to be illustrated is the finality of the blow dealt to the enemies of the Israel of God." No figure imaginable could present to the mind a thing more frightful to be contemplated than is here presented. I conclude with Robertson that this (along with v. 10) "constitutes the most terrible picture of the fate of the ungodly to be found in Scripture." It should be enough to cause everyone to flee from the wrath to come, to seek refuge in the city of God.

REVELATION 15

Chapters 15 and 16 are made up of another vision depicting the victory of the saints and the final terrifying defeat of the wicked. In it the saints are seen praising God in their heavenly home and the seven bowls of wrath are poured out on the beast and all who worship him. The vision as a whole reminds us of the judgments brought on by the sounding of the seven trumpets. The similarity in the two can be seen by the following:

TRUMPETS

1. Fire, blood on earth (8:7).
2. Sea became blood (8:8).
3. Fountains made bitter (8:10).
4. Sun, moon darkened (8:12).
5. The bottomless pit (9:1).
6. Angels of Euphrates loosed (9:14).
7. Mystery of God finished (10:7).

BOWLS

1. Poured out on earth (16:2).
2. Poured out on sea (16:3).
3. Poured on fountains (16:4).
4. Sun scorched men (16:8).
5. Seat of beast (16:10).
6. Poured on Euphrates (16:12).
7. "It is done" (16:17).

But the similarity between the two does not mean they are identical. Richardson observes, "There is, however, a significant difference. The trumpets are warnings and the judgments are incomplete. In the case of the bowls the judgments are intensified and consummated. . . . The trumpets were calls to repentance, the bowls are visitations of wrath in punishment. The trumpet judgments were partial, extending only over a third part; the judgments of the bowls are final and complete." When we keep in mind the rule I have constantly and consistently urged, namely, to see what the picture as a whole is designed to signify, the lesson is usually clear and understandable. The bowls are thus symbols of the judgment of God being poured out on the wicked. When this is seen the correct interpretation of each detail which goes to make up the picture will not be absolutely essential to an understanding of the message. The picture is usually clear; the details are often obscure.

SEVEN ANGELS WITH THE SEVEN LAST PLAGUES

15:1 And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God.

15:1 **And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous,** — Another wonderful and awe-inspiring vision, pictorially presented (see notes on 12:1). **seven angels** — Seven messengers of God whose mission it was to bring upon the wicked the wrath of God's judgment (16:1-21). **having the seven last plagues;** — The seven last punishments inflicted by the judgment of God. This probably means the last series of such events to be presented in the revelation: for there are other judgments recorded (e.g., 18:2). But at any rate it clearly depicts the final separation of good and evil — the righteous are seen in glory (vv. 2-4) while the wicked suffer the full measure of divine justice (16:1-21). **for in them** — The seven last plagues or the pouring out of the seven bowls. **is filled up the wrath of God.** — Because with them God's wrath is completely expressed (Williams). That is, God's wrath reaches its ultimate end, its full measure, or its final goal.

PRAISE OF THE TRIUMPHANT

15:2-4 And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.

15:2 **And I saw as it were a sea of glass** — See notes on 4:6. **mingled with fire:** — Probably meaning that it was intermingled with a fiery red coloring. It thus seems to me that it has no significance beyond its fundamental design to enhance our mental concept of the beauty and splendor of that sweet home of the soul, the place of eternal glory. **and them that had gotten the victory** — Those who had conquered (Williams). They had faithfully fought every battle and had overcome the enemies of God, the Redeemer, and the redeemed and were now before the throne singing the victor's song. **over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name,** — See notes on 13:16-18. **stand on the sea of glass,** — Their place or position in the heavenly city. The sea of glass is said to be before the throne (4:6). The triumphant are on (or by, ASV) the sea and are therefore in the presence of God. John thus saw them in heaven, depicting their final victory. **having the harps of God.** — That is, they were praising God. Those who see in such statements literal instruments of music in heaven have surely either forgotten that this book is written in symbols or else they willfully ignore that fact in order to twist the Scriptures to make them fit what they want them to teach. A symbol does not symbolize itself. Thus harps, if they are symbols, and it is all but certain that they are, must symbolize something other than harps. And it seems obvious to me that they symbolize the praise of God. And, in fact, v. 4 confirms this. John saw them with the harps of God. But what did they do? They sung the song of Moses and of the Lamb. C.S. Lewis, with

incisive insight, makes an excellent statement that should help everyone understand the point here made. He says: "There is no need to be worried by 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 fact that those who are united with God in eternity share His splendour and power and joy. Gold is 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" (**The Best of C.S. Lewis**, pp. 509-510).

15:3 And they sing the song — They were singing the song (Goodspeed). See notes on 14:3. **of Moses the servant of God**, — The song given to Israel by Moses and in which he joined with them in singing of victory after they had passed through the sea and were safe on the other side, the Egyptians having been destroyed in the pursuit of Israel (Ex. 14:31; 15:1-19). Rather than singing the same song that Moses gave, this probably means that the redeemed were singing the song of triumph just as Moses and Israel had done. **and the song of the Lamb**, — Since this is parallel with the song of Moses, it almost certainly means the song given by the Lamb and one in which He joined the vast host of the saved in singing praise to God. The whole scene depicts the saints in praise and adoration of God for their difference from the beast, his image, and his mark (v. 2). **saying**, — The song, which is compiled mostly from OT expressions, follows: **Great and marvellous are thy works**, — Cf. Ps. 40:5; 92:5. God's works in creation, redemption, and deliverance are all marvels beyond the human mind to fully comprehend (Rom. 8:31-39; 11:33-36). But we can perceive enough to know that He is due our eternal praise for them. **Lord God Almighty**; — The omnipotent God, limitless in power (cf. 4:8; Amos 4:13). **just and true are thy ways**, — Cf. Ps. 145:17. Though He is limitless in power, God is just in all He does and all His ways are true to His holiness, whether in the salvation of saints or the condemnation of the wicked. God, by His infinite love, mercy, and grace, provides the means, at the terrible expense of His only Son to die a cruel death on the cross, by which all men can be saved. That death, that shed blood, was the only means whereby He could be just and true and still save the sinner (Rom. 3:26). It is a travesty on justice, an insult against God, and a total rejection of the sacrifice of Christ to say, as William Law once said, "What a paltry logic to say, 'God is righteousness and justice as well as love, and therefore His love cannot help or forgive the sinner till His justice or righteous wrath has satisfaction!' " While I would not use the terminology employed by Law to express the concept he deplors, when

one understands his meaning it is a total rejection of the necessity of the death of Christ in the scheme of human redemption. He says in essence that God's love can set aside His justice and thereby forgive the sinner without the penalty being paid. But nothing could be further from the truth as revealed in the God-inspired Scriptures. God said to man in the very beginning, the day you sin is the day you die. But man sinned then and all responsible men have continued to sin since (Rom. 3:9, 23). Thus the penalty of sin, eternal death, has passed upon everyone (Rom. 6:23). Now the question God was faced with was how He could be true to His word (administer the just penalty of sin) and still save the winner. If He did not keep His word (that is, satisfy the demands of justice), He would not be just and hence not God. If He did keep His word, every sinner must die spiritually or be eternally separated from Him. For God to be just, death had to be paid for sin; but man could not live (have eternal life) if he had to pay the debt himself. Here the love of God stepped in. He sent His only Son into the world to die in man's stead. Now His death met the demands of the violated law. God can now say to the sinner, "If you will accept the death of Christ as your own death, I too will accept it as the full payment of the penalty of sin." In this scheme death is paid for sins, the sinner is free, and God is just (Rom. 3:26) and true. This, however, could not have been possible without the death of Christ. The love of God cannot justly disregard His law, but that love can and did provide the means (at a tremendous cost) whereby the demands of the law were satisfied and the law violator justified. Thus the death of Christ is the answer, the only answer, to the sin problem, and in it God is proven to be just in dealing with sin and true to His word that the penalty of sin is death. **thou King of salnts.** — King of nations (NASV) or King of ages (ASV). While all three statements are true, there is almost no manuscript support for the reading of the KJV. The other two readings are about equally divided, and there is no positive way to determine which was the original reading. But it seems to me that the context (v. 4) and other passages (e.g., Jer. 10:7) favor heavily the NASV. Thus the meaning is that God is the Ruler of all nations. If the ASV is accepted then it means that God is the eternal King.

15:4 **Who shall not fear thee, O Lord,** — Cf. Jer. 10:7. When men recognize God as the Almighty, the King of nations, and His works as great and marvelous (v. 3), who could be so thoughtless, so insubordinate, as not to stand in awe of Him? The fundamental fault of sinful man is undoubtedly a failure to acknowledge God and reverence Him as the Creator and Sustainer of all things, including man himself (cf. notes on 14:7). **and glorify thy name?** — God is glorified by man when man lives as God made him to live. And to live as one was made to live, he must be a Christian, a true follower of Christ, and live in total submission to the will of God as it is revealed in His word. There is no other way by which man can bring glory and honor to the name of God (cf. notes on 14:7). **for thou only art holy:** — God alone is absolutely holy, that is, holiness is an essential part of His nature. **for all nations shall come and worship before thee;** — Cf. Ps. 86:9. The authority of God, His right

to rule, extends over all nations. But more likely the concept here is that of individuals from every nation will worship Him rather than every nation as a whole. In my judgment, it is an expression of the universal scope of Christianity. **for thy judgments are made manifest.** — For Thy righteous acts have been revealed (NASV). Or as Williams states it, "Because the justice of your sentences has now been shown" (cf. 16:7). It will then be fully revealed that the judge of all the earth does right (Gn. 18:25), and only right, both in His mercy (redemption) and in His wrath (condemnation).

THE SEVEN ANGELS RECEIVE THE PLAGUES

15:5-8 And after that I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened: And the seven angels came out of the temple, having the seven plagues clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles. And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power; and no man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled.

15:5 **And after that** — After these things (ASV). After the vision of the redeemed singing the triumphant song (vv. 2-4). **I looked, and, behold,** — The scene now changes from those praising God on the sea of glass to the seven angels emerging from the temple of the tabernacle in heaven. **the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven** — Barclay correctly observes that John "is seeing the picture, not in terms of the Jerusalem temple, but in terms of the ancient tabernacle." The temple that is opened is thus not the Jerusalem temple but that part of the tabernacle of the testimony here called the temple. The OT tabernacle was a tent-like structure, designed to be moved from place to place. It has two basic or fundamental departments, the holy place and the most holy place — in the former the priest served daily; the latter signified the presence of God. It seems clear to me that here the temple means that part of the tabernacle called the most holy place. Hence the very presence of God is signified. **was opened:** — The most holy place was opened to John's vision. He was thus permitted to view the dwelling place of the Most High.

15:6 **And the seven angels came out of the temple,** — The angels introduced in v. 1 now come out from the presence of God (v. 5) to be sent on their mission. **having the seven plagues,** — The seven bowls of wrath which are to be poured out upon the wicked (chapter 16). **clothed in pure and white linen,** — Arrayed with precious stones (ASV). While there is manuscript support for both readings here given, the ASV stands virtually alone in accepting stones rather than linen as the true reading. I thus follow the KJV. The Greek word appears only one other time in the NT (Mt. 12:20), where it is translated flax. It seems to me that the essential part of the picture is the purity and brightness of the garments, whether stones or linen, which undoubtedly signify the holiness and heavenly nature of the angels (cf. Mt. 17:2; 28:2-4; Mk. 16:5; Jn.

20:11-13; Acts 1:10-11). **and having their breasts girded with golden girdles.** — And wore golden sashes around their chests (NIV). See notes on 1:13. The golden belts probably signify their royal mission — that is, they are sent out from the King and are engaged in the King's business.

15:7 **And one of the four beasts** — See notes on 4:6-9. **gave unto the seven angels** — The seven messengers who came out from the presence of God (v. 6). **seven golden vials full of the wrath of God,** — The wrath of God, or the plagues contained in the bowls, were to be poured out one by one upon those who worshipped the beast and his image (cf. v. 2). The bowls of wrath signify the judgment of God against all those who turn away from God and His marvelous scheme to redeem. The fact that there are seven indicates that the wrath is full or complete (see notes on v. 1). Through the gospel God has repeatedly warned the world of impending destruction and urged all to flee from the wrath to come — to take safe refuge in Christ. Millions, however, reject His gracious offer. And because He is just and true (see notes on v. 3) He is left with no alternative: when mercy is refused, justice must be satisfied — when the death of Christ is rejected as the full payment for our sins, we must pay the penalty ourselves. What a horrible thought to contemplate! **who liveth for ever and ever.** — The eternal God, who is from everlasting to everlasting (Ps. 9:1-2; Acts 17:22-31).

15:8 And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power; — God's glory and power filled the temple with smoke (Beck). The cloud of smoke signifies the presence of God — His presence in glory and power — and indicates that He is active in carrying out the judgment that is now to be poured out upon the wicked (cf. Ex. 19:18; 40:34; 1 Kgs. 8:10; Is. 6:4). **and no man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled.** — That is, no one was permitted to enter the presence of God until His administration of judgment was finished. The significance of this seems to be that nothing could now be done to avert the plagues or change the eternal state of the enemies of Christ and His saints. Keep in mind that the temple here is that part of the tabernacle known as the holy of holies (see notes on v. 5). Into this no man entered except the high priest, and that only once a year, on the Day of Atonement. And even then it was necessary for him to make a sin offering for himself as well as for the people — that is, he made an atonement for the sins of the whole nation (Lv. 16). Thus when no one is permitted to enter the temple (the holy of holies), the symbolism is clear: the day of atonement for sins is past. The offer of salvation has been spurned for the last time. The day of pleading for sinners to repent is over. The doom of the wicked is certain. The door of opportunity has been closed and no one can open it (cf. 3:7). As it relates to the beast, his image, and those who received his mark, the atoning power of the precious blood of Christ is no longer available and thus there are no means of appeasing the divine wrath. With fearful finality the day of salvation has ended. Now comes the judgment, certain, terrible, and without the means of mercy.

REVELATION 16

THE SEVEN ANGELS COMMISSIONED

16:1 And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth.

16:1 **And I heard a great voice out of the temple** — Undoubtedly the voice of God, since no one was permitted to enter the temple until the plagues were finished (15:8). The temple here means the part of the tabernacle known as the holy of holies (see notes on 15:5) or the place of God's presence. The mighty voice of God indicates that the judgments to follow are His judgments. **saying to the seven angels**, — The ones who were given the seven bowls of wrath (15:7). **Go your ways**, — Carry out your mission. These words remind us of the Great Commission given by our Lord to His apostles (Mt. 28:19; Mk. 16:15). They were to go into all the world proclaiming the good news of salvation. But that time is now past. The go ye (ASV) here is a charge to empty the bowls of God's wrath upon the earth — upon all those who had rejected the gracious offer made through the gospel. **and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth**. — Administer to the wicked the full and awesome judgments of God (see notes on 15:1).

THE SEVEN VIALS

16:2-21 Most commentators agree that this is a most difficult section to correctly apply, regardless of the approach one takes to the book as a whole, but it probably offers more difficulty to the historical approach than to all the others combined. Robersen sums up the difficulty by saying, "This compiler knows no successful effort to determine the meaning of the objects visited by the wrath of God — the land, the sea, the river and fountains of waters, and the sun, and, it may be that no attempt to do so will ever be successful." While I feel the difficulty and come to the section with a high respect for those who have explored it before me, it seems to me that most of the difficulties have been created by missing the point signified, by getting bogged down in the minute details (which could be called majoring in the minors), or by trying to apply the details to historical events or to pockets of corruption in society. In my

judgment, the author had none of these in mind when he wrote. When we look at the picture as a whole, when we get the general effects of all that is said, it seems obvious that the vision is designed to depict the results of the final judgment of God. If so, then what we are to see is the final end of rebellion against God and His Christ in contrast with the heavenly bliss and joy of those gathered before the throne (15:2-4) singing the song of deliverance to the praise, glory, and honor of God. I therefore conclude that the vision of the pouring out of the bowls of wrath, while it is seen as happening on earth, is in reality a symbolic picture of the awful nature and tormenting effects of the judgment of that great and final day, just as the scene in 15:2-4 depicts the final victory of the saints. If this is the case, then it is an exercise in futility to try to find historical events, either past or present, to correspond to the plagues. The vision, when seen as a whole, leaves no room for doubt that it is designed to depict the terrible results of rebellion against God, especially as it relates to the beast, his image, and his mark. It is therefore not necessary to see the plagues, the pouring out of the bowls, as successive and separate events, one following the other in historical order. Rather they should be seen in the aggregate as God's wrath poured out on sinful men. It is only by so seeing these plagues that we can receive an impact of what it will mean to be on the receiving end of God's wrath. And anyone who will seriously consider this section as a description of the horrifying end awaiting those who know not God and obey not the gospel of His Son will find himself faced with only two alternatives: He must either fall on his face and cry for mercy from Him who reigns forever and ever or else lose his sanity. The only way to escape the alternatives is to ignore the facts — to live as if there were no judgment to which all will be called, and that, dear reader, is the height of folly.

THE FIRST VIAL

16:2 And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image.

16:2 **And the first** — The first of the seven angels. **went, and poured out his vial** — Departed and emptied his bowl (BV). That is, his bowl, which contained the plagues of God's wrath (15:1), was poured out upon those for whom they were intended. **upon the earth;** — Undoubtedly meaning (as the remainder of the v. shows) the wicked of the earth. **and there fell a noisome and grievous sore** — A foul, ugly, painful, malignant, ulcerated, and tormenting sore broke out on them. Whatever the sore was, it signifies the loathsome nature of the judgment. **upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image.** — Those upon whom the plagues were poured were God haters and Christ rejectors, those who had worshipped at the shrine of Satan inspired institutions, whether secular or religious. On the beast, his image, and his mark see notes on 15:1, 11, 15-18.

THE SECOND VIAL

16:3 And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea.

16:3 **And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea;** — As with the earth (v. 2), the sea is a part of creation and symbolizes the sphere of the wicked. It becomes the instrument through which they are punished. **and it became as the blood of a dead man:** — Not the life sustaining blood that flows through the veins, but the repulsive curdled rotting (coagulated) mess that results when a murdered corpse is left to lie in its own blood. **and every living soul** — Everything having life. Since this is to be viewed as the judgment of God upon those who had received the mark of the beast (v. 2), it seems reasonable to conclude that its meaning is limited to man. **died in the sea.** — That is, they perished. Keep in mind that what is described here is not a literal historical event, but a vision designed to depict to the mind the terrible judgment awaiting those who reject God and His gracious offer of salvation (cf. notes on 8:8-9).

THE THIRD VIAL

16:4-7 And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy. And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.

16:4 And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; — Fresh water in contrast to sea water (v. 3). Like all the other elements upon which the bowls are poured, the rivers and springs of water become instruments by which the impenitent are punished, the means by which God brings His righteous judgment upon them (cf. notes on 8:10-11). **and they became blood.** — That is, all drinking water turned into blood, making it impossible to drink (cf. Ps. 78:44). This undoubtedly is designed to depict for us the repulsive nature of the rewards of unrighteousness (cf. vv. 5-7).

16:5 **And I heard the angel of the waters say,** — Of the several views as to who the angel of the waters is, only two (that I have seen) seem plausible to me: (1) The waters are personified as an angel. (2) The angel who poured out the bowl of wrath upon the waters (v. 2). Of the two, I prefer the latter. **Thou art righteous,** — God is just in administering the judgment which has befallen them (see notes on 15:3), even though they may seem terribly severe to us. We often glibly speak of the justice of God as if it were something that would rectify the inequities of this life (and in some respect this is unquestionably true), but few if any have ever realized what a terrible thing it would be to receive a just retribution for our sins (cf. Heb. 10:27-31) from the hands

of Him whose eyes are too pure to look upon iniquity (Hb. 1:13). When it comes to the righteous judgment of God, it is not justice but mercy we need. **O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be,** — See notes on 1:4, 8; 4:8; 11:17. The ASV drops "O Lord" and "and shall be" for lack of manuscript support and gives in their place "thou Holy One," which is apparently designed to express the divine and eternal nature of God (see notes on 11:17). **because thou hast judged thus.** — Judged with the judgment of the third bowl (vv. 6-7).

16:6 **For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets,** — They had opposed, persecuted, and martyred the people of God. **and thou hast given them blood to drink;** — They had shed the blood of the righteous and so it is just that they be given blood to drink. While we tremble at the fate of the wicked as here depicted, we recognize the justice of one receiving what he gives. **for they are worthy.** — They deserve it (BV). That is, they are given a dose of their own medicine — their punishment is fitted to their crime (Ob. 15). **After the flood, God established a law which says, "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed"** (Gn. 9:6, NASV). Haman built a gallows upon which to hang the hated Jew Mordecai, but he himself was hanged on the gallows (Est. 5:14; 7:10).

16:7 **And I heard another out of the altar say,** — And I heard the altar say (ASV). The most likely meaning is that the altar is here personified and speaks for the martyrs who were seen under it in 6:9-10, crying for vengeance upon their shed blood. Now that the judgment is come and their enemies are given blood to drink, they join the chorus proclaiming the righteousness of God's retribution. **Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.** — Yes, Lord God Almighty! Your sentences are true and just (Williams). See notes on 15:3.

THE FOURTH VIAL

16:8-9 **And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory.**

16:8 **And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun;** — Cf. notes on 8:12. The sun, the source of light, is the object of the fourth plague, and, as it was with the previous elements, it became an instrument of punishment for the wicked. **and power was given unto him** — And it was given to it (NASV). That is, the sun was given power or permitted to scorch men with fire. — To burn them with its fiery and intense heat. Hailey calls it the "scorching heat of God's wrath." This intensifies the picture of divine judgment and should serve as a warning to all to flee from the wrath to come.

16:9 **And men were scorched with great heat,** — The burning was intense, the judgment severe. **and blasphemed the name of God,** — See notes on 13:6. The punishment should have led them to acknowledge God as the rightful object of worship and praise (rather than the dragon and the beast,

13:4) and to see that they were reaping the fruit of the seed they had sown (Gal. 6:7-8), but instead they cursed the holy name of God for bringing this punishment upon them. This shows the depths of their degradation. When a criminal gets to the point where he blames his victim, his parents, society, the courts, and the prison system for his suffering the penalty of his crime rather than seeing himself and his crime as responsible, we call him a hardened criminal. So it is here: these men are hardened sinners, so hardened in fact that repentance is completely absent from their thinking. **which hath power over these plagues:** — Who had control over these plagues (NIV). God is the Judge and He is in charge of administering the punishment. **and they repented not** — Lenski says, "Not for one moment did these men think of repenting." Why not? One cannot think of repentance until he is convinced of sin. These men had not acknowledged their sin and therefore did not perceive of the punishment as the inevitable reward of rejecting God and His gracious offer of salvation. As they saw it, God was the guilty one, the one who should repent, for the visitation of such calamities upon them; this was solely His doing, not the results of their sins. **to give him glory.** — Even while being scorched for their sins, they did not recognize God as God, the rightful Ruler and Judge of all the universe, and thus they did not admit that they had failed to serve His creative purpose for them.

THE FIFTH VIAL

16:10-11 And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.

16:10 **And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast;** — This plague is poured on the very center of the beast's power, the throne set up in opposition to the rightful Ruler of the world. As we have seen (chapter 13), the beast rules over ungodly and unchristian institutions, both civil and religious, which have for their purpose the bringing of all into submission to the dragon's authority (13:2), even, when necessary, by coercive force. This plague thus strikes at the nerve center of all false and evil systems which are under the beast's control and which are enemies of the Lamb and His saints. **and his kingdom** — The dominion and people over which the beast rules, that is, any worldly power which has as its source of authority the infernal regions rather than Him who sits on the throne in heaven. **was full of darkness;** — Was plunged into darkness (NIV). This reminds us of the darkness which came upon Egypt in the nine plagues (Ex. 10:21-22), but, as Robertson (WP) observes, worse here because "the effects of the previous plagues continue" (v. 11). **and they gnawed their tongues for pain,** — Their anguish was so great, the judgment so severe, they chewed their tongues in an effort to alleviate their agony. Whatever else may be said about this bowl of wrath, its basic purpose is to present to the mind the horrors of being lost —

the terrible punishment that awaits the wicked.

16:11 And blasphemed the God of heaven — See notes on v. 9. **because of their pains** — Caused by the scorching sun (vv. 8-9 and the notes there). **and their sores**, — Brought on by the first plague (v. 2). Here we are given some insight which should prove useful. The plagues are not consecutive historical events, but are accumulative — that is, the second is an addition to the first, the third is an addition to the first and second, and so on to the end. So that when all seven are poured out, we have depicted to our minds the horrors of the full judgment of God upon the beast and his worshippers. This seems so obvious from the whole context that I marvel at the great number of commentators who have utterly missed it in their search for a literal and separate historical fulfillment for each bowl. It seems clear and certain to me that the seven plagues, all taken together, are designed, not to give a prophetic history of future world events, but to depict the severity of the final judgment of God upon the wicked. To see more in them than this is, in my judgment, to see more than God meant for us to see. **and repented not of their deeds**. — See notes on v. 9.

THE SIXTH VIAL

16:12 And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared.

16:12 And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; — See notes on 9:14. **and the water thereof was dried up**, — The water being dried up signify the fact that all the restraining power holding back judgment has now been removed — the time has come and nothing stands in the way. The way for the wicked to be gathered for their destruction is now opened (vv. 13-16). **that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared**. — That the way might be made ready for the kings that come from the sunrising (ASV). The restraining barriers are removed so that the kings of the east (probably signifying the unchristian institutions over which the beast rules) can be gathered for the great day of God's wrath. Regardless of who the kings are, they represent the enemies of God. They are being gathered for their destruction. The day of Armageddon has arrived.

ARMAGEDDON

16:13-16 And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.

16:13-16 Armageddon (Har-Megedon, ASV) probably means the mountain of Megiddo and is here seen as the gathering place of the kings of the east and the

kings of the earth (representing all the enemies of the Lord) for the final showdown with God. While many theories have grown up around this name and event, especially among premillennialists, it seems obvious to me, when the whole context of chapter 16 is taken into consideration, that John is depicting for us the culmination of the battle of the ages (the battle between the forces of good and evil) at the time when the subdued (the wicked) are gathered, not for a final battle with God (they have already suffered defeat) but to receive the judgment which will now be thrust upon them by the conquering Lord. Thus the gathering is not preparatory for a literal battle that will be fought between the army of the Lord and the army of Satan, but the dramatic and climactic outpouring of the wrath of God upon the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet and all those who have worshipped at their shrines. To see this as a literal battle fought with literal guns, tanks, planes, bombs, and missiles rather than the gathering of the wicked for the final outpouring of God's wrath, an awesome way of depicting God's judgment, is to disregard both the text and the context and fall into the fallacy of literalizing the figurative and materializing the spiritual. We must ask, "What is John (and the Lord, the ultimate author) picturing for us in this vision?" Is he foretelling a literal battle (prophecy) or is he depicting the coming judgment upon the wicked (apocalyptic vision)? The whole context replies, "The coming judgment." Is this a physical battle or does it depict the culmination of all the spiritual battles that have been fought by Christians on every geographical location on the map and in every century since Pentecost? The context clearly indicates that it is the climax of all spiritual battles. Armageddon is thus a judgment scene, not a literal battle with literal soldiers fighting a literal war. It is not now, never has been and never will be, the purpose of Christ and His saints to engage in literal war to advance His cause and reach His goals. Or as Paul put it, "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds" (2 Cor. 10:4).

16:13 And I saw three unclean spirits — Foul spirits which signify their evil words and vile teaching, the satanic communication from their mouth. **like frogs** — The only other times frogs are mentioned in the Bible is in connection with the second plague brought upon Egypt (Ex. 8:2-11; Ps. 78:45; 105:30). They are usually considered unclean, odious, and loathsome. Thus they signify the loathsome character of the words and teaching of the dragon, beast, and false prophet. Or as Barclay expresses it, their "words were like plagues . . . unclean . . . empty futilities . . . allies of the power of the dark." **come out of the mouth** — Indicating the source and manner of the vile teaching. **of the dragon**, — Satan. This may well stand for worldliness — that is, the wicked world over which Satan rules. **and out of the mouth of the beast**, — The sea beast of 13:1. He represents all godless governments. See notes on 13:1. **and out of the mouth of the false prophet**. — The earth beast of 13:11 (see notes there and cf. 19:20; 20:10). Here for the first time the second beast is called the false prophet. Since the word prophet is nearly always connected

with religion, this tends to confirm my view that he symbolizes apostate or antichristian religions which join hands with the beast and the dragon against Christ. Robertson (who draws heavily from Swete) says, "True religion has no worse enemies, and Satan no better allies" than religious imposters who "make common cause with temporal power in doing Satan's work." The three evil powers, the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet, depict all the sources of wickedness and evil that are to be gathered to the great day of God's judgment, as is shown in v. 14.

16:14 For they are the spirits of devils, — That is, the three unclean spirits (v. 13) from the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet are demonic in nature. **working miracles,** — Performing signs (NASV). False signs, such as were performed by the magicians of Egypt (Ex. 7:10-12, 19-22; 8:5-7) and Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:9-10) (see notes on 13:13). **which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world,** — And they go out to the kings all over the world (Goodspeed). They carry their false and vile teaching throughout the whole earth. As in v. 12, kings probably signify godless governments and thus represent all the wicked. **to gather them** — To bring them together as an army is assembled on a battle field. **to the battle** — Battle here is not meant to be taken as a literal battle in war (for no battle is actually fought, at least as far as this vision is concerned) but as a symbol of the wicked being gathered for the judgment (cf. Is. 42:13; Jer. 25:30-33). It is not the design of this vision to foretell a coming war between the armies of right and wrong, but to depict the defeated being gathered to account to their conqueror. **of that great day of God Almighty.** — That great and final day when all will be judged, the day when all the lost will be forever separated from the God they have rejected and fought against. The day of God (2 Pt. 3:12) is also called the day of the Lord (2 Pt. 3:10; 1 Thes. 5:2), the day of Christ (Phil. 2:14), the day in which He will judge the world (Acts 17:31), the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God (Rom. 2:5), His day (Lk. 17:24), that day (Mt. 7:22; Lk. 17:31; 2 Thes. 1:10; 2:2; 2 Tm. 1:12, 18; 4:8), and the day of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:8; 2 Cor. 1:14; Phil. 1:6), all meaning the final day of history, the day in which Christ will come to judge the world.

16:15 Behold, I come as a thief. — A voice breaks into the vision, which can be none other than the voice of Christ Himself, and announces the manner of His coming, namely, suddenly, unexpectedly, and unannounced (Mt. 24:43-44; 2 Thes. 2:2; 2 Pt. 3:10). **Blessed** — See notes on 1:3. **is he that watcheth,** — Who stays awake (NIV) or is constantly on the alert, always ready (prepared) for the Lord's coming (cf. Mt. 25:1-13). **and keepeth his garments,** — Who takes care of his clothing (BV). His clothing signify his life, and he keeps ready by keeping undefiled (3:4), spotless (Jas. 1:27), and without wrinkle (Eph. 1:27). Every Christian should have as his aim and purpose in life to be robbed in righteousness when the Lord comes (cf. Ti. 2:11-12). **lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.** — So that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed (NIV). For a Christian to be found anytime without his robe of right-

teousness is a shame of the highest magnitude; how much more if his is so found when his Lord returns.

16:16 **And he** — And they (ASV). The unclean spirits of v. 13. **gathered them** — The kings of v. 14. As I have already noted, the kings probably signify ungodly governments, hence all the wicked. **together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.** — Together into the place which is called in Hebrew Har-Magedon (ASV). There is admittedly a great deal of mystery and fascination connected with the name Armageddon (or Har-Magedon) and thus very little certainty can be attained as to its meaning. It is usually defined as the Mount of Megiddo, and therein lies the rub. The Bible speaks of the towns of Megiddo (Jos. 17:11; Jgs. 1:27), the waters of Megiddo (Jgs. 5:19), and the valley of Megiddo (2 Chr. 35:22; Zec. 12:11), but there is no mention of the mountain of Megiddo. In fact, Ladd says, "Megiddo is not a mountain, but a plain located between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean." Those who spin out theories and conjectures about the battle of Armageddon identify it with the valley or plains of Megiddo. But why? Not because the meaning or text demand it (or even permit it) but because it is essential to their theories. However, since it cannot be definitely identified with any location, not even the valley of Megiddo, this should be taken as more than a faint hint that it is not to be interpreted as a literal geographical site (we are not to look for that any more than we are to look for unclean spirits in the form of frogs), but as the gathering place of the final judgment, somewhat paralleled with Mt. 25:31-46. The whole context bears this out. In the first bowl noisome and grievous sores depict the results of judgment; in the second and third, the sea and fresh water are turned into blood as a just reward for those who had shed the blood of saints; in the fourth, the scorching sun becomes an instrument of punishment; in the fifth, darkness is added to their anguish; in the seventh, the climax is reached and great hailstones fall upon them. If I am correct in my exegesis, all these are designed to depict some aspect of the final judgment and punishment of the wicked. Their accumulated effects are designed to enhance and intensify the picture. It is therefore unreasonable to lift the sixth bowl out of this context of a judgment scene and make it a literal battle in a literal location between literal armies. Hence I conclude that Armageddon is a judgment scene presented in a dramatic and symbolic way as the gathering together of a mighty host, namely, all the wicked of the world.

THE SEVENTH VIAL

16:17-21 And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done. And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great. And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great.

16:17 **And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air;** — Into (or upon, ASV) the earth's atmosphere. As with the other elements, mentioned in the other six bowls, the atmosphere now becomes the means of administering God's judgment (wrath) to the wicked (vv. 18-21). **and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne,** — Undoubtedly the voice of God (cf. v. 1). **saying, It is done.** — It is all over (Goodspeed). That is, the task is finished; the pouring out of the plagues is completed. The judgment upon the wicked has reached its climax and consummation (cf. 10:7 and the notes there).

16:18 **And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake,** — See notes on 4:5; 8:5. **such as was not since men were upon the earth,** — No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth (NIV). As is seen in vv. 19-20, the foundation of both the earth and society are shaken from center to circumference. **so mighty an earthquake, and so great.** — Never before, in the whole history of the world, had there been an earthquake of this magnitude. Since earthquakes indicate the awesome presence, majesty, manifestation, and power of God in judgment, the terribleness and extensiveness (so great and so mighty, beyond anything that had ever been known) of this earthquake depicts the final judgment as far more intense and terrifying than the judgments brought by Him upon men down through history (such as the destruction of Jerusalem, Mt. 24). All other judgments have had their limitations, but this one is absolute . . . and final. How horrifying to think that sinful men must face such awful catastrophe, and that unnecessarily. They are doomed, not because their doom was necessary, but because they spurned the divine offer of salvation, purchased for them by the bleeding, dying Lamb.

16:19 **And the great city** — Babylon the great (see notes on 11:8; 14:8). **was divided into three parts,** — It was split asunder, broken to pieces, and, like the other cities, fell into total destruction. **and the cities of the nations fell:** — The nations signify every other ungodly power and influence which have positioned themselves outside of an in opposition to the Israel of God. **and great Babylon came in remembrance before God,** — God had not forgotten her wickedness and immorality (the judgment against her is detailed in chapter 18). He remembered her in order **to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.** — That is, He had not forgotten to bring her to His fierce judgment (see notes on 14:10, 19). It may have appeared that God had forgotten Babylon as she went on in her wicked abominations from one century to another, but not so. The wheels of God's justice may turn slow, but their turning is as sure as the throne of God itself.

16:20 **And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.** — Every island vanished; not a mountain could be seen (Williams). This is a continuation of the destruction caused by the greatest of all earthquakes (see notes on vv. 18-19). Such terrifying natural convulsions are designed to enhance and intensify the fearfulness of the final judgment, now brought upon

all unbelievers and truth rejectors. G.R. Beasley-Murray (as quoted by Mounce) says that it "depicts the unspeakable grandeur of the awe-fulness of the revelation of God's judgments and deliverance at the end of history." Precisely!

16:21 And there fell upon men a great hail — Huge hailstones which signify God's awful judgment (cf. Ex. 9:22-26; Jos. 10:8-11; Is. 30:30; Ez. 38:22). **out of heaven**, — Undoubtedly meant to indicate the source of judgment. It is the judgment of God. **every stone about the weight of a talent**: — Weighing about a hundred pounds (Beck). Hailstones of such magnitude would be utterly destructive. Thus the purpose of this vision is to heighten the sense of God's final judgment upon the wicked. **and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail**; — See notes on v. 9. **for the plague thereof was exceeding great**. — Because the torture of it was severe (Williams). That is, the punishment was so great that we immediately conclude that man could neither endure nor survive it. But then how could anything less severe symbolize to our minds the everlasting destruction awaiting those who reject Christ and His gracious offer of salvation? What we have here is a dramatic picture of the terrible fate awaiting the dragon, the two beasts, and all those who worship them. The picture must be drastic in order to depict, even partially, the severity of the judgment.

REVELATION 17

Chapters 17 and 18 are concerned with the fall (judgment) of Babylon, that adulterous city which has corrupted the earth, nations, and kings. Obviously, then, if we are to interpret these two chapters in any meaningful and practical way, we must determine what is symbolized by Babylon. While I cannot afford the space to argue it, it seems certain to me that it represents worldly institutions of lust and seduction, that is, the promotion by Satan of immorality in opposition to Christ and His church. There can be little or no doubt but that John's original readers would have identified her with the Imperial City, the city of allurements and enticement, and undoubtedly this was John's intention. But as with the other symbols in Revelation, Babylon should not be limited to Rome alone — every generation has its own cities of immorality. Wherever there is seduction from purity to promiscuity (which is here emphasized by such expressions as whore, fornication, scarlet, abominations, etc.), there is mystery Babylon (cf. 2 Thes. 2:1-12). The picture here presented by the symbols is that immorality, even when dressed in religious garb, is doomed, along with all wickedness, to destruction. Just as judgment came upon the beast and all who worshipped him (chapters 15 and 16), it is now to be administered to every system of moral iniquity which seduces men away from the true church. Thus Babylon is any system, secular or religious, which seduces men into immorality. As in previous visions, the details here are often difficult to apply (some think the most difficult in the book), but the total picture is relatively clear. It simply shows us (and I believe this is its design) that all systems of immorality will be brought to judgment, regardless of the extent of their influence and popularity. Richardson concludes his remarks on these two chapters by saying, "A godless and guilty world in the end feels the terror of His avenging and destroying wrath." That is here depicted; that is what the Lord meant for us to see; and to go beyond that is but to conjecture and speculate.

THE GREAT HARLOT

17:1-6 And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication. So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYS-

TERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus; and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.

17:1 And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, — One of the seven whose mission it was to pour out the seven last plagues upon wicked men (chapter 16). **and talked with me, saying unto me,** — That is, the angel came with an invitation to John to come with him to see another vision of judgment. **Come hither;** — Come here (NASV) or come this way (BV). John was thus invited to place himself at the disposal of the angel, who carried him away in the Spirit into the wilderness (v. 3) so as to give him a vantage point from which to see the vision. **I will shew unto thee the judgment** — The scene is thus identified as a judgment scene, the bringing of Babylon to her final condemnation and destruction. It will be vital to remember this as the chapter is studied. **of the great whore** — That great city (v. 18), called Mystery or Babylon the great (v. 5). The word whore (harlot, ASV) identifies her with immorality. **that sitteth upon many waters:** — The waters are symbolic of peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues (v. 15). The picture is thus that of a harlot having almost universal support by vast numbers of people. She is an enemy of the church and its purity, but the masses love her and rally to her perverted life-style — they are intoxicated with the wine of her abominations (v. 2).

17:2 With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, — In whose prostitution the kings of the earth have joined (Williams). Babylon had seduced the heads of state to enter into illicit relations with her — to support her institutions of immorality. The implication seems to be that the kings are not only participators themselves, but have also influenced their subjects to embrace and practice the impurities, all of which is in opposition to the church. The pages of history are filled with kings and governments who have, in their maddening lust, made immorality the standard by which they live. **and the inhabitants of the earth** — The subjects over which earthly (or worldly) kings ruled. **have been made drunk** — Intoxicated or enraptured with the excitement of her passionate sins. **with the wine of her fornication.** — The intoxicating effects of her adulteries (cf. notes on 14:8). This is not the description of one falling into a single sin but the choice to make the fulfillment of lust the purpose of living. It is rather easy to be blinded by the heat of passion and momentarily choose the illegitimate over the lawful, lust over love, immorality over purity, Satan over God, but it is never right or justifiable. How much deeper then the degradation of one who willfully chooses such as a way of life (chooses the harlot as mistress rather than Christ as groom) and thereby reject God as rightful ruler. Such is the abomination of Babylon.

17:3 So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: — By the instrumentality of the HS (cf. 1:10 and the notes there; Ez. 3:14). **and I saw a woman** — The great whore of v. 1. **sit upon a scarlet coloured beast,** — Undoubtedly the beast is a representative of Satan. It is usually identified

with the one which came up out of the water in 13:1 (see notes there), and this may be the case but not necessarily so. This is another vision altogether. In every vision, however, the beast is the embodiment of evil, including the great dragon of 12:3-4. And in this sense they are all the time. The specific and separate identity of the beast is not an essential aspect of the presentation of the truth involved. As always, the beast here represents the forces of evil, but it is designed (or so it seems to me) to emphasize one aspect of sin (in this case sexual immorality). The beast is pictured as being fundamentally at one with the harlot — that is, she relies on it for her support. Or to say it another way, her immorality is one of the evils supported by the beast. **full of names of blasphemy**, — It was covered with names of ridicule and dishonor to the divine majesty of God and His law (see notes on 13:1), especially His law pertaining to sexual purity. The woman is a harlot, not a wife, indicating the nature of the evil here depicted. Sex in its creative purpose is both pure and holy, designed for man's pleasure and perpetuity, and is the highest and most beautiful expression of love known to man. But God ordained it for and sanctioned it only within the marriage bond. Outside of marriage it is a violation of God's law and is therefore an abuse of its creative purpose. It seems to me that the picture here is of one who despises and rejects the limitations imposed by that creative purpose by not only freely satisfying the call of lust in promiscuity but also teaching it to others as a way of life (keep in mind that the woman is more than just a harlot, she is the mother of harlots). Her abominations thus extends throughout the whole earth. **having seven heads and ten horns**. — See vv. 9-14 and the notes on 12:3.

17:4-5 **And the woman was arrayed in purple** — Signifying her luxury (cf. 18:7), **and scarlet colour**, — Scarlet may indicate royalty (Mt. 27:28-29), bravery (Na. 2:3), or sin (Is. 1:18). Here it seems to signify sexual immorality — she is clothed in scarlet to indicate her prostitution (cf. 18:3). **and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls**, — Indicative of her vast wealth (cf. 18:11-19). **having a golden cup in her hand** — The cup of seduction with which she enticed nations, kings, and merchants (18:3), maddening them with lust (Jer. 51:7) and the promise of carnal delights. **full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication**: — Full of every form of evil and immoral conduct. The cup is golden but its contents are filthiness and corruption — full of the sins which will bring both her and all who drink to utter destruction. **And upon her forehead was a name written**, — A title of identity was written on her forehead (cf. notes on 13:16), a title which fully indicates her vile character. The remainder of the v. is printed in capital letters. As far as I can determine there is nothing in the Greek text that would indicate that this should be done. I suppose, therefore, that the translators have used this device to convey to the English reader the concept that the words (her name) are inscribed on her forehead (cf. Mt. 27:37 and parallels). The caps have been dropped in the RSV. **MYSTERY**, — A name of mystery (RSV), or a name with a secret meaning (NEB). Mystery may be taken as a part of the name (KJV, ASV, and

others) or as describing the name (RSV, NEB, and others). It seems more probable to me, especially in light of v. 7, that the RSV is correct here, that is, the name is a mystery, or, more to the point, symbolic (Williams, Goodspeed, and Moffett). Thus her name is not to be seen as literal but as symbolic of her sinful character. **BABYLON THE GREAT, — THE GREAT BABYLON** (Beck). Babylon stands for lust and seduction in its full depths (see notes on vv. 1-2). **THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS** — In her practice of harlotry she produced more harlots by influencing others to follow the way of lust. **AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.** — And of every obscenity on earth (NEB). She was full of impurities with which she enticed lovers by offering them unobstructed satisfaction to their fleshly desires.

17:6 **And I saw the woman** — Babylon, the great. **drunken with the blood of the saints,** — Drinking herself drunk with the blood of God's people (Williams). Cf. 18:24. The cause of her intoxication is not wine, but blood — the blood of God's chosen ones. This figure obviously indicates the severe persecution of the woman against Christ and the Christian system. **and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus:** — The blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus (NIV). That is, those who died for being faithful witnesses of Jesus, the way, the truth, and the life (Jn. 14:6). **and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.** — I wondered with great wonder (ASV), I marveled greatly (RSV), I was perfectly amazed (Goodspeed), I was utterly astonished (Williams). It is not easy to ascertain precisely why John stood in amazement (not admiration as in the KJV) at the sight of this wicked woman, but perhaps his amazement was caused by the startling fact that an evil force of such magnitude could have reached such proportions without the judgment of God being brought upon it. Keep in mind that wonder is not approval. Who among us have not been filled with astonishment when we view the power, appeal, and influence of such ungodly institutions as communism? And, when we have seen its unmerciful treatment of innocent people, how many times have we cried out, "How long, O Lord, how long" will such be permitted to continue in such blatant wickedness? John may have expected to see the woman under the lashing judgment of God, but instead he saw her, as Mounce says, "Ostentatiously attired in wealth, she sits upon the scarlet beast advertising her base trade and intoxicated with the blood of her victims." She was wickedly drinking lust to its last drop — draining for herself all it had to offer — and yet she seemed to be prosperous in fame, wealth, and influence. The wonder of wonders is how God's marvelous grace tolerates so many for so long in so much evil and disobedience!

SYMBOLISM OF THE BEAST EXPLAINED

17:7-14 And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns. The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet

is. And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth. And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space. And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition. And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.

17:7 **And the angel** — The angel who had showed John the woman (v. 1). **said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel?** — Why did you stand amazed at the sight of the woman (see notes on v. 6)? **I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her,** — He would reveal to John the symbolism (or the interpretation) of the woman (vv. 15-19) and the beast upon which she was seated (vv. 7-14). It seems obvious to me that the interpretation of the symbolism is also given in symbolic language, and most will readily agree that the explanation is as difficult, if not more so, to explain as the martyr itself. So here again we must invoke our often used principle of seeing the overall picture rather than trying to explain each minute, and often obscure, detail which is used to compose the picture. As I have concluded in the note at the beginning of the chapter, the total picture shows the woman as the personification of lust and immorality and the beast the people, kings, nations, and merchants, who support her filthy trade. Most likely the beast is organized society, that is, civil governments. To see a once-for-all fulfillment of this in any one city, with a succession of kings ruling in it, is more than I can do. And I think it is more than the Lord meant to be done. The woman and her supporters are simply another way of depicting the enemies of Christianity and the terrible fate awaiting them. **which hath the seven heads and ten horns.** — See v. 3. The seven heads are said to be seven mountains (v. 9), which, viewed from a different angle, are seven kings (v. 10), and the ten horns are said to be ten kings which have received no kingdom as yet (cf. 12:3). The seven heads, mountains, or kings may be thought of as seven governments. The number seven indicates the full or the perfect. Hence the full number of all worldly and immoral governments. Thus we have depicted here lust riding on the back of (or being supported by) civil authority and civil authority being controlled by lust.

17:8 **The beast that thou sawest** — The scarlet colored beast upon which the woman sat (v. 3). **was, and is not;** — Once was but now is no more (Williams). The institutions he represented had at one time exerted great power over the saints, but at the time John sees him that power has been momentarily curtailed. It may be, as many commentators hold, that the beast here is either one or a combination of both the beasts in chapter 13, who there represent civil and religious organizations which claim the exclusive right to rule over and control men's life. But it seems best to me to view this as an independent vision in which the beast attacks the saints with all the fury and force of lust and immorality. But regardless of how it is viewed, its design is to depict the enemies of Christianity. In former visions the beasts are in absolute

control of the wicked forces; here the woman is in ascendancy over him. **and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit**, — And is about to come up out of the abyss (ASV). He is about to arise to oppose the saints again, perhaps with greater fury than before (cf. v. 10). His coming up out of the abyss also indicates the source of his origin — the place (the infernal regions) from which he receives his power. **and go into perdition**: — And go on to destruction (BV) or before going to perdition (NEB). No evil power is beyond the power of destruction and the beast's ultimate end will be the pit from which he came. **and they that dwell on the earth** — The inhabitants of the earth (Williams) or earth people (non-Christians). **shall wonder**, — That is, they will be awed and astonished when they see the beast which was, is not, and yet will be. **whose names were not written in the book of life** — See notes on 3:5. **from the foundation of the world**, — See notes on 13:8. The KJV could be understood to give some credence to the Calvinist concept that God from the foundation of the world (from even before time began) predetermined those who would ultimately be saved and recorded their names then in the book of life. But the thought here is not of God electing some to salvation and others to damnation long before any of us were born, but that He has never, not from the very beginning of time, recognized the wicked, those of the earth who are devoted to the beast and awed by his presence, as His people — their names never have been and never will be written in the book of life as the people of God. As Mounce says, "John is not teaching a form of determinism (according to 3:5 names may be blotted out of the book of life), but emphasizing the great distinction that exists between the followers of the Lamb and those who give their allegiance to the beast." Thus Williams and Goodspeed translate the expression, "Whose names from the foundation of the world have not been written in the book of life." Beck may be even clearer in saying, "Whose names since the world was made have not been written in the book of life." **when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is**. — The meaning is the same as the expressions in the beginning of the v.

17:9 **And here is the mind which hath wisdom**. — Here is scope for a mind that is packed with wisdom (Williams). This could possibly refer to the explanation of the mystery (v. 7), in which case it would be saying that the explanation is by divine wisdom. But more likely it means that it will take a mind possessed of great wisdom to explain it. If the latter (and I think it is), it means the same as a similar statement in 13:18 (see notes there). At any rate, as Mounce says, "The interpretation of the seven heads is not obvious." Or as Swete says, "What is to follow will put to the proof the spiritual discernment of the hearer or reader." I am utterly reluctant to think that my mind possesses such wisdom, and I approach this part of Revelation with both fear and care — fear because of my acknowledged lack of such wisdom and care because the statement probably should be viewed as a warning to those who interpret it to tread carefully. **The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth**. — That is, the seven heads (v. 7), the seven moun-

tains, and the seven kings (v. 10) are one and the same, neither of which should be taken literally. They all represent the full or complete manifestation of the power exerted by the beast as it is expressed in immoral instructions, then, now, and for all time to come (see note on v. 7). No single city or institution can exhaust the meaning here.

17:10 And there are seven kings: — See notes on vv. 7, 9. **five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come;** — There can be but little doubt that this constitutes the most perplexing problem in the whole book. I have not come across a satisfactory solution, and I am far from satisfied with what I have to offer. But one thing is for sure, it is impossible to interpret it literally, making it mean five kings had ruled in Rome before the time of John, that one was then ruling, and that there was yet one to come. Unless John is carried backward in time, there were more than five before he received the revelation and there were certainly more than one to follow. If my approach is correct, John is seeing this from the perspective of the final judgment rather than in his own time — that is, he was carried forward in the Spirit. This makes the literal approach incredible. But to interpret figuratively is no easy matter either. Without arguing the point at length, I think that in the final analysis the statement is no more than a numerical scheme to depict the fact that worldly governments has supported immorality (the woman) in the past, is now supporting it, and will continue to support it until God's judgment is executed upon the harlot. This view is substantiated by the remainder of the v. and is similar to if not identical with the conclusions reached by Hailey. **and when he cometh,** — When the seventh king comes. **he must continue a short space.** — He must continue for a little while (ASV). From the time John sees the beast, which is pertaining to and thus must be near the time of the judgment (v. 1), there remains only a short time until wickedness and immorality will be called to account. The seven represents the fullness of the beast. So it seems logical (or at least to me) that when it is divided up into five, one, and one, a long period in the past is symbolized, while relatively short ones are indicated for the present and the future. Thus judgment is about to come upon both the beast and the woman.

17:11 And the beast that was, and is not, — See notes on v. 8. **even he is the eighth,** — Is himself also an eighth (ASV). This apparently means that the beast is an eighth king. The beast is said to have seven heads (v. 3), and the seven heads are said to be seven mountains (v. 8). But the seven mountains are also seven kings (v. 10). Thus an eighth would be an eighth king. **and is of the seven,** — In the vision the eighth is distinct from the seven and yet he, in some sense, belongs to the seven. He is not one of the seven in the sense of succession, but of the seven in the sense of being a composite of them. As Plummer says, "The beast himself consists of, and is formed by, what has been denoted by the seven kings." If this is the case, the vision means that the seven heads, mountains, and kings are symbolic of the beast himself and are probably designed to present to us different aspects of his diabolic work. **and goeth**

into perdition. — See notes on v. 8.

17:12 **And the ten horns which thou sawest** — See notes on 13:2. **are ten kings**, — Kings signify royal dominion and ten in all probability indicates full power. Hence the ten horns, who are ten kings, is a symbol of the total future power connected with the beast — the total power united in opposition to Christ and His church (v. 14). **which have received no kingdom as yet**; — Who have not yet become kings (Williams). They had no dominion in their own right. **but receive power as kings one hour with the beast**. — For a short time (the total period the ten kings reign) they rule as kings but only by the authority of or in connection with the beast. That is, they rule for the beast rather than in their own behalf. Cf. the seventh king and the short space of v. 10.

17:13 **These** — The ten horns or ten kings of v. 12. **have one mind**, — Have one purpose (NIV). That is, they all have one end in view. **and shall give their power and strength unto the beast**. — They place themselves under the control of the beast to carry out his diabolical plans. Their wills become his will and his work their work. They thus merge into one with the beast.

17:14 **These shall make war with the Lamb**, — The ten horns or kings, who have merged their dominion into the dominion of the beast, have one purpose or aim, and that is to war against Christ, the Lamb. This and the following statement sum up the whole message of Revelation. Throughout the book there are two sets of symbols, one is of the forces of evil and the other is of righteousness, Christ, and the church. The evil is always in conflict with righteousness. These two forces meet in combat time and again, the symbols being different but the message the same. It often appears that wickedness is going to win the battle. But always, in every single case, the righteous cause emerges victorious. Thus the design of the book is to say to downtrodden and persecuted saints, "You are in a battle you cannot lose if you will be faithful unto death. For the faithful, victory is as sure as the throne of God." In my judgment, to fail to see this is to fail to comprehend the fundamental purpose of Revelation — the purpose of which is clearly stated in the v. before us. One who fights against God is fighting a foolish battle because he is fighting in a losing cause. Indeed, he may appear to be winning in his conflict with the saints, but he absolutely cannot win in the end. The Lamb and those who stand with Him are the certain victors, God having already made that determination. **and the Lamb shall overcome them**: — They will be defeated, here as always, by the sovereign Lord, Savior, Priest, Prophet, and King. **for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings**: — Cf. 19:16; Dt. 10:17; Ps. 136:2-3; Dn. 2:47; 1 Tm. 6:15. His dominion is a higher dominion than that of earthly kings. They rule over a material time-bound kingdom; He rules over an eternal or spiritual kingdom (Jn. 18:36). And to Him all kings must submit, if they are to please God and go to heaven. All the lords of earth, both great and small, have an obligation to be His servants (Acts 2:36). No king is exempt from His sovereign rule and no lord is exempt from His service. **and they that are with him** — The saints of all ages. **are called**, — Called by the gospel (2 Thes. 2:14) into

the service of Christ (Rom. 1:6-7). **and chosen**, — Chosen as His own (cf. Mt. 22:14; Rom. 8:28-29; Eph. 1:4). Chosen as the redeemed (Eph. 1:7), adopted sons (Rom. 8:15-17), members of His family (1 Tm. 3:14-15), and heirs of heaven (Rom. 8:17). **and faithful**. — True followers of the Lamb who will permit nothing to turn them from Him (cf. 2:10; 14:4 and the notes on each).

SYMBOLISM OF THE WOMAN EXPLAINED

17:15-18 *And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues. And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled. And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.*

17:15 *And he saith unto me*, — The angel who was explaining the mystery to John (v. 7). **The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth**, — See vv. 1, 3. **are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues**. — Probably the best way to view this is as each statement describing and enlarging upon the first one. Thus the waters upon which the great harlot was seated signified peoples, multitudes of people, nations of people, and people of all languages. Its basic design is to signify her universal support (cf. notes on 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6). There is no conflict in her sitting on many waters (v. 1) and sitting on a scarlet colored beast (v. 4). Both are correct because the beast is ultimately the expression of degenerate people, that is, the immorality of the people personified.

17:16 *And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast*, — The beast and the ten horns you saw (NIV). See notes on v. 12. **these** — Both the beast and the ten horns. **shall hate the whore**, — They will despise her with an ill will deep enough to cause them to destroy her (cf. Ez. 23:28-29). This may at first seem strange since the beast earlier supported the woman and since the ten horns (ten kings) have merged their power and strength with him into a single unit (v. 13). But on further thought, it is precisely what we would expect between wicked powers. While they normally unite their forces against a common enemy, they often hate and devour one another. Here the immoral forces of the woman and the organized forces of the beast are one in heart as they battle the church of God, but internally there is bad blood between them. The beast and the ten horns (an integral part of the beast) so despise the woman that they will utterly destroy her in the end. A thief and a dishonest merchant may join together to obtain and share the gains from stolen property, but this does not mean that the thief will never steal from the merchant or that the merchant will always be honest with the thief. Quite to the contrary: if an opportunity presents itself you can be assured that the thief will steal from the merchant and the merchant will cheat the thief. Wickedness carries within its own bosom the seed of destruction, and the woman is now to be destroyed by her partners in crime. Worldly powers are so greedy that we naturally ex-

pect them to hate each other. **and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh**, — As a city, she would become a ghost town, deprived of her possessions and inhabitants (cf. 18:2). As a woman, she would be stripped of all her adornments, her robes of purple and scarlet (v. 4), and left only with the shame of nakedness (cf. 18:12-24; Ez. 23:26). As a victim, her flesh, through which she enjoyed all the pleasures of sin, would be torn from her bones and eaten. That is, the source of her pleasure would be taken away (cf. 18:3-4; Ez. 23:27). **and burn her with fire**. — And shall burn her utterly with fire (ASV). She would be utterly destroyed, and that by the beast who had formerly supported her (cf. 18:5-11; Ez. 23:25). The destruction of the woman is more fully described in chapter 18.

17:17 **For God hath put in their hearts** — God (by means unknown to us) put into the minds of the ten horns or kings to do what He willed to be done. This probably means no more than that their own will was to give their power to the beast and God thus permitted it to be so. It was not unusual in the OT to have ascribed to God that which He allows or does indirectly (cf. Dn. 1:9; Jb. 1:6-21), **to fulfill his will**, — To accomplish, carry out, work, or achieve His purpose. This means that He is using the wicked as His agents to administer judgment to the wicked, as He did when He sent the Chaldeans against Judah (Hb. 1:6-11). How God may put such into the heart or mind of His enemy to accomplish His will and purpose cannot be certainly known (for it is an unrevealed thing, Dt. 29:29), but that He does cannot be questioned. He is said to remove and seat kings (Dn. 2:21), to give kingdoms to whomsoever He wills (Dn. 4:17; 5:21), and to rule the kingdoms of men (Dn. 4:32). Thus it seems that, either directly or indirectly, everything is moving in the direction of God's ultimate will. As Mounce puts it, "In the final analysis the powers of evil serve the purposes of God." **and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast**, — By agreeing to give the beast their power to rule (NIV). See notes on v. 13. **until the words of God shall be fulfilled**. — Until all that God has spoken is fulfilled (NEB) or accomplished (ASV). That is, until all the wicked, including the woman and the beast, be brought to the final judgment.

17:18 **And the woman which thou sawest is that great city**, — The city of lust (see notes on vv. 1, 3, 5). As Hailey states, the woman "Symbolizes the world of lust, seduction, and the allurements of all that appeals to the flesh." **which reigneth over the kings of the earth**. — They bowed to her dominion in order to satisfy their passion (cf. 18:3).

REVELATION 18

It seems to me that chapter 18 is a description of that which was stated in chapter 17. There the fall of Babylon is announced; here the fall is described. Thus chapter 18 is a detailed description of Babylon's fall, which was announced in chapter 17. If I am right in my interpretation of Babylon as the seductive powers of the flesh, what we have here is the final end of the effort to seduce the saints away from their Master. Having overcome Babylon, the saints are ready for the final victory (which is depicted in chapters 20-22). Chapter 18 describes the destruction of this enemy; chapter 20 describes the victory of the saints.

BABYLON IS FALLEN

18:1-3 And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.

18:1 **And after these things** — After the vision of chapter 17. **I saw another angel come down from heaven**, — An angel in addition to the one mentioned in 17:1. The fact that he comes down from heaven indicates that he is from God — heaven is the source of his authority. **having great power**; — Having great authority (ASV). Having authority to deliver the proclamation he is about to make. **and the earth was lightened with his glory**. — The earth was illuminated with the splendor of his presence. His glory was undoubtedly that of God.

18:2 **And he cried mightily with a strong voice**, — The voice of heaven. A voice strong enough to be heard by all concerned. **saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen**, — The fall had been previously announced (14:8; 16:19) but is now to be accomplished. As ancient Babylon, it is to be utterly destroyed as a place of decent habitation (cf. Is. 13:19-22). **and is become the habitation of devils**, — That is, the place where demons dwell. It has been their city and now its fate is to be their fate. **and the hold of every foul spirit**, — The word from which hold and cage is translated means a strong place or a strong hold and probably carries the idea of a haunt or prison. Thus every

His judgment against them (cf. Jer. 51:9). **and God hath remembered her iniquities.** — She will be called to account for her crimes (see notes on 16:19).

18:6 Reward her even as she rewarded you, — Pay her back even as she has paid (NASV) or pay her back in her own coin (Williams). That is, she is to receive the reward of woe and destruction just as her sinful ways have brought destruction upon others. Or as Jeremiah expressed it, "According to all that she has done, do unto her" (Jer. 50:29). The question here is to whom is this addressed? Undoubtedly it is to the power of destruction which is to be unleashed upon Babylon. But who is that power? Probably this points back to 17:16-17 (see notes there) where the ten horns will turn on the harlot and will hate her and will make her desolate and naked and eat her flesh and burn her with fire. Thus the ten horns (or ten kings) seem to be the destroying agency addressed. **and double unto her double according to her works:** — And double unto her the double according to her works (ASV). This probably means no more than the administration to her that which is due for her sins (cf. Mt. 7:2). Ladd says, "The idea of rendering double for one's deeds is an Old Testament idiom indicating punishment in full measure (Jer. 16:18; 17:18)." **in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double.** — In the cup she mixed for others, mix her a double draught (Goodspeed). The expression here is parallel with the previous one, thus making them mean the same thing. The thought is repeated in different words after the order of Hebrew poetry, probably for the purpose of emphasis.

18:7 How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: — To the same degree in which she has lived in splendor and luxury, give her torture and tears (Williams). That is, her punishment is to be measured out with the same cup from which she measures her own glory and luxury. **for she saith in her heart,** — With her whole being. This is the proud boastful way she esteemed herself (cf. Prov. 11:2; 16:18). **I sit a queen,** — The ruler of her own life, accountable to no one, not even God. **and am no widow,** — Not one left destitute. Of course she was no widow; she was a harlot (17:1, 4-5). **and shall see no sorrow.** — She thought that the approaching calamity which God had pronounced upon her would not come to pass. That is, she was confident of her security and thought that she was beyond the reach of God's judgment. She thought therefore that she would never experience sorrow, then or ever (cf. Is. 47:7-9). Little did she know that her doom had already been pronounced by Him who rules the universe.

18:8 Therefore — Introduces a conclusion which grows out of her boastful defiance as stated in v. 7. **shall her plagues come in one day,** — Because of her pride and defiance God had determined that her plagues, downfall, judgment, or total collapse would come suddenly, that is, one day signifies a very short period of time. Babylon would learn, even though in her heart she thought she was queen, the ruler of her own life, that God is the ruler of the universe and He alone determines the course of all things. Her plagues consisted of

death, and mourning, and famine; — Each seems to correspond in some way to her boast. Alford is probably correct in saying, "Death, for her scorn of the prospects of widowhood; mourning, for her inordinate revelling; famine, for her abundance." In this way the cup which she had filled for others was filled to her double (v. 6). **and she shall be utterly burned with fire:** — That is, she would be totally consumed or completely destroyed. Her fall would be absolute. **for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.** — God has the power to accomplish her destruction, and His judgment is as certain as Babylon's sins.

LAMENT OVER BABYLON'S FALL

18:9-19 And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning. Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come. And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more: The merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyne wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, And cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men. And the fruits that thy soul lusteth after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all. The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, And saying, Alas, alas that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls! For in one hour so great riches is come to nought. And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off, And cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like unto this great city! And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing, saying, Alas, alas that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness! for in one hour is she made desolate.

18:9-19 Those who lament Babylon's fall are placed into three classes: (1) the kings of the earth (vv. 9-10), (2) the merchants of the earth (vv. 11-16), and (3) all maritime trade (vv. 17-19). Babylon was the major source from which kings, merchants, and shipmen received their wealth. They would therefore naturally weep and mourn her fall, especially since they shared in her sins and would experience the loss of their wicked trade. As they saw it, it was woe to them as well as woe to Babylon.

18:9-10 **And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her,** — That is, they had shared in her foul sins and now they must also share in her great losses. **shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning,** — They mourn over her because the source of their power, wealth, and pleasure is being destroyed. **Standing afar off** — Formerly these kings had been closely associated with her in her lust but now they put a distance between them and the burning city. **for the fear of her torment,** — Terrified at the severity of her punishment, they stand afar off. **saying, Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city!** — That city which thought herself impregnable (v. 7) but which is now in flames. **for in one hour** — Suddenly or in a very short

time. **is thy judgment come.** — Very quickly she is called to account for her wicked deeds.

18:11 **And the merchants of the earth** — Business men who are engaged in trade now join the kings in the lament over Babylon. **shall weep and mourn over her;** — That is, they bewail the fate of the great city. **for no man buyeth their merchandise any more:** — The commerce with Babylon, which had brought them riches and pleasure, had come to an abrupt end. The merchants had cargo to sell, but there were no customers to buy.

18:12-14 **The merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, And cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men. And the fruits that thy soul lusteth after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and thou shalt find them no more at all.** — I do not think it necessary to comment on these items individually, since they are no more than an inventory of the commercial goods used in trade with Babylon. All we need to see is the great wealth that is being destroyed with her. And this is primarily what concerned the merchants.

18:15 **The merchants of these things,** — All the things mentioned in vv. 12-14. **which were made rich by her,** — That is, they were made rich by the commerce carried on with her. **shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing.** — See notes on vv. 9-10. It should be observed however that the weeping and wailing is not so much for the destruction of Babylon as it is for their own losses because of her destruction. This is characteristic of sinful men: they are only concerned with themselves and their own selfish enterprises. Babylon is destroyed but they could care less except for the fact that their commercial interest and source of pleasure were destroyed with it.

18:16 **And saying, Alas, alas that great city,** — Saying, Woe, woe, the city (ASV). This is their lament over the fall of the city. It seemed incredible to them that one which had been exalted so high should suddenly be brought so low. It was a double woe — woe to the city and woe to those who carried on trade with her. **that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls!** — See notes on 17:4.

18:17-18 **For in one hour** — Suddenly or in a single hour, signifying a very short period of time. **so great riches is come to nought.** — A wealth so vast has been destroyed (Williams). To the merchants, as it is with so many people of the world, wealth was the highest attainment, and to see such riches destroyed (see vv. 12-14) was the ultimate loss. Wealth within itself is not wrong; in fact, it can be and is a great blessing when attained and used properly —

when attained honestly and used to advance the kingdom of God and to aid the needs of humanity. But when hoarded away for selfish purposes it becomes an evil to be avoided (Mt. 6:19-21; 1 Tm. 6:6-11), a gangrene on the soul. A man ought to so live, so trust in his Master's providential care, that very little or nothing would be taken from his love, life, or faith if all his earthly treasures perished. There is a higher goal in life than riches — the salvation of the soul. Let us strive to reach that higher goal. If we do, then we will have obtained possessions that cannot be taken from us when Babylon burns. The lament is now taken up by the third class of mourners, all those connected with the shipping industry. **And every shipmaster**, — Every sea captain (NIV). **and all the company in ships**, — All ship passengers. **and sailors**, — Seamen who work on board ship. **and as many as trade by sea**, — Those who earn their wealth by sea trade. **stood afar off**, — See notes on v. 10. **And cried when they saw the smoke of her burning**, — That is, they made great lamentations when they saw the judgment fall upon Babylon. **saying, What city is like unto this great city!** — In their view, no city would compare with this city and therefore no destruction could compare with its destruction (cf. Ez. 27:32).

18:19 **And they cast dust on their heads**, — Among oriental people, a symbolic gesture of bitter sorrow and grief (cf. 2 Sm. 13:19; Jb. 2:12; Ez. 27:30). **and cried, weeping and wailing, saying, Alas, alas that great city**, — See vv. 10, 15-16 where the kings and the merchants make essential the same lament as the shipmen do here. **wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea** — Whose treasures have made everyone rich who had ships on the sea (Beck). Thus all maritime trade was enriched **by reason of her costliness!** — That is, they grew rich by the trade made possible by her vast wealth (vv. 12-14). **for in one hour is she made desolate**. — Suddenly her judgment had come (v. 10) and she is brought to nought (v. 17) or laid waste. And with her downfall came the desolation of kings, merchants, and shipment who were partakers of her wickedness and immorality. The source of their pleasure and riches was destroyed with her. And it was their loss they bewailed more than the loss of Babylon.

THE SAINTS REJOICE

18:20 Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her.

18:20 What a contrast we have here: the kings, merchants, and shipmen are weeping with great lamentations over the fall of Babylon, but the saints of God are told to rejoice — rejoice because the righteousness of God is vindicated. With the former the source of their wealth and pleasure is destroyed: with the latter a great enemy and persecutor has been brought to judgment — the suffering of the saints is being avenged by God. **Rejoice over her**, — Because the cause of truth and right has prevailed. The great seducer of Chris-

tians has been cast down and is no longer a threat to them. The church is victorious. The rejoicing is not the glee of seeing vengeance upon the people of the city, but the delight of celebrating the long awaited victory. The victory belongs to the saints, whether in heaven or on earth. Hence they are told to rejoice (cf. Jer. 51:48). **thou heaven**, — Heaven's inhabitants, the angels and perhaps the redeemed who had died in the faith. **and ye holy apostles and prophets**; — And ye saints, and ye apostles, and ye prophets (ASV). The saints include all the redeemed; the apostles probably mean the 12, although all of them were dead at this time except John. The prophets are inspired teachers. The heaven, saints, apostles, and prophets taken together mean all the people of God in heaven and on earth. They are all to rejoice over the fact that Babylon has been brought to judgment. **for God hath avenged you on her**. — God has judged her for the way she treated you (NIV). The great enemy of the purity of the church is now to receive her due, and that due is to be administered to her as she had administered punishment to the people of God (cf. 6:10).

BABYLON'S TOTAL DESTRUCTION

18:21-24 *And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all. And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be, shall be found any more in thee; and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee; And the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived, And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.*

18:21 **And a mighty angel** — A strong or powerful angel, not further identified by John (cf. 5:2; 10:1). **took up a stone like a great millstone**, — A huge boulder the size of a large millstone (cf. Jer. 51:63-64). **and cast it into the sea**, — With great force the angel hurled the stone into the sea as a symbolic act, showing that Babylon would sink to rise no more. **saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down**, — Or destroyed. The violent nature of her final end is thus illustrated. **and shall be found no more at all**. — And will never be found again (Williams). Like ancient Babylon, which was utterly destroyed (Is. 13:19-22; Jer. 50:13, 39-40), the destruction of spiritual Babylon is to be so complete and final that she shall never be found again. This shows the finality of her judgment.

18:22 We have seen (vv. 9-19) the lament of those who stood afar off from the burning city (kings, merchants, and shipmen), but now we are to look inside the city itself and see the activities which are to cease — it is a picture of utter destruction. The activities are divided into five categories: (1) No more music or festive occasions; (2) no more work from the craftsmen; (3) no more domestic activities — no more preparation of food; (4) no more light, thus no festivities of the night — darkness would prevail; and (5) no more weddings

or happy social occasions. **And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee;** — Entertainment is at the center of all large and wicked cities, but Babylon would know no more of its joys. All music, the symbol of a happy state of affairs, would cease. **and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be, shall be found any more in thee;** — All works of craft, including the fine arts, would come to a halt, all industrial production would cease. **and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee;** — No more food production or preparing for feasts.

18:23 **And the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee;** — All night festivities would cease — darkness would cover the whole city. **and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee:** — There would be no more marrying or happy social occasions. All this signifies that Babylon would be utterly destroyed and the very site where she had been would be absolutely desolate. This shows the awful extent of her judgment. **for thy merchants were the great men of the earth;** — The connection here is hard to determine but the point seems to be a contrast between what was before and what was after the fall. Before the great men of earth, kings, merchants, and shipmen, filled her streets and shops with trade, but now they stand afar off for fear of her judgment. Before their commerce filled her with riches, but now they have abandoned her. The great men who had joined in her wickedness are now helpless to save her from destruction. They could offer her nothing. **for by thy sorceries** — Magic spells, trickery, impostures, pretenses. **were all nations deceived.** — That is, they were led astray by her deception.

18:24 **And in her** — When her sordid past was uncovered. **was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.** — Babylon represents lust and seduction and wherever such immorality reigns the saints suffer and die for their faith. Thus their blood had been shed in Babylon, and no doubt cried out for vengeance (cf. 6:10). And as judgment is administered to the great harlot, the enemy of purity, the saints can rejoice (v. 20). Babylon is judged (destroyed); the saints are victorious (saved).

REVELATION 19

HEAVEN'S HALLELUJAHS

19:1-6 And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia. And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

19:1-6 Babylon has come to her final end and the heavenly host sing the triumphant song. This section is an extension of 18:20. There heaven and the redeemed are told to rejoice; here the rejoicing is described in a fourfold hallelujah chorus. (1) Hallelujah, salvation and glory belong to God (v. 1) — He has judged the harlot and brought the redeemed safely home. (2) Hallelujah, the smoke of the destruction of the great harlot rises forever and ever (v. 3) — she will never trouble the saints again. (3) Hallelujah, God is to be worshipped and praised by all who fear Him (vv. 4-5) — praised for His provision of salvation and deliverance from the powers of Babylon. (4) Hallelujah, for the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns (v. 6) — the great enemy is defeated, His throne is secure, and the final victory is His.

19:1 **And after these things** — The vision of chapter 18. **I heard a great voice of much people in heaven**, — I heard as it were a great voice of a great multitude (ASV). The voice John heard was as the voice of a vast multitude, that is, it had the volume which sounded like the shout of a huge number singing. It no doubt represents the voice of the redeemed. **saying, Alleluia;** — Saying, Hallelujah (ASV). The word hallelujah, found only here and in vv. 3-4, 6 in the NT, means "Praise the Lord." In the OT, as Robertson observes, "Fifteen of the psalms begin or end with this word" (e.g., Ps. 104-106). Thus the song of the heavenly voice John heard was a voice of praise. **Salvation**, — The salvation (BV). The salvation in view here is that of man but it is here ascribed to God because He is its author and giver. Man was lost in sin, utterly hopeless to do anything about his lost condition. But God intervened and provided a plan whereby man could be saved (through the shed blood of the Lamb). The plan is wholly of God in the sense that it was provided by Him solely upon

the basis of grace (Eph. 2:8-9). Man could not have designed it, nor could he have given it. Thus the origin of the means of salvation is of God and He is to be praised forever for its provision. Of course once the plan was given solely by God, it contained the duty of man (e.g., Mt. 7:21; Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; Heb. 5:8-9). When man obeys the plan he is not working out or providing for his own salvation (the provision was made by God). He is simply meeting the conditions of salvation as stipulated by God in the plan. Do not confuse our duty to obey the plan once given with God's grace in giving the plan. (See notes on 12:10.) **and glory**, — The glory (BV). This is ascribed to God here because He has provided salvation. God is glorified when man does (and is) what he was made to do (and be). Since God has provided the plan, all the glory for salvation belongs to Him. **and honour**, — See notes on 5:12. This is omitted by later translations on textual grounds. **and power**, — The power (BV). See notes on 5:12; 12:10. **unto the Lord our God**: — The salvation, the glory, and the power are all His. The redeemed are not victorious because of their own strength and plans, but by God's. Thus the salvation, glory, and power belong to Him, not to man.

19:2 **For true and righteous are his judgments**: — This states the reason for their rejoicing. See notes on 15:3. **for he hath judged the great whore**, — He has called wicked Babylon to account for her immoral deeds, especially her persecution of the saints who can now rejoice because deliverance has come. **which did corrupt the earth** — The people of the earth (cf. 18:3). **with her fornication**, — With her lewdness (BV) or her immorality (see notes on 17:2). Keep in mind that the great harlot represents any and every system, power, or organization whose business it is to corrupt by seducing to sexual impurities. **and hath avenged the blood of his servants** — She had murdered the saints of God (see notes on 18:20, 24). **at her hand**, — The blood which she had caused to be shed was now being exacted from her. Her judgment has come and she is reaping what she had sown (Gal. 6:7-8).

19:3 **And again they said, Alleluia**. — The first hallelujah was in praise to God for His salvation (vv. 1-2). This one seems to be praising God because He has brought Babylon to judgment. **And her smoke** — The smoke of her torment and destruction (cf. 14:11; Gn. 19:28; Is. 34:9-10). **rose up for ever and ever**. — That is, her destruction is complete and final. She will never rise again! The smoke rising from her signifies the finality and nature of her judgment and implies that her destruction will be for all eternity. Thus I think the point here is that Babylon lies in utter and eternal collapse — there is absolutely no hope for her recovery. The smoke of destruction will keep on rising from her ruins.

19:4 **And the four and twenty elders** — See notes on 4:4. **and the four beasts** — See notes on 4:6. **fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne**, — See 4:8. Worship here is the paying of homage to God. The throne is the throne of heaven — God's throne. **saying, Amen**; — Be it so. That is, they concur with the judgment administered to Babylon. **Alleluia**. — Praise

the Lord. The twenty-four elders and the four beasts join in the hallelujah chorus — the chorus of praise and worship.

19:5 **And a voice came out of the throne**, — And a voice came forth from the throne (ASV). While the speaker is not identified, it is probably the voice of another angel. **saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great.** — The voice exhorts all the redeemed, all those who have been delivered from the threat of Babylon, to join in the chorus of praise. There is no end to the reasons why the creature should praise his Creator, and there is no higher reason for praise than the attaining of salvation or the final victory, which all of these had done.

19:6 **And I heard as it were** — The voice John heard was similar to a great multitude, many waters, and mighty thunder. It no doubt signifies the praise of the vast number of all the saved. **the voice of a great multitude**, — Probably indicating harmony. See notes on 7:9. **and as the voice of many waters**, — That is, the voice was rhythmic, as in the flow of water. See notes on 1:15; 14:2. **and as the voice of mighty thunderings**, — This indicates volume. See notes on 6:1. The point seems to be that the voice John heard was harmonious, rhythmic, and voluminous. **saying**, — It was not just a noise he heard; it was the voice of praise. **Alleluia**: — The first hallelujah praises God for salvation, the second for the destruction of Babylon, the third was a praise of worship, and here, the fourth, is praise for the reign of God. **for the Lord God omnipotent** — For the Lord our God, the Almighty (ASV). That is, our God is all powerful (see notes on 1:8; 4:8). This is proven by His work (Gn. 1:1; Ps. 8:3; 19:9; Rom. 1:20). Such infinite power is beyond the comprehension of finite mind. Nevertheless it is true, and we must recognize God as the Almighty. This is so done here by the great voice because He had brought Babylon low and thus proved that His reign is over the earth as well as over heaven. **reigneth**. — The fact that He reigns, that He is the victor, is proven by His bringing the great harlot to judgment. Barnes seems to have struck the right note here in saying, "The meaning is, that as the last enemy of the church is destroyed, he now truly reigns" — that is, He reigns with no rivals (cf. Ps. 97:1).

19:7-10 Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God. And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

19:7 **Let us be glad and rejoice**, — These are the words of the great voice John heard in v. 6. The reason for being glad and rejoicing is that the marriage of the Lamb has come. **and give honour to him**: — And let us give glory unto him (ASV). See notes on v. 1. **for the marriage of the Lamb is come**, — Some see a difficulty here in the fact that Paul taught that the church is now married to Christ (Rom. 7:4; Eph. 5:22-32) while John sees the marriage taking place

after the work on earth is done and all the saints are gathered to celebrate their final victory. Hailey deals with this difficulty by seeing the present marriage between Christ and the church as a betrothal (according to the custom of the Jews in Bible times). The betrothed were bound together more strictly than in our engagement — it was a binding contract, but short of the marriage itself. The parties were considered as committed to each other but they had not yet come together to consummate the marriage. The marriage actually took place when the bridegroom came for his bride (Mt. 25:1-13). Thus Hailey sees the church now as only betrothed to Christ (a state that can be called a marriage) and the marriage taking place when Christ comes again. This is an attractive explanation and may well be the truth of the matter, but I had considered it long before I read Hailey and was forced to reject it on the grounds that Paul says we are married to Christ now in order to produce fruit (Rom. 7:4). Whatever that fruit is, it is the results of the union between Christ and the church and that union is precisely what Paul calls marriage. Thus it appears to me that we have no alternative but to accept the fact that the church is now married to Christ, that it is in spiritual union with Him. This Paul positively asserts. The fact that we are now married to Christ means that we are united with Him, that we belong to Him, and that our relationship with Him is both fruitful and permanent. This is the emphasis of Paul. The emphasis of the marriage feast is the great joy of that eternal union when Christ comes for His victorious wife. Then the church (His bride) shall have won the victory over her enemies, and will join Christ in that eternal home He has gone to prepare for her (John 14:2-3). The two metaphors are independent and we do an injustice to the truth when we try to make them one. Thus to use the passage here to prove that the saints are not now married to Christ is to confuse two metaphors and to ignore or explain away the plain words of Paul. **and his wife hath made herself ready.** — His bride or the people who are now to be joined to Him in an eternal relationship. The actual marriage feast is not described; it is just announced. Rightly understood, it is simply a metaphorical way of depicting for us the final victory of the saints, their homegoing to be with the Lord forever.

19:8 **And to her was granted** — To her was given the right or power (by the grace of God) to array herself in such dazzling apparel. This, of course, clearly indicates the responsibility of the saints to make themselves ready, to be properly dressed (cf. Mt. 22:11-14), for the wedding feast. **that she should be arrayed in fine linen,** — That she should array herself in fine linen (ASV). Note in particular that it was given to her to be arrayed but she had to put on the garments herself. The bridal dress is described as fine linen, which represents the righteous deeds of the saints. This should be contrasted with the seductive apparel of the harlot (17:4; 18:16). **clean and white:** — Bright and pure (ASV). Her bridal attire signifies her purity and dazzling beauty (cf. Eph. 5:27). Swete remarks, "As the saints are individually clad in robes made white in the blood of the Lamb (Apoc. vii. 9, 14); so corporately the whole church

is seen to be attired in dazzling whiteness of their collective purity." **for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.** — That is, the bride is robed in righteousness — her wedding attire signifies her righteous standing before God. Since God granted the attire (righteousness), in a sense it is His; but since the bride was to dress herself with it, there is a sense in which it is hers. It is God's in the sense that He gave the plan (the gospel) by which righteousness is attained. Man had absolutely nothing to do with giving the plan; it was done wholly by grace. But once the plan was given, it contained the duty of man — it revealed to man what he must do in order to be pleasing to God. As man obeys the gospel (God's plan), he attains the righteousness God has provided. As in all respects of salvation, God is the author and giver; man is the appropriator and receiver. Thus the righteousness of the saints here is the results of obedience to the gospel of Christ.

19:9 **And he saith unto me,** — The speaker seems almost certain to be the same as the voice which came out from the throne in v. 5. **Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.** — The symbol or metaphor changes here: in vv. 7-8 the saints are seen collectively as the bride; here they are seen individually as the blessed or happy ones who are bidden to the wedding supper. The saints are, in the two metaphors, seen as both the bride and the guest. On the word blessed, see notes on 1:5. **And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.** — "These are the true words of God" (BV). That is, they are the words which God Himself has spoken. Although spoken through His agents, they originated with God — He is the true source. Commentators are not agreed on what words the voice had in mind, whether this beatitude alone, the whole vision starting with chapter 17, or the whole book. While we may never settle this matter (I know of no way it can be done), the principle here stated would apply to the whole Bible. There is not a word in the Bible which God did not put there (the devil and evil men have words there, but they are there, not because they put them there, but because God did — He told us what they said). Thus we can say that the Scriptures are the word of God and as such they are true (Ps. 119:160) and pure (Ps. 12:6; 119:140).

19:10 **And I fell at his feet to worship him.** — This is surprising because we do not expect John to so worship a creature as he does here and in 22:8-9. He seems to have been so awed by the angel's presence and so excited about what he said (that he spoke the true word of God, v. 9) that he either mistook him as one so closely representative of God that to worship him would be to worship God or else he momentarily forgot that no created object is to be worshipped. **And he said unto me,** — The angel quickly responds to John in order to correct him (cf. Acts 10:25). **See thou do it not:** — Do not do it (NIV), "No, not that!" (Moffett). The following gives two reasons why John was prohibited from this act of worship: (1) the angel was a fellowservant; (2) worship belongs to God alone. This should remind us that all our worship must be kept true to its purpose and nature [John 4:23-24]. Barnes notes, "Nothing is more

carefully guarded in the Bible than the purity and simplicity of worship; nothing is more sternly rebuked than idolatry; nothing is more contrary to the divine law than rendering in any way the homage to a creature which belongs of right to the Creator." Necessity is therefore laid upon us all to see that our worship is according to the divine pattern — rendered to the right object (God), with the right motive (in spirit), and by the right methods or acts (in truth). **I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren** — Like John, he was one of the great host, both in heaven and on earth, who serve God. **that have the testimony of Jesus:** — One of those who believe, hold, and teach the testimony (the truth, the gospel message) given by Jesus (see notes on 1:2, 9; 12:17). **worship God:** — God is the only object of true worship (Mt. 4:10). **for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.** — That is, the testimony (the truth, word, or message) delivered by Jesus is the very heart (or character) or prophecy. Prophecy here is probably limited to the gospel message given to the world by Christ.

THE KING OF KINGS APPEARS

19:11-16 And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse: and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

19:11 **And I saw heaven opened,** — That is, he was permitted to see a new vision which began in heaven (cf. 4:1; 11:19; 15:5; Mt. 3:16; Lk. 3:21). Evidently the vision was of such vast proportions that the whole of heaven had to be thrown open for John to observe all the activity. **and behold a white horse;** — See notes on 6:2. **and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True,** — See notes on 1:5; 3:14. When the total picture is considered, there can be no doubt but that the rider is Christ (cf. v. 16). He is in battle array against evil. **and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.** — All His judgments and battles are administered in justice. His warfare is only against evil (cf. 2 Cor. 10:4-6). One does a grave injustice to the spirit of Christ and Christianity to interpret war here as a literal battle fought with literal people on a literal battlefield with literal instruments of war. No such is here intended. Like previous visions, this one depicts the war between right and wrong, Christ and Satan. No battle is actually visualized or described (except in preparation, v. 19, and with the remnant of v. 21). Christ and His armies go forth prepared to battle (vv. 11-16) and then the fowls are invited to clean up the carnage of war (vv. 17-21), indicating that the battle has been ultimately fought and won. Thus the vision is not of a battle (except as it is to depict victory for the King of kings) but a judgment scene against the beast, the kings of the earth, and

the false prophets. While the battle rages through the whole Christian period, in the end victory is won for righteousness.

19:12 **His eyes were as a flame of fire**, — See notes on 1:14. **and on his head were many crowns**; — The many crowns (diadems, ASV, or regal crowns) signify His unlimited royal rule and authority over all nations of the world (Mt. 28:18-20). Christ is King of kings (v. 16; 1 Tm. 6:15) — that is, He is the Ruler who is above all rulers. **and he had a name written**, — He has a name written on him (NIV). Probably His new name, as mentioned in 3:12 (cf. notes on 2:17). **that no man knew, but he himself**. — If no man knows that name, it would be futile and a waste of time and space for me to try to explain what it is. Thus I leave it with the simple observation that the name, when it is known, will identify Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords. It will manifest to all that He has all authority, in heaven and on earth (Mt. 28:18). It will reveal Him as victor over all His enemies. The unknown name undoubtedly signifies something, but what I am at a loss to say.

19:13 **And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood**: — And he was arrayed in a garment sprinkled with blood (ASV). Textual critics are divided over the reading of the KJV and ASV, although most translations are with the KJV. Both readings have substantial support and I know of no way currently to solve the problem. However as far as understanding the text is concerned, it makes no difference. Whether the garment is dipped or sprinkled in blood, it signifies the same thing. There are basically two ways to understand the bloodstained garment: (1) it signifies the blood shed on the cross for the redemption of sinners — it is the shed blood of Christ by which we are saved. (2) It signifies the blood shed by Christ in battle with His enemies — it is not His blood, but that of His enemies, which stains His garment. I prefer the former but most commentators seem to prefer the latter (or some variation of it). **and his name is called The Word of God**. — The word who became flesh and dwelled among us (Jn. 1:1-14). This further identifies the rider as Christ.

19:14 **And the armies which were in heaven** — That is, the heavenly hosts (cf. Mt. 26:53; 2 Thes. 1:7-9). **followed him upon white horses**, — The white horses undoubtedly signify holiness and purity and the fact that they follow Him shows their devotion. Thus the picture is of a pure army devoted to the service of our blessed Lord. This is strengthened by the fact that they (the armies) were **clothed in fine linen, white and clean**. — See notes on v. 8.

19:15 **And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword**, — The word of God (Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12) as the means of judgment (cf. Jn. 12:48). See notes on 1:16. This reveals His instrument of battle and proves beyond any doubt whatsoever that this is a spiritual battle rather than a literal one, the same battle that has been fought throughout the book, the battle between the church and the world, good and evil, Christ and Satan. **that with it he should smite the nations**: — With which to strike down the nations (NIV). He conquers the nations (the wicked of the world) by the word of His mouth, that is, he brings

judgment upon them by the powerful word of God. While the word has power to save (Rom. 1:16; Jas. 1:21; 1 Pt. 1:22), salvation is not depicted here. The word also has power to judge and condemn. And that is the symbolism in this scene (cf. Is. 11:4). The word of God is the instrument by which the nations are brought to judgment. **and he shall rule them with a rod of iron:** — That is, the scepter of his judgment will be stern (cf. Ps. 2:9). Or as Mounce puts it, "It is strong and unyielding in its mission of judgment" (cf. notes on 2:27). **and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.** — God's fierceness is a result of His anger at man's sin and degradation, that is, His fierce judgment is against sin and it will be as severe as pressing the juice from grapes in a winepress. The winepress here is a symbol of the raging wrath of Almighty God (see notes on 14:19).

19:16 **And he hath on his vesture** — Robe or garment — the vesture dipped in blood (v. 13). **and on his thigh** — This may mean that it was on that part of the garment which covered the thigh, but more likely the name of v. 13, The Word of God, is written on the thigh to symbolize the sword with which He battles. **a name written,** — This is the third or fourth time the name has been mentioned: first, if we take v. 11 as His name, it is Faithful and True; second, He has a name which no one could know but Himself; third, His name is The Word of God; and here it is the King of kings and Lord of lords. All these help to identify the rider on the white horse as Christ, the Ruler of heaven and earth. **KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.** — In this vision He is the King leading His victorious army in judgment against the enemy. As Ladd says, "The name designates the absolute sovereignty of Christ" — the one who reigns over all God's creation, the highest King and Lord of them all.

THE CARNAGE OF BATTLE

19:17-18 And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great.

19:17 **The purpose of the vision given in vv. 17-18 is to depict the complete victory of Christ through the word of His mouth. As John sees the vision the battle is over and the victory won and the carnage of the battle is given to the birds of prey. And I saw an angel standing in the sun;** — The sun (as it appears to man) is the brightest object in the universe, and yet the splendor and grandeur of this angel can be seen as he is standing in the sun, a position from which all could see and hear him. **and he cried with a loud voice,** — With a voice of great volume, so as to be heard by all the fowls he addressed. **saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven,** — To all the birds flying in midair (NIV). Hines says, "The fowls here mean birds of prey — those that eat flesh and the image is that of such birds hovering over a battlefield ready to consume the bodies of the slain." **Come and**

gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; — The fowls are invited to clean up the carnage of battle. It is called the supper of the great God because He provides it (cf. Ez. 39:17-20; Mt. 24:28).

19:18 **That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great.** — This is a description of all the enemies of truth and right (cf. notes on 6:15). The birds of prey are called together so that they may dine on the flesh of all those who have fallen under the judgment of Almighty God. Barclay lets his modernism show when he says, "This bloodthirsty picture is again far more in line with Old Testament apocalyptic expectation than with the gospel of Christ." But this misses the point. There is no literal battle or shedding of literal blood. The picture is of necessity made severe in order to depict the severity of God's judgment against His enemies. To lessen the severity would be to weaken the picture of the judgment before which all who fight against God must stand. They were slain, not with a literal sword, but with the word of God. Thus the picture is of judgment. Such a judgment may not be easy for us to accept, but we must remember that the slain made their own choice as to whom they would serve. They took their stand against God, their Creator, and chose to follow Satan and his representatives, and in making that choice they inevitably chose the consequences with all its severity. We must learn that to refuse the gospel with its offer of salvation is to accept the judgment of God against sin and disobedience (2 Thes. 1:7-9), regardless of how severe it may be.

THE FINAL DEFEAT OF EVIL

19:19-21 And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.

19:19 **And I saw the beast,** — The sea beast of chapter 13, which represents godless governments wherever found (see notes on 13:1), **and the kings of the earth,** — The rulers in godless governments. **and their armies,** — All those who support the kings. **gathered together** — United in purpose. **to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army.** — To launch an all-out assault against Christ and His saints (for a similar vision, see 16:13-16, along with the notes there). The showdown has come and the judgment of the beast is at hand. We must remember that the battle took place while the saints were here on earth; the scene here is after the battle is over and the time of judgment has arrived. This is therefore a judgment scene, not a battle scene.

19:20 **And the beast was taken,** The sea beast of 13:1, the great enemy

of God manifested through corrupt and antichristian governments, was seized or captured. That is, he was brought to judgment. **and with him the false prophet** — The land beast of 13:11-18 (see notes on these vv.), which manifested himself through false religions. **that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them** — He performed lying wonders so as to deceive the beast worshippers (see notes on 13:13-14). **that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image.** — Both the sea beast and the land beast, both ungodly political powers and false religions. Swete states it well by saying, "The day that sees the end of a false statecraft will see also that of a false priestcraft." **were cast alive into a lake of fire** — The final and eternal state of the wicked. What is here called the lake of fire, Jesus called Gehenna (e.g., Mt. 5:22, 29-30; 10:28; 18:8-9), the place of eternal destruction. It is also called the second death in 2:11; 20:14. In Mt. 13:42 Jesus called it a furnace of fire and in Mt. 25:46 everlasting punishment. Consider other descriptive terms as used in Phil. 3:19; 2 Thes. 1:9; Heb. 10:39; 2 Pt. 2:17; Jude 13. Whatever else may be said about the lake of fire, it depicts the final and irreversible separation from God and all that is holy. It is separation from God for all eternity. **burning with brimstone.** — See notes on 9:17-19; 14:10-11. Robertson (WP) well observes, "The fact of hell is clearly taught here, but the imagery is not to be taken literally any more than that of heaven in chapters 4-5, 21-22 is to be so understood. Both fall short of the reality."

19:21 **And the remnant were slain** — The remainder of the enemies of truth — the kings and their armies of v. 19. **with the sword of him that sat upon the horse,** — That is, they were brought under the judgment of the word of God. **which sword proceeded out of his mouth:** — This identifies the instrument by which they were slain as the word (see v. 15), the source of which is the mouth of the Lord. **and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.** — They feasted on the flesh as they had been invited to do in vv. 17-18. This indicates their utter and final destruction. As in previous divisions of the book, when we come to the end of this section we see again the saints victorious and their enemies destroyed. The righteous are vindicated and the wicked are judged with a judgment from which there is no appeal. Thus in the end the saints, under the leadership of their great King, have won the battle of the ages and are safely at home with Christ in the world to come. As Hailey says, "In this defeat and destruction is revealed the destiny of all such powers that should ever arise to fight against God and His kingdom. This is God's guarantee of victory to the saints who lived then and to all who would come after them, even until the end of time."

REVELATION 20

Chapter 20 has long been a fertile ground for theorists, especially those of the premillennialism persuasion. But one thing characterizes them all: they spin their theories into the text rather than drawing them out of it by a serious study of what is actually said in conjunction with the remainder of Scripture. As Warfield says, "Nothing, indeed, seems to have been more common in all ages of the Church than to frame an eschatological scheme from this passage, imperfectly understood, and then to impose this scheme on the rest of Scripture." While there is no question but that the chapter is difficult (and this is true regardless of which approach one may take to it), it seems to me that in the final analysis it is another vision of the great battle between the church and the world — that is, it covers the same ground as the other visions, except it is designed to emphasize the defeat of Satan and the victory of the saints. In this view, the picture presented is relatively clear: (1) Satan is bound for a thousand years, after which he will be released for a final assault against Christ (vv. 1-3); (2) some or all the dead saints reign with Christ for a thousand years — that is, they reign victoriously (vv. 4-6); (3) Satan is defeated in his final assault and is cast into the lake of fire (vv. 7-10); (4) the final (or general) judgment in which both saints and sinners appear before the great white throne (vv. 11-15). Thus the contents of the chapter can be summed up: vv. 1-3 is the conflict, although more implied than stated; vv. 4-6 depicts the victory gained by the departed saints — the dead saints are not dead; they live and reign with Christ; vv. 7-10 shows the final assault of Satan against Christ — he is defeated and cast into the lake of fire; vv. 11-15 gives us a view of the final judgment. That is the picture as John presents it to us. This we can understand. But when we try to explain every detail which goes to make up the picture, we run head-on into difficulties. However, as I have pointed out several times before, it is the overall picture God wants us to see. It is wonderful to be able to understand all the details, but if it cannot be done, with our present knowledge, that does not prevent us from seeing the picture as a whole — from learning what God wants us to learn.

THE BINDING OF SATAN

20:1-3 And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and

Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

20:1 And I saw an angel come down from heaven, — Some argue that this angel is Christ Himself, but I see no substantial reason to so believe. It is better, or so it seems to me, to see him as another angel armed with the authority of heaven to bind Satan and to lock him in his prison house, the bottomless pit. Rather than being Christ, he is the agent of Christ, acting in His stead. This probably indicates that the angel has power over Satan throughout the Christian dispensation. **having the key of the bottomless pit** — Having the key of the abyss (ASV). The key is a symbol of his power or authority, given to him by heaven, over the abyss and consequently over Satan (cf. Mt. 16:19). The abyss is the dwelling place of Satan and his cohorts. As Plummer says, "The abyss; as in ch. ix. 1, 2, 11; xi. 7; xvii. 8. In all these places the word signifies the present abode of Satan and his angels, whence they direct their operations in hostility to God, not the place of their final punishment (see v. 10)." **and a great chain in his hand.** — A chain ready to be used to bind Satan. The chain signifies the instrument by which Satan is bound. And in the Christian age there can be no doubt but that this is the word of God. Thus Satan is chained (bound or limited) by the gospel of Christ (see notes on v. 2). It says in essence, "Your power can extend thus far (the limits set by the gospel) but no farther."

20:2 And he — The angel of v. 1. **laid hold on** — Seized him or took him by force. **the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan,** — A fourfold designation of the archenemy of God and His people (see notes on 12:9). **and bound him** — Evidently bound him with the chain of v. 1. That is, Satan is bound by the word of God. But to what extent is he bound? Does this mean that he is absolutely bound from all activity or does it mean that his activity has been limited to certain spheres? Some say the former but I think the latter because it is more in keeping with the context. He is bound in his prison house (v. 3), and from there he directs his work through his agents. Barnes says, "This passage does not require us to suppose that there will be a total cessation of Satanic influence in the earth during that period." Even so he is still bound from certain things. For example, he cannot destroy the Bible (Mt. 24:35); he cannot prevent the gospel (when it is believed and obeyed) from saving (Rom. 1:16); he cannot tempt a child of God with a temptation that has no escape (1 Cor. 10:13); nor can he so control man as to destroy his free will. It seems that Satan has power over man only to the extent that man permits him to exercise that power, and certainly only to the extent that God permits it. Thus Satan is bound in many ways and from many activities in the Christian age, and I think this is what is symbolized here. As an example of how he may be bound, consider the limits placed on him in the case of Job. Job was in comfortable circumstances, with a large happy family and a great deal of wealth (Jb. 1:1-5). But a day came when the sons of God presented them-

selves before the Lord, and Satan came also (Jb. 1:6). The Lord asked him if he had considered His servant Job. Satan replied that the reason Job feared God was because He had hedged him about with so many blessings (Jb. 1:7-10). The devil said that if he could remove the hedge from him, Job would curse God to the face (Jb. 1:11). "And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thy hand" (Jb. 1:12). God thus bound Satan from touching Job's person. He could destroy his goods but he could not put a hand on Job because God limited his power. When Satan had destroyed all Job's possessions and he was still faithful, he appeared before God again and said, "Put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life" (Jb. 2:5-6). Some of the restrictions were now lifted and Satan was permitted to attack the person of Job, but he was bound from destroying his life. From this it should be obvious that Satan can only work to the extent God will permit him — he is bound from all other activities. Jesus asked, "Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he shall spoil his house" (Mt. 12:29). The strong man is the devil and this tells us that when Christ entered the realm of death and then broke its bonds by His resurrection He bound Satan. Thus the binding of Satan took place at the resurrection and he will remain bound (by the gospel) until he is loosed for a little season at the time of judgment. **a thousand years**, — A period that is mentioned six times in the first 7 vv. of this chapter, but nowhere else in the Bible. I suppose that in each of the six uses it has reference to the same period of time, if indeed time is an element at all. While there are scores of ideas about it, in my opinion the number is symbolic, signifying the complete or whole period of time from the first coming of Christ to His coming in the power of judgment. This concept seems to fit the overall context better than anything that has come under my observation. While it is not without difficulty, the difficulty seems less than with any other view.

20:3 The binding of Satan (v. 2) and casting him into the bottomless pit seems to be another way of depicting the battle of the ages. It shows that regardless of what befalls us God is in control, that Satan is subjected to His power, and those who follow Him will be the victors. **And cast him into the bottomless pit**, — He was first bound with the chain (v. 2) — that is, his activity was limited (cf. Jn. 12:31) — and now he is forcibly thrown into the abyss, his own place of abode. As Swete states it, "Already he has been cast out of heaven (xii. 9), now he is cast out of the earth, and returned to his own place." **and shut him up**, — The entrance was closed. **and set a seal upon him**, — And sealed it over him (ASV). The seal is designed to prevent a secret opening from the outside. The security was absolute; no intrusion could go undetected. **that he should deceive the nations no more**, — This probably means that he could not personally deceive the people of the world to the extent that he did before the first advent of Christ. He is depicted as bound by the word of God

and shut up in the abyss. Thus his activities are limited to what he can do from his prison. As we have seen, his binding does not mean that he can do absolutely nothing, but rather that his activities and influence are limited to his agents, such as the sea beast, the land beast, and the harlot. It is my judgment that this is designed to show the battle-worn saints that, even though it may appear at times that Satan is in complete control of the world, the powers of evil are limited. Their fight for truth and right is not in vain. the archenemy is bound and will ultimately be defeated, **till the thousand years should be fulfilled:** — That is, until the thousand years comes to an end or is completed. **and after that** — After the thousand years are completed, **he must be loosed a little season.** — A short period in contrast with the thousand years. But if the thousand years is the Christian age, how can there be a little season at its end? This is a very forceful question and is one of the difficulties confronting the view here advocated, but it does not take into account the fact that in a vision what appears to be a time sequence may not in reality be so at all. Probably all that is signified here is that Satan will regain his power and influence when he is released from his prison and will consequently use that power to resist the judgment. But no matter, in the end he will lose the battle and be cast into the lake of fire. Thus at the end of the thousand years Satan will be set free for a little period and will make a final assault on Christ and the judgment which is to be brought upon him. This final assault, as described in vv. 7-10, is, in my opinion, just another way to depict the devil's final rebellion against the judgment. If so, essentially the same thing is presented in 19:17-21 as the final battle between Christ and His enemies. It therefore appears to me that vv. 7-10 reveals the little season as the time of judgment against Satan.

REIGN OF THE SAINTS

20:4-6 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

20:4 **And I saw thrones,** — Thrones from which the saints exercise authority given them by Christ. They do not reign for Christ; they reign with him. A throne signifies the power of one who is in authority, such as a king or ruler. **and they sat upon them,** — Just who were seated upon the thrones is not here stated, but since the saints lived and reigned with Christ it is reasonable to presume that "they" of the first part of the v. are the same as those who lived and reigned with Christ of the last part of it. **and judgment was given unto them:** — Received power to sentence (BV). Just how or upon whom they were to pass judgment is not clear. But this we do not need to know in order to see the point of the vision. What is here depicted is the saints exalted to

the highest possible position, and this may indicate that they have a voice in deciding the fate of their enemies (cf. 1 Cor. 6:2-3). **and I saw the souls** — Souls in contrast with bodies — that is, souls separated from their bodies. This means the eternal part of man, the spiritual being, the part of man which never dies. This is extremely significant in the interpretation of this difficult passage. John did not see bodies; he saw souls. Barnes says, "The word used here [souls, HW] is fatal to the notion of a literal resurrection and a personal reign with Christ on the earth." The reign John here sees could not be in this life because souls have bodies here. Nor can it be after the resurrection, for then the body and soul will be reunited. It must, therefore, mean the disembodied souls of the intermediate state. I conclude, therefore, that the reign John sees is not on earth, nor in heaven, but in the sphere where the spirit of saints go at death. If this conclusion is correct, then John sees the blessed dead he spoke of in 14:13. The same state would also be called Abraham's bosom in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-31). Paul probably has the same thing in view when he says that for him to depart (die) would be for him to be with Christ, which he sees as a greater blessing than to live (Phil. 1:21-24). Consequently those who reign with Christ are some or all of the departed saints. This reminds us of the souls under the altar of 6:9. There martyrdom is pictured as defeat (as it relates to this world) — they are crying for vengeance upon those who had taken their lives; here the picture is of victory (as it relates to the state of the departed saints in the intermediate realm). **of them that were beheaded** — Those martyred for the cause of Christ. The word translated beheaded appears only here in the NT, and according to Vine, "Denotes, to cut with an ax." Hence to behead with an ax. Barnes states my view precisely: "This was a common mode of execution among the Romans, and doubtless many of the Christian martyrs suffered in this manner; but 'it cannot be supposed to have been the intention of the writer to confine the rewards of martyrs to those who suffered in this particular way; for this specific and ignominious method of punishment is designated merely as the symbol of any and every kind of martyrdom' (Professor Stuart)." **for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God,** — The reason for their martyrdom (see notes on 1:9). **and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands;** — Also the souls of those who had not worshipped the beast or its statue, nor received the mark on the forehead and on the hand (BV). This statement may be understood either as the martyred saints (KJV) or as an additional group (BV) — probably all the saints. The translations are about evenly divided on it and I know of no way to settle the issue positively. But the picture is the same regardless of which view is accepted. Those who live and reign are symbolic of the saints' victory. It is my judgment however that the BV gives the correct view (this is also the way the ASV and the NASV understand it) and that the two groups taken together depict the happy state of all the holy saints, past, present, and future, who are at rest in the intermediate state. They are,

in some very meaningful sense, reigning with Christ. But the picture is not changed even if only a part of the departed saints are meant. What we see is the saints' victory — the saints reigning victoriously after their battle on earth is completed. For notes on the beast, his image, and his mark see chapter 13.

and they lived and reigned — What is here called living and reigning is called the first resurrection in v. 5 (and probably overcoming in 2:11 — see notes there). John may put the living and reigning in the past tense because he is viewing it from the perspective of the end of the world, but more likely it is simply a variation of the expression in v. 6. They lived means that the martyred saints (and all others included in John's vision), even though dead from the world's perspective, are very much alive to God — that is, they have life now. Barnes says, "They were put to death in the body, but their 'souls' were now seen to be alive." Warfield says, "Though dead, therefore, in the bodily sense, they were yet alive — alive in the paradise of God with Christ." Thus the death of the saints is depicted as a promotion from the battle-worn pilgrims in this world to thrones in the place where they await their eternal reward. They reigned means that they have been exalted to rule on thrones with Christ. It should be noted that the emphasis here is on the saints living and reigning with Christ. **with Christ** — Christ reigns, but His reign is not the subject matter here. As Wallace says, "The reign of Revelation 20 was not the reign of Christ. It was rather a peculiar and special reign of souls **with Christ.**" Christ may have reigned before the martyrs began their reign (which is certainly the case if all saints join in the reign at death); He may reign after their reign comes to an end. All that is said here is that for a thousand years the saints reigned with Him. Not a word, not even a hint, is said of Christ reigning on earth with His saints, but that His saints reign with Him (in the state where the soul is separated from the body). **a thousand years.** — See notes on v. 2. The thousand years symbolizes a complete period, which I believe covers the whole Christian age, from the first to the second coming of our Lord. It is often called the millennium, around which all kinds of false theories have been spun. But I think Warfield is exactly on target when he says, "The millennium of the Apocalypse is the blessedness of the saints who have gone away from the body to be at home with the Lord." That millennium is not on earth, nor in heaven, but in the intermediate state.

20:5 But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. — (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended) (NIV). As the NIV shows, this is a parenthetical statement and means all those who have no part in the first resurrection. I think Cox is right when he says, "These are sinners who will not experience a resurrection of any kind until the end of time." They are not alive with Christ (even though they are in conscious existence, Lk. 16:19-31) in the sense those living and reigning are. Warfield says of them, "They are in every sense dead — already suffering the penalty of sin and to be restored to even bodily life only to be plunged into the terrible 'second death.'" **This is the first resurrec-**

tion. — Since the previous statement is parenthetical, this connects to v. 4 and shows that the saints living and reigning with Christ (in the intermediate state) is here called the first resurrection. The manner of their living (living now, living with Christ) and reigning was such as to appear that they had been raised from the dead (cf. Mt. 10:39). That is, they had been raised from the low ranks of this world (through death) to set on thrones with Christ. The first resurrection is set in contradistinction to the general resurrection in which all the dead, both good and bad, will be raised [Jn. 5:28-29]. Here I must leave you with a problem of the interpretation here given. I have made the first resurrection a figurative one and the second (implied) a literal one. Without trying to solve the problem (although both a figurative and a literal resurrection are in the same context of John 5:25-29) I give you two quotes, the one saying it cannot be done and the other that it is the proper thing to do. Alford says, "If in such a passage the first resurrection may be understood to mean **spiritual** rising with Christ, while the second means **literal** rising from the grave; then there is an end of all significance in language, and Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to any thing." On the other hand Swete says, "To infer from this statement, as many expositors have done, that the **ezesan** of v. 4 must be understood of bodily resuscitation, is to interpret apocalyptic prophecy by methods of exegesis which are proper to ordinary narrative." Obviously, in this case, I agree with Swete.

20:6 **Blessed** — See notes on 1:3. **and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection:** — If my exegesis of vv. 4-5 is correct, this is equivalent to saying blessed and holy are they who die in the Lord (14:13) or "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death" (2:11). To die in the Lord and to overcome seem to mean the same as to live and reign with Christ. For the meaning of the first resurrection, see notes on v. 5. **on such the second death hath no power,** — The second death is defined in v. 14 as being cast into the lake of fire — that is, eternal destruction. The picture to be seen here is that those who lived and reigned with Christ are secure in their victory. Satan can never again lead them in the paths of wickedness so as to cause them to be lost. **but they** — Those who have part in the first resurrection. **shall be priests of God and of Christ,** — They shall be a royal priesthood [cf. 1 Pt. 2:5, 9]. See notes on 1:6; 5:10. **and shall reign with him a thousand years.** — See notes on v. 4.

THE FINAL DEFEAT OF SATAN

20:7-10 And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

20:7 **And when the thousand years are expired**, — That is, when the term of his imprisonment has ended (see notes on v. 2). **Satan shall be loosed out of his prison**, — Released from the abyss (where he had been bound for a thousand years) to face the coming of Christ in judgment (see notes on v. 3). As Cox says, "When the final judgment is at hand, the powers of evil will again assemble and gather force." But to no avail: Satan's cause is doomed.

20:8 **And shall go out to deceive the nations** — When freed from the abyss Satan goes out to deceive and unify the enemies of God. It seems that his power may still be limited: for he deceives only the nations. The living and reigning saints are beyond his power, even though those still living on earth, if such there be, may suffer at his hands. The point here is that he musters God's foes from all over the world for the final fray against Christ and His cause. **which are in the four quarters of the earth**, — The four quarters (or corners, ASV) of the earth simply mean all the world, east, west, north, and south (cf. notes on 7:1). **Gog and Magog**, — Symbols for all the nations deceived by Satan. No specific geographical area is involved. This has for its background Ez. 38-39. There Gog was from the land of Magog and was the prince of Meshech and Tubal (Ez. 38:2-3). Ezekiel himself gives us more than a strong hint that Gog represents all the heathen enemies of the ancient people of Israel. The prophet says, "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Are you not the one I spoke of in former days by my servants the prophets of Israel? At that time they prophesied for years that I would bring you against them" (Ez. 38:17, NIV). No prophet, however, had spoken of Gog by name. What they foretold was that the heathen nations would come up against Israel. We must conclude, therefore, that Gog represents the heathen hordes which had throughout its history plagued God's kingdom and they would continue to do so after the restoration. Ezekiel's prophecy was designed to encourage those in captivity who were homesick for their native land. Thus God declared that when Gog (the heathen nations) attacked the land of Israel His anger would be aroused and He would execute a fearful judgment upon him (Ez. 38:18-23). This means that when the heathen nations came against Israel they would ultimately be defeated. The defeat would be so dreadful that their burial place would be called Hamongog (Ez. 39:11), which means hordes of Gog. So here in Revelation Gog and Magog represent all the forces that Satan can marshal for his final assault. **to gather them together to battle**: — The final battle of good and evil. This appears to be paralleled with the battles of 16:14-21; 19:17-21. It is Satan's final effort to overthrow the powers of heaven. Or, to express it another way, it is the consummation of the battle of the ages. **the number of whom** — The wicked, those symbolized by Gog. **is as the sand of the sea**. — Great multitudes of hordes so vast as to be practically innumerable.

20:9 **And they went up on the breadth of the earth**, — And they marched up over the broad earth (RSV). Their number being as the sand of the sea, they came in swarms from all parts of the world (see v. 8). The picture is of a vast invading army coming from all directions to encircle the saints.

They thus symbolize the great number who had pledged allegiance to Satan and had therefore become the enemies of Christ. We have again the same image which has appeared over and over in the book: the forces of evil clashing with the forces of righteousness. **and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city:** — And surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves (NIV). The camp of the saints and the beloved city are simply two different ways of expressing the same thing (as the NIV shows): they are both symbols of the church of God. **and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.** — That is, they were totally defeated in the battle — they were consumed by the just judgment of the Almighty. Robertson (WP) says that it is a "Vivid climax to this last great battle with Satan."

20:10 **And the devil that deceived them** — Satan who had deceived the nations and led them to the destruction of v. 9. **was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone,** — That is, he is finally and completely defeated and delivered to his ultimate doom. We first saw him cast out of heaven (12:9) and then locked in the abyss (v. 3). Neither, however, ended his rebellion. But now he is hurled into his eternal abode, the place prepared for him (Mt. 25:41), never to be able to practice his art of deception again. This depicts the fact that when the final battle is over Satan will have been defeated beyond the possibility of recovery. On the lake of fire and brimstone, see notes on 19:20. **where the beast and the false prophet are,** — See 19:20 and the notes there. **and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.** — That is, the torment shall never cease. This is to say that the judgment of God against Satan is complete and final. Whether the lake of fire is literal or not, we need not stop here to inquire (although it would be a strange phenomenon if literal fire is used to torment spiritual beings). What we are to see is that Satan is finally brought to judgment for his wicked deeds and that he receives punishment severe enough to be described as spending all eternity in a lake of fire. Since all those who follow Satan will be cast with him into this lake of fire (v. 15), I know of no symbol that could present a more dreadful or horrifying picture to the human mind and I know of nothing but the depths of God's love that should be a stronger motivation for denouncing Satan as one's master and fleeing to the Savior for divine refuge. It is a horrible picture, but one that all who are deceived by Satan need to see. We cannot fight against God in this life and expect to live with Him in peace in the world to come. Thus if we cast our lot with Satan here there is no choice but to suffer with him there.

THE FINAL JUDGMENT

20:11-15 And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

20:11 **And I saw a great white throne,** — The throne of judgment (cf. Mt. 25:31). The throne here signifies God's royal and judicial power. The fact that it is white assures us that His judgment is pure, holy, and just (cf. Ps. 89:14; 97:2). The greatness of it indicates that it surpasses all other thrones, in heaven and on earth. **and him that sat on it,** — God (cf. v. 12). Whether God the Father or God the Son is meant is of little significance to the meaning of the vision. Their unity is such that what is ascribed to the other also. Jesus said that the Father had committed all judgment to the Son (Jn. 5:22). Paul said that God would judge the world by (or through) Christ (Acts 17:31). Rom. 14:10 (ASV) says that we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God; 2 Cor. 5:10 says that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. Both statements mean the same thing. God is the ultimate judge but He exercises His judgment through Christ. **from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away;** — They vanished or disappeared in order to be replaced by the new heaven and earth (21:1; Mt. 24:35; 2 Pt. 1:7-13). **and there was found no place for them.** — That is, they had no place in the new order of things — the material cannot inhabit the spiritual. Hence, not a trace of them was to be found.

20:12 **And I saw the dead,** — All the dead, both saint and sinner. From the prospective of the vision, the resurrection has already occurred and all the dead, as in Mt. 25:31-46, are gathered to the final judgment. **small and great,** — Everyone, regardless of his status in life. Mounce states it concisely: "The point is that no one is so important as to be immune from judgment and no one is so unimportant as to make judgment inappropriate." **stand before God;** — Standing before the throne (ASV). The throne of judgment (v. 11). Some try to limit this scene of judgment to the wicked alone, but to do so is to ignore its parallel (Mt. 25:31-46) and the irrefutable internal proof to the contrary. From vv. 12-15 we can observe: (1) The dead. Unmodified, as it is here, it means all the dead. (2) The dead great and small (ASV) can hardly bear any meaning but everyone. (3) They were judged according to their works. But if all their works were wicked, how could this be? The implication is that the righteous are present. (4) Every man of v. 13 means they were all (all men) judged. (5) It is strongly (and I think necessarily) implied that some had their names written in the book of life (v. 15), hence the saved or redeemed. **and the books were opened:** — Precisely what books John saw may be beyond our present knowledge, but in all probability the books are a symbol of the fact that God has recorded (retained) in the depths of His own infinite memory every thought, word, and deed of every man who has ever lived, and upon the basis of these thoughts, words, and deeds brought forth in that great and final day men will be judged. The books thus seem to be the record of each man's life as it is retained in the mind of God. While it is true that the Bible (containing 66 books) will be the standard by which all works will be judged (Jn. 12:48), and while it may be included in the books which were opened, it is not likely that the expression means the Bible alone. It is not inconceivable however that the Bible plus the record of each man's works are the books John saw. At any rate, it

is certain that both will confront man when he faces God at judgment. **and another book was opened, which is the book of life:** — See notes on 3:5. Only the redeemed appear in this book. **and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books,** — This gives further indication that the books are the record of one's life. Everyone is therefore judged upon the basis of how he has lived. **according to their works.** — Rewarded or condemned according to the deeds recorded in the books (cf. 2 Cor. 5:10).

20:13 **And the sea gave up the dead which were in it;** — While it is possible that the sea here could be taken literally, it seems more likely (at least to me) that it signifies the keeper of the dead who did not have a proper burial. If this is the case, then the sea is personified as the one having dominion over the realm of all bodies not properly entombed. In the view of the ancients, a proper burial was of vital importance, so much so that many feared that the body was forever lost otherwise. But those lost at sea could not have a proper burial. Their bodies had been devoured by the ravenous creatures of the deep. Did this mean that they were destroyed eternally? This v. replies with a strong negative. Barclay says, "No matter how a man died, he will not escape his punishment, and he will not lose his reward, for the whole universe, land and sea, is in the hands of God." **and death** — Death is also personified and is seen here as the keeper of the tomb. If my conclusion is correct on the meaning of the sea, then death stands guard over the bodies properly buried. **and hell** — And Hades (ASV). Hades means the unseen — the unseen realm of departed spirits. It too is personified and seen here as the keeper of spirits, as the sea and death are the keepers of bodies. **delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.** — The picture is of the sea having dominion over the unburied bodies, death over the buried ones, and Hades as over the departed spirits. Each delivers, in the resurrection, what it holds. The body without the spirit is dead (Jas. 2:26), but the spirit lives on, though separated from the body (cf. notes on v. 4). In the resurrection the body is brought from the tomb (whether in the sea or on land) and the spirit from Hades to be reunited. Thus the sea and death delivers the bodies over which they have had dominion and Hades delivers the spirits which have been kept in its realm. One thing should be observed: regardless of what may be symbolized by the sea, death, and Hades, it is certain that the purpose of the whole v. is to impress on all of us the completeness of the resurrection. Not one body or spirit will be left under the dominion of death or Hades.

20:14 **And death and hell** — See notes on v. 13. **were cast into the lake of fire.** — Their power over the bodies and spirits of men is utterly destroyed (cf. 1 Cor. 15:26). The lake of fire is the eternal destiny of all who are not numbered with the saints. As Mounce says, it "indicates not only the stern punishment awaiting the enemies of righteousness but also their full and final defeat." The beast, the false prophet, and Satan have already suffered this fate; now death and Hades are added to the number; and in the next v. all whose names are not found written in the book of life will finish out the population

of that awful place. **This is the second death.** — That is, to be cast into the lake of fire is the second death — the final and complete separation from God and all that is holy. It is the ultimate penalty of sin (see notes on v. 6; 2:11). Alford's comment is to the point: "As there is a second and higher life, so there is also a second and deeper death. And as after that life there is no more death (ch. xxi. 4), so after that death there is no more life, ver. 10; Mt. xxv. 41)." Unbelievers may say that such a punishment as is here described is more barbarian than Christian, that such a judgment cannot be ascribed to a loving and merciful heavenly Father. And while it may seem harsh to our natural senses, the Christian cannot reject it for three fundamental reasons: (1) The Bible teaches it; (2) sin separates one from God (Is. 59:1-2); (3) Jesus died to provide the means of reconciliation. Anyone who is lost, is lost because he has not appropriated the means Jesus provided for his salvation. It is therefore not necessary for men to suffer such an end, but if he rejects the provided means of redemption, there is no other alternative. He cannot spend his life for the devil in sin and wickedness and then live with God in eternal purity and holiness (cf. 2 Pt. 1:3-4).

20:15 **And whosoever** — Anyone (which includes everyone) in that vast throng gathered around the great white throne for the final judgment (vv. 11-12). This includes all those who have fought on the side of Satan against Christ and His saints. **was not found written in the book of life** — See notes on 3:5. This necessarily implies (or so it seems to me) that some in this judgment scene had their names written there. If so, then both saints and sinners appear in the final judgment together. **was cast into the lake of fire.** — Their ultimate destiny (see notes on v. 14).

REVELATION 21

The divine drama of Revelation now brings us to the eternal bliss of the saints. As we have surveyed the visions given to John, we have seen the final defeat of all the wicked, including Babylon the Great, the beast, the false prophet, Satan, and all whose names were not written in the book of life. As enemies of truth and right, they had fought against Christ and His saints until the bitter end. In some cases it appeared that the forces of wickedness were going to win, at least for a time, but then as each vision closes they are seen as defeated and the saints appear as the true victors. In chapters 21 and 22 the emphasis is on the reward of those who are finally victorious. In chapter 20 the battle is depicted by the binding of Satan and the victory of the reigning saints. Then there is a final assault of Satan against Christ, after which comes the judgment of all, both great and small. The devil and all his co-workers are cast into the lake of fire, which signifies their complete and final ruin — defeat beyond the possibility of recovery. Now a new act in the drama opens. It describes the saints free from the presence of their enemies and enjoying complete and final victory — they have won and are wearing the crown of life. They are at home with God, dwelling in the new heaven and the new earth, where there will be no more war with evil. The battle of the ages has forever ceased and the saints are to spend the ceaseless ages of eternity in the peace and praise of their redeemer. Victory is theirs — and what a victory it is! The battle has been long and fierce, but in the end the people of God enjoy the spoils of victory. This is what we are to see in this vision of the remainder of the book, especially 21:1-22:5. In short, the final conflict is over and the saints are at home in heaven. This is what is depicted in this section. And as in other sections of the book we are to see the beauty of the picture as a whole rather than getting bogged down on the details used to paint the picture.

THE NEW HEAVEN AND EARTH

21:1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

21:1 **And I saw a new heaven and a new earth:** — The final or eternal state prepared for the victorious saints (cf. Jn. 14:1-6). This indicates the new order of things after the final judgment. **for the first heaven and the first**

earth were passed away; — They had served their purpose and had thus ceased to be (cf. v. 4; 20:11). Most commentators seem to think that the new heaven and the new earth are a renovated version of the present universe, a renewing of it to make it a fit abode for the saints. But to my mind, this is too literal and materialistic — that is, it sees the eternal home of the soul as a material, physical world. But it seems to me that heaven then will be as it is now, a spiritual sphere. Peter says that the present heaven (meaning the heavenly bodies, the sun, moon, stars, planets, and all the inhabitants of outerspace) will pass away, melt with fervent heat, and be burned up (2 Pt. 3:10), which means that it will be destroyed (2 Pt. 3:11). In 20:11, we saw that the earth and the heaven of the present order fled away, and there was found no place for them. In v. 4, it is said, "The old order of things have passed away" (NIV). This leads me to believe that the new heaven and earth here symbolizes heaven itself, the final and eternal state of the saved. Thus the present physical order is to pass away and be replaced, for the saints and all heavenly beings, by a new or spiritual order. **and there was no more sea.** — The sea vanished along with the first earth. Just what is symbolized by the sea being no more I am unable to determine with certainty. It may have the same significance as in 13:1, where it means the sea of worldly minded people in turmoil and unrest. Such will not characterize the new heaven and earth. Or it may mean the same as in 20:13, where it is personified as the keeper of unburied bodies. In this case, there would be no necessity for the sea: for all bodies will have been raised from the dead.

THE NEW JERUSALEM

21:2-5 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.

21:2 **And I John saw the holy city,** — The redeemed church, the glorious bride of Christ, under the figure of a city. **new Jerusalem,** — Heavenly or spiritual Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22) in contrast with earthly Jerusalem. Some see the new Jerusalem as heaven (the place) but it seems clear to me that the total picture requires us to see it as the people who are in heaven; hence the church. **coming down from God out of heaven,** — That is, it was descending from above, from the presence of God, to become the center of the new heaven and earth (heaven itself). Robertson (paraphrasing Swete) says, "The primary idea is the heavenly origin of the church and her divine mission" (cf. Jas. 1:17). **prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.** — Dressed in her most beautiful attire, fine linen, clean and white (see 19:8). This indicates the preparation the bride has made in order to present herself to Christ as a chaste

virgin (2 Cor. 11:2). Her bridal attire (adornment) is righteousness (19:8). She is thus ready for the Lord to present her unto Himself a glorious church, pure and without blemish, not having spot or wrinkle (Eph. 5:27). Her adornment and beauty are further described in vv. 9-27.

21:3 **And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying,** — And I heard a great voice out of the throne saying (ASV). A strong or voluminous voice, which may signify either God Himself or the heavenly host (cf. notes on 16:17; 19:1, 5). **Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men,** — Behold, God's dwelling place is among men (BV). The concept here is drawn from the tabernacle in the wilderness (Ex. 40), in which the glory of God dwelt — that is, it was a symbol of His presence and guidance. Here it signifies the redeemed or glorified church in which God will dwell among His people in eternity (cf. Eph. 2:21-22). While a different figure, the tabernacle's symbolic significance is the same as the new Jerusalem. **and he will dwell with them,** — He will tabernacle among them (v. 2) in a more personal sense than He has done before. The dwelling place is to be the new heaven and the new earth, where God and His people will tabernacle together, never again to be separated. **and they shall be his people,** — The thought is not that they will then become His people: because they had to be His people to enter the tabernacle. It means rather that their relationship has become permanent. There will be no more war, death, or change for them. They are at home with God (cf. Lv. 26:11-12). I am unable to see any essential difference in the meaning of people in the KJV and peoples of the ASV. People means all the redeemed and peoples mean the people from every nation. Either, in the final analysis means all the saved. Thus there is no point in making an issue as to which is the correct reading. **and God himself shall be with them,** — That is, He shall dwell among them. **and be their God.** — Be their God for all eternity (cf. Jer. 31:33; Heb. 8:10). They will serve Him as His people and He will provide for all their needs as their God.

21:4 **And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes;** — Robertson (WP) says, "More exactly, 'shall wipe out every tear out of their eyes.'" This indicates the cause of tears, probably both past and present, has been removed. If there is no cause there can be no tears. Robert S. Arnold wrote in his beautiful hymn:

No tears in heaven fair,
No tears, no tears up there,
Sorrow and pain will all have flown;
No tears in heaven fair,
No tears, no tears up there,
No tears in heaven will be known.

Four reasons are given as to why there will be no tears in heaven: (1) **and there shall be no more death,** — Death will have been cast into the lake of fire (20:14), or destroyed (1 Cor. 15:26), so that as a rider on the pale horse he can never again enter into the camp of the saints. Never again will they have to

follow a loved one to the grave and then return home to live in a broken family circle. Never again shall a beloved voice be stilled in the silent slumber of death. For death will be dead. (2) **neither sorrow**, — Neither shall there be mourning (ASV). Mourning, or prolonged sorrow, is associated with death. This indicates that in heaven all grief will have ended and will be replaced with joy and happiness. (3) **nor crying**, — Probably signifies the wailing which comes from affliction, oppression, and persecution. (4) **neither shall there be any more pain**: — Sickness, injury, or mental anguish. **for the former things are passed away**. — The old order of things (the heaven and the earth which fled away, 20:11), of which death, sorrow, crying, and pain were a part. There is no place, however, for them in the new order (the new heaven and the new earth, v. 1).

21:5 **And he that sat upon the throne** — Whether Christ or the Father cannot be certainly determined (see notes on 20:11). **said, Behold, I make all things new**. — We have already seen that there was a new heaven and a new earth and a new Jerusalem. The perspective seems to be broadened here to include all heavenly relationships and activities. The saints had lived, served, and died under the Christian system. That system had now served its purpose and would be replaced by a new order of worship and service (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17). **And he said unto me**, — The voice of Him who sat on the throne. In the first part of the v. he probably addresses the redeemed, but now he turns and addresses John. **Write**: — Make a record of these things (cf. 1:11; 14:13; 19:9). Precisely what this refers to I am unable to determine. Was it, "Behold, I make all things new"? Or was it "These words are faithful and true"? Or does it include the whole book, or the whole vision of chapters 21 and 22? While John is certainly charged to write the whole book, it seems more likely here that the whole vision is meant (cf. 22:6). **for these words are true and faithful**. — These words are true and you can trust them (Beck). Like every word of God, they are trustworthy and dependable.

TO HIM WHO OVERCOMES

21:6-8 And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

21:6 **And he said unto me**, — He who sat upon the throne (v. 5). **It is done**. — They are come to pass (ASV). That is, they are already completed, accomplished, or fulfilled. This may refer to all previous symbols in Revelation, or to the true and faithful words of God, but more likely to the fact that all things are made new. **I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end**. — See notes on 1:8, 11. **I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life** — This is another way of saying that God will supply every need of the redeemed in heaven. He who hungers and thirsts after righteousness shall be filled

(cf. Mt. 5:6). **freely**. — Without money and without price (Is. 55:1). Salvation cannot be earned by the works of man but is graciously supplied by the favor of God.

21:7 **He that overcometh** — There are at least twelve promises made in Revelation, in addition to the two here, to those who overcome (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21 — some vv. contain two or three promises). The two promises here are: (1) **shall inherit** — Shall obtain by right of inheritance that which the saints of all ages have anticipated (cf. Mt. 19:29; 25:34; Gal. 4:7; 2 Tm. 4:6-8; 1 Pt. 1:4). **all things**; — These things (ASV). That is, he shall come into possession of the things God has prepared for him, probably referring to the things mentioned in vv. 3-6 (cf. 2 Pt. 1:3-4). (2) **and I will be his God, and he shall be my son**. — Hailey comments: "Here is the assurance of an eternal relationship with God, like that of a son receiving the inheritance which has been guaranteed to him (Eph. 1:14)." (Cf. Gn. 17:7; 2 Sm. 7:14.) See notes on v. 3.

21:8 **But** — This draws a contrast with the final state of the wicked (the lake of fire) with the bliss of those who are the heirs of heaven (see v. 7). **the fearful** — The cowardly who draw back from duty because of fear or lack of commitment (cf. Heb. 10:38-39). **and unbelieving**, — Unfaithful (Good-speed), or untrustworthy (Beck). This may indicate those who have turned away from the faith because of unbelief, temptation, or persecution, but more likely it is all unbelievers, regardless of their stripe. **and the abominable**, — The depraved (BV), the polluted (Williams), the vile (NIV). That is, they have polluted their hearts and lives by the unholy things in which they engage, such as the filthiness of fornication (cf. 17:4) and the other debaucheries of paganism. **and murderers**, — Those who willfully and with malice aforethought shed innocent blood. **and whoremongers**, — And fornicators (ASV). Those who violate God's sexual laws. **and sorcerers**, — Those who deceive by the practice of magic. Vine says the word means "Devoted to magical arts . . . especially one who uses drugs, potions, spells, enchantments." **and idolaters**, — Worshipers of idols. By NT times the word had expanded to mean anything that replaces God in one's heart and devotion (cf. Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5). **and all liars**, — Those who replace truth with falsehood (Jn. 8:44; Acts 5:1-11; 1 Tm. 1:9-10; 1 Jn. 2:22). **shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone**: — They will have their place with the devil and all the host of hell. See notes on 20:10, 14. **which is the second death**. — See notes on 20:14.

THE HOLY CITY — NEW JERUSALEM

21:9-14 And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal; And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

21:9 **And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues,** — See notes on 17:1. This may be the same angel that was sent to show John the judgment of the great whore in 17:1. There John saw the harlot (representing the lustful world) utterly destroyed under the judgment of God. Here he sees new Jerusalem, the bride of the Lamb, blessed for all eternity. What a contrast! **and talked with me, saying,** — Communicated to him the message concerning the holy city. **Come hither,** — Come this way (BV). **I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.** — New Jerusalem (v. 3), the holy Jerusalem (v. 10), the bride, and the Lamb's wife all signify the same thing, namely, the glorified and victorious church of the living God (cf. notes on 19:7-9).

21:10 **And he carried me away in the spirit** — Here I depart from the opinion of the translators of the KJV and agree with the ASV and most modern versions that spirit here means the HS. John was carried away by the power on instrumentality of the Spirit (see notes on 1:10; 17:3). **to a great and high mountain,** — He was placed at the best possible vantage point to see the glorious vision — to survey the victorious people of God, depicted by a beautiful city (cf. Ez. 40:2; Mt. 4:8). **and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem,** — And showed me the holy city of Jerusalem (Beck). As in v. 2 (see notes there) this is a figure of the glorified church. In chapter 17 the harlot is seen as a wicked and lustful city of the world; here the bride, the church, the glorified and holy people of God, is seen as an heavenly city. The former depicts wickedness and lust; the latter righteousness and purity. **descending out of heaven from God.** — See notes on v. 2. The vision seems to be introduced in an abridged form in v. 2 and then repeated here in order to give a more detailed description of the city.

21:11 **Having the glory of God:** — The city shimmers with glory because of the majestic and abiding presence of God (cf. Ex. 40:34-35; 1 Kgs. 8:11; Is. 60:1; Ez. 43:5). **and her light was like unto a stone most precious,** — Its luster, radiance, or brilliance was like a very precious jewel, dazzling with splendor. This signifies that the source of her light (cf. v. 23) is pure and perfect. That is, the light which illuminates the glorified church is divine. **even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal;** — See notes on 4:3.

21:12 **And had a wall great and high,** — In the ancient world a wall was built around a city for protection — the greater the wall the greater the protection (cf. Is. 26:1; Zec. 2:4-5). The wall, thick and high (v. 17), signifies that no enemy shall ever invade the city. **and had twelve gates,** — Three gates on each side (v. 13). Gates probably signify entrance, and twelve is the number of completeness. Thus the means of access to the city was absolutely abundant and adequate. **and at the gates twelve angels,** — A guardian angel was assigned to each gate. Their presence seems to indicate that no one will enter the city except by the blood of the Lamb. That is, no one shall enter who is not a proper subject. **and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:** — On the gates were written

the names of the twelve tribes of Israel (NIV). Cf. Ez. 48:30-35. This part of the vision seems to be designed to connect the OT saints with NT Christians in their eternal reward.

21:13 On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates. — The city was foursquare (v. 16). That is, it was the same length in each direction. And on each of the four walls there were three gates. Since this arrangement has an entrance from all four parts of the compass, east, west, north, and south, it may well indicate the grand fact that the glorified church is made up of people from all parts of the earth. No one, because of race or nation, is excluded.

21:14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. — The 12 gates of the city bore the names of the 12 tribes of Israel; the 12 foundation stones (cf. v. 19) had engraved on them the names of the 12 apostles (cf. Eph. 2:20). Hailey says, "With gates bearing the names of the twelve tribes and the foundation stones bearing the names of the twelve apostles, the churches of the Old and New Covenants are thus united into one, bringing all the redeemed into one eternal home." Here some enter into a fruitless argument as to whether the 12 includes Paul or Matthias, since to count both would add up to 13 (and some even think that the name of Judas rather than Paul or Matthias may be used, e.g., Robertson's Word Studies). But such discussions overlook what appears to be obvious, namely, the term "twelve apostles" is used to signify the complete or full apostleship and thus should not be thought of as a literal number anymore than the foundations of the eternal city of God should be thought of as resting upon 12 literal stones (cf. Mt. 19:28). I believe Beckwith is essentially correct when he says, "The term 'twelve apostles' is used here in its official sense designating the body of the apostles as a whole; the individuals, whether the original twelve, or whether including St. Paul and others added to the number, are not thought of. This corporate reference of 'The Twelve' must have been common, as may be inferred from its use in cases where a smaller number must be actually understood; cf. 1 Cor. 15:5, where only eleven, or according to Jn. 20:24, only ten made up the number. Even in the Gospels it is doubtful whether the whole twelve are always thought of in the use of the term, e.g., Lk. 9:12." The picture here is of a city secured by its walls, entered only by those who have been faithful, and resting upon the sure foundation of the gospel, preached and confirmed by the apostles.

THE MEASURING OF THE CITY

21:15-17 And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal. And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel.

21:15 **And he that talked with me** — The angel of v. 9. **had a golden reed** — A measuring rod of gold. The rod probably signifies the Word of God, by which everything pertaining to the will of God must be measured (see notes on 11:1). **to measure the city,** — The people of God. **and the gates thereof,** — The means of entrance into the city. **and the wall thereof.** — The security provided for God's people. The former measuring (11:1-2) was designed to establish the exact dimensions of the apostolic church, its worship, and the worshipers, thus establishing the pattern by which each could be reproduced by every generation of Christians. Here the purpose seems to be to show the city's enormous size, its perfect symmetry, and its shimmering beauty. When measured, it is found to be fully adequate to fill all the needs of the redeemed. They will not be short-changed in the blessings promised to them by the divine Savior.

21:16 **And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth:** — The city was a square, its length the same as its breadth (Good-speed). That is, it was a square, a perfect cube. **and he measured the city with the reed,** — See v. 15. **twelve thousand furlongs.** — Fifteen hundred miles (BV). Robertson (WS) says, "It is not clear whether the 1500 miles (12,000 furlongs) is the measurement of each of the four sides or the sum total." If the sum total, then the city would measure 375 miles in each direction. Even this size is staggering. But it seems more likely to me that it means each of the four sides. Hence the city is 1500 miles square. With either view, the city is immense. And to depict its enormous size, indicating the vast number of the redeemed, seems to be the purpose here. That is, heaven will be vast enough to contain all the saved . . . and with room to spare. Beckwith concludes, "The Apocalyptist, regardless of architectural reality, is struggling to express by symbols the vastness, the perfect symmetry, and the splendor of the new Jerusalem." **The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal.** — Its measurements were the same in every direction, length, breadth, and height.

21:17 **And he measured the wall thereof,** — The angel had already measured the city (v. 16); he now measures the wall. **an hundred and forty and four cubits,** — Seventy-two yards (BV) or 216 feet. Again it is not clear whether this means the height or the thickness of the wall. But since the wall is described as great and high (v. 12), it probably has reference to its thickness. If so, no measurement for its height is given. One would expect it, however, to be at least as high as the city. But in any case the size of the wall seems to be completely out of proportion with the size of the city. Hailey says, "If it is the height of the surrounding wall, it would be only a marker in comparison to the city itself. If it is the thickness of the wall of the city, the ratio would be one-inch thickness compared to three thousand feet in height, which is completely out of proportion." I think the solution may be that the wall is purposely played down (in comparison to the city) in order to depict the fact that no protection from enemies is needed. All the wicked are destroyed. Thus there is no evil to attack the city. **according to the measure of a man, that is,**

of the angel. — By man's measurement, which the angel was using (NIV). While the measuring was performed by the angel, he used the standard which was commonly used by men.

DESCRIPTION OF THE WALL AND CITY

21:18-21 And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius, the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.

21:18 **And the building of the wall of it** — The word from which building comes is found nowhere else in the NT. It apparently means the material out of which the wall is constructed, that is, the wall **was of jasper**: — Made of jasper. Scholars have generally concluded that jasper in the several places it occurs in Revelation is the diamond. When we consider the size of the wall and understand that John is saying the wall is either a solid diamond or else is fully constructed of diamonds, we may be able to grasp a small part of the beauty and grandeur John is seeking to describe for us. **and the city was pure gold**, — Not only was the wall made of diamonds, the city itself was constructed of pure gold, gold the like of which we have never seen. **like unto clear glass**. — As transparent as glass (Williams). Gold of such purity is unknown to this world, but this in no way hinders us from seeing that it depicts a rest, peace, beauty, purity, holiness, and glory beyond the power of human language to describe. With heaven so beautiful, so rewarding, what must it mean to be there?

21:19 **And the foundations of the wall of the city** — The foundation stones (see notes on v. 14). **were garnished with all manner of precious stones**. — Were adorned with every jewel (RSV) or precious stone (ASV). The jewel ornaments of the wall's foundation probably have for their purpose (in this vision) the enhancement of the sense of beauty and richness of the new Jerusalem. Twelve precious stones are mentioned, corresponding to the 12 foundation stones. It is not possible to identify each stone precisely, but the following is generally accepted. **The first foundation was jasper**; — Thought to be the diamond. The whole wall was also made of this precious gem. **the second, sapphire**; — Not the modern sapphire but a clear blue stone said to be highly prized in Egypt and Assyria. Barclay says, "Pliny describes it as sky-blue, flecked with gold." **the third, a chalcedony**; — Not the modern stone by this name but, as Plummer says, "A green carbonate of copper found in the mines of Chalcedon." **the fourth, an emerald**; — Said to be the same as the emerald today. Barclay quotes Pliny's description of it as "The greenest of all green stones."

21:20 **The fifth, sardonyx**; — Barclay says, "The sardonyx was an onyx in which the white was broken by layers of red and brown." It was widely

used to make cameos. **the sixth, sardius;** — A red stone, probably of several gradations of color. According to Pliny it derived its name from Sardis, where it was discovered. Many consider it the same as the modern carnelian. **the seventh, chrysolite;** — Robertson (WP) says, "Stone of a golden colour like our topaz or amber or a yellow beryl or golden jasper." **the eighth, beryl;** — Closely related to the emerald. It is tinged with yellow, blue, or green, but the green is less pronounced than in the emerald. **the ninth, a topaz;** — Plummer says, "Not the modern topaz, but a variety of chrysolite . . . of a yellowish-green colour, the latter predominating." **the tenth, a chrysoprasus;** — Probably a pale-green variety of the emerald. **the eleventh, a jacinth;** — Thought to be the same as the modern sapphire. **the twelfth, an amethyst.** — Barclay says, "The amethyst is described as being similar to the jacinth, but more brilliant." Its color may have been violet or purple. It is difficult to ascertain precisely the symbolic meaning of this list of precious stones, but one thing seems certain: they are designed to depict, at least in part, the striking beauty and the eternal value of the foundation of the church of the living God (the wall and its foundation is a part of the city).

21:21 And the twelve gates were twelve pearls: every several gate was of one pearl: — The twelve gates were twelve pearls; each gate made of a single pearl (Goodspeed). Pearls are probably the most common of all precious stones, and it is said that they held the highest rank among jewels in the ancient world. Their beauty is entirely the work of nature — that is, they are not crafted by the art of man. Here each gate is made of one huge pearl, thus enhancing the beauty and richness of the wall and its foundation. The gates of pearl may also signify that, even though there are twelve gates, they are all of the same character. Thus those who are admitted into the city must all meet the same requirements — they must be one (cf. Jn. 17:20-21). **and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.** — See notes on v. 18.

INSIDE THE CITY

21:22-27 And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.

21:22 And I saw no temple therein: — That is, the new Jerusalem had no central temple as did the old Jerusalem. Under the old covenant the priest, as a representative of the people, made sacrifices and offerings to God in the temple. Under the new covenant every Christian is a priest. Thus the church is the temple of God — God's dwelling place (Eph. 2:21-22), and each one goes before God with his own offerings. But a temple, such as characterized earthly

Jerusalem, was no part of the heavenly city. There was no need for one: **for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.** — God and the Lamb were present throughout the city, thus eliminating the need for a central place to worship (see notes on 3:12).

21:23 **And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it:** — In the present order, the sun is the source of light; we could not survive without it. But in the new order neither the sun, nor its nightly reflector, the moon, will be needed. **for the glory of God did lighten it,** — For the glory of God gives it light (NIV). See v. 11; cf. 1 Jn. 1:5; Is. 60:19-20. **and the Lamb is the light thereof.** — And the lamp thereof is the Lamb (ASV). Plummer is undoubtedly correct in saying, "No distinction is to be made between God and the Lamb; both are the light." They are even now the spiritual light of the church, and the medium of that light is the gospel by which the light of salvation is brought to us (cf. Ps. 119:104-105, 130). Now the light shines through the word; then the light will be in the glory of their presence.

21:24 **And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it:** — While the words "of them which are saved" are of doubtful origin and are lacking in most Greek texts, the nations certainly mean the redeemed from all the nations — "Of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues" (7:9). As far as the vision is concerned, the wicked are now out of view. All the enemies of Christ have been cast into the lake of fire (19:20; 20:10, 15). Thus the nations must mean the saved of the nations. **and the kings of the earth** — Those who had been Christian kings while living on earth. **do bring their glory and honour into it.** — The kings bring their luster to the heavenly city and lay all their glory down at the feet of the King of kings.

21:25 **And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day:** — The gates need not be shut because those within enjoy perfect security (cf. Is. 60:11). There are no enemies without to invade the city. They have all been destroyed. **for there shall be no night there.** — God and the Lamb, who are the light of the city (v. 23), are always present. Heaven is therefore one eternal day.

21:26 **And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it.** — See notes on v. 24. Those who do the will of God are the glory of any nation (cf. Prv. 14:34); those who go to heaven take the splendor of their nations with them. Or as Robertson (WP) says, "The city of God will have the best of all the nations."

21:27 **And there shall in no wise** — A strong statement which means on no account or under no circumstances. **enter into it** — Into that heavenly city. **any thing that defileth,** — Nothing common, unclean, impure, or polluted, nothing that is unholy, can ever enter through the gates into the city. The holy is that which pertains to God or is devoted to Him or to use in His service. In contrast, everyone or everything else is profane (unholy). When the profane is used in God's service, it defiles and corrupts. Thus everything profane, everything not devoted to the service of God, must remain without. **neither whatsoever worketh abomination,** — Nor anyone who indulges in abom-

inable practices (Goodspeed) or lives shameful lives (see notes on v. 8; 17:4-5), which almost certainly includes idolatry. **or maketh a lie:** — Those who live by the deceitfulness of lying rather than by the integrity of truth (see notes on v. 8). John has now told us who cannot enter the eternal city; he proceeds to tell us who can: **but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.** — See notes on 3:5. This puts beyond any question whatsoever who the nations and kings are of v. 24: since they enter into the city, they are of necessity a part of the redeemed.

REVELATION 22

INSIDE THE CITY

22:1-5 And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and 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: And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.

22:1 **And he** — The angel of 21:9. **shewed me** — Chapter 21 for the most part describes the city, its dimensions, its wall, its foundations, and its gates. The angel now gives John a view of the interior. **a pure river of water of life**, — The river is no doubt a symbol of the abundant life provided for by the scheme of human redemption. The expression water of life may mean living water — that is, pure, clean, running water in contrast with stagnant (cf. Jn. 7:37-38). But more likely it means water which possesses the power to give life. Thus a symbol of the life given. Coffman concludes, "The point is that eternal life will belong to those who enter it." **clear as crystal**, — Descriptive of the shimmering beauty and the absolute purity of the life supplied by the river. **proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb**. — Flowing from the throne. Indicating the source of life — it is from God and the Lamb. There is but one throne and thus no distinction is to be made in the reign of God and the reign of Christ. The river equally flows from both.

22:2 **In the midst of the street of it**, — Down the middle of the great street of the city (NIV). That is, the river of the water of life flowed down the middle of the street of gold (v. 1). In man's original paradise home, a river flowed out of the garden of Eden to form four rivers (Gn. 2:10-14). In paradise restored, in the eternal city, John sees the river of life flowing from the throne of God. **and on either side of the river**, — On both sides of the river (Williams). **was there the tree of life**, — As with the water of life (see notes on v. 1), the tree of life signifies the power to give life. Man's right to partake of the tree was taken away when he fell into sin (Gn. 3:22-24); it is now restored to all the redeemed. Plummer is probably right in saying, "The singular 'tree' seems intended to be understood generically of the whole of that class of trees." If so, the tree of life (as a class) may have lined the river on both sides. **which**

bare twelve manner of fruits, — That is, the tree produced twelve annual harvests. Twelve signifies the completeness of both the fruit and the harvest — the source of life is always there and there in abundant supply. There is nothing to prevent all from partaking and the results of partaking is life everlasting, **and yielded her fruit every month**: — This means that the tree of life constantly yielded. The crop never failed. **and the leaves of the tree** — While the fruit gave life, the leaves were for the perfection (or healing) of those who enter the city (cf. Ez. 47:12), **were for the healing of the nations**. — Nations mean the same here as in 21:26 — the redeemed from the nations. Those who partake of the tree of life will never again know the distress, warring, and destruction which characterized the nations of the world. This does not imply that there will be a need for healing in heaven (there is nothing there from which to be healed, 21:4), but rather that those who enter that happy abode were healed by partaking of the source of life.

22:3 **And there shall be no more curse**: — Nor anything that is cursed. Sin is the great curse of man and of the world, but in that city divine there is no sin; hence, no curse. This probably has reference to the curse that was placed upon man when he sinned in the garden of Eden (Gn. 3:16-19) and which has followed him during the whole course of his life on earth. It is the curse of violated law, pain, sickness, sorrow, and physical death now but ultimately, if the curse is not removed, eternal death (cf. 20:15). But those who partake of the tree of life (v. 2) have the curse forever removed by the blood of Christ. The redeemed in heaven are beyond the danger of any of the plagues brought upon man by sin. They are justified, safe and secure, in the sight of God. **but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it**; — Cf. v. 1; see notes on 7:15. **and his servants shall serve him**: — That is, they shall be His people (serving the function for which they were created) and He shall be their God (supplying all their needs). Heaven is thus not a place of inactivity, but of the highest and most satisfying service it is possible for man to render.

22:4 **And they shall see his face**; — The soul of man hungers to see God, to understand and partake of His nature, to be in personal communion with Him (Ps. 42:1). But this is not possible while man lives in the flesh (1 Jn. 4:12). Even Moses, who communicated with God on a personal basis and who was permitted to see Him in some sense, was not allowed to see His face (Ex. 33:17-23). Here it seems certain that God's face signifies His total presence. Thus the thought is that the people of God shall forever be in the presence of God — they shall know Him as He is (1 Jn. 3:2). What a blessing to anticipate! **and his name shall be in their foreheads**. — A name identifies. The name of God engraved in their foreheads identifies the city dwellers with God. They are His people, the redeemed of all the earth (cf. notes on 3:12; 7:3; 14:1).

22:5 **And there shall be no night there**; — See notes on 21:25. **and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light**: — See notes on 21:23. **and they shall reign for ever and ever**. — The thousand-year (an indefinite time but one that has an end) reign of the saints

is no longer in view (20:4); they are now reigning for all eternity, reigning in a reign that knows no end. To serve God, to see His face, to wear His name, to dwell in the light of His presence, and to reign with Him while the ceaseless ages of eternity roll on and on is the final glory of the redeemed. This is the end toward which the plan of God has been moving from the beginning. And now that it has arrived, now that the battle between good and evil is over and the victory is won, it ends the last act of the drama, the last major vision of the "Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass: and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John" (1:1). The remainder of the book serves to warn us that the things herein revealed are to come quickly, that every man will be rewarded according to his character, and that the message revealed is the eternal truth of God, not to be added to or subtracted from.

THE MESSAGE IS TRUE PROPHECY

22:6-7 And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done. Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.

22:6 **And he said unto me,** — While the speaker is difficult to ascertain with any degree of certainty, he is generally thought to be the angel of v. 1 (see also 21:9, 15). I see no reason to dissent from this view. **These sayings are faithful and true:** — That is, the words, both in oral communication and in vision, which John has heard and seen are the true word of God, the revelation of Jesus Christ to His servants, given first to John and then to all Christians through the written message. Furthermore, the revelation has been faithfully delivered. This all adds up to the fact that the book of Revelation is a trustworthy production, coming from the mind of God. **and the Lord God of the holy prophets** — And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets (ASV). The spirits of the prophets could hardly mean anything more than the prophets themselves. Thus the thought is the God whom all the prophets served. The design here is to firmly link the source of Revelation with God who inspired all OT prophets. That is, the same author inspired both. Both are therefore equally faithful and true. **sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done.** — The same thought as expressed in 1:1 (see notes there).

22:7 **Behold, I come quickly:** — The words here are almost certainly those of Christ. He may have interjected them personally, but more likely He spoke them through the angel. As I have observed in previous notes, the coming of Christ does not always mean His second coming at the end of the world. In 2:5, He would come quickly to remove the church, if it did not repent. In 2:16, He would come in judgment upon the church in Pergamum. In 3:11, He would come quickly to safeguard the church in Philadelphia in time of its trial. In 16:15, He comes as a thief, suddenly and without warning. This is the first

of three times the expression is repeated in this chapter (vv. 7, 12, 20) and all of them might indeed apply to the second coming. But if so, it cannot mean soon, as many understand it, for it has already been nearly two thousand years. It must therefore mean that at the time of His coming there will be no delay — He will come swiftly, suddenly, and without warnings, other than those warnings given to all generations in the gospel. Thus His coming will be quickly, whether it be soon or whether it be a million years in the future. The important thing for us is to be prepared for His coming at all times. **blessed** — See notes on 1:3. **is he that keepeth** — Pays attention to, follows, or practices the truth herein revealed. **the sayings of the prophecy of this book.** — The book of Revelation, although it would apply in principle to the whole of God's revealed will. The contents of the book is here called prophecy, and all true prophecy has its origin with God (2 Pt. 1:21).

JOHN'S REACTION

22:8-9 **And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God.**

22:8 **And I John** — See notes on 1:1, 4, 9. **saw these things, and heard them.** — That is, he himself had heard the communications and seen the visions which had been delivered to him by the angel, the things which now make up the book of Revelation. **And when I had heard and seen,** — When the visions had all been delivered (they came to an end in v. 5). **I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things.** — This is the second time John has fallen into this error, and in both cases he is instantly corrected by the angel. See notes on 19:10. As Hinds concisely states, "John should no more worship the angel than the angel John." Worship belongs to the Creator, never to the creature.

22:9 **Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant,** — See notes on 19:10. **and of thy brethren the prophets,** — That is, he was a creature of God, serving the function for which God made him, as were all the prophets, past and present. He thus emphasized the inappropriateness of worshiping any created thing, whether it be sun, moon, or stars, earth, fire, or water, spirit, idol, or Satan, beast, man, or angel. **and of them which keep the sayings of this book:** — Not only was the angel a fellowservant with the prophets (the inspired spokesmen of God) but also with all those who obey God — those who keep the sayings of God as they are delivered to them in His word. While this statement primarily refers to Revelation, it states a principle which applies to all Scripture, namely, that to be faithful one must obey the whole counsel of God — he must do all God reveals for him to do, that and nothing less, that and nothing more. To do less would be to leave undone some of the revealed will of God, and thus to subtract from

His word (v. 19); to do more would be to go beyond that which is written (1 Cor. 4:6, ASV), to practice unrevealed things (Dt. 29:29; Gal. 1:6-9), and thus to add to the word of God (v. 18). Man's whole duty (that is, his whole purpose of being) is to fear God and keep His commandments (Eccl. 12:13). **worship God.** — The only true object of worship, both here and in the world to come.

REVELATION IS AN OPENED BOOK

22:10-11 And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.

22:10 **And he saith unto me,** — Again, the speaker is uncertain but seems to be the angel of vv. 8-9. **Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book:** — That is, Revelation is to be an opened book — its message is for all the saints of God. In 10:4 to seal up the utterance of the seven thunders was to conceal them, not write them, not make them accessible to men (cf. Dn. 8:26; 12:4, 9). To seal not up here means the opposite: to reveal, to write, to publish, to make available to all. This strongly implies that its message is not just to a chosen few or to a limited time in history but for all, of every generation, who will receive and apply its divine principles. **for the time is at hand.** — This has no reference to the end-time period, except as everything in Revelation is moving toward that climactic event, but rather that the time of persecution is at hand for the saints and they will be in need of the assurance of victory the book is designed to give — that is, the message is to be delivered to them so that the principles can be applied at once. There is a certain urgency in the matter: John was to publish the book (open it to everyone) and, as Hailey says, "Its message was to be made known, its warnings were to be heeded, and its hearers encouraged by the divine assurance of victory."

22:11 Some see this v. as a description of the final state of man. That is, after the judgment, let men remain the characters they had become before the judgment. There is no second chance, or opportunity to change, after one's destiny is sealed. And while this is true, it is not in my judgment the purpose or intent of this v. to teach it. I think I have correctly connected it with v. 10. John is instructed to publish the prophecies of Revelation. When people heard and understood its content, they could respond in one of two ways: They could accept and apply its message and thereby be righteous and holy, or they could reject it and their unjust and filthy state would be confirmed. If one rejects God's revelation, he has no choice but to be made unjust or remain lost. To reject God's plan, as it is revealed in His word, is to reject His only means of making man righteous. **He that is unjust,** — He who rejects God's plan to save. **let him be unjust still:** — Let him stand condemned by the message he has rejected. **and he which is filthy,** — Unholy, vile, or profane. **let him be filthy still:** — If the message of the unsealed book will not change one, Christians have no other recourse (cf. Lk. 16:27-31). **and he that is righteous,** — He

who accepts and obeys the message and is therefore justified in the sight of God. **let him be righteous still:** — Let no man condemn him or try to deprive him of his salvation. **and he that is holy,** — He that has received the message and devoted himself to the service of God. **let him be holy still.** — Let him stand as holy. The message of the unsealed book will not make the holy unholy, unless its divine plan is rejected. Thus the emphasis here is that men will be unjust and filthy or righteous and holy in direct proportion to their response to this book.

THE LORD SPEAKS

22:12-13 And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

22:12 **And, behold, I come quickly;** — These are undoubtedly the words of Christ, as in vv. 7, 20. See notes on v. 7. **and my reward is with me,** — His reward is the eternal blessings which come to those who keep the prophecy of this book (v. 7), and the eternal destruction of those who reject it. Christ will reward both the good and the bad (Jn. 5:28-29; 2 Cor. 5:10). **to give every man according as his work shall be.** — The reward will be in keeping with the works of each individual (see notes on 2:23; Mt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6). If the word be good (if it has been in obedience to the divine will), the reward will be according to the work done; if the work has been evil (contrary to the revealed will of God), it will receive the reward of evil.

22:13 **I am Alpha and Omega,** — The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, the language in which the Revelation was being recorded. **the beginning and the end,** — Words with the same meaning as the first phrase, but more explanatory of the Deity and nature of Christ. He was co-eternal with the Father (Jn. 1:1-2; 8:56-58; 17:5). He was before all things (Col. 1:17), the Creator of all things (Jn. 1:3; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:16-17; Heb. 1:3), and by Him all things consist — literally, are held together (Col. 1:17). All things pertaining to redemption are consummated in Him (Eph. 1:10). He is pre-eminent in His church (Col. 1:18). He is the first fruit of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20-23). In the end He will sit as the eternal Judge of His universe (Jn. 5:22; Mt. 25:31-32; 2 Cor. 5:10). And in that eternal realm ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands will lift their voices in praise to Him that lives for ever and ever (5:11-14). **the first and the last.** — A third synonymous expression, reflecting the Deity of Christ (see notes on 1:8, 11, 17).

THE HOLY CITY

22:14-15 Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.

22:14 **Blessed are they that do his commandments,** — Rather, blessed

are those who wash their robes, for so it is rendered by most of the translations. The import, however, is the same: one is cleansed by the blood of Christ through obedience to His commandments (Heb. 5:8-9; Ti. 3:5; Acts 22:16; Rom. 6:3-4). **that they may have right to the tree of life,** — By disobedience to God, man forfeited his primitive Edenic paradise and, consequently, his right to the tree of life (Gn. 2:9, 22-24). Only in obedience to Christ, and cleansing by His blood, does man regain that right to live forever. **and may enter in through the gates into the city.** — Most ancient cities were walled for protection, and the city of God is here so portrayed (21:12). Those within share the city's protection and blessings; those without are forever deprived of the same.

22:15 **For without are dogs,** — An expression quite often used of those not within the ranks of God's holy people (Mt. 15:26-27), those giving sway to immoral and animalistic natures (Dt. 23:18; Ps. 22:16, 20), and those rejecting the will of Christ (Phil. 3:2). **and sorcerers,** — See notes on 9:21. **and whoremongers,** — Gk. *pornos*: Thayer says, "a man who prostitutes his body to another's lust for hire, a male prostitute." **and murderers,** — Those who shed innocent blood (Gn. 9:6-7; Nm. 35:31-33; Prv. 6:16-17; Gal. 5:21). **and idolaters,** — Those who foolishly worship the creature rather than the Creator (Is. 44:14-17; Acts 17:29-31; Rom. 1:20-23). **and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.** — There are those who love not the truth because of the pleasures of unrighteousness (2 Thes. 2:10-12); some, having itching ears for falsehoods, turn from the truth to fables (2 Tm. 4:3-4). Others create lies for their own convenience or profit (1 Kgs. 13:11-19; Acts 5:1-9). All are barred from the holy city.

THE UNIVERSAL INVITATION

22:16-17 I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

22:16 **I Jesus** — The Lord Himself here gives His endorsement to the message which has been delivered. **have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches.** — The book before us contains God's revelation of the victorious triumph of the redeemed through the blood of Jesus (12:10-11). It was delivered to John by an angel (1:1), and to the churches through the medium of the written word (1:3, 11, 19). And what is true of Revelation may be said of every other inspired book of God (Jn. 14:26; 16:13; 20:30-31). **I am the root and the offspring of David,** — The prophet Isaiah predicted that a branch would grow out of the root of Jesse (Is. 11:1, 10), through the lineage of David (2 Sm. 7:12-14). These prophecies were remarkably fulfilled in Christ (Rom. 15:12; Acts 2:30-32; Rv. 5:5). **and the bright and morning star.** — The beautiful star that heralds the break of day. Perhaps there is also

an allusion to Jesus as the star that would come out of Jacob (Nm. 24:17).

22:17 **And the Spirit** — The Holy Spirit, God's medium for revealing, confirming, and delivering the message of redemption (Jn. 14:26; 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:12-13; Heb. 2:3-4). **and the bride** — The church of Christ (Rom. 7:4; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-27, 32), God's medium for spreading the message of redemption to the world (Mk. 16:15-16; 2 Tm. 2:2). **say, Come.** — The Spirit and the church extend the invitation to all to share in the heavenly blessing. **And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come.** — Whoever has a burning need for more than sin and Satan can possibly offer. **And whosoever will,** — The invitation is universal — every kindred and tongue, people and nation (5:9). God is not willing that any should perish, but pleads for all to come to repentance (2 Pt. 3:9). **let him take the water of life freely.** — Jesus gives freely the water of life (Jn. 4:10), producing within each individual a well of water that springs up into everlasting life (Jn. 4:15).

THE REVELATION COMPLETE

22:18-19 *For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.*

22:18 **For I testify** — The solemn proclamation about to be delivered was from the Lord Himself. **unto every man** — The warning applied to all; there would be no exceptions. **that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book,** — The Revelation had opened with a promised blessing on those who would read, hear, and keep the things written in the book (1:3). Now at its close a solemn warning is tendered. **If any man shall add unto these things,** — This warning applied specifically to the book John was just completing; but also stands as cherubim and a flaming sword to protect all inspired writings (1 Cor. 4:6). When the hand of inspiration stopped writing, God's revelation to man was complete: no alterations were needed, and none would be allowed (Gal. 1:6-12). **God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:** — To make claims of additional revelation that would add to the divine message would bring dire consequences, not the least of which is the lake of fire (20:15).

22:19 **And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy,** — Every word recorded was both essential and eternal (Jn. 10:35; Mt. 24:35). And whether one destroys the pages of the book as king Jehoiakim did (Jer. 36:23), or whether he simply labels certain requirements as non-essential (Jas. 2:10), the effect is the same: God's word has been voided, and man's religion made worthless (Mt. 15:3-6; Mk. 7:6-13). **God shall take away his part out of the book of life,** — See notes on 3:5. **and out of the holy city,** — The beautiful city described in chapter 21. **and from the things which are written in this book.** — Absolutely no blessing of a spiritual or

an eternal nature can be enjoyed apart from obedience to God's divine word. To reject it is to reject not only the word, but every promise contained in the word.

THE LORD'S COMING

22:20-21 He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

22:20 **He which testifieth these things saith,** — It is again the Lord Himself who gives the final exhortation. **Surely I come quickly.** — This could have reference to the events of Revelation that were soon to begin (see the notes on 1:3); but it seems more natural to apply it to the Lord's coming in final judgment on the world, and descriptive of the fact that it would be sudden, and without warning (Mt. 24:36-42). **Amen.** — This is John's expression of support for the Lord's promise concerning His coming. **Even so, come, Lord Jesus.** — A further expression of support: Lord, let it be just as you have said.

22:21 **The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.** — The entire Bible is a book about God's grace or unmerited favor toward His creation, but especially manifested through the coming of Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:17). How appropriate that the final book of the New Testament should end on this note! **Amen.** — John's final expression of support, not only to the statement just given, but to the revelation in its entirety. It was as if he said, God said it, and that settles it! How beautiful. And how comforting to those who believe and obey the message of this divine Lord given to His servant John.



