

THE FINAL TRIUMPH

A verse-by verse study of the book of Revelation

Zac Poonen

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For further details, please contact:

*Christian Fellowship Church
40, DaCosta Square ,
Wheeler Road Extension,
Bangalore-560084,
India.*

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Summary

CHAPTER ONE

Seven Introductory Remarks

V. 1-3: The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bondservants, the things which must shortly take place; and He sent and communicated (signified) it by His angel to His bondservant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

In these first three verses we find seven expressions that are an introduction to the whole book of *Revelation*.

First of all, this book is called a revelation. The word “*revelation*” is the translation of a Greek word which means “*an unveiling*”. God alone can unveil His truths to us. This is the first thing that we must bear in mind. We need the Spirit of wisdom and revelation if we are to understand what God is trying to say to us in His Word. Human cleverness can never grasp it.

Secondly, we read that this revelation was given to be “*shown to His (Christ's) bondservants*”. It is not meant for everyone. It is only for the willing bondservants of the Lord.

There is a difference between a paid servant and a bondservant. A servant works for wages. But a bondservant is a slave who belongs to his master and has no rights of his own, whatsoever.

Who then are the bondservants of the Lord? Those who have joyfully given up all their own plans and ambitions, and all their rights, and who now desire to do the will of God alone in every area of their lives. Only such believers are true bondservants.

The Lord has many servants, but very few willing bondservants. God's Word can be understood accurately only by His bondservants. Others may be able to study it intellectually, as one studies a textbook. But they will never be able to grasp the spiritual realities that are hidden in it. Jesus made it clear in *John 7:17* that it was only through obedience to God's will that one could know the truth.

Thirdly, we are told that this book was "*signified*" to John (v.1 - KJV). This means that the message was communicated through symbols. We read in the first three chapters alone about lampstands and stars, bronze feet and a two-edged sword, hidden manna and a white stone etc., These are not literal. They are symbols of spiritual realities. We need to compare Scripture with Scripture to understand what these symbols mean.

Fourthly, John calls this unveiling "*the Word of God*" (v.2). In *Revelation 22:18,19*, a severe judgment is pronounced on anyone who attempts to add to, or to subtract from, the "*words of this book*". There is no book in the entire Bible that contains such a solemn warning.

Every part of God's Word has been given to us "*for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness*" so that we may become "*perfect, and thoroughly equipped for every good work*" (2 Tim.3:16,17 - KJV).

The book of Revelation has also been given to make us perfect. Only those who are interested in perfection in their life will get the maximum benefit from the study of any part of God's Word.

Fifthly, this revelation is the "*testimony of Jesus Christ*" (v.2). In *Revelation 19:10*, we are told that "*the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy*". True prophecy will always point to the Lord and not just to events. A true understanding of prophecy will humble us before the Lord and not make us proud of our imagined knowledge of coming events. Even if we are mistaken about the correct sequence of various events in the coming days, if we are not mistaken in our knowledge of the Lord, we would have done well.

Although this revelation unveils "*the things which must shortly take place*" (v.1), yet that is not its primary purpose. It is called "*the testimony of Jesus Christ*". It has been given, not to give us a detailed knowledge of future events, but to show us that the Lord Jesus is in control of those future events. It is the triumph of the Lord that we see primarily throughout the book of Revelation.

Let us "*fix our eyes on Jesus*" then as we go through this book.

Sixthly, a blessing is promised on those who "*keep the things which are written in it*" (v.3 - KJV). This last book of Scripture has been given to us to *OBEY*. It is blessed to obey any part of Scripture. But the book of Revelation is the only book in which a specific blessing has been promised to those who obey what is written therein.

Even if we don't understand much of the symbolism in it, it will suffice if we obey what we read. There is no blessing promised to those who understand what the symbols mean or to those who can interpret the sequence of coming events accurately. Obedience means far more to God than mere intellectual understanding of His Word. Unfortunately, most believers value knowledge of the Word more than obedience to it.

The food we eat is converted into flesh and blood and bone, even if we don't understand how that happens. It is enough if our digestive system is working properly. So too in the spiritual realm. Knowledge without obedience to God is like undigested food. It brings death instead of life. Knowledge plus obedience brings life.

At the beginning and at the end of the book of Revelation we see this call to obedience repeated (1:3; 22:7). The whole book of *Revelation* is sandwiched between these two calls to obedience.

Seventhly, a blessing is also promised on those who "*read the words of this prophecy*" (v.3) - referring to those who read it aloud publicly and teach it to other believers.

Remember that individual copies of the book of Revelation were not available to believers in the first century. The only way one could hear the message of the book was when it was read out in the meetings

of the church. This was why Paul encouraged Timothy to “*give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching*” (*1 Tim.4:13*).

The application for us today is that we should share with others what we receive from God through His Word. A blessing is promised here to all who do this.

Grace And Peace From God

V.4-8: John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him Who is and Who was and Who is to come; and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne; and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him Who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood, and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father; to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Even so. Amen. ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘Who is and Who was and Who is to come, the Almighty.’

John begins with a prayer that grace and peace might come to them from God.

“*Grace*” means “*God’s help offered to us according to our present need*”. If we need forgiveness, grace can forgive us. If we need power to overcome sin, grace can endue us with power. If we need help to be faithful in a time of testing, grace can give us the needed help. God’s grace is always sufficient for our every need.

“*Peace*” is another great gift of God - peace within our hearts, with no nagging sense of guilt or condemnation; and peace with others around us, bringing fellowship in the church.

The greeting is sent in the Name of the Triune God.

The One Who ever exists in the present, past and future is a reference to the Father.

“*The seven Spirits*” refer to the Holy Spirit. Seven symbolises perfection in the Scriptures. And the “*seven Spirits*” refers to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of perfection. In *Isaiah 11:2,3* the Holy Spirit is referred to as : (i) the Spirit of the Lord; (ii) the Spirit of wisdom; (iii) the Spirit of understanding; (iv) the Spirit of counsel; (v) the Spirit of strength; (vi) the Spirit of knowledge; and (vii) the Spirit of the fear of the Lord.

Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity is referred to by a number of titles, which we can look at one by one (*v.5*).

The Titles Of Christ

“*Faithful Witness*” refers to the absolute trustworthiness of our Lord in relation to the promises that He has made.

“*The firstborn of the dead*” refers to Him as the first man to have overcome death and come out of the grave permanently. Others who were raised from the dead before Him, died again. Now that Jesus has permanently conquered death, we need never fear sickness or death anymore.

Jesus is also referred to as “*the Ruler of the kings of the earth*”. Our Lord has been given all authority in heaven and on earth. He controls the hearts of earthly rulers as well. “*The king’s heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes*” (*Prov.21:1*).

Our Lord is further referred to as the One “*Who ever loves us and has once for all loosed and freed us from our sins by His own blood*” (*v.5 - Amplified*). His love for us is everlasting. And He shed His blood not only to forgive us our sins but also to free us from our sins once and for all. The first promise in the New Testament is that Jesus “*will save His people from their sins*” (*Mt.1:21*). To be freed from sin’s power is the great theme of the entire New Testament. No sin can now have the mastery over us, if we live under grace (*Rom.6:14*).

A Kingdom And Priests To God Our Father

We are told further that the Lord Jesus has formed us into “a kingdom, priests to His God and Father” (v.6).

The “kingdom of God” is the sphere in which God exercises absolute authority. The church is a representation of “the kingdom of God on earth - that is, a group of people who have become “one kingdom”, because they have submitted to the authority of God in every area of their lives. The Lord has converted an unruly mob into an orderly kingdom - a people who are now being governed by God.

We have also been made priests. Every single believer - man or woman - has been made a priest unto the Lord. In God’s eyes, there is no such thing as a special class of people called “priests” in the church. That is an Old Testament concept. Where such a thing exists in any church today, it is leading people back into B.C. conditions !! We are *ALL* priests.

As priests, we are called to offer sacrifices to God. Whereas in the Old Testament they offered the bodies of animals, today we offer our own bodies to God as a living sacrifice (*Rom.12:1*).

The expression “*His God and Father*” is similar to the expression that Jesus used after His resurrection, “*My Father and your Father, My God and your God*” (*Jn.20:17*). His Father has now become our Father too. We can now find our security in God as our Father, just as Jesus found His security therein. “*Amen*”, says John (v.6). And we too say, “*It shall be so*”.

To Him alone “be glory and dominion forever and ever” (v.6).

Then in *verse 7*, Christ’s return to earth is prophesied. The last that this world saw of our Lord was when He hung in shame on the cross of Calvary. But one of these days the world will see Him coming with the clouds in glory. Every eye will see Him. Those who pierced Him (the nation of Israel) will also see Him. The tribes of the earth will weep when He comes. But we will rejoice. Again John says “*Amen*”. And we also say, “*It shall be so!*”

In verse 8, God refers to Himself as the Alpha and the Omega, the Almighty and ever-existing God. He was there right at the beginning, when nothing existed. He will be there right at the end of time. There is nothing that can ever take place anywhere at any time that is going to take God by surprise. Our Father not only knows the end from the beginning. Being the Almighty God, He controls everything as well. Therefore we need have no fear whatever concerning the future.

At the end of the book of Revelation, God is again referred to as the Almighty and the Alpha and the Omega (*ch.19:6; 22:13*). We could say that the whole book of Revelation is also sandwiched between these two statements referring to the all-knowing, almighty power of our God and Father. This is what gives us perfect security, as we read here about the trials and tribulations that will befall God’s people, and the calamities that will befall the world around us, in the last days.

In the entire New Testament God is called “*Almighty*” only 10 times. Nine of those 10 references are in *Revelation*. The reason for this is that God wants us to be rooted and grounded in the fact that He is Almighty and in control of everything, as we read this book. The only other reference is in *2 Corinthians 6:17 and 18*, where God calls His people to be separated from all that is unclean. This shows that it is only to those who desire to be separated from all that is unclean and contrary to the word of God, that God reveals Himself as “*ALMIGHTY*”. It is primarily for such people that the book of Revelation is written.

Seven Glorious Truths

Some of the greatest truths that we need to be established in, during these days, are those concerning our Lord and our relationship with Him, that we have just considered :

- (1) The absolute trustworthiness of our Lord’s promises;
- (2) His triumph over man’s greatest enemy (death);
- (3) His total authority over everything in heaven and earth;
- (4) His everlasting and unchanging love for us;
- (5) His freeing us from sin’s power;

- (6) His Father now being our Father too;
- (7) His coming back to establish His kingdom on earth.

We need to be rooted and grounded in these truths if we are to remain steadfast and unmoveable in the times that are going to come.

Encouragement In Tribulation

V.9,10: I, John, your brother and fellow-partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos, because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet.

Here we read John calling himself “*your brother*”. John was at that time the only living apostle of the twelve whom Jesus had chosen. He was about 95 years old when the Lord gave him this revelation on the island of Patmos. He had walked with God for over 65 years by then. But he was still a *brother*.

He wasn’t Pope John or Reverend John. He was not even Pastor John! He was just an ordinary brother. Jesus had taught His disciples to avoid all titles and to refer to themselves always as only brothers (*Mt.23:8-11*). And the apostles obeyed Him literally, unlike many today.

We have only one Head and one Leader - even Christ. All the rest of us are *brothers*, whatever our ministry or our experience in the church may be.

John also refers to himself as a “*fellow-partaker in the tribulation which is in Jesus*”. Every wholehearted disciple of Jesus should be prepared to partake in the “*tribulation which is in Jesus*”, as long as he is in this world.

John did not get this unveiling while living in comfort. He received it, while experiencing tribulation at Patmos, because he had been faithful to “*the word of God and the testimony of Jesus*” (v.9). He had to experience tribulation himself in order to be able to write about the saints experiencing the great tribulation from the Antichrist in the last days. God takes us through trials and tribulations first before giving us a ministry to others who are facing tribulation.

Paul said, “*God encourages us in all our affliction so that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction with the (same) encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God*” (*2 Cor.1:4 - Amplified*).

It is not surprising therefore that the doctrine that Jesus would come secretly and take (rapture) His church out of the world, before the great tribulation, arose for the first time in a country (England) where Christians were living in comfort, and at a time (mid-19th century) when they were not facing any persecution for their faith at all. Today this doctrine continues to be proclaimed and believed by Christians who live in ease and comfort, in countries where there is no persecution against Christians at all.

Since the prayers of most Christians are basically of this order : “Lord make my life more comfortable on earth”, it is not surprising that they have gladly accepted this teaching of a pre-tribulation rapture of the church. Thus Satan has succeeded in lulling multitudes of Christians with a false comfort, so that they will be unprepared for the great tribulation when it does come upon them.

The words of Jesus are clear: “*In the world YOU HAVE TRIBULATION. But take courage; I have overcome the world*” (*Jn.16:33*). He never promised that we would escape tribulation - whether small tribulations or the great one. But He did say that we could overcome even as He overcame. He is far more interested in making us overcomers than in saving us out of tribulation, because He is far more interested in our character than in our comfort.

Neither did Jesus ever say that escaping the great tribulation was a reward for faithfulness, as some teach. On the contrary, He said that those who forsook everything to follow Him would have even more tribulations than others who didn’t follow Him (*Mk.10:30*).

When He prayed to His Father for His disciples, He said, *“I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil.”* (Jn.17:15). He did *NOT* want His disciples to be raptured out of the world at that time, just because they were going to face tribulation.

In the 3rd-century when Christians were being thrown to the lions in the Roman amphitheatres and being burnt at the stake in different parts of the Roman empire, the Lord did not rescue them from such tribulations. The God Who shut the lions' mouths and took away the power of the fiery furnace in Daniel's day, did *NOT* do such miracles for these disciples of Jesus - for these were new-covenant Christians who were going to glorify God through death. Like Jesus their Master, they neither asked for, nor expected twelve legions of angels to come and protect them from their enemies.

From heaven, God watched the Bride of His Son being torn to pieces by lions and being burnt to ashes; and He was glorified in their testimony - for they had *“followed the Lamb, wherever He went”*, even unto a violent physical death (Rev.14:4). The only word that the Lord spoke to them was, *“Be faithful until death and I will give you a crown of life”* (Rev.2:10).

Even today, when the disciples of Jesus are being tortured and persecuted for His Name in many lands, the Lord does not take them away from the earth. And He will not rapture us to heaven before the great tribulation either. He will do something far better. He will make us overcomers in the midst of the great tribulation.

Jesus is far more interested in saving us from evil than in saving us from tribulation. He permits us to go through tribulation because He knows that that is the only way that we can become spiritually strong.

Such a message is strange teaching indeed to a comfort-loving Christendom that has been coddled in their pews every Sunday for years by ear-tickling preachers. But this is the message that the apostles preached to the early churches. *“They (the apostles Paul and Barnabas) strengthened the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, saying, ‘Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God’”* (Acts 14:22).

The little trials that we face at home and at work now, are but a preparation for the greater ones that will come in the days to come. That is why it is essential that we are faithful now. For God says, *“If you have run with footmen and they have tired you out, then how can you compete with horses?”* (Jer.12:5).

John speaks here about being a *“fellow-partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus”* (v.9). We have to enter into fellowship with Jesus in tribulation first, before we can share His throne with Him in His kingdom.

Perseverance is a great virtue that is emphasised throughout the New Testament. Jesus Himself said *“They will deliver you to tribulation..... but the one who endures to the end shall be saved”* (Mt.24:13).

Being “In The Spirit”

John received this revelation on the Lord's day (v.10). The first day of the week was called *“the Lord's day”* because that was the day that Jesus rose from the dead, having conquered sin, Satan, death and the grave.

The early disciples met together on the first day of every week, to build one another up and to break bread (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor.16:2). They had no special days in the year. They had no “Good Friday” or “Easter” or “Christmas”. They had been freed from keeping days and seasons etc., for they had come under the new covenant (Col.2:16,17).

John was *“in the Spirit”* and that was why he heard the voice of the Lord. We can hear that voice too - if we are in the Spirit. It all depends on where our mind is set. If our mind is set on the things of earth, then the voices that we hear will be concerning earthly things.

We know, for example, that there are many voices in the radio-waves in the air around us. The voice that we pick up will depend on the frequency that our radio-set is tuned to. You can hear God's Word over radio or you can hear Satan's rock-music over it. The choice is yours.

It is just the same with our mind. If we are in the Spirit - that is if we are filled with the Spirit and our mind is set on the things that are above (*Col.3:2*) - we will be able to hear the Lord's voice.

But there are other voices in the air that are clamouring for our attention too. There are voices that would like to tell you how to make more money, how to get your share of the family property, how to settle scores with that person who cheated you and how to defend yourself against those who are spreading false stories about you etc., etc., Satan's radio stations are broadcasting lies, bitternesses and anxieties etc., 24 hours of every day. All you have to do is tune in, and you can pick up what you like!!

When believers complain that God doesn't speak to them, it is not because God does not speak. He is speaking all the time. But their minds are tuned in to this world and its interests. I am convinced that there is much that the Spirit has spoken in the past that was meant for us, but which we never "picked up", because we were not in the Spirit.

You can sit in a meeting of the church and hear absolutely nothing that the Spirit is saying, even though you may understand everything that the preacher said. Someone sitting next to you who is "*in the Spirit*" may however hear the Lord's voice just like John did. John heard the Lord's voice so clearly that he says it was as loud as a trumpet! That's how loudly God speaks! But those who are deaf won't hear even the blast of a trumpet.

Let me exhort and challenge every one of you to keep yourself in the Spirit every day - especially in these the last days of this age. Keep yourself sensitive to sin and walk in humility before the face of God, so that your ears can be open to hear what the Lord has to say to you.

The Risen Lord And The Seven Churches

V.11-20: Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea. And I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; and in the middle of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His breast with a golden girdle. And His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire; and His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been caused to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. And in His right hand He held seven stars; and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as a dead man. And He laid His right hand upon me, saying, 'Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and Hades.' Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall take place after these things. As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

God gives us messages not only for ourselves but also for others. When God speaks to us, it is a good habit to write down what we hear, as John was commanded to do here (*v.11*). He might otherwise have forgotten what God had spoken to him.

The message in this case was for the seven churches in Asia. What was known as Asia then is today a small part of Turkey. All these 7 churches were located within a radius of 75 miles of each other. But notice that even though they were so close to each other, they were still NOT collectively called "The *CHURCH* in Asia". They were called "The *CHURCHES* in Asia".

This is a small point but a very important one, nevertheless. "The church in Asia" would have meant that these churches had become a denomination with a central headquarters. But "*the churches in Asia*" indicate that each church was a local church directly under the headship of the Lord.

The church is a work of God, built by Christ. But denominations are the work of men. All the teachings and the writings of the apostles make it clear that the will of God is for each church to be directly under the headship of Christ, and not part of a denomination.

There was no bishop or superintendent in charge of these seven churches, to whom John could send these letters for distribution to the churches. Each letter had to be sent individually to the messenger of that church - for each church was an independent unit. The Lord had given apostles to the church. John himself was one of them. But the Lord had not appointed any bishops or superintendents.

There is no such thing, for example, as "*The church in India*". There are *churches* in India, and these are built by the Lord in different localities, each one directly under His headship.

Satan's final aim is to build his counterfeit world "church", Babylon. And his first step towards that goal was to group churches into denominations, many centuries ago. He knew that the task of building Babylon would have been impossible otherwise. We should not be ignorant of Satan's schemes.

The seven golden lampstands symbolise the seven churches (*see v.20*). Under the old covenant, the temple had *ONE* seven-branched lampstand. This was because all the tribes of Israel were branches of one "denomination" with its central headquarters and leaders at Jerusalem.

But it is different under the new covenant. There are seven different lampstands, each completely separate from the other. The reason, as we saw above, was because each church was independently under the headship of Christ, although in fellowship with the other churches, through the Head.

The church being called a lampstand indicates that, in God's eyes, its primary function is to give light. The lampstands being golden indicate the Divine origin of a true church. It is built by the Lord and not by men.

A lampstand is not meant to be a mere decoration. Neither is a church! The light that every church should hold forth is God's Word, which alone is a light for our path in this dark world (*Psa.119:105*). Instead of holding forth that light, when so-called "*churches*" begin to major on running schools and hospitals and on doing social work, we can be sure that they have strayed from God's primary purpose.

When John turned around to see who was speaking, he saw Jesus (*v.12,13*). But he saw Him in the midst of the churches. It is through the local church that the Lord seeks to reveal Himself and to speak to others.

The first dwelling-place of God mentioned in the Bible is the burning bush that Moses saw in the wilderness (*Deut.33:16*). Like John at Patmos, Moses also turned aside at that time to see that marvellous sight. And that's when God spoke to him (*Exod.3:3*).

Today the church is God's dwelling place. God desires every church to be aflame with His Spirit like that burning bush was. When people look at a local church, they should be able to see the life of Christ revealed through the members of that church. Then God can speak to people through the church.

John then goes on to describe the Lord Jesus as he saw Him. Even though the Lord is risen, He is still called the "*Son of man*", emphasising the fact of His identification with humanity permanently.

His long robe (undoubtedly white in colour) reaching to His feet, points to His High-Priestly ministry of intercession for us - for this was how the Jewish high-priest was dressed when He went into the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle, on the day of atonement every year (*v.13*).

The Lord was wearing a golden girdle (belt) across His breast (*v.13*). Gold symbolises what is Divine. The girdle symbolises righteousness and faithfulness (according to *Isaiah 11:5*). This emphasises the perfect righteousness of God that was seen in Jesus' earthly life and the perfect faithfulness with which He keeps His promises to us.

His head and His hair were white like wool (*v.14*). *Daniel 7:9* uses this very same symbolism to refer to God's eternity (His endless age). The white hair also speaks of wisdom. So this emphasises the fact that Jesus, although the Son of Man, is nevertheless also the Eternal God, perfect in wisdom.

His eyes were like a flame of fire (*v.14*). That means that "*all things are open and laid bare*" to Him (*Heb.4:13*). His eyes penetrate through all religious veneer, and can see through the flowery and pious language and the "*form of godliness*" of the religious hypocrite. It also sees beyond the broken, stuttering

words of the Godfearing soul into the sincerity of his heart. As a result, His evaluations are totally different from man's.

His feet were like burnished bronze (v.15). Bronze was the material with which the altar of sacrifice was made (in the outer court of the tabernacle), where the sin-offering was slain. Bronze therefore symbolises God's judgment of man's sin at Calvary. While crushing the serpent's head, Jesus' feet had to be pierced on the cross (*Gen.3:15*).

His voice was like the sound of many waters (v.15). The rivers of living water symbolise the Holy Spirit (*Jn.7:37-39*). The speech of Jesus was always full of the gentleness and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

He held seven stars in His right hand (v.16). The seven stars are the seven messengers of the churches (v.20). God has ordained that the New Testament church be led by a plurality of elders (*Acts 14:23; Tit.1:5; Acts 20:17*). But God usually equips one among the elders with the gift of proclaiming the Word in the church, as His messenger. This one is referred to here as "*the messenger of the church*". (The word translated as "*angel*" is a Greek word which actually means "*one who brings news*" or "*a messenger*").

These messengers are held by Christ in His hand. That is why we are commanded to give double honour to the elders "*who work hard at preaching and teaching*" (*1 Tim.5:17*).

It is necessary however, to mention that many elders of churches and many who preach God's Word today are NOT held by Christ in His hand, for they are self-appointed and not appointed by Him.

A messenger appointed by the Lord will be a man of God, who inspires your confidence, and through whose life and ministry you will be fed, led and blessed. Such a man should be respected - for he is held by the Lord in His hand. There are few men like that in the world today - but praise God there are a few.

God's servants are special targets of Satan. Therefore they are specially kept by the Lord in His hand. As long as they remain there in humility, Satan cannot touch them. But when they are puffed up, or if they sin and do not repent, then God allows Satan to inflict them in various ways so that they can come to repentance. It is a tremendous privilege to be held by the Lord as His messenger in His hand. But it has awesome responsibilities as well.

Out of Jesus' mouth came a sharp two-edged sword (v.16). This refers to the Word of God that He speaks (*Heb.4:12*). We noticed in *verse 15* that His voice was like the sound of many waters. These two verses put together indicate that Jesus always speaks God's Word in the power of the Holy Spirit. He speaks with great gentleness, but He also rebukes firmly, where necessary.

His face was like the sun shining in its strength (v.16). This is how Peter, James and John saw Him on the mount of transfiguration as well (*Mt.17:2*). This symbolises the "*unapproachable light*" in which God dwells (*1 Tim.6:16*). The holiness of God is compared here to the noonday sun, which we cannot look at directly. The sun is a ball of fire in which no germs or bacteria can dwell. No sin can dwell in the presence of God either (*Isa.33:14*).

At The Feet Of The Lord

The same John who leaned on Jesus' breast at the last supper now falls at His feet as a dead man (v.17). John had walked with God for 65 years. He was undoubtedly the saintliest man on earth at that time. Yet He could not stand erect in the Lord's presence. Those who know the Lord the most, reverence Him the most. Those who know Him the least, pretend to have a cheap familiarity with Him.

The seraphs of heaven cover their faces before the Lord (*Isa.6:2,3*). Job and Isaiah saw their sinfulness and mourned when they saw the glory of God (*Job 42:5,6; Isa.6:5*). But "fools rush in where angels fear to tread"!! Such is the folly of the carnal believer.

The more we know the Lord, the more we will fall at His feet in adoring wonder, with our mouth in the dust. Only as we see the glory of the Lord constantly, will we see our own un-Christlikeness. Only then will we stop judging others and start judging ourselves. And only then will we experience His touch of power like John experienced at Patmos.

Jesus laid His right hand upon John (v.17). This symbolised enduement with power and authority. He told John not to be afraid.

“*Do not be afraid*” and “*Follow Me*” are the two most oft-repeated statements of Jesus in the gospels. He speaks the very same words to us today.

Jesus went on to tell John that He was the First and the Last - the very same title used by the Father earlier (verse 8). He knows the end from the beginning and He Himself is before the beginning and after the end. This is why we need never fear.

Jesus then tells John how He has conquered death and the grave and now holds the keys of death and Hades (the place of departed spirits) (v.18). Keys symbolise the power to open and close doors. Once it was Satan who had the power of death (*Heb.2:14,15*). But when Jesus died and rose again, He took those keys from Satan.

Today Jesus has the keys of death and Hades. That means that if you are a wholehearted disciple of Jesus, seeking to do the will of God alone in your life, you cannot die until God’s appointed time comes. No accident or sickness can claim your life, until Jesus decides that it is time to open the door of death for you to go through into His presence. This is a tremendous encouragement for all who are truly disciples of Jesus.

John may be persecuted by men at Patmos. But they could not kill him until God’s time for him had come. And the Lord still had a ministry for John to fulfil.

John is now empowered and commissioned by the Lord for a new task - to write this wonderful book of *Revelation* (v.19). We need to be empowered again and again by the Lord if we are to complete our ministry triumphantly.

The Threefold Division of “Revelation”

In verse 19, the Lord gives John the three-fold division of the book:

(i) *What John has already seen (chapter 1)* - the vision of a triumphant Lord Jesus saying, “*Do not be afraid*”. Fear has absolutely no place in the heart of a disciple who has seen the glory of the Lord.

(ii) *The situation in John’s time (chapters 2 and 3)* - referring to the condition of the seven churches in Asia Minor. The Lord’s messages to these seven churches are a warning and a challenge to all churches of all time and to their “messengers”.

(iii) *Events future to John’s time (chapters 4 to 22)* - the phrase “*after these things*” that is used here, is used again in chapter 4:1, indicating that the third part of the book begins there.

The Lord then explains to John the meaning of the lampstands and the stars (v.20). We studied these when we looked at verses 12 and 16.

The Lord alone can give us revelation on the secrets of His Word. To receive such revelation, we need two indispensable qualities - the fear of God and humility. “*The secret of the Lord is for those who fear Him....and He teaches the humble His way*” (*Psa25:14,9*).

Let us study this book then in that spirit.

CHAPTER TWO

Although these seven letters are addressed primarily to the messengers of the churches, yet at the end of each message, we find an invitation to anyone who has an ear to hear, to pay attention to what the Holy

Spirit is saying to ALL the churches. They have a message therefore for every disciple in every church in every generation.

We saw in *Chapter One* that our Lord is described as the Faithful Witness. We see Him fulfilling this ministry in these letters of His. To use a modern expression, Jesus “*tells it like it is*”. Christ is the Judge in the midst of His church, judging both the messenger and the church itself. He tells the messengers and the churches exactly what He thinks of them.

In His evaluations, the Lord doesn’t “touch-up” the portraits like modern photographers do. He loves His people far too much to do that!! He knows that it is better that we deal with sin, worldliness, lukewarmness and self-centredness right now, than to have to face up with these things at His judgment-seat later. To be judged for these over there would not be profitable for us; and He has our eternal good in view. So it is good for us to pay careful attention to everything that the Lord says in these letters.

Where there is room for appreciation, the Lord expresses sincere appreciation. And where there is need for rebuke, He does not hesitate to rebuke scathingly. Cancer cannot be washed away with soap and water. It cannot be removed gently either. It has to be excised by radical surgery. Even so with sin.

The Loveless Church

V.1-7: To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, The One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: ‘I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; and you have perseverance and have endured for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place - unless you repent. Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.’”

In the letter to the messenger at Ephesus, the Lord describes Himself as the One Who holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks among the seven churches (v.1).

The Lord is always walking in the midst of the churches, examining everything that is said and done by everyone therein, and especially by the messengers Whom He holds in His hand. And He measures everything, not by the low standards that carnal Christians have, or even by the standard of the ten commandments, but by the plumbline of Divine righteousness.

He expresses His approval and appreciation first before He points out the failures (v.2). The Divine nature is like that. The Lord always looks for that which is good first, and expresses appreciation for that, before pointing out what needs to be set right.

Man’s nature however is quite different. He does not look for that which is good in others first, but for that which is bad. Man is naturally slow to appreciate and extremely quick to criticise. This is but one mark of the poison of the “*Accuser of the brethren*” that is in our system. The more we partake of the Divine nature however, the more we will be like our Lord - quick to appreciate and slow to criticise.

It is good to follow this principle all through life : “*I will never point out a fault to someone, in whom I have found nothing so far to appreciate*”.

Following that simple rule can lead us to greater heights of godliness than we have ever imagined. It will make us a far greater blessing in the church and far less of a nuisance to others than we have been thus far.

It is only when we appreciate others that we have laid the foundation to constructively criticize them. Otherwise we will only be hurling bricks at them. You cannot write with a chalk on thin air. You need a blackboard if people are to see what you are writing. Even so, expressed appreciation forms the

blackboard on which we can write and “*speak the truth in love*” to others. Then, what we say is also more likely to be accepted by them.

Appreciation and rebuke are both signs of love. But we must begin with appreciation first. Notice how Paul follows this principle even when writing to the carnal Corinthian Christians (*1 Cor.1:4-10*).

The Lord commands the messenger at Ephesus for his toil and perseverance and for his efforts to keep the church pure from evil men. No doubt he had fought a battle against worldliness to keep it from entering the church. Not only that, he had also striven to keep the church pure in doctrine. He had tested those who claimed to be apostles and had proved their claims to be false.

The Lord’s reference to “apostles” in verse 2 clearly indicates that there were other apostles in the church in the first century, besides the eleven whom the Lord had appointed when He was on earth. Christ has given apostles to the church even after He “*ascended on high*” (*Eph.4:11*), and there are apostles even today. But there are also many who claim to be apostles who are not. And so we must not be deceived by false apostles (*v.2*).

The messenger in the church at Ephesus had also “*endured*” for the sake of the Lord’s Name without giving up (*v.3*). What a wonderful man this messenger was, according to the standards of most believers. And what a wonderful church the Ephesian church appeared to be - one that toiled, persevered, kept away evil men, kept out false doctrine and exposed deceivers - thus emphasising both purity of life and purity of doctrine.

One would have thought that such a church had everything that the Lord wanted to find in a church. But alas it was not so. It lacked the main thing that the Lord looked for. It had left its first love - love for the Lord and love for one another (*verse 4*).

What the Lord said to them was essentially this : “In the midst of all your zeal and your activity, you have lost sight of ME. You have lost that fervent devotion that you once had for Me. You have kept yourself from evil and you have steered clear of doctrinal error. But remember how you loved Me fervently when you were first converted and how you did everything out of love for Me then. Now everything has degenerated into a dry routine. You’re still going to the meetings, reading your Bible and praying. But it has all become a ritual.”

The church here had become like a wife who once served her husband joyfully out of love for him, but who now considers the same tasks a drudgery - because the fire of love has gone out of her marriage. In the olden days, she used to wait eagerly for her husband to come back from the office every evening. But not now. She is still faithful to Him, but she has lost her first love.

What does a true husband desire from his wife first of all? Is it her love or her labours? Certainly, it is her love. It is the same with the Lord. He desires the love of our hearts first and foremost. When that is gone, everything that we do becomes dead works.

Good works become dead works when love for God is not the motivating force behind them.

The believers here had also cooled off in their love for each other. They were no longer able to bear with each other’s weaknesses or to overlook each other’s sins. They had lost their first love for one another too.

The messenger had lost his first love - and gradually the church too had become like its messenger.

This was not a small error. It was a great fall - for the Lord says, “*Remember therefore from where you have fallen*”. We usually think of a believer as having fallen only when he falls into adultery or theft or smoking etc., When we become sensitive to the voice of the Spirit however, we will recognise that even a slight loss of devotion to the Lord and a slight cooling off in love for others is also evidence of backsliding.

From where had the church in Ephesus fallen?

Ephesus was the place where some 40 years earlier the apostle Paul had come and established a church. There was such a revival there at that time that the whole city had known about it (*Acts 19*). Here was a church where Paul had laboured for three years, preaching DAILY with tears (*Acts 20:31*). When finally he left Ephesus, he called the elders of the church and warned them of some of the dangers that the church would face after his departure (*Acts 20:17-35*).

Four years later, Paul wrote a letter to them - a letter containing some of the deepest truths of the new covenant found in the entire Bible. He could write to them about such matters because he considered the church at Ephesus to be the most mature and most spiritually-minded of all the churches that he had established. We also notice from the letter that Paul had found nothing to rebuke or correct in them. Such was the high position that they had occupied at one time.

Paul's letter could be called the first letter to the Ephesians. Here in *Revelation 2*, we see the second letter to the Ephesians. The story is entirely different now. A new generation had arisen in the church and they did not have the devotion or the spirituality of their fathers.

This is the sad history of almost every church and movement in Christianity, throughout these twenty centuries. The second generation has the same doctrine, but not the same life as their fathers.

And so the Lord tells the church at Ephesus, "*Remember therefore from where you have fallen*".

There was only one solution for this problem. "*Repent and do the deeds you did at first*", says the Lord (v.5).

The word that we normally think of preaching to unbelievers - "*REPENT*" - is the word that the Lord preaches to the church. "Before you tell others to turn from their sins, turn from your own sin of leaving your first love", He tells them. They must mourn for having left their first love.

"*Do the deeds you did at first*", says the Lord (v.5). If their works did not spring out of love, then all their activities had no value before Him. Their works were wood, hay and straw now, fit only for being burnt.

The motive behind each action is what gives value to the action. The motive behind your perseverance and your toil and your purity is what makes them acceptable or unacceptable to the Lord. In the day that we stand before the Lord, we shall find that the question "*WHY?*" will be far more important than the question "*WHAT?*". Why we did what we did will be the test by which the Lord evaluates all our actions. We must never forget this.

Whatever does not spring out of love for the Lord is a dead work.

Remember, that we are commanded to repent of dead works. *Hebrews 6:1* tells us that this is part of the foundation for pressing on to perfection in our lives.

If the messenger and the church do not repent, then the Lord says that He will remove their lampstand from out of its place. That means that He will no longer consider them thereafter as one of His churches on earth. They may still have their meetings and their conferences, and their numbers may keep increasing. But, as far as the Lord is concerned, they would be dead and non-existent, without the anointing of His Spirit and without His grace.

That is how serious the loss of first love can be.

The Lord then commends the messenger for hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans which He also hated (v.6).

There is no reference anywhere in Scripture that tells us who the Nicolaitans were or what they did. So we cannot be certain about what deeds the Lord was referring to. However, the word "Nicolaitans" means (in Greek) "conquerors of the people".

If that was what the Lord meant, then it would be a reference to those who sought to "*lord it over the flock*" (*1 Pet.5:3*) - elders who behaved like kings and not like servants. Such elders set themselves up as a separate priestly class (as the Levites were in the Old Testament) and rule over other believers. The Lord said that He hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans.

Today we have Christian preachers using titles such as “*Reverend*” (a title that is used in Scripture for God alone - *Psa.111:9 - KJV*) and “*Pastor*” (which is a gift and not a title or an office - *Eph.4:11*). etc., to exalt themselves over others in the church.

However, it is not just with titles that preachers seek to rule over others. There are many who call themselves just “*brothers*” who dominate their fellow-believers by their soul-power (dominant personality), their financial-power and their spiritual gifts.

All this is Nicolaitanism and it is nauseating to God.

In India we see the sad spectacle of multitudes of Christian churches and organisations ruled by their Western masters through money-power. Because of financial indebtedness and the obligations that have come through being invited to Western countries, many Indian believers have ended up as slaves of “the white man”. Such slavish subservience of one believer to another is “Nicolaitanism” and is an abomination in God’s eyes.

Consider another form of Nicolaitanism. There are some priests who teach that Mary is a mediator between Christ and man. The priests then act as further mediators between Christians and Mary!! But this unScriptural, mediatorial attitude can be practised just as much by a pastor as by a priest!

When a pastor “*finds God’s will*” for one of his flock in matters concerning employment or marriage or whatever, he is acting as a Nicolaitan mediator. By such methods, priests and pastors gain power over their flock in a way that God detests.

To give spiritual counsel and advice is a godly thing. But to “*find God’s will*” for another member of the body of Christ is to rob him of his connection with Christ as his Head.

Under the old covenant, there were prophets who found God’s will for the people, because the Holy Spirit had not been given to individuals then. But now, under the new covenant, things are different. All can know God personally (*Heb.8:8-12*). In fact the Lord eagerly desires that every member of His church (His body) should have a direct connection with Him as Head (*Col.2:18,19*). Nicolaitans however hinder this.

The church in Ephesus had successfully resisted Nicolaitanism. They hated it, and the Lord commended them for it because He hated it too. He hated it in the first century and He hates it still.

What about you? Do you hate this evil just as much as the Lord hates it? If not, you are unlike Christ, and you cannot be a true messenger of His. A Nicolaitan can never build the body of Christ.

Finally, the Holy Spirit exhorts everyone who has an ear to hear, to hear what He is saying, for the message is for *ALL* the churches (v.7). Not every believer is willing to obey what the Lord has to say - for most of them are either wanting to have their own way or wanting to please their fellowmen. Recognising this fact, the Holy Spirit proceeds to challenge individuals in the church to an overcoming life.

The Holy Spirit gives recognition here to a group of wholehearted and faithful believers whom He calls “overcomers”, in the midst of a church. These are the ones who overcome sin and worldliness and who stand faithfully for the Lord in the midst of the spiritual decline around them.

In every locality, God is looking for those who will stand true to His standards and who will fight for those standards at any cost. In the letters to the seven churches, we see that the Lord is primarily interested in the overcomers. Even today, He looks for overcomers in every place. He may not find them in every church, but He looks for them in every locality.

The Lord promises a reward to those who overcome. In this case, it was the privilege of eating from the tree of life (v.7) - the privilege that Adam missed. The tree of life is a symbol of the Divine life, the Divine nature. The greatest reward that God can ever give a human being is to partake of His nature. Here on earth, even most believers don’t think too highly of this. But in the clearer light of eternity, we shall discover that this is indeed the greatest of all rewards that God can ever give a human being.

The Suffering Church

V.8-11: And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this: 'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.'

The Lord describes Himself here as the First and the Last, the One Who has overcome death. A church that is facing opposition and persecution needs to see the Lord as the One Who is in control of all events from the beginning to the end and as One Who has conquered man's greatest enemy - death.

The Lord has no charges at all against this church.

It was a church facing tribulation, poverty and slander.

Tribulation is a recurring theme in the book of Revelation - and notice that it is faced by the most faithful among God's children, and not by compromisers. In the first chapter of Revelation, we saw John undergoing tribulation. Here we see a faithful church undergoing the same. It is a church against which the Lord does not have a single charge, that is being persecuted. The worldly, compromising churches have an easy time.

All this is meant to remind us that tribulation is a part of God's perfect will for His wholehearted children. So when we ourselves are faced with the great tribulation one day, we need not think that some strange thing has befallen us. We will be treading the same pathway that God's faithful children have trodden through the centuries.

God allows the very best among His children to face tribulation. It was so in the first century. It has been so throughout these 20 centuries of church-history. And it will be so even at the end of time.

The best of God's children, the most faithful among them, the elite commando-troops of the Lord's army will be the ones who will be here on earth to stand as witnesses for Him in the days of the Antichrist. Every General sends his best troops to where the battle is raging the thickest. The Lord does the same too. It will be a great privilege and honour to be among those troops of the Lord.

God will certainly not take the overcomers away to heaven at a time when He needs their testimony on earth the most. He has never done that in the past and He will not do that in the future either.

The Lord's elite troops who stand up to the Antichrist in the days of the great tribulation are referred to in the book of Revelation as those "*who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus*" (*Rev.12:17*). They will refuse to bow down to the Antichrist or to receive his mark on their bodies. Many of them will therefore have to lay down their lives for their faith (*Rev.13:7,8,15-17*). Thus they will join that select company of martyrs of all time who "*did not love their lives even to death*" (*Rev.12:11*).

None of us naturally have the courage to face death for the Lord. But if God has called us to seal our witness with our blood, then we can rest assured that He will give us special grace for that when such a time comes. It was through such a special supply of grace that every Christian martyr faced death fearlessly in the past. And what God did for them He will do for us too - even for the weakest and the most cowardly among us. All we have to do is tell Him that we want to be faithful to Him at any cost. If we have the willingness, God will give us the boldness.

The saints in the church at Smyrna were poor. Poverty is another thing that God's faithful children have faced throughout church-history.

Many Old Testament saints were rich. God had promised earthly wealth as a reward for obedience in Old Testament times, because Israel was called to possess an earthly kingdom.

But Jesus inaugurated a new covenant and brought the kingdom of heaven to earth. Now the wealth we are promised is heavenly, not earthly. That was why Jesus Himself and the apostles were all poor.

Today, there are many who are teaching that becoming wealthy is a sign of God's blessing on His children. This doctrine was first invented by preachers in the West, who used it to justify their becoming wealthy from the tithes of God's people! Christian businessmen then latched on to it as a convenient doctrine to justify their own amassing of wealth. Covetous preachers everywhere have found it to be a convenient doctrine for them as well!!

The poverty of Jesus and of the apostles should suffice to show that all such preachers have been thoroughly deceived by their own covetousness.

The believers at Smyrna were faithful to the Lord in the midst of great trials, and they were poor. The believers at Laodicea, on the other hand, were thoroughly dead, and they were materially rich. What does this prove? The answer is plain for anyone to see.

"God has chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith..... God has chosen the foolish things of the world..... God has chosen the weak things of the world..... God has chosen the things that are not..... that no man should boast before God." (Jas.2:5; 1 Cor.1:27-29).

God has made no mistake in choosing His children.

God has promised to provide all our material needs, if we seek His kingdom and His righteousness first (Mt.6:33; Phil.4:19).

We have seen evidence of this again and again in the churches in India, where believers who were living in abject poverty and who were heavily in debt, have been blessed financially by their heavenly Father, when they honoured Him in their lives. This is a miracle in a country like India, where there is no government-funded social security system and where unemployment is high and bureaucratic corruption rampant. But we have also seen that such believers have not become wealthy. God has met their needs. But He hasn't made them rich.

We have also seen that where believers have pursued after wealth, they have destroyed themselves spiritually (1 Tim.6:9,10).

What should a believer do if he is already wealthy - as a result of inherited family wealth or some other reason? He should obey God's Word: (i) Recognise first of all, that **all** that he has belongs to the Lord (Study the following Scriptures : 1 Cor.10:26; 1 Cor.4:7; Lk.14:33; Jn.17:10); (ii) Obey the Lord's command to use his wealth for the spread of the gospel, thus seeking first the kingdom of God with his money ("Use your money to make friends for eternity" - Lk.16:9 - paraphrase); (iii) Obey God's command to share his wealth with other needy believers (1 Tim.6:17-19).

If he follows these three steps, he won't be able to stay wealthy for long. But he will become a spiritual man, for God rewards us spiritually exactly according to our faithfulness with material things (Lk.16:11). Many are spiritually poor, because they have been unfaithful with "*the mammon of unrighteousness*" that God entrusted them with, and tested them with.

God has not promised us material wealth in the New Testament. But He told the church in Smyrna, "*You are rich*" (v.9). They were rich in God's eyes, because they had been faithful in their trials and thus partaken of the Divine nature. This is the true eternal wealth that God gives us in the new covenant.

The church in Smyrna faced the "*blasphemy of those who say they are Jews*" (v.9).

Slander is another thing that all of God's faithful children have to face. Notice here that the slander and opposition that this church was facing was from those who called themselves God's people - "*those who say they are Jews, but are not, but are a synagogue of Satan*" (v.9).

Those Jews were religious people, who studied their Bibles (*Genesis to Malachi*). Yet the Lord called them "*a synagogue of Satan*", because they were hypocrites. That was why they persecuted the true disciples of Jesus.

Many a synagogue that was started by God-fearing Jews degenerated into a synagogue of Satan over a period of time. In the same way, many churches that were started by God-fearing believers, have also degenerated into “*churches of Satan*”, in God’s eyes, today.

Opposition for the true disciples of Jesus today, comes not just from heathen religions (which is understandable), but also from “those who say they are Christians, but who are not, but are a church of Satan”.

Today if we said that a so-called Christian “church” was “a church of Satan”, many would accuse us of being un-Christlike. But they forget that it was Jesus Himself Who rebuked Peter, saying “*Get behind Me, Satan*” (Mt.16:23), and that it was Jesus Who called this group of religious people “*a synagogue of Satan*”. He would use exactly the same strong language today to rebuke “churches” that have drifted from their calling.

Jesus warned His disciples, “*They will make you outcasts from the synagogue; but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. And these things they will do, because they have not known the Father, or Me.*” (Jn.16:2,3).

What He said then that the people in a synagogue would do to His disciples, was in later centuries done by “*churches*” too. In the middle ages, Godfearing disciples of Jesus were killed by “*Christian*” inquisitionists.

This hatred of the disciples of Jesus will reach its peak during the time of the Antichrist and the Babylonian “world church”. We must be prepared to face it when it comes. That is why we must not be afraid of the little slander and opposition that we face from so-called Christians these days.

We must never be afraid of being slandered - for Jesus Himself was maligned. He was called a gluttonous man, a false teacher, a blasphemer, an insane man, a demon-possessed man, a half-breed and one who had Satanic power (Lk.7:34; Jn.7:12; Mt.26:65; Mk.3:21,22; Mt.12:24; Jn.8:48).

He told His disciples, “*A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become as his teacher, and the slave as his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul (a Jewish title for Satan, the prince of demons), how much more the members of his household!*” (Mt.10:24,25).

Peter exhorts us saying, “*Keep your behaviour excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.*” (1 Pet.2:12).

God’s promise to us is, “*No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper; and every tongue that accuses you in judgment you will condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord. And their vindication is from Me.*” (Isa.54:17). So we need not fear slander. The Lord Himself will vindicate us at the right time. Until then we can afford to keep quiet and ignore what ungodly people say about us.

The Lord then tells the church at Smyrna not to fear (v.10). “*Don’t be afraid*” was a word that fell from Jesus’ lips frequently when He was on earth. And it is the same word that He speaks now to a church that is facing suffering for His Name’s sake. Perhaps it is the one word from the Lord’s mouth that all of us need to hear the most in these days.

There is a spirit of fear all over the world today and it is gripping people more and more powerfully. Jesus warned us that it would be so in the last days (Lk.21:26). But He also told His disciples that they should not be affected by this spirit of fear. The sad thing is that most believers are not free from this spirit. Many believers are enslaved by the fear of what will happen in the future, fear of men, fear of sickness, fear of death and various other types of fears.

Fear is one of Satan’s master-weapons, with which he enslaves many believers. It is this spirit of fear that prevents many believers from boldly testifying for the Lord in the meetings of the church and from being bold witnesses for the Lord in their places of work. Many believers confuse timidity with humility and thus Satan deceives them.

It was fear that prevented Peter from boldly testifying about the Lord to the servant-girl who questioned him in the high-priest's palace. But when Peter was baptised in the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, that fear was driven away. He could then testify about the Lord boldly to anyone.

Later, when he and the other apostles were tempted to be afraid again, they prayed and they were filled with Holy Spirit again, and the spirit of fear was driven away from them once more (*Acts 4:31*).

This then is the answer : We must be filled with the Holy Spirit again and again.

God doesn't want you to be enslaved to the spirit of fear that prevents you from opening your mouth and being a witness for Christ among your friends and relatives and in your place of work. He wants to fill you with His Holy Spirit and to make you bold. All you have to do is to acknowledge that you are a coward and ask God to fill you with His Spirit so that you can be His bold witness. Those who hunger and thirst will be filled.

We will be tempted to fear far more in the days to come. So let's use every opportunity that we have now to overcome fear of every kind.

God does not protect His faithful children from suffering. He knows that suffering is necessary for our spiritual growth. And so the church in Smyrna was not spared suffering. But the Lord encouraged them saying, "*Do not fear what you are about to suffer*"(*v.10*).

The Lord warned them that Satan was going to cast some of them into prison. God has given Satan the power to cast believers into prison unjustly. But we must remember that Satan can't do anything to us without first getting God's permission. And even if we are cast into prison, it will only be in order to test us (*v.10*). God uses even imprisonment to fulfil His purposes.

Paul said, "*My circumstances (in prison) have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel*" (*Phil.1:12-14*). God used Paul's imprisonment to fulfil a number of purposes: (i) to sanctify Paul; (ii) to convert a number of Paul's jailers; (iii) to give Paul an opportunity to write his epistles; and (iv) to encourage many other believers to preach fearlessly.

Truly our God is able to turn the tables on Satan in such a way that everything (including imprisonment) works only for the fulfilment of the Divine purposes (*Rom.8:28; Psa.76:10*).

How long we spend in prison is also determined by the Lord. "*You will have tribulation ten days*", the Lord tells them (*v.10*). It is our Heavenly Father Who decides the length of time that His children have to undergo tribulation.

Even in the days of the great tribulation, Jesus said that "*for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short*" (*Mt.24:22*). "*God remembered Noah*" when the flood was on the earth (*Gen.8:1*). And He won't forget His elect when they are encompassed by the great tribulation on earth. "*I will not forget you. I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands*", is His Word to us (*Isa.49:15,16*).

It is a great comfort for us to know this. And we must remember it in the days to come, when we have to suffer for the Lord's sake. He will never allow us to be tested beyond our ability. He has His Hand on the control knob and He will turn down the pressure (that we are facing) when the right time comes.

"Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life", is the Lord's exhortation (*v.10*). We should be willing even to die if necessary, in order to stand true to the Lord. Don't follow the example of believers who compromise their witness just for the sake of a little earthly gain - some honour, or promotion, or money etc., How will such believers stand true to the Lord in the day when we won't be allowed to buy even our necessary food without the mark of the Antichrist (*Rev.13:16, 17*)? Surely such "believers" will accept "the mark of the beast" in order to survive.

Remember that the crown of life is a far greater reward than any earthly honour and even than physical life itself.

Again the Lord recognises that not all have ears to hear such a message. And so He calls those who have ears to hear, to hear.

The overcomers will not be hurt by the second death (v.11).

The second death is eternal death - being cast away from the presence of God for all eternity, into a lake of fire. It is significant that the promise of escaping the second death is made only to the overcomers. That's why it is so important to overcome sin - for death is the end-result of sin (as *James 1:15* makes clear).

The fundamental message of the Spirit throughout the New Testament is that we should overcome sin in every form.

The Worldly Church

V.12-17: And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: 'The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this: 'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith, even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit acts of immorality. Thus you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.'"

The Lord describes Himself here as the One Who has the sharp two-edged sword of the Spirit - God's living and powerful Word (v.12; *Eph.6:17*). This was the sword with which He overcame Satan in the wilderness, when He was on earth. This sword still comes out of His mouth today. And this is the weapon that we need for our battles against Satan as well.

Pergamum was a city which was so evil that the Lord says that Satan had his earthly headquarters there. This is mentioned twice in *verse 13*. And right in the midst of that city the Lord had placed His church.

The Lord tells them, "*I know where you dwell*". He knows exactly where we are living, and in what circumstances we are living. And He can keep us pure and triumphant, even if Satan has his earthly throne right where we live. With the sword of the Spirit we too can overcome.

No lampstand ever complains that the surroundings are too dark for it to shine in. The brightness of a lampstand has nothing to do with its surroundings. Its light depends solely on the amount of oil it contains.

It is exactly the same with any local church. The surroundings may be evil. Satan may have his throne in that city. But if the church is filled with the oil of the Holy Spirit, the light will shine brightly. In fact, the darker the surroundings, the more brightly any light will be seen in such surroundings! The stars are seen at night - not during the day.

The Lord commends this church for holding fast His Name and not denying the faith even in times of persecution. He specially mentions Antipas, who was a faithful witness who laid down his life for his faith.

Antipas was one who stood for God's truth, even if it meant having to stand alone. He was a man of conviction and not one who sought to please men. Those who know God do not have to look around to see how many others believe what they believe. They are willing to stand alone for the Lord, if necessary against everyone else in the whole world. Antipas was a man like that. And as a result he was killed.

If he had been a man-pleaser, he could have escaped death. He was killed because he stood uncompromisingly for God's revealed truth. People probably called him narrow-minded, stubborn, hard-to-get-along-with and insane. But it made no difference to him. He just stood true to his Lord, standing against all sin, worldliness, compromise, disobedience to God's Word and against the devil. Here was a man who was a threat to Satan's kingdom.

Perhaps it was because Antipas was in Pergamum that Satan decided to place his throne there. What a man Antipas must have been if even Satan dreaded him!

God needs people like Antipas in every part of the world today. The time is soon coming when we will have to pay a price for our faith. All of Babylonian Christendom around us will compromise and bow to the Antichrist. Will we stand firm in that day, like Antipas did? Or will we bow the knee to Satan to preserve our life? Are we convinced that it is worth losing our life for the sake of God's truth?

Today, God is testing us through little trials. It is only if we are faithful in these little testings that we can be faithful in the bigger trials that will come in the future. Satan should consider you such a threat to his kingdom that he moves his throne to the town where you live.

The sad thing was that the church at Pergamum lost out spiritually, after Antipas died. Antipas was probably the messenger of the church when he was alive. When he died, someone else took over and the church went downhill. This is the sad history of many churches.

When Paul was leaving Ephesus, he told the elders there that he knew that after his departure, the church there would compromise and backslide (*Acts 20:28-31*). As long as Paul was there he fought against worldliness and sin and kept the spirit of the antichrist at bay. But there wasn't anyone strong enough in Ephesus to do that after Paul left. And so the wolves got in among the flock and devoured the sheep freely, while the elders stood by and watched!

Satan changed his tactics at Pergamum, after Antipas died. The fact that Satan's throne is in a place does not necessarily mean that he will always attack the church with persecution.

He is described in the Scriptures, not only as a roaring lion (*1 Pet.5:8*), but also as a wily serpent who transforms himself into an angel of light (*Rev.12:9; 2 Cor.11:14*). He has found through the centuries that he accomplishes his purposes far better by corrupting the church with worldliness from within than by persecuting it from without.

This is what he finally did at Pergamum through "Balaamism" - and thus he succeeded, where he did not succeed with persecution!

The Lord tells the church here, "*You have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam*" (*v.14*). Balaam was one who was hired by King Balak to curse the Israelites. He was the first of the "hired preachers" that we read of in the Bible.

Christendom is flooded with these hirelings today, for whom preaching is a means of earning a living. God is against such hirelings, who pretend to be shepherds of God's flock, but who are interested only in fleecing the sheep.

Balaam did not go when Balak called him at first, because God specifically told him not to go. But when Balak offered a higher pay and greater honour, then Balaam "*sought God's will again*" - just like many do today, in similar circumstances !! God allowed Balaam to go after money, and to destroy himself thereby. And God allows many Christian preachers today also to follow in Balaam's footsteps and finally to come to Balaam's end.

When Balaam saw that he could not curse Israel, he suggested to Balak that the Israelites be corrupted by tempting them to immorality and idolatry (*Num. 24 & 25*). Thus Balaam succeeded in getting God Himself to punish them.

That was how Satan succeeded at Pergamum too. He knew he could not overcome the church, until the church became worldly in some way. So he corrupted the church from within. Thus the church became ineffective in its witness for the Lord and also in its battle against Satan.

"If you can't beat them, join them", has been Satan's motto in relation to the church. And thus he has succeeded in destroying the witness of many churches throughout these twenty centuries.

Idolatry and immorality were the two sins that God condemned the most throughout the Old Testament. And these are the two that he condemns even today. According to new-covenant standards, to be greedy,

or to worship money or one's profession or a person or anything earthly is idolatry. And to lust after a woman with one's eyes is immorality. To compare your wife unfavourably with someone else's wife in any area is to "*covet your neighbour's wife*". This too is immorality.

Where these new-covenant standards are not consistently preached in a church, hidden idolatry and immorality will prevail among its members and the church will soon become like the one at Pergamum.

When worldliness overtook the church at Pergamum, the sad thing is that the messenger of the church just watched it happen and did nothing about it. Many elders are just as powerless today against worldliness that has come in like a flood into their churches.

The messenger in Pergamum had not himself succumbed to the doctrine of Balaam. There were only "some" in Pergamum who had fallen a prey to it. But the messenger was guilty in that he had not rebuked the worldliness that had come into the church. This is where he had failed.

The reason for his failure must have been that he had not judged such worldliness severely in his *own* thoughts. We can have authority in the church only over those things that we have crucified *in our own flesh*. It is when we treat sin and worldliness lightly in our own lives that we become tolerant of it in the lives of others in the church as well. What looks like a "merciful" attitude on the part of an elder towards a worldly person in his church is usually dictated by the fact that there is unjudged worldliness in the heart of the elder himself.

The messenger at Pergamum was so lax about worldly teachings that he even permitted the teaching of the Nicolaitans to flourish in his church (v.15). Priestcraft was being taught as a doctrine by some in the church at Pergamum! And the messenger had done nothing about it. That was another thing that the Lord held against him.

The Lord warns him and the church to repent. If they don't, He says that He will judge them with the sword of His mouth (v.16). It is by His Word that God judges us. Jesus said that we would all be judged in the final day by the word that He has spoken to us (*Jn.12:48*). Our lives will be compared with the words of God that we have heard, and we will be judged thereby.

The overcomer is then promised the reward of the hidden manna and a white stone with a new name written on it (v.17).

In the Old Testament, Moses was told to hide some of the manna that fell from heaven inside the ark, in the most holy place of the tabernacle (*Ex.16:33,34*). While manna that was kept by the Israelites in their tents began to stink within 24 hours (*Ex.16:19,20*), the "*hidden manna*" in the ark remained fresh throughout the 40 years that the Israelites wandered in the wilderness. Such is the power of God's presence in the most holy place to keep us fresh, if we live there before His face at all times.

The most holy place can be entered only through the rent veil of the flesh (*Heb.10:20*). If we walk on this new and living way, we can receive the hidden manna that God gives - revelation from His Word and fellowship with Him. And our lives will always carry the fragrance of the freshness of the Lord.

The hidden precious stone with the overcomer's name written on it (v.17). speaks of an intimate relationship with the Lord such as a bride has with her bridegroom. This is the spiritual equivalent of the engagement ring (with an expensive precious stone and a name engraved on it) that worldly men give their fiancees.

The bridegroom calls the bride by an intimate name that no-one else knows (v.17). Bridal intimacy with the Lord is a reward that is promised to all who overcome.

The average believer has a dry and boring relationship with Christ, because he is not radical in his hatred of sin and worldliness. But the true overcomer enters into a spiritually ecstatic relationship with his Lord such as a bride has with her bridegroom with whom she is deeply in love. This is the type of relationship described in the "*Song of Solomon*" - and only an overcomer can understand it fully and experience the reality of it.

The Adulterous Church

V.18-29: And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write : The Son of God who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this : 'I know your deeds and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first. But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bondservants astray, so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent; and she does not want to repent of her immorality. Behold I will cast her upon a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. And I will kill her children with pestilence; and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds. But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them - I place no other burden on you. Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come. And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end to him I will give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also received authority from My Father; and I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'"

The Lord says here that He has eyes like a flame of fire (v.18). He searches the hidden thoughts and motives of the heart - and so He does not judge as men do, who only look at the outward appearance. His feet are like burnished bronze - which means that He believes in severe judgment on sin. If there is one clear message that comes down to us from Calvary's cross, it is this : *God hates sin and will judge it severely wherever it is found.*

The Lord knew the deeds, love, faith and perseverance of the messenger and the church at Thyatira. And He notices that while the quantity of those deeds had increased considerably (v.19), their quality had come down. Compromise and worldliness had come into the church.

This compromise had come about mainly because the messenger had permitted a woman (symbolically called "Jezebel") to influence the church in an evil, worldly way (v.20). She had pretended to be a prophetess, and the messenger of the church had been deceived.

Although Christ has given *prophets* to the church, He has not given any *prophetesses* (See Eph.4:11,12). Women can be anointed by the Spirit to prophesy in the meetings of the church (Acts 2:17; 1 Cor.11:5). The daughters of Philip are examples of those who did that (Acts 21:9 - KJV).

Men and women can prophesy - that is, share God's Word to the encouragement and edification of the church (1 Cor.14:3). All believers are encouraged to seek for this gift (1 Cor.14:1; Acts 2:18). But there is a difference between one who prophesies and a *prophet*. The Lord never appointed a woman to be a *prophetess* under the new covenant - the reason being that God never intended a woman to have authority over men.

There were prophetesses under the old covenant. We read of five of them in the Bible, with Anna being the last (Lk.2:36). They all spoke the word of the Lord with authority. Deborah is one example of such a prophetess (Judg.4). But under the new covenant, authority in the church is always invested by the Lord in men.

Paul gives us two reasons why God does not allow a woman to exercise any authority over men in the church: (i) She was created after man - to be his helper; (ii) She was deceived by Satan first (1 Tim.2:12-14).

A woman is more prone to deception by Satan than a man is. This is one reason why Christ has not set any women-teachers in the church either.

Jezebel however called herself a prophetess. And the messenger of the church at Thyatira was so weak and spineless that he could not silence her.

In a home, if the man who should be the head of the house, is weak and effeminate, his wife will take over the leadership of the home. This will be true in a church too. When powerful women see that the elders in a church are weak, they will begin to assert themselves in the church.

God's Word exhorts us to "*act like MEN*" (*1 Cor.16:13*). There is a great need for that exhortation, for many elders today have just about as much backbone as a jellyfish, when it comes to silencing powerful women! They are like King Ahab who was so scared of his wife Jezebel, that he allowed her to do whatever she liked in his kingdom - even to the extent of murdering innocent, Godfearing people (*1 Kings 21*). Ahab was the head of Israel only in name. Jezebel actually ran the kingdom. Many church-elders function exactly like Ahab too!

Elijah however was a fearless man of God who stood against all of Jezebel's false prophets and slaughtered every last one of them (*1 Kings 18:40*). That's why Jezebel hated Elijah. And she feared him too. There were 7000 people in Israel at that time who did not bow down to Jezebel's idols. God Himself had said so (*1 Kings 19:18*). But Jezebel never feared any of them. She feared only Elijah. She knew that those 7000 were scared of her, even if they didn't bow down to her idols.

A Jezebel today does not fear 99.9% of believers, because she knows that those believers cannot stop her, even if they don't agree with her. Jezebels fear only Elijahs. And Elijahs are rare in Christendom today.

Today's Jezebels hate Elijah-like elders and love Ahab-like elders. Every elder of every church follows either Elijah or Ahab in this matter.

The Wife Of The Elder

The Greek word translated as "*woman*" here can also be translated as "*wife*". This would mean that Jezebel was the wife of the messenger of the church. This would certainly have made the situation more difficult for the messenger.

If the messenger had been a true disciple of the Lord and had learnt to "*hate*" his wife (as Jesus had told His disciples to do - *Luke 14:26*), there would have been no problem at all. But he obviously loved his wife more than he loved the Lord and the church. And so he did not want to offend her. And so he let her have her way in the church. That was how the church at Thyatira was corrupted. And that is how many churches are corrupted today.

Many a church has been ruined by a Jezebel, who is often the wife of one of the weak, effeminate elders. A woman like that can seek to make herself prominent in the meetings of the church through frequent speaking in tongues, or through interpreting her own "*tongues*", or through long prayers or in other crude, unBiblical ways. She may also seek to change the decisions of the elders by influencing her husband at home.

There are foolish elders who, after having discussed church matters at the elders' meeting, then go home and discuss these matters with their wives. Then being brainwashed at home by their wives, these effeminate men express their changed views at the next meeting of the elders!! And the decisions that were taken in the previous meeting are then changed!! Such is the power of a hidden Jezebel to influence a church!

In other cases, the Jezebel could be a woman who has acquired influence over one of the elders in some soulish way. There are some elders' wives who have such powerful personalities and such soul-power that the other men in the church (including the elders) are afraid to displease her in any way. In some cases, even her own husband is frightened of her.

It will be impossible to build the body of Christ in any place, if the elders in the church there, allow a woman to have power over them in any way.

The wife of an elder must be an example as one with "*a meek and a quiet spirit*", taking extra care to hide herself at all times. She must not be an Assistant Pastor or Songleader or Assistant Administrator (as many women are), but a *hidden* helper to her husband and not one who seeks to run the church from

behind the scenes. Praise God that there are such wives too, who are real helpers to their elder-husbands, because they recognise their boundaries as women. Blessed is the elder who has such a wife.

All elders must keep a special eye on any woman who seeks to be prominent in the church in any way. She will almost certainly have the spirit of a Jezebel. If she is allowed free rein, she will certainly become Satan's agent to destroy the church slowly but surely.

The "adultery" spoken of here (v.20) is obviously spiritual - because a righteous God cannot possibly punish innocent children born of physical adultery. Spiritual adultery is more dangerous than physical adultery, because it is less recognized. Religious harlotry results from the teaching of false grace that leads believers to take sin lightly. Disobedience to God in small things and little unfaithfulnesses are glossed over. It is such teaching that builds Babylon, the harlot church. And this is what the Lord denounces here.

Time To Repent

The Lord gave Jezebel time to repent (v.21). Even Jezebels are given time to repent. Such is God's mercy. But God also placed a time limit for her to repent. If she did not repent within that time, she would be judged. Not only Jezebel, but all those who committed adultery with her, and her children (v.22,23) would also be killed. God's patience with sinners and hypocrites is not endless.

Jezebel's partners in spiritual adultery were those who propagated this false teaching along with her. Her "children" were those half-converted hybrids who were the products of this teaching of false grace, who imagined that they were converted without having repented from sin first, or who imagined that now that they were "converted" they could take fleshly indulgence lightly.

People who live in sin in the world are not judged so quickly by God. But those who come into the church and treat sin lightly are dealt with more severely and more quickly.

God's judgment of Ananias and Sapphira and of those who sinned in Corinth (*1 Cor.11:29,30*). are examples of the severity of God towards those who take the name of Christ lightly.

The Lord goes on to say that He will give to each one according to his deeds (v.23). This is to counter the teaching of false grace in Thyatira that taught that "*our deeds won't matter if we just believe*". Our deeds *do* matter.

God's Word says, "*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad*" (*2 Cor.5:10*). "*If you are living according to the flesh, you MUST die*" (*Rom.8:13*).

The Lord said that He would cast the sinners in Thyatira into "*great tribulation*" (v.22).

There are two types of tribulation spoken of in the New Testament, and we read of both of these types in the book of *Revelation* : (i) that which comes from men in the form of persecution against the disciples of Jesus - (most of the references in the New Testament are to this type of tribulation); (ii) that which comes from God in the form of judgment "*on every soul of man who does evil*" - (*Romans 2:9* and *Revelation 2:22* are the only two references to this type of tribulation).

God threatened to cast the unrepentant sinners of Thyatira into *great tribulation*. But this could not possibly be referring to *the great tribulation* to come in the days of the Antichrist - for that is still in the future, whereas the sinners of Thyatira have already died. So the Lord must have meant the judgment that God brings on sinners and hypocrites.

There were some however in Thyatira, who did not agree with Jezebel or follow her teachings. To these, the Lord says that He will place no other burden on them (v.24). They had steered clear of "*the deep things of Satan*", because the anointing within them had told them that something was wrong with this false grace that Jezebel preached; and they had listened to the anointing (*1 Jn.2:27*).

Notice that the Lord calls the teaching of false grace as “*the deep things of Satan*”. False grace is one of Satan’s masterpieces, with which he has deceived most of Christendom. So it is appropriate to call it one of “Satan’s deeper truths”!!

Doctrine is like a seed. The proof of whether a seed is good or bad is seen in the fruit it produces. Many Christians analyse various types of seeds (doctrines) under their theological microscopes and pronounce some as bad and some as good. But that’s not the way to find out the quality of a seed. It is better to sow the seed and to see what type of fruit it produces.

Any doctrine of “*grace*” that takes away the fear of sinning is certainly a false teaching. If a doctrine enables you to sin lightly and to ask for forgiveness cheaply, without the deep sorrow and vehement hatred for sin that true repentance brings, then you can be sure that that doctrine is one of the “deeper truths of Satan”!

There are many believers nowadays who mouth impressive phrases such as “End-time truths” and “Kingdom truths” etc., The test by which we can evaluate every so-called “truth” is the test that Jesus Himself gave : “*The truth shall make you free...from sin*”(Jn.8:32-36). A “*truth*” that does not liberate you from sin in your daily life is not the truth of God, however Scriptural it may appear to be to you. It is a false doctrine.

One indication that you have understood God’s truth correctly will be that you experience more and more liberty from every type of bondage in your life. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth and “*where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty*” (2 Cor.3:17).

The Lord then exhorts the remnant in Thyatira to hold fast to what they have - that is, to “*the true grace of God*” (1 Pet.5:12). We need to hold fast to this, because Satan would like to snatch it away from us. We are commanded to hold fast to it until Jesus comes (v.25).

The overcomer is described by the Lord here as one who keeps His deeds until the end (v.26). Jesus’ deeds are His victories over temptation, in the days of His flesh. The overcomer is one who overcomes temptation, even as Jesus overcame, and who endures in this path until the end.

The Lord promises the overcomer the reward of authority over the nations in the future (v.26). This is not a domineering over others, as we understand authority in the world today. The expression “*He shall rule them*” (v.27). actually means “*He shall shepherd them*” (the word “rule” here comes from a Greek word meaning “*to shepherd*”).

This is the type of authority that the overcomer exercises in his home and in the church now, and that he will exercise one day over the nations of the world. Those who domineer over others today, whether in a family or in a church, are actually exercising a Satanic form of authority and will be unfit to shepherd the nations. All of us who have authority - fathers, mothers and elders - are being tested by the Lord now.

The Lord then uses the expression, “*As I also have received authority from My Father*” (v.27). The Father gave Jesus authority primarily to give eternal life to all whom He had chosen (John.17:2). This is the purpose with which the Lord gives His messengers authority in the church too - to lead others to take hold of eternal life (1 Tim.6:12). Any elder who exercises authority in any other way is actually misusing his authority.

Those who reject this authority of the Lord over their lives will be dealt with one day, with a rod of iron that Jesus will wield (Psa. 2:7-9; Rev.12:5; 19:15). The Lord will share that rod of iron with the overcomer, who would have learnt during his time on earth, how to use the rod of authority with gentleness and firmness (v.26,27).

“*He who rules his spirit is better than he who captures a city*” (Prov.16:32). It is only those who have overcome the lusts in their flesh, the attractions of this world and the wiles of Satan, who are truly qualified in God’s eyes to rule the nations one day in His kingdom.

The overcomer is also promised “*the morning star*” (v.28). The morning star is Jesus Himself (See Rev.22:16). Jesus is also called the Sun of righteousness Who will burn the evildoers and bring healing to

the nations (*Mal.4:1,2*). The world can see Him only as the Sun of righteousness, but the overcomers will see Him as the morning star.

The morning star is seen just before the rising of the sun. In the last moments of this age, at the end of the great tribulation, while the world is lying in darkness, the last trumpet will sound, and the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout. The overcomers of all generations will then be taken up to meet Him in the air to welcome Him back to earth. Then they will see Him as the morning star.

The Lord will then descend to the earth as the Sun of righteousness to judge and heal this sin-sick world. And every eye will see Him. The overcomers will also come down with Him at that time to reign with Him on earth.

He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit is saying (v.29).

CHAPTER THREE

The Hypocritical Church

V.1-6: And to the angel of the church in Sardis write : He who has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars says this : 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, and you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. Remember therefore what you have received and heard; and keep it and repent. If therefore you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you. But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white; for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

The Lord refers to Himself here as the One who has the seven Spirits of God, or the sevenfold Holy Spirit. We saw the meaning of this in Chapter One. He also has the seven stars. He expects each star (messenger) in His hand to be a Spirit-filled representative of His in the church.

The messenger in Sardis was one who had built up a tremendous reputation before others as a spiritual man. But the Lord's opinion of him was the exact opposite of that of his fellow-believers in Sardis. This shows how carnal and gullible most believers in Sardis were.

More than 90% of believers are unable to differentiate between a carnal preacher and a spiritual one. And more than 99% of believers are unable to distinguish between human-soul-power and Holy-Spirit-power.

Most believers are impressed by the display and exercise of spiritual gifts and that is how they evaluate a preacher or an elder. And that is how they are deceived. God however looks at the heart. The messenger at Sardis may have had the gifts of the Spirit. But he was spiritually dead.

This is a warning for all of us to take heed to : *The opinion that 99% of our fellow-believers have about us can be 100% wrong!* God's opinion about us could be the exact opposite of their opinion.

The same applies to a church. Others may consider a church to be "spiritually alive". But God may know it to be spiritually dead. And vice-versa. Churches that God considers spiritually alive could be considered dead by undiscerning men.

Most believers evaluate a church by the warmth of the welcome they receive when they come to the meetings, the size of the congregation, the amount of noise and emotion in the meetings, the musical

quality of the singing, the intellectual content of the sermon and the amount of the offering!! But God isn't impressed by any of these things.

God evaluates a church by the Christlike humility, purity and love and the freedom from self-centredness that He finds in the hearts of its members. God's evaluation and man's evaluation of a church can therefore be at total variance with each other. In fact, they usually are.

There were no Jezebels in Sardis and no teachings of Balaam or of the Nicolaitans either. But they had something worse - hypocrisy.

The messenger at Sardis must have felt a secret satisfaction in the reputation that he had built up for himself. Otherwise he would not have ended up as a hypocrite. There is nothing wrong in being known by others as one who is spiritually alive, provided we don't get any satisfaction out of their opinion of us.

But if we are seeking a name for ourselves in what we do for the Lord, then we will certainly end up living before the face of men and not before the face of God. Then we would have to admit that we haven't realised that man's opinion is worthless.

Christendom is full of preachers who are constantly doing things and writing reports in order to get a name for themselves. All of these will end up like the messenger in Sardis. And they will be judged by the Lord in the final day, because their works were not perfect before God. It is impossible for our works to be perfect before God if our motive is to impress men.

The messenger at Sardis was also fast asleep spiritually.

Jesus warned His disciples of the great need of being alert and praying, in order to be ready for His coming - for worldly cares and the love of mammon have a way of putting the best of believers to sleep (*See Luke 21:34-36*).

When a man is asleep, he is unaware of things happening in the real world around him. He is more conscious of the unreal world of his dreams. This is how it is with those who are spiritually asleep too. They are unaware of the real world of the kingdom of God, of lost souls around them and of eternal realities. They are alive however to the unreal, temporary world of material riches, pleasure, comfort, earthly honour and fame.

That was how it was with the messenger of the church in Sardis.

The Lord exhorts him to wake up - in other words to give up the unreal world of his dreams (the world of materialism) - and to strengthen the few things in his life that were sinking towards spiritual death, but which had not yet died (v.2). The embers had not died out completely. But he had to "*fan them to a flame*" soon, or they would die out completely (*2 Tim.1:6 - Amplified*).

The Lord tells him that his works were not *perfect* in God's sight (v.2 - KJV). Many believers are afraid of the word "*perfection*". But here we see that the Lord expected this messenger's works to be perfect before God.

Spiritual perfection is a vast subject. But what it means here is that this elder's works were not done with singleness of heart to secure God's approval alone.

His works were good works - that's how he got a name that he was spiritually alive. But they were not done for the glory of God. They were done to impress men. And so they were all dead works. There was "*iniquity in his holy activities*" (*Ex.28:38*). He had to cleanse himself from this filthiness of spirit, before God could approve of him (*2 Cor.7:1*).

Good works done to obtain the honour of men are dead works.

The first step to perfection is to do everything before the face of God. If we don't begin here, we won't get anywhere. Whether it is praying or fasting or helping others or whatever, the important question that we need to ask ourselves is :"Am I thinking now of some man seeing me do this and appreciating me, or am I doing this before God's face for His glory alone?" A wrong motive is what corrupts many good deeds and makes them imperfect in God's eyes.

The Lord reminds the messenger to remember what he has received and heard through the years and to obey those exhortations (v.3). The Lord expects more from those to whom more is given. This messenger had heard much about perfection and about the necessity of doing everything for the glory of God. But he had not taken those exhortations seriously. To know the truth and not to obey it is to build one's house on sand. One day it will collapse. And that was what happened to the messenger and the church at Sardis.

The messenger is now exhorted to repent (v.3). This is the message of the Lord to all churches in these last days : *REPENT*.

There was still hope for this messenger, for he was still a star in the Lord's hand (v.1). The Lord had not given up on him. But he had to wake up first and repent.

John the Baptist was the forerunner of Christ who prepared the nation of Israel for the Lord's first coming by preaching repentance. Now the prophets in the church have to prepare God's people for the second coming of Christ by preaching repentance to them. The message of repentance is the greatest need in the church today.

If the messenger does not wake up and repent, the Lord says that He will come upon him in judgment, as unexpectedly as a thief comes at night. The Lord comes as a thief in the night primarily for unbelievers - but also for believers who walk in darkness. The sons of the day who are walking in the light will not be surprised by the coming of the Lord, but the sons of the night will (*1 Thess. 5:4,5*).

The overcomers will always be ready for the coming of the Lord because they are always walking in the light. Those who are walking in darkness, however, with unconfessed sin in their lives will not be ready, even if they call themselves "believers".

Revelation 3:3. indicates clearly that those believers (even if they are messengers in a church) who are spiritually asleep and who do not repent will be surprised by the Lord when He comes. They will be in the same category as the sons of darkness. These are the foolish virgins who will be left outside the closed door, when the Lord comes (*Mt.25:10-13*).

The Lord says, "*Behold I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his garments, lest he walk about naked and men see his shame.*" (*Rev.16:15*).

There were however a few people in Sardis who had not soiled their garments (v.4). This was the only redeeming feature of this church.

God has a list of names of those who have kept their hearts pure. This purity refers not only to freedom from the sins of the flesh, but also to freedom from the sin of seeking the honour of men and other sins of the spirit.

This was the remnant of the overcomers who lived before God's face in Sardis. As the Lord Himself pointed out, these overcomers were *FEW*. This remnant has always been small in every generation, for there are few who find the narrow gate and the narrow way that lead to life (*Matt.7:14*).

The Lord says that these few are worthy and that therefore they will walk with Him in white (v.4). These are the ones who had obeyed the Lord's exhortation in *Luke 21:36* : "*Keep awake then and be attentive at all times, praying that you may have the full strength and be accounted worthy to escape all these things and to stand in the presence of the Son of man*" (*Amplified*). They were accounted worthy. And so they will walk in the white garments of the bride on the wedding-day of the Lamb.

All overcomers are then promised the reward of being clothed in white garments (v.5). This indicates clearly that only overcomers will form the bride of Christ.

Overcomers are also promised that their names will not be erased from the Lamb's book of life (v.5). This makes it clear that a person's name can be in the book of life and then be erased from it. The promise given to the overcomer here would be meaningless, if such a danger does not even exist. The plain teaching of Scripture is that believers who live after the flesh *WILL DIE SPIRITUALLY* (*Rom.8:13*). They will lose the salvation that they once had.

The Lord said to Moses, “*Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of my book*” (*Ex.32:33*).

In *Psalm 69:25* we read of a prophecy concerning Judas Iscariot that is quoted by Peter in *Acts 1:20*. On reading further in *Psalm 69*, we see a prophetic reference there to Judas Iscariot’s name being blotted out of the book of life (*v.28*). His name was once in that book and then it was erased.

One has to be an overcomer to retain one’s name there.

The Lord also promises to confess the overcomer’s name before the Father and before His angels. This is a reward promised to those who unashamedly confess His Name before men (*Mt.10:32; Lk.12:8*). The Lord places great value on our publicly confessing His name before our relatives, friends, neighbours and colleagues at work. Many believers are unfaithful here. And thereby they prove that they are not overcomers.

What an honour it will be for our name to be publicly confessed by the Lord in that final day. Even if we have to bear shame and persecution for the Lord’s sake, every day for a hundred years on earth, it will still be worth it all, if the final reward is that the Lord proudly acknowledges us before the Father and His holy angels one day. One word of approval from His precious lips will erase from our minds the memories of a lifetime of suffering and ridicule.

Those who have ears to hear will listen to what the Spirit is saying (*v.6*).

The Faithful Church

V.7-13: And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write : He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this : ‘I know your deeds. Behold I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name. Behold I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews, and are not, but lie - behold, I will make them to come and bow down at your feet, and to know that I have loved you. Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth. I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it any more; and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

The Lord calls Himself here the One who is holy and true. “*He committed no sin, nor was any deceit (hypocrisy) found in His mouth*” (*1 Pet.2:22*). He looks for holiness and for reality in His messengers too.

He also says that He has the key of David. The gospel concerns the Son of God who was born of the seed of David (*Rom.1:1-3*).

One of the last exhortations that Paul gave Timothy was “*to remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David has risen from the dead*” (*2 Tim.2:8*).

The key speaks of ability to open a door. By overcoming sin, death and Satan, Jesus opened a way for us to walk in. Our Lord Himself is the Forerunner and Example for all who want to overcome.

The Lord also describes Himself as the One who can now open or shut any door. If we are overcomers, we need never stand before a closed door at any time, when it is the will of God that we should go through.

But the Lord also shuts certain doors before us, so that we don’t go into paths that He has not ordained for us - paths that He knows will not be profitable for us. It is really an exciting life to be an overcomer. The Lord Himself decides which doors we should go through, and which doors we should stop knocking at.

In the book of Jonah, we see how the Lord shut one door (of a ship, by getting Jonah thrown overboard) and opened another (of a fish’s mouth, by getting it to swallow Jonah). When the fish came to the coast of

Israel, the Lord opened the fish's mouth once again to place His servant ashore. Thus God brought Jonah back to "Square One". Then He told him once again to go to Nineveh, where He wanted him to preach. Then Jonah went.

If God wants us in any place for any purpose, He has ways and means of closing the wrong doors before us (getting us thrown out of somewhere perhaps!) and of opening the right doors in front of us. He even has means of transporting us back to "Square One" in our lives, so that we don't miss His best! What He did for Jonah, He will do for us too. He will do even more.

The key to every door is in His hand. If you are a wholehearted disciple of the Lord with no ambition in life but to glorify God, you can be certain of one thing - that nothing can stand in your way. Like automatic doors that open as soon as a person comes near them, every closed door that hinders you from moving forward in the fulfilment of God's will, will open up before you - as soon as you come near it. He opens each door at the right time - not too soon and not too late. He will also close those doors that would make you miss His perfect will for your life.

Here in Philadelphia, we see the second of the two messengers and churches that receive no rebuke at all from the Lord. The first we saw was the one at Smyrna.

These two examples show us that it is possible to be such a messenger of the Lord and to be such a church as to receive no rebuke at all from the Lord when He examines us. This should be a challenge to all of us.

The messenger and the saints here were a weak people (v.8). They had very little human influence and power. But they had obeyed God's Word and confessed the Name of the Lord.

These are two primary requirements for the days in which we live - and that is why we find them being repeated again and again in the book of Revelation: *OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S WORD AND HOLDING FORTH THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS.*

Because of their faithfulness, the Lord says that He has set before them an open door to witness for Him. No one will be able to shut that door (v.8). Their witness will naturally be opposed by Satan. But the gates of Hell will not be able to prevail against this church - for this is a triumphant church that Satan himself is afraid of.

The church here was being opposed by a synagogue of Satan - similar to the one that was in Smyrna (v.9). Notice that the synagogue of Satan opposed only two of the seven churches in Asia - the very two that the Lord commends unreservedly. Those churches that are most wholehearted for God are the ones that Satan opposes the most. And Satan's opposition comes mainly through religious people.

Jesus was opposed on earth, not by the Romans or the Greeks, but by religious Jews who studied their Bibles daily! It will be the same for the body of Christ. Our main opposition will come from those who claim to be Christians, but who don't preach freedom from sin's power.

The Lord says that He will make the synagogue of Satan recognise in an obvious way that He is with the church at Philadelphia. The agents of Satan will be compelled to bow down before the church (v.9). God has destined that Satan should be crushed under the feet of the church (*Rom.16:20*). We must never forget this that God is always on our side against Satan. So we need never fear Satan or his agents at any time.

Jesus prayed that the world would know that His disciples were loved by the Father (*Jn.17:23*). This prayer was to be answered in Philadelphia. The synagogue of the Jews would be made aware of the fact that the Lord loves the church and that He would stand by them (v.9). God has wonderful ways of confounding our enemies and of making them aware that we are the objects of His love and care!

The church in Philadelphia had kept the word of Jesus' perseverance (v.10). They had obeyed the word of the Lord and endured to the end in obedience. It is only by enduring faithfully in times of temptation, that we become perfect, lacking in nothing (*Jas.1:4*).

The Lord's promise to this church was, "*I will keep you from the hour of testing that is about to come upon the whole world*" (v.10). Here the Lord warns them in advance of a time of trial that was going to

come upon the whole world at that time (at the end of the first century or in the early second century). The church in Philadelphia was promised Divine protection during that time of testing.

How did the Lord “*keep them from that hour of testing*”? It was certainly not by rapturing them out of the world. No. They were *KEPT SAFE IN THE MIDST OF THE TRIAL*. They experienced the Lord’s protecting hand in the midst of their tribulations.

This is a word of encouragement for us too - for the Lord will similarly keep us also safe from evil in the midst of the great tribulation during the time of the Antichrist. He will keep us exactly as He kept the church in Philadelphia in the second century - on earth, safe from evil, even though we may have to suffer for His Name’s sake.

Jesus has said, “*You will be hated by all on account of my Name...but do not fear those who kill the body...for the very hairs of your head are all numbered...Not a hair of your head will perish*” (Mt.10:28,30; Lk.21:18).

Even during the tribulation, not a hair on our head can be touched by anyone without the Lord’s permission. So we can be at rest.

The Lord then tells the church at Philadelphia that those who are going to be tested during “*the hour of testing*”, are “*the earth-dwellers*” - those who have made this earth their home, whose minds are set on earthly things, and who pursue after wealth and seek the honour of men (v.10).

No overcomer is such an earth-dweller, for His mind is set on the things that are above.

The Lord goes on to tell the church here to hold fast to what they have until He comes back to earth, so that they may not lose their crown (v.10). It is possible therefore for someone else to get the crown that God meant for you.

God has planned a task and a crown for you. But if you are unfaithful in fulfilling that task, you won’t get that crown. God will raise up someone else to fulfil that task and he will get the crown that was meant for you. This is a real possibility. So we must be watchful.

God had planned a specific task for Judas Iscariot, just as He had planned tasks for the other apostles of Christ. But Judas was unfaithful. So he lost his crown. Someone else (perhaps Paul) fulfilled the task that Judas was to have fulfilled. That person will now get Judas’ crown in addition to his own.

We have to hold fast what God has given us. We cannot afford to take things easy at any time.

The overcomer will be made a permanent pillar in the church (v.12). What that means is that he will be a support to others in the church, bearing their burdens. He will be a spiritual “father” to others. In every church there is a great need for such pillars.

The overcomer will have the name of God, the name of the New Jerusalem and the Lord’s new name written on his forehead. In other words, he will be publicly identified as a wholehearted disciple of Jesus, wherever He goes. This will lead to his being despised on earth now, but honoured by the Lord when He returns.

The New Jerusalem is a symbolic name for the bride of Christ. (Rev.21:9,10). The name of that city will be written on the forehead of the overcomers. And so we see once again that only overcomers will constitute the bride of Christ.

Those who have ears to hear must take these words of encouragement very seriously (v.13).

The Proud Church

V.14-22: And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write : The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this : ‘I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. Because you say, “I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,” and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich, and

white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eyesalve to anoint your eyes, that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore and repent. Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me. He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

The Lord calls Himself here the Amen - the One whose word will certainly be fulfilled. He is also the faithful and true Witness who tells the truth exactly as it is. He is also the Beginning (or the Author) of the creation of God. He is the One who created the first creation and He is the One Who began the new creation, through His death and resurrection. "*He is BEFORE all things*" (*Col.1:17*) - the Author of everything visible and invisible, the Beginning and the End.

Here is another church that did not have any Jezebels or false teachings in it. They were neither immoral nor evil. But they were not on fire for God either. They were just plain "*lukewarm*" (*v.16*). They were dead right in their doctrines - but they were both *dead* and *right!* They were morally respectable - and spiritually dead!

The Lord wants our hearts to be on fire at all times - aflame with a fervent love for Him and for other believers.

"Fire shall be kept burning continually on the altar; it is not to go out", was the old-covenant Law (*Lev.6:13*).

Symbolically we see here what God expects the normal state of the true disciple of Jesus to be. Anything less than this is sub-standard. When the burning bush was aflame with the fire of the Lord, no insects or germs could survive within it. And when our hearts are aflame with the fire of the Spirit, no unloving attitudes can survive therein either.

This is one way by which we can test whether we are hot, cold or lukewarm : To be "hot" is to love others fervently. To be "cold" is to be bitter and unforgiving towards others. To be "lukewarm" is to have neither bitterness nor love towards others.

When a believer says, "I have nothing in my heart against anyone", he is lukewarm. Did Jesus say, "All men will know that you are my disciples when you have nothing in your hearts against each other"? No. The absence of evil attitudes towards each other is NOT the identifying mark of the disciples of Jesus (*cf. Jn.13:35*).

We must *have something* in our hearts. We must have *fervent love* for all our fellow-believers. Love is a positive virtue and not just the absence of evil.

To cast out the spirit of bitterness from our heart and then to leave it cleansed and empty is the surest way to be lukewarm and to finally end up in a worse state than at the beginning (*Lk.11:24-26*).

The world says, "Something is better than nothing". If so, then one would think that it is better to be lukewarm than cold. But that is not what the Lord says. He says, "*I would that you were cold*" (*v.15*). He would rather see us totally worldly than half-hearted.

The lukewarm, compromising Christian does a lot more damage to the cause of Christ on earth than the unbeliever. The unbeliever does not take the name of Christ, and so his worldliness cannot be a hindrance to the gospel. But a compromising, half-hearted Christian takes the name of Christ and disgraces that Name among the heathen by his worldliness.

The cold, worldly unbeliever is also far more likely to come to an awareness of his spiritual need than the lukewarm, self-righteous Pharisee (*See Mt.21:31*).

It is for these reasons that the Lord says that He would rather see us cold than lukewarm.

In practical terms this means that if you have no longing to be free from the love of money and from anger and impure thoughts (to take just three areas of sin), it would be better if you remained an unbeliever than one claiming to be a disciple of Jesus. There is more hope for you if you are cold than if you are lukewarm. This is amazing, but true.

The church at Laodicea was proud of what it possessed. The “believers” there considered themselves rich and needing nothing - perhaps because they were rich in knowledge of the truth and had a good reputation before men and had a lot of money as well. Respectable leaders in Laodicean society may also have been members of their church.

Like the Pharisee who prayed in the temple, these Christians may have imagined themselves to be spiritual, because of the wealth of their religious activities (*Lk.18:9-14*).

Whatever the reason, there was certainly no poverty of spirit either in the messenger or among those in the church.

Both the messenger and the church were completely unaware of their backslidden state - just like many today. The Lord’s opinion of them was the exact opposite of their own evaluation of themselves. He calls them, “*wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked*” (*v.17*). What strong adjectives the Lord used to show them that their condition was pathetic indeed!

In Sardis, the messenger and the church had a reputation before others that they were “spiritual”. In Laodicea, they didn’t even have that reputation. They were “spiritual” only in their own eyes.

The vast majority of believers have a far higher opinion of their own spirituality than the Lord has of them. This is true of believers in every Christian group. Very, very few believers have a realistic estimate of themselves - because very, very few are ruthlessly honest with themselves.

It is more than likely that YOU yourself have a far higher opinion of your spirituality than the Lord has of you. Humble yourself and cry out to the Lord to give you *His evaluation* of your life. Why not put this book down for a few moments and make that prayer right now....

The believers at Laodicea may at one time have been on fire like those in Philadelphia. But they had backslidden and become careless about their spiritual life. They still held the doctrines of the Spirit-filled life. But they had lost the reality of that life.

Peter says about such people, “*It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment delivered to them*” (*2 Pet.2:21*).

What does the Lord do with such people? He says that He will spit (vomit) the messenger and the church out of His mouth (*v.16*).

What do we vomit out of our mouths? We vomit out food that we ate, but which did not get digested, and therefore which did not become a part of our physical body.

When we give ourselves to the Lord, the intention is that we should be “digested by Him” (“*No longer I but Christ*”) and thus become a part of His Body. If however, we still continue seeking our own, then we will end up like that undigested food - finally vomited out by the Lord.

You may even have been the Lord’s messenger for a time, and yet be vomited out so that you are no longer His messenger. We can be “in Christ” at one time and be vomited out later so that we are out of Him.

However, the Lord still had hope for this messenger and for this church. This is amazing indeed. He is always seeking to redeem even that which is wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. What men would have discarded long ago, the Lord still seeks to salvage. That’s why even the worst among us can have hope. We can all be salvaged - if we repent.

The Lord advises the messenger and the church to BUY gold, white garments and eyesalve from Him (*v.18*).

There are some things in the Christian life that are free. Forgiveness of sins and the baptism in the Spirit are free gifts of God.

But the parables of the hidden treasure in the field and of the man seeking fine pearls, teach unmistakably that the kingdom of God can be obtained only by those who are willing to give up everything. (*Mt.13:44-46*).

To the Christians at Laodicea too, the Lord says the same thing - that they have to pay a price to obtain spiritual wealth. They have to buy it.

Gold refined by fire symbolises the divine nature that is pure, without any alloy in it. This is what we need to partake of - within us.

The white garment speaks of outward righteousness - purity in our external life, speech, behaviour etc.,

Eyesalve refers to the revelation of the Holy Spirit that enables us to see everything from God's point of view. Thus we can understand God's Word and His purposes, and also see ourselves as God sees us. It enables us to see the worthlessness of earthly wealth and honour too.

To obtain all of these, we have to pay a price. We have to forsake everything and be "sold-out" for God. If we do that, we can have these riches that the Lord offers - real riches that have eternal value.

The Lord then says that He rebukes and disciplines only those whom He loves (*v.19*). It is a great comfort to know this. When we are corrected and chastened by the Lord, we can bear in mind that these are but indications of His great love. They prove that He still has hope for us.

If on the contrary, when you sin, you don't feel rebuked in your conscience, and you are not chastened by the Lord, then you are truly on dangerous ground. Perhaps the Lord has given up trying to change you. And maybe the reason is that you have persistently refused to hear His gentle voice of correction in the past.

Repent then, and turn to Him again, before it is too late altogether.

"If you are without discipline, of which ALL (true sons) have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons." (Heb.12:8).

The Lord exhorts the messenger and the church at Laodicea to "burn with zeal and repent" (*v.19*). Even our repentance can be sluggish. We must be zealous and wholehearted about our repentance too.

The Lord is now standing outside the church, knocking, trying to get in (*v.20*). In the meetings of the church however, it is "*Business As Usual*" with praise and prayer and preaching going on with monotonous regularity. But the congregation is blissfully ignorant of the fact that the Lord Himself is on the outside!

Don't ever belong to a church where the Lord Himself is outside the door. For if He is on the outside, you have no business to be inside yourself!! You should be outside too. If the bridegroom is standing outside, the bride should be with her bridegroom.

The Lord now calls individuals in the church to open their hearts to Him. How can they do that? The context makes it clear that it is by burning with zeal and repenting that they can open the door. The door is not the door of our intellect or the door of our emotions. It is the door of our will. When the will is yielded, then the Lord enters in and fellowships (dines) with us in our spirit.

Again there is the call to overcome. This time He specifies that we can overcome *EVEN AS HE ALSO OVERCAME* in the days when He was on earth (*v.21*).

Jesus was the first Overcomer. He is our Forerunner, Who has already overcome the world and the Devil. Thus He was exalted to sit down with the Father on His throne. Now we can overcome all of these just as He did. If we do, we too can sit with Him on His throne one day, as His Bride.

"If we endure, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Tim.2:12).

Finally, we hear the same word again at the end : “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*” (v.22).

Arresting The Downward Trend

The seven messengers and churches that we have looked at are pictures of seven types of messengers and churches that have been in existence in all these 20 centuries. These seven types of messengers and churches are existing in the world even today. Each of us can evaluate ourselves and see where we stand.

When we look at the five messengers and churches that are rebuked by the Lord we see in them a definite downward trend:

(1) In Ephesus, we see the loss of first love for the Lord. When we lose our devotion for Christ, we have taken the first step downwards. In a little while, this leads on to our losing our love for our fellow-believers too.

(2) In Pergamum, we see that worldliness has crept in slyly through the teaching of Balaam. The Nicolaitans (who were kept out of the church at Ephesus) have now got power here. When devotion to Christ is lost, worldliness creeps in and the religious hierarchy takes over the church. Once a religious hierarchy has taken over the leadership of a church, Babylon is built easily.

(3) In Thyatira, the church has become thoroughly worldly, and as a result religious harlotry is rampant. A woman now has power to influence the church, and is proclaiming false grace and counterfeiting the gifts of the Spirit too (prophecy in particular).

(4) In Sardis, we see hypocrisy. Sin is covered up and man’s opinion is valued more than God’s. The messenger of the church is spiritually asleep (unaware of spiritual realities). The form of godliness however hides from the eyes of men the spiritual death that the Lord sees in him.

(5) In Laodicea, things have degenerated to such an extent that the body has not only died, but also begun to decay and stink. Lukewarmness and spiritual pride are the cause of the death. In the above four churches, there was something good that the Lord could still see in each of them. But here in Laodicea He could see nothing.

None of the messengers of the above churches were aware of the true spiritual condition of their own lives or of their churches. All of them were complacent because of the high opinion they had of themselves. They could not hear what the Lord had to say to them personally, because they were all busy preparing sermons to preach to others. They were more interested in preaching than in seeing their own need.

It is very easy, once a person has become the messenger of a church, to imagine that he himself is beyond the need for correction. The Bible speaks of “*an old and foolish king who no longer knows how to receive instruction*” (Eccl.4:13).

The messengers of these five churches were all like that foolish king. Their word had been law for so long that they could not even imagine the possibility of their now being wrong in any matter!! Such was their deluded state. They imagined that they could never lose the anointing of God from their lives. Their proud attitude was what made them spiritually deaf.

King Saul was another foolish king who had started out well but who fell by the wayside very soon. He was “*little in his own eyes*” when he was first anointed by the Lord as king (1 Sam.15:17). But he did not keep himself in low thoughts about himself. And so he lost the anointing of God. The anointing then moved on to young David. Saul realised this, but he refused to face up to it. He stubbornly continued to sit on his throne and sought to kill David. Finally, God took away Saul’s life and put David on the throne.

We see similar situations in many churches today. The anointing of the Spirit has departed from many who were once the Lord’s messengers, and is now resting powerfully on some younger brothers in their churches. But the “old and foolish kings” cannot bear to see this. So what do they do? Their jealousy and their selfish desire to preserve their kingdoms prompts them to suppress those young brothers in one way or the other.

Perhaps something similar may have been happening in the five backslidden churches of Asia Minor as well. So the Lord gave those messengers one last warning.

There is no partiality with God and He has no special favourites. Even the apostle Paul realised that he could fall away and be disqualified if he was not careful to live a disciplined life (*1 Cor.9:27*).

Paul told Timothy, “*Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you*” (*1 Tim.4:16*).

Timothy had to watch over his own life first of all. He would then be able to experience salvation from unChristlikeness in his own life and thus be enabled to lead others to such a salvation as well. This is the way the Lord has appointed for all His messengers in every church.

Paul told the elders of the church in Ephesus also to watch their own lives first of all and then the lives of their flock (*Acts 20:28*).

This is the responsibility of every messenger of the Lord - to preserve his own life first of all in purity and under the constant anointing of the Spirit. “*Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head.*” (*Eccl.9:8*).

The Lord had wanted to speak to these messengers directly. But they did not have listening ears. Finally He had to speak to them through an apostle. Thank God that there was at least a John who could hear the Lord’s voice clearly.

In spite of their failures however, the Lord had hope for all five messengers - for He still held them all in His right hand (*Rev.2:1*). If they repented, they could become glorious brothers once again. And their churches could radiate the glory of the Lord once more. If however they failed to heed this last warning, then the Lord would cast them off.

In the midst of all this degeneration, there were two wonderful messengers and churches (at Smyrna and at Philadelphia) against whom the Lord had no charge at all.

In them we see the virtues of:

- (i) faithfulness in the midst of poverty and opposition;
- (ii) perseverance in obedience to God’s Word; and
- (iii) proclaiming the testimony of Christ unashamedly.

The Lord had to rebuke and correct the five backslidden messengers and their churches because they had not judged themselves.

The two faithful messengers and their churches did not need any rebuke, because they were constantly judging themselves and cleansing themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit (*2 Cor.7:1*).

God’s Word says, “*If we judged ourselves rightly, we should not be judged*” (*1 Cor.11:31*).

“*It is time for judgment to begin with the household of God...it begins with US FIRST*” (*1 Pet.4:17*). This is the identifying mark of the true house of God that we judge ourselves FIRST and CONSTANTLY.

The Lord gives us the privilege of judging ourselves now, so that when we stand at His judgment-seat one day, there will be nothing left to be judged in our lives. That is why it is important for us to read and meditate on God’s Word with an attitude of self-judgment. Thus we too can be among those in whom the Lord finds nothing to rebuke or correct.

In the messages to every one of these churches is a call to individual believers to overcome. Overcomers are those who arrest the downward trend (that we have seen above) in their own life, and thus radiate the glory of the Lord. They recognise that they have the same flesh with the same evil tendencies to backslide that are found in others around them. But they stand against those tendencies and crucify them in the power of the Spirit.

What should overcomers do today? Should they stay in the dead churches that they find themselves in, or should they come out?

In the letters to the seven churches in “*Revelation*”, we find no command to the overcomers to leave their local churches. But that was because there was *ONLY ONE CHURCH* in each locality. And the Lord had not yet removed the lampstand from any of them.

The situation is very different today. There are many “churches” in our towns and cities these days. But we cannot call all of these the lampstands of the Lord, for in most cases the Lord never founded them. Their messengers were never stars in the Lord’s hand at any time, because He never called them or appointed them to eldership.

In many other cases the Lord has given up both messenger and church long ago, because of their refusal to repent. So we need discernment to see whether the “anointing” of the Lord is on a messenger and a church before deciding to become a part of that church.

Overcomers must certainly not become a part of any local “church” that does not proclaim “*the whole purpose of God*” (*Acts 20:27*).

The messenger at Ephesus was warned that if he did not repent, the Lord would remove the lampstand out of its place (*Rev.2:5*). What would have happened if the messenger had *NOT* repented? The Lord would have set him aside as His messenger and appointed someone else.

What would have happened if the church at Ephesus also had *NOT* repented? The church would have been set aside and thus become one that was unrecognised by the Lord. They would no doubt still have continued as a congregation - but only as a Babylonian “church” thereafter, in the Lord’s eyes.

What would the overcomers in Ephesus have done then?

They would have pulled out of the old “church” as soon as the Lord pulled out of it. And they would have started gathering separately. Those who had eyes to see the moving of the Lord away from the old system to the new church would then have gathered together with these overcomers. That new gathering would then have become the church at Ephesus - for the Lord would have placed His lampstand in their midst.

If at any time this new church now refused to walk in the ways of God or to judge itself, then the Lord would have had to remove the lampstand from their midst and start all over again. There is no partiality with God.

The history of the Christian church shows how this process has been repeated over and over again in every part of the world, during these past twenty centuries. This is why we now find so many Babylonian “churches” in every place. It can become so bad at one stage that there is no lampstand left in a city at all. Every so-called church can be a Babylonian one.

We must in any case, never stay in a “church” after the Lord Himself has pulled out of it. Our loyalty must always be to the Lord and to His church - not to “the church we grew up in”. Human attachments can hinder us from moving on with the Lord.

From our study of these seven churches, we have seen clearly what it is that the Lord looks for in a church. And so, overcomers must seek to fellowship with a church in their locality :

- (i) that burns with devotion to Christ and love for one another;
- (ii) that preaches a living faith in God;
- (iii) that emphasises total obedience to all of God’s commandments;
- (iv) that proclaims the testimony of Jesus unashamedly;
- (v) that stands against spiritual pride, hypocrisy and worldliness;
- (vi) that exposes false apostles, false teachers and false gifts;
- (vii) that constantly preaches the crucifixion of the flesh;
- (viii) that encourages all believers to judge themselves constantly;
- (ix) that challenges believers to be overcomers, like Jesus Himself was.

The Lord desires such a testimony to His Name in every place.

To build such churches, the Lord needs messengers who are gripped by the truths that we have considered in *Chapters 2 and 3*.

May the Lord find many such men and many such churches in every part of the world in these last days.

CHAPTER FOUR

Before we turn to Chapter Four, it will be good to remember what we read earlier, “*Blessed is he who reads and those who hears the words of the prophecy, and obeys the things which are written in it; for the time is near*” (Rev.1:3).

When believers study prophecy, their interest is usually related to knowing all about the tribulation, the millenium and the symbolism of the trumpets and vials etc., But the important thing is not *understanding* prophecy but *obeying* what is written. Prophecy, like the rest of Scripture, is also meant for obedience!

There are many symbols and signs used in the book of *Revelation*. It is impossible for anyone to be dogmatic in interpreting them. God has deliberately left these things vague, so that He can separate those believers who are preoccupied with explaining the symbols from those who are seeking to *obey His commands*.

We are all familiar with the beatitudes - the “*Blessed*”s in *Matthew 5*. There are seven “*Blessed*”s in *Revelation* too. There is one in the first chapter: “*Blessed is the one who reads and obeys*” (Rev.1:3). And there is one in the last chapter “*Blessed is the one who keeps on obeying the words of this book*” (Rev.22:7).

Right at the beginning and at the very end of this book, you have this blessing promised to all who *obey* what is written in this book. Between these two “*Blessed*”s lies the whole book of *Revelation*.

Obedience is what God requires even in the last book of the Bible. In no place in *Revelation*, do we find a blessing promised on those who understand and interpret all the symbols or on those who can draw a prophetic chart to show the time-schedule for the various events prophesied etc., It is obedience that God looks for - right from *Genesis 3* to *Revelation 22*.

Revelation 4 to 22 is written for those who have already listened to the call of the Spirit in *Chapters 2 and 3*, to *overcome*. Never forget that. These chapters have not been written for those who want to merely increase in understanding.

In *Revelation 1:1*, we saw that God gave this revelation to Jesus Christ to be shown to His servants. The meaning of this book is not something that God wants to conceal from us. No. He wants to *reveal* its meaning to us. This is the faith that we must have as we study this prophecy. According to your faith, be it unto you! If you come in faith saying, “Lord, I am Your bondservant. I want to be an overcomer. I believe You will make me understand this prophecy”, then you will understand - not otherwise.

V.1: After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, ‘Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.’

In *Revelation 3:20* we saw the necessity of a door being opened on earth. There we saw Jesus standing at the door of our hearts and knocking. If we open that door (yield our wills) to Jesus, then Jesus opens a door for us “*in heaven*”, as we see here. We cannot experience the opening of the door in heaven, if we haven’t yielded our wills to Him and made Him Lord of our lives. And then we hear Jesus saying, “*Come up here*”. John was on Patmos on earth. And Jesus told him to come up higher - to heaven - so that he could see what would happen in the future.

God is always calling us to come up higher. But we have to respond to that call. If we don't respond, we will remain forever where we are. If John had not responded, the book of *Revelation* would have closed with just three chapters!!

V.2: Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne.

This is how God lifts us up also in the Spirit so that we can see the things of earth from a heavenly standpoint! As we approach the end of time, it is important that we learn to look at the things that are going to happen on earth, not from an earthly standpoint, but a heavenly one.

Jesus told us in *Luke 21:28*, “*When these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads*”. That means the same thing - to look at things from heaven's viewpoint. Otherwise, we will be filled with fear. But when we look up, we see that our Father is in control of everything. And so we need to experience what John experienced too - in our spirits.

And what was the *first thing* that John saw? Not the antichrist or the tribulation, but “*GOD'S THRONE*”. That's what we need to see in these days - God Almighty *RULING* and *CONTROLLING* everything. If we don't see that first of all, we will have many problems and difficulties on earth.

V.3: And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance.

The jasper stone is a stone that is crystal clear (*Rev.21:11*). And the sardius is flaming red in colour, speaking of God's judgement on sin. So we see that the very first thing emphasized about the One who sits on the throne through both these symbols is His holiness and purity.

There was a rainbow around the throne. The rainbow was given by God immediately after the flood, when Noah came out of the ark. It was a sign of God's covenant with the people of the earth that He would never again destroy the earth with a flood”. The rainbow therefore is a symbol of *God's grace*.

So we see “*TRUTH AND GRACE*” on the throne. This is the glory that was seen in Jesus too (*Jn.1:14*).

Throughout the book of Revelation we see these two aspects of God's glory alternately - *grace and judgement*. God is both good and severe (*Rom.11:22*).

V.4: And around the throne were twenty four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads.

Among the angels whom God created, we read in *Colossians 1:16* that there are “*thrones, dominions, rulers and authorities*”. So these 24 elders symbolize such spirit-beings who have authority around the throne of God. And we will see, later in *Revelation* that one of their primary tasks is to lead people in the worship of God. Their white garments speak of their purity, and their golden crowns speak of their authority.

V.5: And from the throne proceed flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

The lightning and thunder are meant to emphasise God's majesty and glory, and the fact that He has total control over everything that is going to come.

And the seven lamps of fire we are told are the seven Spirits of God - or in other words, the sevenfold Holy Spirit (*Isa.11:2,3*). Notice that the Holy Spirit is represented by seven lamps of fire - symbolising perfect purity.

“*Our God is a consuming fire*” (*Heb.11:29*). Many would like to think of God always as a God of love. But He is also a consuming fire.

I have seen wall-plaques in many homes with the words, “*GOD IS LOVE*”. But it is rare to find a wall-plaque with the words, “*GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE*”. Man does not like to think of God as a consuming fire. But whether we like to think of this fact or not, *He is still a consuming fire*.

When people speak about their being filled with the Holy Spirit, and of having experiences in the Holy Spirit, they must remember that any genuine experience of the Holy Spirit will bring the fire of God's purity into their lives. If that doesn't happen, the experience must be regarded as counterfeit.

V.6-8: And before the throne there was, as it were, a sea of glass like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind and the first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.

The lion is the king of beasts, the calf the king of cattle, the eagle the king of birds and man the king of creation. The four living beings represent the heavenly cherubs. This is clear when we compare this passage with *Ezekiel 1:4-20 and 10:20*. There we read that there were wheels on earth for each of the cherubs, and that whenever the cherubs moved, the wheels moved with them. We also read that the wheels moved in the same direction as the Spirit was moving. Those wheels represent earthly events and circumstances, and the vision was meant to portray this truth that "*Although our circumstances may seem to go round and round in different directions like wheels, God is in total control of every one of them*". God alone determines the direction in which our circumstances move.

These cherubim are the guardians of the glory of God. The book of *Ezekiel* deals with the subject of the glory of God departing from Israel, because Israel sinned. We read, "*Then the glory of the Lord went up from the cherub to the threshold of the temple, and the temple was filled with the cloud*" (*Ezek.10:4*). And then in *verse 18*, we read, "*the glory of the Lord departed*".

When Adam and Eve were turned out of the garden of Eden, we read in *Genesis 3:24* that "*God drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction, to guard the way to the tree of life*". The cherubs with their flaming sword were to prevent sinners from taking part of the *tree of life*. That sword finally fell on our Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross and now the way to the tree of life has been opened. Today, we can all partake of the tree of life, if we agree with God's judgment on our flesh - if we allow His sword to fall on our flesh. It is impossible to enter into the Divine life, without first being crucified with Christ.

True servants of God stand in the church today, like those cherubs, with flaming swords, and guard the glory of God and His holiness.

These cherubs keep on crying "*Holy, Holy, Holy*", day and night.

Isaiah too had a vision, where he saw the *seraphs* in heaven crying, "*Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts*" (*Isa.6:1-3*). Isaiah saw those seraphs using only two of their six wings to fly. With the other four they covered their faces and worshipped God. Those seraphs had never sinned. Yet they had to cover their faces when they came into the presence of God. How much more you and I need to do that!

This is the God we worship. "*HOLINESS*" is the predominant characteristic of heaven - whether of cherubs or of seraphs. That's why it is a disgrace when a person calls himself a Christian and doesn't seek to live in purity.

V.9-11: And when the living creatures give glory and honour and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 'Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honour and power, for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created'.

The 24 elders are quick to cast their crowns down before God. In other words, they are saying, "Lord, if we have crowns upon our heads, they are what *YOU* gave us, and so we give them back to You."

When God gives us some position or authority in the church, that is *not* something we are to be proud of. If God places a crown on our head, we must immediately cast it down at His feet, recognising that He alone is worthy of all honour. To show off our authority or gift is of the very spirit of hell.

In heaven, they cast their crowns down and say, “*Thou alone are worthy, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power.*”

The elders remind us in their song of another matter that we must never forget: *That God created us according to His will, and we fulfil the purpose of our creation only when we do His will, and not our own.*

CHAPTER FIVE

V.1,2: And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?’

Here we see God holding a book (a scroll). A scroll is a large length of parchment rolled up that has to be unrolled in order to be read.

To understand what this scroll symbolizes, we need to turn to the Old Testament. In *Leviticus 25:24,25*, we read “*For every piece of your property, you are to provide for the redemption of your land. If a fellow-countryman of yours becomes so poor that he has to sell part of his property, then his nearest kinsman is to come and buy back what his relative has sold*”.

There was a law in Israel, that when a man became so poor that he had to sell his property, his nearest relative had to buy it for him. That was called “*redeeming the land*”. How does this apply to us?

God gave Adam the whole earth. He told him to rule over it and to subdue it. But Adam disobeyed and became poor. Thus he gave away the title-deed of the earth to Satan. Then Satan became the ruler of the earth.

When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, he showed Him the glory of the world and told Him, “*I will give you all this, because it has been handed over to me*” (*Lk.4:6*). Who had handed it over to him? Adam.

There are many gifts that God has given man that He has handed over to Satan. For example, God gives men money and health, and they hand them over to Satan, by using them for indulging in selfish pleasures.

Now this earth which Adam had given to Satan had to be redeemed.

But we read in *Leviticus 25* that only a close relative, a near kinsman could redeem it. That's why Jesus had to come as a Man. Only thus could He be our Relative and Redeemer and redeem the earth back to God.

In *Jeremiah 32:6-9* we read of Jeremiah buying a land for his relative according to this law. He paid the money and signed the purchase deed. The deed was a scroll which was then rolled up and sealed (*Jer.32:10*).

It is a similar scroll that we read of in *Revelation 5*- the purchase deed of the earth. And the angel asked who was worthy to redeem it.

In the book of *Ruth*, we see one more picture of this type of redemption. Ruth was a Gentile who had married a Jew in Moab. When her husband died, she came to Israel with her mother-in-law Naomi. They were both very poor and someone had to redeem the land that belonged to Ruth's late husband. The one who could redeem it was a near relative called Boaz. So Ruth went up to Boaz and said "Can you redeem it for me?"

The Law stated that if a man died leaving his wife, his brother must marry her (*Deut.25:8 to 10*). So Boaz had to purchase this land as well as marry Ruth. But when Ruth came to Boaz, he told her, "There is someone who is a closer relative to you than I am. We will have to ask him first. If he is unwilling to purchase the land and marry you, then I will do both." So Boaz told the other relative. But the other man was unwilling. So Boaz redeemed Ruth.

Ruth is a type of the church - poor and needing redemption. The first relative, the *LAW* could not redeem us. Then, Boaz typifying Christ, redeems us and marries us. This is what *Romans 7:4* says, "My brethren you are dead to the law, so that you can be married to Christ".

V.3-5: And no one in heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth, was able to open the book, or to look into it. And I began to weep greatly, because no one was found worthy to open the book, or to look into it; and one of the elders said to me, 'Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.'

No one was found worthy or able to unseal the book of earth's redemption. The Law of God could not do it. And when John saw that no one could redeem the earth that man had lost, he wept.

He wept greatly - because no one was found worthy to open the book. There was no relative who came forward to help this poor "girl" who had lost all her lands, and no one to marry "her" either.

And then one of the elders proclaimed the good news to John that the Lion of Judah, the Root of David, was worthy. Jesus, the Root of David also became the Seed of David (*Rev.22:16*). Jesus came as a Man, became our closest relative and redeemed both us and the earth.

So the gospel message is, "Stop weeping! Someone has come as a man - as your close relative - and loved you enough to redeem you."

He could not have become our closest relative if He had not come as a Man. That's why Paul says, that an essential part of the gospel is the fact that Jesus Christ was born of the seed of David (*Rom.1:3; 2 Tim.2:8*). That is why our Lord Jesus Christ is worthy, and that is why we read further in *Rev.5*. that they sing a new song of praise to Him in heaven.

V.6,7: And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth. And He came, and He took it out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.

When John turned to see the *lion*, what he saw was a *lamb* - a lamb as it has been slain - symbolising Jesus Christ crucified - standing between God and man as the one Mediator between them.

Jesus was always like a *lion*, towards Satan, sin and the spirit of the world (wherever He found it) - fighting them and resisting them. But towards people, Jesus was always like a *lamb*. People could beat Him, insult Him, and ill-treat Him, and He would never retaliate.

In the world, we see the opposite of that. People are like a lamb towards the Devil, afraid of him, submitting to him and yielding to sin. But they behave like lions towards each other - tearing each other apart and fighting with each other. This is the spirit of the antichrist - the opposite of Christ.

The word "Lamb" is a frequently used title of Jesus Christ in the book of Revelation. John the Baptist pointed to Jesus saying, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world". (*Jn.1:29*).

The seven horns that the Lamb has, symbolize "all power". Seven is the perfect number and the horns speak of strength and power. All power in heaven and on earth has been given to our Lord.

The seven eyes are again the sevenfold Holy Spirit of God. This is another symbol of the Holy Spirit, that speaks of His perfect discernment.

Here we are also told that these seven eyes have been sent out into all the earth. Why? The answer is found in 2 *Chronicles* 16:9, “*The eyes of the Lord, (the sevenfold Holy Spirit) move to and fro throughout the whole earth to strongly support those whose hearts are completely His*”. It is very important, as we look to the future, that we recognise that the Holy Spirit is working all across the earth to support us strongly, if our hearts are completely His. When we see this, we won’t be afraid even if the Devil himself opposes us.

And then we read, “*And He came, and He took it out of the right Hand of Him who sat on the throne*” (v.7). Look at the authority here - walking up to the Father and taking the book from His hand. Which man can do that? Only Jesus, our Lord and Saviour.

There are some “Christian” groups that teach that there are *NOT* three Persons in the Godhead but only one. Therefore they baptize people in the Name of “*Jesus only*”. This is a great deception of the devil that removes the distinction between the Father and the Son as two separate Persons and thus leaves us without any Mediator (*See 1 Tim.2:5*).

But here we see the Father sitting on the throne and Jesus coming and taking the scroll from the Father’s hand, proving that He had the right to take it - as the only mediator between God and men.

In *Ezekiel 2:9,10* we see something more about this scroll: “*Lo, a scroll....written on the front and the back, and written on it were lamentations, mourning and woe*”. Various judgments were written on the scroll. Zechariah also saw a scroll, showing God’s curse going over the earth, because people had disobeyed God’s commandments (*Zech.5:1-3*). Two of the 10 commandments are mentioned especially: (1) Do not steal; and (2) Do not to take the Lord’s name in vain. Everyone who stole would be judged according to the writing on the outside of the scroll. And everyone who swore would be judged according to the writing on the inside of the scroll.

God had written the ten commandments on two tablets of stone. On one were written four commandments relating to man’s relationship with God. On the other were written six commandments that related to man’s relationship with his fellowman. Swearing broke one commandment on the first tablet and stealing broke one commandment on the second tablet. So the two sides of the scroll represent the ten commandments of God that have been disobeyed by the human race, necessitating God’s judgment falling on man.

As the 7 seals are opened, we can therefore expect to see the judgment that will come upon man for his disobedience to God’s commandments.

We could therefore look at the question, “*Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?*” (verse 2), as “Who is worthy to execute judgment upon the human race for their disobeying God’s commandments”.

When the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery to Jesus, He asked them, as it were, a similar question, “*Who is worthy to throw a stone at her? (Jn.8:1-12)*.”

So the question here is: “*Who is worthy to judge the world?*”

In the case of the adulterous woman, only the sinless Jesus was qualified to throw a stone at her. But He did not. He said, “*I do not condemn you*”. Jesus had come then to initiate the age of grace. 2000 years have gone by and the age of grace is almost over now. One of these days, the same Jesus will return to judge the world.

The unsealing of a scroll also means giving us understanding on what is written in the scroll. A *sealed* book is a book that we cannot understand. A book that is *unsealed* however is something that we *can* understand. *Isaiah 29:11-12* says, “*The entire vision shall be to you like the words of a sealed book, which when they give it to the one who is literate, saying, ‘Please read this’, he will say, ‘I cannot, for IT IS SEALED’. Then the book will be given to the one who is illiterate saying, ‘Please read this’.* And he

will say, 'I cannot read'". The literate person becomes as foolish as the illiterate person when confronted with a sealed book!! Why so? Verse 13 gives us the answer. The Lord says, "*Because the people draw near with their words and honour me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from me*".

If we approach the book of *Revelation* with this attitude - drawing near with our words but not with our hearts - then the book will be a sealed book to us. "*The Lord poured a deep sleep upon the prophets and covered the eyes of the seers*" in Isaiah's time, so that God's Word was like a sealed book to them (*Isa.29:10*).

The book of *Revelation* however is not a sealed book. It says in *Rev.22:10*, "*Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near*". If our eyes are blinded to its meaning, the reason must be that our hearts are far from the Lord. God has given the book of *Revelation*, to open the eyes of His bondservants.

V.8: And when He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

Previously we saw the 24 elders falling down before the Father - (*4:10*). Now they fall down before the Lamb. We also see each of them having a golden bowl full of incense (representing the prayers of the saints).

These bowls contain the prayers that believers have prayed for 2000 years. Every prayer of ours goes into those bowls. One day, the bowls will be full and they will be poured out. That will be the result of the sum total of all the prayers that believers prayed - especially this prayer "*Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven*". That prayer is asking the Lord to redeem the earth and to let His kingdom of righteousness come on earth.

Jesus told us to pray always! And even if nothing happens immediately, our prayers go into the bowl. One day that bowl will be filled - and then you will see things happen. That is why it is important to pray. Pray especially for the coming of the kingdom of God. That is more important than prayers for physical healing and other such matters.

In a few more years the bowl will be full and those angelic authorities will pour out the bowls before the Lord. And God's final programme for winding up the affairs of this earth will begin. It is important for us to see that God acts in response to the prayers of the saints.

And when they pour out these bowls, what do they sing?

V.9,10: And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth'.

When it says that they sang a *NEW* song, it means that every time they sing "*Thou art worthy*", it is fresh!

How is it with us? If we are filled with the Holy Spirit and walk the way of the cross daily, we can be fresh in our expressions of worship and praise to the Father and the Son, *EVERY* single time we do so.

Here it also says we will reign on the earth. Jesus has made us kings and priests. We rule in our spirit now. One day we will reign in our bodies as well.

V.11: And I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriad of myriads and thousands of thousands".

That means that there are a hundred million angels in heaven plus many more millions!! So there are enough angels there for God to allot one for each child of God quite easily - many more than one each!!

We read in *Hebrews 1:14* that the angels are ministering spirits sent forth to serve those who inherit salvation. God has allotted angels for each of us. When we believe that, we will be encouraged. Jesus

taught that every child has an angel who sees the face of the Father and helps it (*Matt.18:10*). And those angels don't leave us when we grow up.

V.12: And they also said with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.'

All men are to honour the Son, exactly as they honour the Father. There is no doubt here that Jesus Christ is God, to be worshipped just as much as the Father is worshipped.

V.13,14: And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, 'To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever'. And the four living creatures kept saying, 'Amen'. And the elders fell down and worshipped.

We see here that they didn't say *Amen* just once, but again and again.

Some people are offended when they hear people in a church say "*Amen*" and "*Hallelujah*". How will such people live in heaven??

God has exalted Jesus because He humbled Himself, and given Him a Name that is above every name, so that one day at the Name of Jesus every knee, every thing in heaven and earth and under the earth will bow down to Him, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. (*Phil.2:8-11*).

The most important confession that we must make to the unbeliever is that "*Jesus Christ is Lord*". One day, the whole universe will say that. How wonderful that our eyes have been opened to see the Lordship of Jesus even now, and to see the worthiness of Him Who came as a Lamb towards men and as a Lion towards Satan. Jesus overcame the world (*Jn.16:33*), and paid the price for the earth to be redeemed back to God.

CHAPTER SIX

From *Chapter 6* onwards, we see the more prophetic part of *Revelation*- the things which Jesus told John would take place in the *FUTURE*.

Whenever we study prophecy that is as yet unfulfilled, we must bear *1 Cor.13:12*. in mind: "*Now we see in a mirror dimly - but then face to face. Now I know in part but then I shall know fully*". God in His great wisdom, has allowed a lot of prophecy concerning the future to be seen by us only dimly as in a mirror. We must never forget that.

There is a great curiosity in our flesh to know everything about the future exactly. But the word of God has not been given to satisfy our curiosity. *Deuteronomy 29:29* says, "*The secret things belong to the Lord our God but the things which are revealed to us and to our children*". So there are things that are clearly revealed and things that are hidden.

Here are some things that have been clearly revealed: *2 Peter 1:4* states that "*all things pertaining to life and godliness have been given to us*". Everything relating to partaking of the Divine nature has been revealed clearly. That is neither dim nor unclear. *Romans 6:14* also is crystal clear when it says that "*sin cannot rule over you when you are under grace*".

But the amazing thing is that most believers don't look at such truths that are taught clearly. Instead they argue over the details of prophecy, that are often unclear. This is a dangerous attitude. We must have our priorities right. The greatest thing is not prophecy but love. We are never told to pursue after a clear

understanding of prophecy. But we *are* told to pursue after love - the Divine nature (*1 Cor.13:8,9,13; 14:1*).

There are many parts of Biblical prophecy that we will know clearly only when they actually happen, and yet other things that we will know only when the Lord comes. But since the Lord has given us the book of *Revelation*, He must be expecting us to understand something, albeit dimly, about the future.

In *chapter 6* we have a bird's eye view of the future, upto the very end. Then from *chapter 7* onwards, the Spirit comes back and fills up certain details in the remaining chapters. Praise God that this book has been written like that - so that it doesn't satisfy our curiosity. In all of us, there is a great lust to study prophetic charts that claim to explain the sequence of events at the end time. But God does not satisfy our curiosity. The word of God, including the book of *Revelation*, was not given primarily for that.

Consider what Jesus told His apostles just before He went up to heaven. The apostles had asked Him, "*Lord is it at this time you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?*" They had thought that since Jesus was risen, He was now going to drive out the Romans and establish His millennial reign. Jesus did not say that such questions were unimportant. No. Instead, He said, "*It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority*" (*Acts 1:6,7*). He told them that there was something else that they needed to know right then, and many other things that they did not need to know. And then He told them of the absolute necessity of receiving spiritual power. Not knowledge - but *power!* (*Acts 1:8*) - power to be His witnesses to the end of time. And remember that those were His last words on earth. This fact is important for us to bear in mind as we approach the book of *Revelation*.

V.1: And I saw when the lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, 'Come'.

This invitation is extended 4 times - "*Come*". In *verse 3*, the second living creature says "*Come*". In *verse 5*, the third living creature says "*Come*". And in *verse 7*, the fourth living creature says "*Come*".

These are the four living creatures that we saw in *Chapter 4:7*. We saw there that they were like the cherubs that Ezekiel saw, and that they are leaders among the category in which they were created: the lion - king of the beasts; the calf - king of the cattle; man - king of creation; and eagle - king of the birds. So these 4 creatures who are saying "*Come*" in *Chapter 6:1,3,5 & 7* are expressing the voice of creation, saying to Jesus "*Come*".

At the end of the Bible we read that, John himself says "*Amen, come Lord Jesus!*" (*Rev.22:20*). But all creation itself is crying out for the Lord to come, as we read in *Romans 8:19 to 22*. It is a shame when those who call themselves believers do not have as anxious a longing as the rest of creation. The whole of creation is waiting for the "*revealing of the sons of God*", when Jesus comes in His glory. In that day, the whole of creation will be set free from its slavery to corruption and enter into the glory of the sons of God. Right now however, creation is suffering "*the pains of child birth*" - a travail that will be completed only with the return of Christ.

And when these creatures say "*Come*", the Lord Jesus will come - not as a lamb to take away the sins of the world, but as a lion to judge the sins of the world.

V.2: And I looked and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow, and a crown was given to him; and he went out conquering and to conquer.

Compare this with *Revelation 19:11-16*, where we read "*I saw heaven opened; and behold a white horse, and He Who sat upon it is called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He judges and wages war. And His eyes are as a flame of fire and upon His head are many crowns....and on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS". His name is called the Word of God*". That is our Lord Jesus Christ. But what we see here in *Revelation 6:2* is slightly different. He doesn't have *many* crowns on his head. Here it says that a crown was *given to him*. In other words, it is not something he obtained by his own right. He was allowed to have a crown. But he was on this white horse and he had a bow, and he went out, conquering and to conquer. This is a symbol of someone *IMITATING* Christ - someone claiming to be Christ.

If you read *Matthew 24*, you will find it to be very similar to *Revelation 6*. Both passages are dealing with the end of the age. There the disciples came to Jesus and asked Him “*Tell us when will these things be, what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?*” (*Matt.24:3*).

And Jesus replied saying, “*See to it that no one misleads you*” (*v.4*). Here is the first white horse: “*Many will come in my name saying that I AM THE CHRIST and will mislead many*” That is the first sign that Jesus gave. And that is exactly what we see in *Revelation 6:2* as well. Someone comes on a white horse drawing a whole lot of people after him - people who don’t know the Scriptures, who follow a person thinking that they are following the Lord and who are thus deceived and led astray. Jesus warned us saying that many would come *IN HIS NAME* and deceive us. Such a person is symbolised here as a rider on a white horse. He is a counterfeit Christ!!

Notice the number of times in this chapter that the phrase “*it was given*” occurs - “*a crown was given to him...it was given to take peace from the earth....a great sword was given to him...authority was given to him*” (*v.2,4,8*). In every instance, something evil comes forth. But in each case, it was after God had granted him permission. The first rider was permitted to have a crown. The second was permitted to take peace from the earth and allowed to have a great sword. The fourth rider was permitted to have authority over one-fourth of the earth.

When Pilate told Jesus that he had the authority to crucify Him, Jesus replied, saying, “*You would have had no authority over me, unless it had been GIVEN TO YOU from above*” (*Jn.19:11*). It was the Father Who allowed Pilate to have authority over Jesus. No-one can do anything on earth without God’s permission. It is our Father Who allows deceiving spirits to enter this world to deceive those who do not love the truth (*2 Thess.2:10,11*). All this deception will culminate with the arrival of the Antichrist - the counterfeit Christ - on the world scene. And most people will be deceived into thinking that he is indeed their “*Messiah*” and their “*Saviour*”, and that only by following him they can be saved.

But before the Antichrist arrives, many little antichrists have already arisen through the centuries and are arising even today.

“*Children it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour*” (*1 John 2:18*). If it was the last hour (11 pm) in 96 A.D., when John wrote that, it must be past 11.59 pm now. Only a few seconds are left now.

Many political leaders in history have been little antichrists, who drew people after themselves by demonic power. There are many heathen “*godmen*” in India who do the same. But that spirit is found in Christendom too. Gifted “*Christian*” leaders often get people to follow *them* instead of connecting them to Christ. There are many such leaders in Christian groups today, who are counterfeit “*christs*”.

The antichrist comes on a white horse, as Christ does. Satan comes as an angel of light, deceiving multitudes - and God permits him to do so, because He sees that the people do not love the truth so as to be saved from their sins.

We read here that the rider “*went out conquering and to conquer*” (*v.2*). Satan is bent on conquering man thoroughly.

V.3,4: And when He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, ‘Come’. And another, a red horse, went out, and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men should slay one another; and a great sword was given to him.

Permission was granted to him, to get people to slay one another and to take peace from the earth. This is a picture of war. The red colour of the horse speaks of bloodshed.

The second sign that Jesus gave His disciples was: “*You will hear of wars and rumours of wars, see that you are not frightened, for those things must take place but that is not yet the end - for nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom*” (*Mt.24:6*).

The second rider on a red horse takes peace from the earth and men kill one another. There have always been wars, throughout the past 19 centuries, since John wrote the book of *Revelation*. But in all these

1900 years, there were never any wars that were called “World Wars” until the 20th century. Wars between nations also have increased tremendously in the 20th century. There was no terrorism (as we see it nowadays) until the 20th century.

V.5,6: And when He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying ‘Come’. And I looked, and behold a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard as it were a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, ‘A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine’

The third horse is a black one - and signifies famine and scarcity of food. This corresponds to the third sign that Jesus gave His disciples - famines (*Matt.24:7*). Things will become very difficult especially for the poor people. They will be able to buy only one kilogram of wheat with a day’s salary. Or if they want cheaper food, they will be able to buy 3 kilograms of barley with a day’s wages. As we approach the end, there will be increasing shortage of the necessities of life. But luxuries like the oil and wine will not be touched. This means that the rich will live with plenty, while the poor will have to struggle in order to survive.

James says, “*Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you .. your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure! You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter*” (*Jas.5:1,3,5*).

V.7,8: And when He broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, ‘Come’, and I looked, and behold, an ashen horse: and he who sat on it had the name ‘Death’; and Hades was following with him. And authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.

Here we see a sickly pale horse. And its rider was “*Death*”. Following it is “*Hades*” - which is a name for the place where people go when they die. Authority was given to them over a quarter of the earth . The world’s population is over six billion, and so this represents authority over 1500 million people. Four instruments used to kill people are mentioned here: (1) weapons of warfare, (2) famines, (3) diseases and (4) wild beasts.

It is important for us to know why God permits these four judgments, so that we have no part in them.

In *Ezekiel 14:13,14*, we read that the Lord says, “*If a country sins against me by committing unfaithfulness, and I stretch out My hand against it, destroy its supply of bread, send famine against it, and cut off from it both men and beasts, even though these three men, Noah, Daniel and Job were in its midst, by their righteousness they could deliver themselves*”.

Noah, Daniel and Job were the most righteous people of their time. Noah saved his wife, his three sons and their wives. Daniel saved His three friends. Job saved his family. But God says that if they had lived at this time, they would have been able to save only themselves. They would not be able to deliver their sons and daughters, if those children were not righteous themselves.

And then God says, “*If I were to cause wild beasts to pass through the land, and they depopulated it, and it became desolate so that no one would pass through it because of the beasts, though these three men were in its midst as I live, declares the Lord God, they could not deliver either their sons or their daughters. They alone would be delivered.*” (*Ezek.14:15,16*).

And then the Lord adds, “*How much more when I send my four severe judgments against Jerusalem - sword, famine, wild beasts and plague of disease.*” (*v.21*). These are the four judgments mentioned in *Revelation 6:7,8*.

But God is gracious in that only one-fourth of the world’s population is wiped out, so that the others may turn to righteousness. It is only by righteousness that we can protect ourselves from these severe judgments. We cannot save our wives, our sons, our brothers or our sisters, unless they are righteous too.

For all *righteous* people the promise in *Psalm 91* is particularly relevant. There we read of these four judgments:

- (1) weapons of warfare - “*the arrow that flies by day*” (v.5);
- (2) disease - “*pestilence* (v.6);
- (3) famine - “*the destruction that lays waste at noon*” (noon is the time when we eat and this refers to lack of food) (v.6);
- (4) wild animals - “*you will tread upon the lion and cobra, the young lion and the serpent you will trample down*” (v.13).

These judgments will not touch the righteous. “*A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not approach you*” (v.7).

One-quarter of the world’s population may be affected. But “**IT WILL NOT APPROACH YOU!**”

“*You will only look with your eyes, and see the recompense of the wicked. For you have made the Lord, your dwelling place...No evil will befall you, nor will any plague come near your house*” (v.8-13).

Why? The Lord says, “*Because he loved me, therefore I will deliver him, I will set him securely on high*” (v.14). The Lord will set us on high. Let us make sure that we qualify for that promise to be fulfilled in our lives.

V.9-11: And when He broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice saying, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’ And there was given to each of them a white robe, and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, should be completed also.

The fifth seal symbolises tribulation. These people were killed “*because of the word of God and because of the testimony which they held*”.

Paul exhorted Timothy to “*hold fast the form of sound words*” (2 Tim.1:13). Here were people who had held fast to *the whole counsel of God*. They were not compromisers or men-pleasers who preached to tickle people’s ears. “*If we please men, we cannot be servants of Christ*” (Gal.1:10). These were true servants of Christ who held fast the word of God as their testimony; and because they held fast to the word of God, they were killed.

In *Matthew 23:34,35*, Jesus said “*Behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes (or Bible teachers); some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your assemblies and persecute from city to city, that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar*”.

When Cain killed Abel the Lord told Cain, “*Your brother’s blood is crying unto me from the ground - because you’ve slain him*”. Here in *Revelation 6*, those who were slain cry out with a loud voice saying, “*How long O Lord will you refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?*” This is the cry of the Old Testament prophets and saints. In *Psalm 79:10*, we read “*Let there be known among the nations in our sight vengeance for the blood of Thy servants, which has been shed*”. We read similar prayers in *Psalm 94:1-7* and *119:84*. These all express the same thing: “*Lord take revenge on these people who have shed our blood*” - just like Abel’s blood cried out for vengeance.

But when we turn to *Hebrews 12*, we see something different. Here the old covenant is contrasted with the new covenant. We today have not come to Mount Sinai and to Moses, but to Mount Zion and to Jesus “*the mediator of a new covenant and to the sprinkled blood (of Jesus) which speaks better than the blood of Abel*” (v.21-24). The blood of Abel cried out for revenge, whereas the blood of Jesus cried out for mercy and for forgiveness!! Therein lies one fundamental difference between the old and the new covenants.

Those who *seek for vengeance* have not understood what the blood of Jesus was shed for. When the blood was flowing from Jesus' body - from His head, hands, back and feet - He prayed, "*Father forgive them*". When the blood was flowing from Stephen's body, he prayed, "*Lord don't lay this sin to their charge*" (*Acts 7:60*). That is the cry of the new-covenant saint. One mark of a true disciple of Jesus is that He does not desire vengeance on his enemies.

So these slain saints in *Revelation 6* are obviously Old Testament saints because they are asking for vengeance to be taken on their enemies. When John was given this vision, it was only about 65 years since the church had been established and there were very few Christians who had been slain for their faith by that time. Most of the slain saints were the ones that Jesus spoke of - from the time of Abel to Zechariah. These were the ones whose souls were under the altar. They were given white robes and told to wait a little longer *UNTIL* the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed (during these 20 centuries of the church age) would also be completed. These "brethren" are the new-covenant saints who are slain for the word of God.

There is a particular number of saints that have to be slain for the Word of God and for their testimony. God knows that number. In the past 2000 years, many Christians have died like Jesus and Stephen, asking God to forgive those who killed them. They were killed for the Word of God and for the testimony they held. As soon as this number is complete, God will come down in judgment on this world that killed His servants. Till then we must be patient.

So the fifth seal shows us that tribulation and persecution are our appointed lot on earth. In *Matthew 24:9*, we see the fifth sign that Jesus gives His disciples is tribulation, being hated by ALL nations and being killed for His Name's sake.

The day is coming when *EVERY NATION* on the face of the earth will hate the true disciples of Jesus. Nominal Christians and compromising "believers" will not be hated. They will be accepted and honoured! But the ones who hold to God's Word and proclaim the whole counsel of God will be hated. And at that time many will fall away. They will join Babylonian Christianity (false, compromising Christian churches), because there their lives will thereby be safe. Such Christians will betray the true disciples of Jesus. These things are happening even today in many lands.

Jesus said to His disciples, "*In the world you will have tribulation, but take courage, I have OVERCOME the world*" (*Jn.16:33*). Jesus taught there, very clearly, that we will *have to face tribulation*. The doctrine that believers will escape tribulation is not the teaching of the Holy Spirit, but a doctrine of men.

It is a comfort-loving, compromising, diplomatic Christianity that wants to escape tribulation. And such a Christianity has naturally produced a theology that teaches that "the church will escape tribulation", even though Jesus clearly stated, "*In the world you shall have tribulation*." The Lord is not going to take us out of the world. No He said, "*I have overcome* (not "escaped from") *the world*." And He wants us to be overcomers too.

Jesus prayed to the Father saying, "*Father, I am NOT asking You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from evil (sin)*" (*Jn.17:15*). How do many Christians then teach that we will be taken out of the world so that we do not face tribulation. Jesus prayed that we should be kept from *sinning*, not from *tribulation*. He wants us to be kept from disobedience to God and from the power of Satan, the Evil one, but not from persecution - because Jesus knows that persecution and tribulation are good for us. That is our calling.

When the early apostles went around establishing churches and teaching the disciples, did they teach them saying, "*God loves you so much that He will help you to escape from all tribulation*"? *NO*. They told them, "*We all have to enter God's kingdom through many tribulations*" (*Acts 14:22*). That was the message of Jesus and of the apostles. But unfortunately, that message is not being preached today.

In *Revelation 6:12-17*, we read about the wrath of God that is going to fall upon the earth. *Tribulation* is the wrath of man and Satan poured out on true believers. God has never promised us that He will protect

us from such wrath. Millions of true disciples of Jesus have faced unimaginable tribulation and persecution and been killed during the past 20 centuries. God allowed them to face all of that bravely.

But when it comes to the wrath of God (*Rev.6:12-17*), we will certainly escape.

V.12-17: And I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. And the sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth and the great men and commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the WRATH of the Lamb; for the great day of their WRATH has come; and who is able to stand ?

Here is the first place in the book of *Revelation* where we find the word ‘wrath’ appearing referring to the wrath of God and of the Lamb. In contrast, *tribulation* (which we saw under the fifth seal in *verses 9-11*) was the *wrath of man* instigated by Satan.

The disciples of Jesus will be taken up to meet the Lord in the air, before this judgment falls. We see this sequence described by the Lord in *Matthew chapter 24*:

“Immediately AFTER THE TRIBULATION of those days, the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, the powers of the heavens will be shaken (compare Rev.6:12-14), and then the sign of the Son of man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn (compare Rev.6:15,16), and THEY WILL SEE THE SON OF MAN COMING IN THE CLOUDS of the sky with power and great glory. And HE WILL SEND FORTH HIS ANGELS WITH A GREAT TRUMPET AND THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER HIS ELECT FROM THE FOUR WINDS. (This is the sequence described in *1 Thess.4:16*. as well).” (Matt.24:29-31).

That is the rapture of the church that we look forward to, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ - immediately *AFTER* the great tribulation and just *BEFORE* the wrath of God bursts upon this earth.

Jesus will appear as “*the bright Morning Star*” (*Rev.22:16*). at that time to take us up to be with Him. The morning star appears *JUST BEFORE* the sun appears (Christ setting up His kingdom on earth), and *JUST AFTER* the midnight and the period of darkness (the great tribulation). The darkest hour is just before the dawn.

Our Lord further confirmed this by teaching in *Matthew 25:6* that it was “*at midnight*” that there would be a shout, “*Behold, the bridegroom comes*” In the midst of the pitch darkness (midnight) of the tribulation, the shout will arise, “*The Bridegroom is coming*”. And before the sun rises on the earth, those who are ready will be taken up. They shall see Jesus as the ‘*Morning Star*’. At the end of *Rev.6*. we read of what the Old Testament prophets called “*the DAY of the Lord*”. This is called here “*the great DAY of the wrath of God*” (*Rev.6:17*) - a very brief time of judgment upon the earth.

In *Acts 2:17-20*, Peter quotes from the prophet Joel, on the day of Pentecost, saying, “*It shall be in the last days’, God says, ‘that I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all mankind; and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions .. and I will grant wonders in the sky above, and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD shall come.’*”

The pouring out of the Holy Spirit, and the end of the age are brought together there by Joel. And in between *verses 18 and 19* comes this 2000-year period where we can be filled with the Spirit and can partake of the divine nature. What we read of in *verses 17 and 18* is the beginning of this ‘*church age*’. *Verses 19 and 20* then speak about the end of the church age. Because the prophet Joel did not know about the church age which lay between the outpouring of the Spirit and the second coming of Jesus Christ, he called that day, ‘*the great day of the Lord*.’

Why does this final judgment ("the day of the Lord") come upon the earth? Let us look at some Old Testament verses for an answer.

First of all, let us look at *Isa. 13:6- 11*: "Wail, for the day of the Lord is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. Therefore all hands will fall limp, and every man's heart will melt. And they will be terrified, pains and anguish will take hold of them, they will writhe like a woman in labour. (Jesus also spoke of that period as the beginning of birthpangs - *Matt.24:8*)...for the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light; the sun will be dark when they rise. And the moon will not shed its light. **Thus I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud**". So we see that it is mainly because of the pride of man that this final judgment comes. *Pride* is the root from which all the other sins grow. God says, "I will abase the haughtiness of the ruthless" (v. 11).

Let us also consider *Isa. 2:10-21*: "Enter the rock and hide in the dust from the terror of the Lord and from the splendour of His majesty. **The proud look of man will be abased. And the loftiness of man will be humbled...** For the Lord of Hosts will have a day of reckoning against everyone who is proud and lofty, and against everyone who is lifted up that he may be abased... and the pride of man will be humbled and the loftiness of man will be abased. And the Lord alone will be exalted in that day".

Notice again that the judgment of the Lord is against "PRIDE". Man's pride and exaltation are going to be brought low. Men commit many sins, but it is primarily the pride of man that is highlighted as the thing that God is going to judge in 'the day of the Lord.'

In the midst of a section on the day of the Lord, in *Isaiah 3:10,11*, God says, "Say to the righteous that it will go well with them...Woe to the wicked! It will go badly with him."

Consider also *Zephaniah 1:14*: "Near is the great day of the Lord, near and coming quickly. Listen, the day of the Lord! In it the warrior cries out bitterly." And then the prophet says in *Zephaniah 2:3*: "Seek the Lord, all you humble of the earth who have carried out His commandments. Seek righteousness. Seek humility. Perhaps you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger". Certainly the humble will be hidden.

We see from all these passages that whenever the Old Testament prophets prophesied about the coming of the Lord, they always said that it was going to come as a judgment on *the proud*. It is the humble who are going to escape. And if you were to ask me who are going to be raptured, I will say, "Those who have learned during their earthly life, *before* the Lord returns, to humble themselves." We are told to "seek humility and you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger."

In *Zephaniah 3:11-13,17*, we are told: "**In that day, I will remove from your midst your proud, exulting ones. But I will leave among you a humble and lowly people**, and they will take refuge in the name of the Lord. The remnant of Israel will do no wrong and tell no lies, nor will a deceitful tongue be found in their mouths. The Lord your God is in your midst a victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy."

This is a promise given to the *humble*. Not everyone can claim that "The Lord my God is rejoicing over me", but only those who have responded to the earlier exhortation to *seek humility* and who have humbled themselves. In confirmation of what we have just considered, look at *Revelation 6:15*, and see the *seven* categories of people who are going to hide in the caves, rocks and mountains when Jesus comes in glory: "Kings, great men, commanders, the rich, the strong man and the free man" - six categories of great people -*and every slave*".

It is the proud exulting ones who are going to be humbled in that day. That is why it is very important for us to learn from Jesus in these days what He urged us to learn: "Learn from Me," He said, "for I am gentle and humble in heart". He is coming only for such disciples of His.

Let us now look at a New Testament passage about the day of the Lord, *1 Thess. 5:1-6* says, "Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need for anything to be written to you. For you yourself know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying,

'Peace and safety!', then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness.'

Do you know what it means to be a son of the light and of the day? It means to partake of Jesus' humility - the Divine nature. To belong to the darkness, on the other hand, means to exalt oneself like the prince of darkness has done from the time he fell.

The Antichrist will finally be the head of all those who exalt themselves. And Jesus will be the Head of all those who humble themselves.

Those who live in humility will never be in darkness and the coming of the Lord will not come upon them like a thief. They will not be surprised by His coming, because they are always ready for Him, having learnt the way of humbling themselves - the new and living way that Jesus opened.

CHAPTER SEVEN

V.1-8: After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind should blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, 'Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the bond servants of our God on their foreheads.' And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, from the tribe of Zebulon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand were sealed.

Here we see this phrase again, "After this" or "After these things". We saw this phrase as the beginning of a new section in *Rev.4:1*.

In *Chapter 7* we find *verses 1 and 9* beginning with this phrase.

The first section (*v.1-8*) deals with Israel: "*I heard the number..... 144,000 sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel*" (*v.4*).

The second section (*v.9-17*) deals with the church. "*From every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.*"

The godly remnant in Israel is protected during the time of wrath, but the church itself is raptured to stand before the Lord. Just before the wrath of God is poured out on the earth, the dead in Christ will rise and along with the living ones will be taken up to meet the Lord in the air to welcome Him back to earth - like a bride going out to welcome her bridegroom. They stand "*before the throne and before the Lamb*" (*v.9*).

In Israel, there will be at that time, a godly remnant who have not become Christians. The Lord will protect them from His wrath. In *verse 2*, we read of an angel coming to seal these Israelites.

In *Daniel 12:1* we read about this angel: "*Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since*

there was a nation until that time. And at that time, your people, every one who is found written in the book, will be rescued”.

There seems to be a close connection between the archangel Michael and the children of Israel. He will arise at the time when the wrath of God is going to be poured out upon this earth - a time of terrible distress - to seal and protect the God-fearing Israelites.

In *Daniel 12:2-4*, we read that those who died in faith in Old Testament times, will also arise along with the church and be raptured: *“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground (those who have died) will awake, some to everlasting life, and others to disgrace and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.”*

Many people feel that as far as God is concerned, His purpose for Israel is finished with the coming of Jesus Christ. But that is not true, as we read clearly in *Romans 11*. After explaining the gospel of salvation in *Chap.1 to 8*, the Holy Spirit explains about Israel in *Chap.9-11*. This is New Testament teaching, and not Old Testament teaching. *“God has not rejected His people of Israel, has He? May it never be!”* (*Rom.11:1*). (That, by the way, is the same expression the Spirit uses in *Rom.6:1,2*: *“Shall we sin again? May it never be!”*) Just as in Elijah’s day there was a remnant of 7000 people, there will also be in the last days, *“a remnant according to God’s gracious choice”* (*Rom.11:2-5*).

When Jesus returns, there will be a Godfearing remnant in the nation of Israel. If they had put their trust in Christ they would have become a part of the church in which there is no distinction between Jews and non-Jews. But these did not recognise Jesus Christ as their Messiah.

“If the rejection of Israel has resulted in the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?” (*Rom.11:15*). The whole world has had the opportunity to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ when Israel was rejected. Then when Israel is accepted back again, the earth is going to experience something like a resurrection. The wild animals will become tame again. Thorns and thistles will disappear.

*“If you (Gentiles) were cut off from a wild olive tree and you were grafted contrary to nature to a cultivated olive tree, (into the chosen people of God), how much more shall these who are the natural branches (the Jews) be grafted into their own olive tree? I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery lest you become wise in your estimation that a **partial** hardening has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in”* (*v.25*).

“The fulness of the Gentiles” refers to those whose names are written in the book of life among the nations of the earth. And when the last person whose name is written in the Lamb’s book of life is gathered in, it will be time for the rapture and time for the hardening to go away from this Godfearing remnant in Israel. We must not be ignorant of this fact. *“The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable”* (*v. 29*). God never changes. He called the nation of Israel once. He will never change His mind about them.

Look back at *Rev. 6:13*. There we read, *“The stars of the sky fell to the earth as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind”*. The stars falling from the sky are pictured as a fig tree shaking off its unripe figs. Immediately after that, we read about Israel in *Rev.7:1-8*. The fig tree is a picture of Israel. Then we read about *“four angels standing at the four corners of the earth”* (*Rev.7:1*). The four corners refer to ‘north, south, east and west’. The Lord has brought back the Jews to the land of Israel from all corners of the earth.

In the Old Testament, David is a picture of Jesus Christ Who overcame Satan (Goliath). And the initial part of Solomon’s rule before he became an idolater is a picture of the future reign of Jesus Christ on earth for a thousand years. *‘Solomon’* means *‘peaceable’*, and in Solomon’s time, *“Judah and Israel lived in safety, every man under his vine and fig tree”* (*1 Kings 4:25*). The vine and fig tree mentioned here were two symbols used to represent Israel in the Old Testament.

Jesus said in *Jn.15:1*: “*I am the true vine*”. But He never said, “*I am the true fig tree*”. We in the church are now part of the vine. But the fig tree remains as Israel.

When Jesus comes to rule on the earth, “*the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established as the chief of the mountains and the word of the Lord will go forth from Jerusalem. And He will judge between many peoples. Nation will not lift up sword against nation and never again will they train for war* (during the 1000-year reign of Christ) *and each of them will “sit under his vine and under his fig tree”* (*Mic.4:1-4*).

In *Deut. 32:8*, we read about God giving the nations their inheritance. “*The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it*” (*1 Cor. 10:26*). And because the earth is the Lord’s, He has apportioned different parts of the earth to different people. “*When He separated the sons of Adam, He set the boundaries of all the nations. But first of all, He set the boundary for the sons of Israel.*” (*Deut.32:8*).

The Lord had told Abraham, “*I am going to give your descendants this land, from the river of Egypt to the River Euphrates*” (*Gen.15:18*). That was the land God had promised Israel and that was the land over which Solomon ruled when he was king of Israel. And that is the land which will once again become Israel’s possession when Jesus reigns on the earth.

In *Gen.35:9-12*, we read that God appeared to Jacob and told him, “*Your name is Jacob. You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name...The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give it to you, and to your descendants after you*”. This gives us a clear answer. The whole earth belongs to God. And God has said, “*I have given this land to the descendants of Jacob*”.

In *Joel 1:12* we read, “*The vine dries up and the fig tree wastes away*”. That was the beginning of the decline of Israel which was completed soon after Christ ascended to heaven. But then we read further in *Joel 2:22*, “*After the Lord has done the work, the fig tree and the vine have yielded in full*”. The fig tree that wasted away starts blossoming again.

There are many promises in the Old Testament that we can apply to ourselves *spiritually*. But they will also be *literally* fulfilled in the nation of Israel before Jesus establishes His kingdom on earth. *Joel 2:28* says, “*It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit upon all mankind, And your sons and daughters shall prophesy. Your old men will see dreams. I will pour out My Spirit in those days. The sun will turn into darkness, the moon into blood before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes*”. The first part of this was fulfilled *spiritually* on the day of Pentecost when the first disciples were baptised in the Holy Spirit. It will be *literally* fulfilled in Israel when the day of the Lord comes.

In *Mk. 11:12-14,20*, we read that Jesus saw a *fig tree* once and when He came close to it looking for fruit, all He saw were leaves, for it was not the season for figs. And He cursed it saying, “*May no one ever eat fruit from you again*”. The next day the disciples saw the fig tree withered up. That action of our Lord’s was a prophecy that could be interpreted like this: “*Jesus came to the nation of Israel to look for fruit for the glory of God. But all that He saw were leaves of religious rituals and no fruit. Jesus cursed Israel. But the nation did not wither away immediately. In fact it looked as if nothing happened. But by the next day (40 years later) it had dried up completely*”.

At the completion of His ministry, Jesus walked out of the temple saying, “*Your house is left to you desolate. Jerusalem, Jerusalem, I wanted to call you, but you did not know the time of your visitation. Henceforth you will not see Me until you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord’*” (*Matt.23:37-39*). The fig tree was cursed.

Jesus Christ was crucified in the year 29 AD or 30 AD. The Jews then cried out saying, “*His blood be on us and on our children*” (*Matt.27:25*). God took them at their word and forty years later in 70 AD, the Roman army entered Jerusalem under General Titus and destroyed the temple. The Jews were then scattered to the ends of the earth. But that was not the end of the fig tree.

Once the disciples of Jesus asked Him about His return saying, “*What will be THE sign?*” (*Mark 13:4*). Jesus replied saying, “*Learn this parable from the fig tree*” (*Mark13:28*). Notice that He told us to *learn* something! Just like Jesus told us to learn gentleness and humility from Him (*Matt.11:29*), He also told us

to *learn from the fig tree*. So it is important for the church to know about Israel - the fig tree which Jesus cursed and which dried up in the morning.

What are we to learn from the fig tree? Jesus said, “*When its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves you know that summer is near. Even so, you too, when you see these things happening, recognise that He is near, right at the door. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place*” (Mk13:28-30) Which generation was Jesus referring to? Obviously the generation which sees the fig tree (Israel) budding again! He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

The fruit has not yet come in Israel. They are not converted and there is no fruit for the glory of God. But the fig tree has started putting forth its leaves. In Lk. 13:6-9, Jesus spoke a parable about a man who had a fig tree and who came looking for fruit on it but did not find any. That too was about Israel. So the master said to the gardener, “*Cut it down. Why is it wasting the ground? Why is it occupying the land?*” The gardener pleaded saying, “*Let it alone Sir. Let me try for a little more time. And next year if you still don't find any fruit, then cut it down*”. So Israel was spared for 40 years and then cut down. But now it has started budding again.

But very few in Israel are God-fearing. The Lord once showed Jeremiah two baskets of figs. One basket had good figs while the other had rotten figs (Jer.24:1-3). Today in Israel, most of the figs are rotten. But there are also a few good figs, who will form part of that remnant of 144,000 that we read of above. We see one example of that in Jn.1:47. Jesus said about Nathaniel, “*Here is an Israelite in whom there is no guile (no rottenness).*” Nathaniel asked the Lord, “*How do You know me?*” Jesus answered and said, “*I saw you when you were under the fig tree!*” Nathaniel was a good fig, although unconverted at that time. He is a type of that remnant that will be in Israel in the last days. God has His eye on them and He will gather them together.

Before Israel even entered Canaan, Moses had told them that one day the Lord would scatter them from one end of the earth to the other (Deut.28:64). When God chose Abraham (around 2000 B.C.), He took him to Canaan. God allowed Abraham's descendants to become slaves in Egypt for over 400 years, and then, around 1400 B.C., brought them back to Canaan through Joshua. After Solomon died (900 B.C.), the nation of Israel was split into two. The southern kingdom called itself Judah and the northern kingdom called itself Israel. In 722 B.C., the Assyrians came and conquered Israel (the northern nation) and took them captive. Israel then ceased to exist. Later, in 586 B.C., Babylon, under Nebuchadnezzar, came and conquered Judah (the southern kingdom), and took them also captive. But God had already told them through Jeremiah, “*After 70 years in Babylon you will come back to your land*” (Jer.29:10). Exactly 70 years later the Jews came back. They built their temple in the days of Ezra, Haggai and Zechariah.

But in all those years, Israel was never scattered to *all the nations of the earth*. They had been taken to Assyria and to Babylon but they came back. But Moses prophesied of a time when they would be scattered from one end of the earth to the other. This happened only in 70 A.D. After the Jews had crucified Jesus, God gave them 40 years to repent. But they did not repent. Then He scattered them to all the corners of the earth.

But Moses also prophesied saying, “*Then the Lord your God will restore you from captivity and will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you. If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back. And the Lord your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers*” (Deut. 30:3-5). That is what has happened in our time. The fig tree has begun to blossom. Israel has been gathered back from the four corners of the earth.

Isaiah prophesied saying, “*On that day that the Lord will again recover the second time the remnant of His people who will remain in Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath and from the islands of the sea. And He will lift up a standard for the nations and will assemble the banished ones of Israel (the northern kingdom), and will gather the dispersed of Judah (the southern kingdom) from the four*

corners of the earth" (*Isa.11:11,12*). The first time the Lord brought Israel back was after their 70 years of captivity in Babylon. The second time was in this century.

This passage in *Isaiah* is connected with the millennium, when "*the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the kid, and the nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra.*" (*Isa.11:6-8*). The animals will no longer be wild when Jesus reigns on the earth. But that could happen only after Israel had come back into her land. So we can say that Jesus could not have returned to earth until Israel had come back to the land and occupied the city of Jerusalem. On May 14, 1948, Israel declared itself to be a nation. In June 1967, they occupied the temple-site in Jerusalem. So Jesus could not have come in 100 A.D. or even in 1900 A.D. The earliest He could have returned was only *after June 1967*.

Another prophecy is in *Ezekiel*, "*I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land*" (*Eze. 36:24*).

Yet another prophecy is found in *Jeremiah*. The Lord told him, "*Have you not observed what this people have spoken saying, 'The two families which the Lord chose (Judah and Israel), He has rejected them? (That is what many people are saying today that God has chosen the church and rejected the Jews). Thus they despise My people, no longer are they as a nation in their sight. But thus says the Lord, 'If My covenant for day and night stand not, and the fixed patterns of heaven and earth I have not established, then I would reject the descendants of Jacob and David My servant, not taking from his descendants rulers over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But I will restore their fortunes and have mercy on them'*" (*Jer.33:23-26*). In other words, as long as there is the cycle of day and night, we can be certain that God has not rejected Israel. That is crystal clear.

The land of Israel was ruled by the Romans (63 B.C. to 313 A.D.), the Byzantine empire (313 to 636 A.D.), the Arabs (636 to 1099 A.D.), the Crusaders (1099 to 1291 A.D.), the Mamluk rulers (1291 to 1516 A.D.), the Ottoman empire (1517 to 1917 A.D.) and finally by the British (1917 to 1948 A.D.).

It is interesting to see how various people through the centuries tried unsuccessfully to get the Jews back to their land. In the 4th century A.D., the Roman emperor Julian promised the Jews that he would build their temple. But each time he tried to build the temple, some calamity would take place and he would not be able to build it. Why? Because God's time had not yet come. In the 16th and 17th centuries A.D., three Jewish leaders tried to bring the Jews back to their land. They also did not succeed. Why? Because God's time had still not come. At the end of the 19th century, Benjamin Disraeli (a Jew) became Prime Minister of Great Britain. He too promised to bring the Jews back to Palestine. But just before he could do it, he was voted out as Prime Minister. In 1917, Lord Balfour of England, put forth what is known as "*The Balfour Declaration*". promising Palestine to the Jews. But because England wanted to please the Arabs, she went back on her word to the Jews for 30 years. Finally, when God's time came, He used one of the greatest enemies of the Jews, Adolf Hitler, to help fulfil His purpose. Hitler was inspired by Satan to kill over 6 million Jews. But that resulted in Jews everywhere fleeing to the nation of Palestine for refuge, and there they established their homeland, some four years after Hitler's death.

In *Jeremiah 16:14-16*, this exodus to Israel is prophesied. There God said, "*The days are coming when it will no longer be said, 'As the Lord lives Who brought up the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt', but it will be said, 'As the Lord lives Who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of the north (Hitler's land, Germany is north of Israel) and from all the other countries where He had banished them.' For I will restore them to their own land. (And how was He going to bring them back?) I am going to send for many fishermen and THEY WILL FISH FOR THEM; and afterwards I shall send for many hunters, and THEY WILL HUNT THEM from every mountain and every hill, and every cleft of the rocks*".

First of all, God would get *fishermen* (friends of Israel) to draw them to Israel with attractive baits. When that didn't succeed sufficiently, He would send *hunters* (enemies of Israel) to chase them out from every nook and corner and make them flee to Israel. Notice the amazing sovereignty of God that used both the *friends* and *enemies* of Israel to fulfil His purposes.

Consider another interesting verse. *Isaiah 43:5,6* says, “*Do not fear, for I am with you’, says the Lord, ‘I will bring your offspring from the east* (that includes India from where many Jews have gone back to Israel), *and gather you from the west* (that includes England and America). **BUT I WILL SAY TO THE NORTH, ‘GIVE THEM UP’ AND I WILL SAY TO THE SOUTH ‘DO NOT HOLD THEM BACK’**”.

Notice the different expressions used here. There was never any problem about Jews migrating from the East or from the West, so the Lord uses the phrases, “*I will bring them and gather them*”. But when it comes to the north (Russia), He says, “*I will tell them that they had better GIVE THEM UP!*” This was because Russia did not allow the Jews to emigrate. But the Lord destroyed Communism in Russia and thus made Russia send 600,000 Jews to Israel after 1990. And when it comes to the countries south of Israel, the Lord warns them **NOT TO HOLD THEM BACK**. This was because those countries also did not permit the Jews to emigrate to Israel. Yet the Lord brought them from there too. It is an amazing story how every single Jew from the country of Oman - 43,000 of them - came back to the nation of Israel in 1948 and in the following years. 30,000 Jews were brought back from Ethiopia through two amazing operations conducted by Israel in 1984 and 1991. All this was an exact fulfilment of Biblical prophecy.

The Lord has also said in *Amos 9:15* that once He has planted the Jews a second time in the land of Israel, they would never again be rooted out from that land. So Israel will stay forever in their own land. And that will not be by the help of any super-power, but *by the power of the Lord*.

Another verse that is relevant to the time in which we are living is *Zechariah 10:9,10*: “*When I scatter them among the peoples, they will remember Me in far countries, and they with their children will live and come back. I will bring them back from the land of Egypt and gather them from Assyria, and I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon until no room can be found for them*”.

Here we are told that the number of immigrants will be so large that no room will be found for them. This is why Israel is constantly building new settlements for its immigrants. Not enough room can be found for them! The word of God is up-to-date! God is *giving back* to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all the land which He gave to their fathers 3000 years ago. No-one can play the fool with God.

The amazing thing is that in all these 19 centuries of their dispersion, the Jews *did not get assimilated* with the people of various countries. They have always remained distinct, unlike any other people on the face of the earth. After 19 centuries they are still Jews. They have been like the prophet Jonah. The Jews scattered into all nations have been like Jonah in the whale’s belly. The whale tried to digest Jonah for three days. But it did not succeed and finally spewed him out on the Israeli coast. In the same way, all nations tried to digest the Jews for 2000 years, but did not succeed. Finally they threw them back into the land of Israel.

In *Revelation 7:1-8*, we see how God protects His people in the last days. This remnant of 144,000 people are like Nathaniel who did not initially believe that Jesus was the Messiah. But when Nathaniel saw Him, he believed. There are going to be people like Nathaniel in Israel in the last days - Godfearing people - who do not believe that Jesus is the Messiah until they see Him in glory. The number of 144,000 is only symbolic of a small number and not literal. These people are going to be protected from the wrath of God that is going to fall upon the world at that time. In Egypt, when the Israelites were being harassed by Pharaoh (a type of the Antichrist), they were protected from the plagues (judgment) that God sent on Egypt. God’s judgment fell on Egypt, but it did not touch Israel. In Babylon, when Nebuchadnezzar (another type of the Antichrist) forced everyone to bow down to his image, there were three Jews (a type of the remnant) who refused and who were put into a flaming furnace. But the fire could not harm them. Even so God will preserve His godly remnant in the last days. They will be sealed and protected.

“*Say to the righteous, it will go well with them*” (*Isa. 3:10*). It will always go well with humble, Godfearing people.

V.9,10: After these things I looked and behold a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the

Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice saying, ‘Salvation to our God Who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.’

This is the church - which includes Jews and Gentiles who are born again. And this is the time when the church is raptured to meet the Lord in the air.

In *Song of Solomon 2:10*, the bridegroom says to the bride, “*Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come along.*” Why ? Because “**the fig tree has ripened its figs**” (v.13). That call is going to come from the Bridegroom (Christ) to the Bride (the church) one of these days. So that is why Jesus told us to learn from the fig tree. Then we will be ready for His call, “*Arise, my darling, and come*”. The marriage of the Lamb is drawing near.

During the time of judgment, the church is not going to be on the earth. *1 Thess. 5:9.* is clear: “*God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

Jesus said that the last days will be like the days of Noah and the days of Lot. Just as Lot was taken out before the judgment fell on Sodom and Gomorrah, and Noah was taken into the ark before the judgment fell on the earth, in the same way, the church will be taken out before judgment falls on the world.

We see the saints here standing with palm branches in their hands. In the Old Testament, the Israelites were told to celebrate the *feast of tabernacles* with palm branches (*Lev.23:40*). All the feasts of Israel had symbolic meanings. The *passover* portrayed the death of Christ and the *feast of tabernacles* pictured the millennial reign of Jesus Christ on this earth. That is the significance of the believers holding palm branches in their hands.

When they cry out saying, “*Salvation to our God*”, what they are saying is, “*Our salvation is entirely due to our God and not due to anything in us*”. They gladly acknowledge that their salvation is by the grace of God and the Lamb. “*They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*” (*Rev.7:14*).

*“I stand upon His merit, I know no other stand -
Not e'en where glory dwelleth, in Immanuel's land”*

Every true child of God will confess when he stands before the Lord that it was only the grace of God and the blood of the Lamb that brought him there.

V.11,12: And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and around the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God saying, ‘Amen. Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen.’

In the book of *Revelation*, in the midst of all the many sevens - 7 churches, 7 seals, 7 trumpets, 7 vials, and 7 thunders - we also have 7 glimpses of worship in heaven. And here is one of those glimpses. We saw two of them earlier in *chapters 4 and 5*.

We see in all these glimpses that people in heaven - the angels, the twenty four elders, and the four living creatures - are always waiting for the slightest opportunity to worship God and to say, “*Hallelujah, praise the Lord!*” How wonderful if we can have this atmosphere in our hearts at all times! We sing in a song, “*Heaven came down and glory filled my soul*”. One mark of heaven coming down into a person’s soul is that he is forever waiting for the slightest excuse to worship God and to praise Him.

The spirit of praise and worship is the spirit of heaven.

So when the believers say, “*Our salvation is due to our God*”, all the millions of angels, the 4 living creatures, and the 24 elders immediately say, “*Yes. Amen. That's right. Let us give glory to this wonderful God*”.

V.13,14: And one of the elders answered saying to me ‘These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and from where have they come ?’ And I said to him, ‘My lord, you know.’ And he said to me, ‘These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Verse 14 teaches very clearly that the church is going to go through the great tribulation and then come “*OUT of it*”. When we say that someone has come *OUT* of a room, we mean that he was in the room and then came *OUT* of it. In Rev.18:4, when God tells His people to come *OUT* of Babylon, He is calling people who are *in* Babylon to come *OUT*. Likewise here, when it says that the believers have “*come OUT of the great tribulation*”, the plain meaning is that they were in the great tribulation and then came *OUT* of it.

It is because the flesh of man does not like tribulation that a doctrine was invented 150 years ago in the Western world that the church would not go through the great tribulation. That is the doctrine that *my* flesh would like to believe too - just like *your* flesh. Everybody’s flesh would like to hear a doctrine that tells us that we are going to have a comfortable time.

BUT THERE IS NOT A SINGLE VERSE IN THE SCRIPTURES THAT TEACHES THAT THE CHURCH WILL ESCAPE THE GREAT TRIBULATION.

God has never promised to protect us from tribulation from man. Throughout the history of the church, the church has always faced tribulation. Even today, more than one-third of the world’s population is under anti-Christian rulers who persecute Christians. And believers are suffering tribulation in these lands. That is not something strange. It has happened for 20 centuries and it is happening right now. It will happen on a wider scale in the future.

Humanly speaking, we may not have the courage to be burnt at the stake or to face lions. Our flesh is fearful and cowardly. But God will give us special grace when that time comes. That is His promise. That is why we do not fear the great tribulation.

We have already seen how John who wrote this book says in Rev.1:9, “*I John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation.*”

If you had told John that tribulation was not for the church, he would have told you that he was going through tribulation himself. The doctrine of a “*pre-tribulational rapture of the church*” originated in comfortable, Western Christianity. No believer living in a country where he is being persecuted, would ever have invented such a doctrine or believed it.

These saints came *OUT* of tribulation triumphantly! They were glad to lay down their own lives and to be slain, counting it a privilege to suffer for the sake of Jesus Christ. And they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. They were cleansed and they were faithful.

V.15: For this reason they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in the temple; and He who sits on the throne shall spread His tabernacle over them.

Only the pure in heart can stand before God and see Him (Matt.5:8). These are pure because they were cleansed in the blood. Therefore they stand before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night. This teaches us that even in eternity there will be some form of service that we will do for the Father. And God Himself will be a covering protection from them. They will have the comforting presence of God, wherever they go.

V.16: They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun beat down on them, nor any heat.

Every unsatisfied longing that we had on earth will be satisfied over there. There will be no heat of any trial or tribulation over there, as there is on earth.

V.17: For the Lamb in the centre of the throne shall be their Shepherd, and shall guide them to the springs of the water of life; and God shall wipe every tear from their eyes.

The Lord will be our Shepherd there in a far deeper and greater way than here on earth. He will guide us to the springs of the water of life - to deeper experiences in the Holy Spirit - far deeper than we can ever have on this earth. And God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. There will be no more sorrow or death.

This is actually a glimpse of what it will be like in eternity. But God gives this vision of grace, before the judgment begins in *Chapter 8*

Again and again in the book of *Revelation*, we find that every glimpse of judgment is preceded by a glimpse of God's grace.

CHAPTER EIGHT

V.1: And when He broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

With the opening of the seventh seal, the judgment of God begins to fall on the earth.

In *Chapter 6*, we saw various riders bringing calamities on the earth. We also saw great tribulation. But we did not see any judgment being poured down *FROM HEAVEN* on the earth.

The church is on earth when five of the six seals are opened - wars, famine, earthquake, pestilence and persecution. But immediately before the judgments of God begin in *Chapter 8*, we find that the church is taken up in *Chapter 7*. And the Godfearing Jews are sealed and protected.

As soon as the seventh seal is opened, there is silence in heaven.

Silence - even for 30 minutes - is so unusual in heaven that it has to be recorded, because the normal atmosphere of heaven is one where praise is rising up to God continuously like the noise of thunders and mighty rivers. John wonders what is happening when everything is quiet.

But here is the reason for the silence: In *Isaiah 28:21,22*, the Lord's decision to carry out "*decisive destruction on all the earth*," is described as His "*unusual task*" and "*extraordinary work*". Judgment is not God's *usual* task or His *ordinary* work. It is a strange work for God. It is not something He delights in. It is something strange and foreign to Him. It is almost as though God is waiting and saying, "I wish the people would repent, so that I won't have to judge them at all."

That is why there is silence. God is not willing that any should perish. His longsuffering is waiting for all men to repent. And there is a pause in heaven. God waits even today, for people to repent before the final judgment comes.

In *Revelation 6*, we saw Jesus opening a scroll. Here we see that scroll fully unrolled - with the opening of the last seal. Until now it was only partially unrolled.

In *Lk.4:16,17* we see Jesus opening another scroll - the scroll of the book of *Isaiah*- in the synagogue in Nazareth. He found the place where *Isa.61:1 and 2* were written and began to read. But he stopped before the end of the second verse. If you compare *Lk. 4:18,19* with *Isa. 61:1,2*, you will find one significant difference. What Jesus read was, "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favourable year of the Lord.*"

Jesus stopped there and did not read the next sentence about "*the day of vengeance (of judgment) of our God*". Notice here that it speaks of the favourable *YEAR* of the Lord - 365 days of favour - and the *DAY* - just 24 hours - of vengeance (judgment)! God is both *kind* and *severe*. But His kindness is 365 times greater than His severity! That is how He wants us to be too.

The Lord is also trying to impress upon us here that He is longsuffering and patient and that the age of grace is a long, long period. Jesus stopped with “*the favourable year*” - the year of grace that has now extended for nearly 2000 years. And then He left the rest unread and rolled up the scroll (*Lk. 4:20*).

But when we come to *Rev. 8:1*, we see that God has waited long enough - 2000 years. But He still waits for a little more time here. One day is with the Lord as 1000 years. So the 30 minutes of silence would be about 20 years. God waits. He is waiting so that people will repent. But finally when they don’t, then Jesus opens up the rest of the scroll and reads that last sentence too: “*The day of vengeance of our God has come.*”

V.2: I saw the seven angels who stand before God; and seven trumpets were given to them.

We need not think of the seven trumpets as seven different trumpets. When we saw the seven lamps of fire, which typified the seven Spirits of God (*Rev. 4:5*), we saw that they were not seven *different* Holy Spirits but the *seven-fold* Holy Spirit. Even so here, this is one trumpet - *the last trumpet- seven-fold in its duration.*

The significance of this trumpet is seen in *1 Cor. 15:51,52*: “*Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep* (we shall not all die; some will die, but not all), *but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.* (when the church is raptured).”

What we read in *Rev. 8:2*, is the beginning of that *last* seven-fold trumpet. That trumpet will sound and “*the dead will be raised imperishable and we shall be changed*” (*1 Cor. 15:52*), as we saw in *Rev. 7*. The last trumpet sounds immediately after the great tribulation, and the church is caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

When the last trumpet is blown, in the twinkling of an eye (and how long does it take to blink) in a moment, we will be transformed and we will be gone from the earth. And as soon as the church is gone, the judgments will begin to fall on the earth.

In *Numbers 10* we see seven reasons why trumpets were used in the camp of Israel. We can relate those to the sevenfold trumpet here:

- (1) To summon the congregation (*v.2*). To call the church to meet the Lord in the air.
- (2) To make the camps set out on a journey (*v.2*). The last journey the church will make will be from earth up to the presence of the Lord in the air.
- (3) To blow an alarm (*v.5*). To inform the world that something serious is about to happen.
- (4) To indicate that a war has begun (*v.9*). The war between God and ungodly people (headed by the Antichrist) has begun.
- (5) To indicate a day of gladness (*v.10*). The church is full of gladness because she is going to see her Lord face to face.
- (6) To proclaim a feast (*v.10*). The marriage feast of the Lamb has begun.
- (7) To proclaim the first day of the month (*v.10*). The church is making a new beginning.

V.3,4: And another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand.

We saw earlier in *Rev. 5:8*, about the prayers of the saints accomplishing something. We see it again here in *Rev. 8:3*- especially this prayer, “*Our Father, let Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven*”. People have prayed that prayer for hundreds and hundreds of years. It is now going to be answered.

Incense was added to the prayers of the saints. The incense is the Name of Jesus Christ. That Name is “*like ointment poured forth*” (*Song 1:3*), like a sweet smelling incense. It is when that Name is added to our prayers that our prayers ascend before the Father and bring an answer. I am not referring to a meaningless repetition of the Name of Jesus, but a spiritual entering in, to the value and the worth there is in that Name, because of Who He is and what He has done for us on Calvary’s cross. In that Name, we are acceptable to God.

By itself, our prayers cannot ascend before God. But when we come in the Name of Jesus Christ, our prayers are accepted by the Father - *just as much as Jesus' own prayers were accepted by Him.*

As soon as these prayers ascend - the multiplied prayers of millions of saints in thousands of years - the result is seen in *Rev. 8:5*. There is an immediate answer.

V.5: And the angel took the censer; and he filled it with the fire of the altar and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

This is symbolic language to teach us that although God waited for a long time to answer those many prayers of ours, when He does begin to answer them, it is going to be quick and powerful! And He will do a mighty job and a thorough job!

If He waits and waits, it is only because He is very patient with unrepentant sinners.

V.6,7: And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them. And the first sounded, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the earth was burnt up, and a third of the trees were burnt up, and all the green grass was burnt up.

The first judgment destroys the greenery and the forests on earth, causing ecological and environmental problems for man.

V.8,9: And the second angel sounded and something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown down into the sea; and a third of the sea became blood. and a third of the creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

The second judgment pollutes the sea and kills millions of fish.

V.10,11: And the third angel sounded, and a great star fell down from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of waters; and the name of the star is called Wormwood; and a third of the waters became wormwood; and many men died from the waters, because they were made bitter.

The third judgment poisons the water-springs and rivers on earth.

In *Jeremiah 9:13-15*, the Lord says, “*Because they have forsaken My law which I set before them, and have not obeyed My voice nor walked according to it, but have walked after the stubbornness of their heart and after their idols, therefore I will feed the people with Wormwood and give them poisoned water to drink*”. The reason for this judgment is man’s stubbornness, idolatry and disobedience.

In *Jeremiah 23:9-15*, the Lord says, “*As for the prophets....the land is full of adulterers....both prophet and priest are polluted....among the prophets I have seen a horrible thing...committing adultery, and walking in falsehood and they strengthen the hands of evildoers....Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the prophets, 'I am going to feed them Wormwood.'*”

The preachers were living in sin and not turning the people away from their sins. This is the condition of a lot of Christendom today. So God decides to feed them with Wormwood too.

This star could possibly also refer to a fallen angel, a demon named ‘Wormwood’ that is permitted to torture and trouble people.

V.12: And the fourth angel sounded and a third of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars were smitten, so that a third of them might be darkened and the day might not shine for a third of it, and the night in the same way.

Here we see God’s judgment preventing the heavenly bodies from giving light on the earth.

These four judgments that fall on the earth are similar in many ways to the plagues that God sent on Egypt. But notice here the fact that only one-third of each category is affected by the judgments. God is gracious. He is still waiting, hoping that some will turn from their sins. He does not want to bring a total end to everything in one blow.

V.13: And I looked, and I heard an eagle flying in midheaven, saying ‘Woe, woe, woe, to those who dwell on the earth, of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound.

Notice that the woes are pronounced on “*earth-dwellers*”- that is, on those whose minds are set on things below, whose interests are on this earth.

If you call yourself a believer, and yet your interests are on this earth, then this woe applies to you.

A true disciple of Jesus will have his mind set on the things above. This world is not his home and he is a pilgrim and a stranger here. The judgments of God are for *those who have made their permanent home on this earth.*

CHAPTER NINE

V.1-11: And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him. And he opened the bottomless pit; and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit. And out of the smoke came forth locusts upon the earth; and power was given to them, as the scorpions of the earth have power. And they were told that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. And they were not permitted to kill anyone, but to torment them for five months; and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man. And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; and they will long to die and death flees from them. And the appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle; and on their heads, as it were, crowns like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. And they had hair like the hair of women, and their teeth were like the teeth of lions. And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to battle. And they had tails like scorpions and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt men for five months. They have as king over them, an angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon.

This star is clearly a fallen angel, most probably Satan. This fallen angel was given the key of the bottomless pit where some demons are locked up by God (as we read in *(1 Pet.3:19)*). All demons are not there. Most demons have freedom to roam around on the earth. Remember the man with a legion of demons whom Jesus met? The demons within that man pleaded with Jesus not to send them into the bottomless pit. Jesus granted their request and sent them into the 2000 pigs that ran into the sea. But one day the bottomless pit is going to be opened. And the demons that are locked up there are going to be released on to the face of the earth.

That is part of the judgment that God is going to allow upon the face of this earth, as though the Lord says to the people, “You wanted to follow the advice of the devil. You wanted to obey the devil’s words rather than Mine. All right. Here are all your friends who are going to visit you now, the whole lot of them from the bottomless pit.” That is what we see here.

The smoke from the pit is the filth and muck of the unclean spirits. The locusts are the evil spirits who are granted power to poison men’s minds and torment them even as the scorpions of the earth have power to

poison men's bodies. The torment of these demons will be so bad that many people will want to die, but they will not be able to commit suicide!!

The description of the demons is terrifying - terrifying faces, flying hair like that of mad women and the teeth of lions - all pictures to show us how horrible it is going to be for those who will be tormented by these demons. But they are given permission to hurt men only for five months. Why only for five months? Because God is merciful.

Jesus told a story in *Matt.18:23-35*. of a man who was forgiven forty million rupees by a king, who would not then forgive his fellow servant a paltry sum of forty rupees. This unmerciful man caught his fellow servant by the throat and said, "Pay up." And when the king heard it he was angry and handed the unmerciful servant over to the torturers. Those torturers symbolise demons who are permitted to torment unmerciful believers today. For Jesus said, "*So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.*" (v.35)

This is something serious, and I don't want anyone's blood on my hands. If you who are reading this, (whether you call yourself a believer or Spirit-baptized or whatever) have not forgiven even one person anywhere in the world, I want to warn you (no matter how long you may have considered yourself to be a "believer") that you will certainly not enter the kingdom of God. You will certainly not be taken up when Jesus comes. You will instead be handed over to these demons who have the sting of a scorpion. That is as clear as black and white to me, because I believe the words of the Lord Jesus. That man who was handed over to the torturers was a man who was once forgiven. But his master withdrew that forgiveness, because he would not forgive someone else. God will not hesitate to hand over such a man to the demons. That is why I would plead with you earnestly, "Get rid of your bitterness (your Wormwood). Forgive everyone freely. Your heavenly Father will not forgive you if you do not forgive even one human being on the face of the earth."

The name of the angel of the bottomless pit, *Abaddon* or *Apollyon*, means "*Destroyer*". That describes in one word Satan's purpose for man - to destroy him with lust or an unforgiving attitude.

Jesus spoke of scorpions in *Lk.10:19* to symbolise the powers of darkness. He said to His disciples, "*I have given you authority over serpents and scorpions to tread upon them.*" The demons can only harm those who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. Spiritually speaking, you can't have that seal on your forehead if you haven't forgiven others.

V.12-17: The first woe is past; behold, two woes are still coming after these things. And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, 'Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.' And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they might kill a third of mankind. And the number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them. And this is how I saw in the vision of the horses and those who sat on them; the riders had breastplates the colour of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone; and the heads of the horses are like lions; and out of their mouth proceed fire and smoke and brimstone.

The River Euphrates mentioned here is a very broad river that flows down through Iraq. Four demons have been bound at that river. These are demons whose main aim is to stir men to go to war against each other. The Middle East is going to be the centre of constant war in the last days. There was a long war there between Iraq and Iran for nearly 9 years and later between Iraq and the Western powers. But all that is nothing compared to what is going to take place around the River Euphrates in the future. As soon as the four demons are released, a great war will start which is described more fully in *Chapter 16*. We read here that the exact hour and day and month and year have already been determined by God.

200 million fierce demons are let loose on the face of the earth at that time to possess 200 million soldiers and to incite them to war. Jesus spoke about hell as a place of fire and brimstone. Here we see demons bringing that atmosphere to people on earth.

V.18: A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone, which proceed out of their mouths.

In *Chapter 6:8*, we saw that one-fourth of mankind was already killed by the ‘ashen horse’ ridden by ‘Death’. Now a further one-third of the remaining population of the world is killed. That reduces the world’s population to half of what it was originally.

V.19: For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents and have heads; and with them they do harm.

God is using various symbols here to teach us the horrible nature of these demons. It is horrible to expose oneself to demons and ignore the warnings of the Word of God. When Eve listened to Satan in the garden of Eden, she opened the door for the influx of demons into the human race. Jesus has come to enable us to shut that door. But it is *WE* who have to make that choice. We are warned in *Eph. 4:27* not to give *ANY PLACE* to the devil. If we don’t give any place to the devil in our lives, we can live a life of perfect rest in God on this earth, even in the midst of many trials and sorrows.

V.20,21: And the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. And they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts.

Even after seeing half the world’s population wiped out, people still do not repent. Jesus once told a true story of a rich man who went to hell. Lazarus the beggar who sat at his gate however went to heaven. When the rich man went to hell, he asked Abraham to send Lazarus back to earth to tell his five brothers to *repent* (*Lk 16:30*). That rich man realized when he went to hell that people go to hell *not* because they are sinners but because they *do not repent of their sins*.

What were the sins men continued to indulge in?

First of all, *idolatry*- worshipping idols made of gold and silver, and the idols of money, position and earthly honour.

Then *murder*- which includes hatred. They did not repent of their hatred and bitterness and murder.

Then *sorceries*- Satan-worship has increased in the twentieth century much more than at any time in the history of the world. Sorcery also includes astrology, palm reading, fortune-telling, reading what the stars foretell for the week, ouija boards, tarot cards etc., etc., The Greek word for sorcery is ‘*pharmakeia*’ from which we get the English word ‘*pharmacy*’. You could therefore translate this word as ‘*sellers of drugs*’ too. People did not repent of selling harmful drugs like cocaine and marijuana and heroin that destroyed others.

Then *immorality*- that is their adultery and fornication, which have all increased tremendously in the world in the last 50 years since the advent of television, video-tapes and pornography on the Internet.

And finally *stealing* - taking things that do not belong to them.

The reason why men do not repent even when they see half the world’s population wiped out is because their hearts have been hardened.

He who has ears to hear let him hear.

CHAPTER TEN

V.1-3: And I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven, clothed with a cloud; and the rainbow was on his head, and his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire; and he had in his hand a little book which was open. And he placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land; and he cried out with a loud voice, as when a lion roars; and when he had cried out, the seven peals of thunder uttered their voices.

The angel referred to here is obviously an archangel since he has this powerful appearance. The rainbow upon his head is a symbol of God's grace. He had a little book open. This book was sealed in *Chapter 5*. Now all the seven seals have been opened, and the book is open.

V.4: And when the seven peals of thunder had spoken, I was about to write; and I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Seal up the things which the seven peals of thunder have spoken, and do not write them.'

John clearly heard what the seven peals of thunder had spoken. And he was about to write it down. If he had, that too would have become a part of the book of *Revelation* at this particular point.

But for some reason, God told him not to write it down. I don't know what those thunders spoke and I don't want to speculate. But considering the seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven bowls of wrath that come later in *Chapter 16*, I certainly don't think it was anything pleasant. It was probably something just as terrible as all these others.

This also teaches us that there are certain things that God speaks to us personally that we should *not* share with others, since they are meant for us alone.

V.5,6: And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and the land, lifted up his right hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things in it, and the earth and the things in it, and the sea and the things in it, that there shall be delay no longer.

In *Revelation*, the sea is always spoken of separately from the earth. *Gen. 1:1* says that "*In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth*". The sea was not created in the beginning. It was created later. The sea has something to do with evil spirits and demons. We will look at that later. Here the angel swears by the One who created heaven, the earth and the sea that there will be no more delay - the work of judgment will be completed quickly.

V.7: But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets.

Once the seventh of the seven-fold trumpet is sounded, the '*mystery of God*' will be finished. What is this mystery of God? In the New Testament, the word '*mystery*' occurs a number of times. It means a secret which cannot be understood without God's revelation. It is *not* a secret that cannot be understood at all, but one that only God can reveal. The mysteries mentioned in the New Testament can basically be summed up under two heads:

- (1) The mystery of godliness (*1 Tim. 3:16*); and
- (2) The mystery of iniquity (*2 Thess. 2:7*).

The mystery of godliness is *the truth*. The mystery of iniquity is *the lie*.

The "*mystery of godliness*" can be divided into *three* parts.

- (a) The *first* part of this mystery of godliness is mentioned in *1 Tim.3:16*. In the previous verse, the church is called "*the pillar and support of the truth*" (v.15). Of which truth? The one mentioned in the next verse: "*Great is the mystery of godliness, Christ was manifest in the flesh and was pure in the spirit, beheld by the angels, proclaimed among the nations*". The essential message here is that Jesus Christ came as a Man like us and was yet pure in His spirit. So we too need not sin. We can walk as He walked. (*1 Jn.2:6*). That is '*the truth*.' The church is to be a pillar upholding this truth! But unfortunately the church through the ages has not held up this truth.

- (b) The *second* part of the mystery of godliness is mentioned in *Eph.5:31,32. 1 Tim. 3:16*, referred to a *great* mystery. Here too we see a *great* mystery - the mystery of Christ and the church being one flesh. Jesus Christ has now got a bride (the church) - who also walks as He walked, keeping her spirit pure.
- (c) The *third* part of the mystery is mentioned in *1 Cor. 15:51,52*, where we are told how we will be transformed into the likeness of Christ in the twinkling of an eye, when Jesus comes and the last trumpet sounds.

Now we come to "*the mystery of iniquity*" (*2 Thess.2:7*)- which is basically that Satan also manifests himself in the flesh - finally as the Antichrist.

In *verses 9-11*, we read of Satan working through the spirit of the antichrist with lying signs and wonders and the deception of wickedness to deceive people. We also read of God sending a deluding influence upon those who *don't* receive the love of the truth so as to be saved - "*so that they might all believe THE LIE*" (*v.11 - Literal*).

What is the lie referred to here? It is the lie that Satan told Eve in the garden of Eden: "*You can sin and get away with it. God won't punish you*".

That is the greatest lie that Satan has deceived the world with. Even many believers believe that lie of Satan!! The mystery of iniquity is that this lie has worked and worked and drawn many into deception. This culminates in false Christendom giving Satan a bride - Babylon! She also is called *a mystery* in *Rev.17:5*, just as the church is called a mystery.

The false church can be identified by this mark that it proclaims Satan's lie that "you can sin and God will not take it seriously".

If ungodly atheists preached that, we could understand it. But how do Christian preachers preach that to their congregations? How are Christians taken up these days with false signs and wonders rather than with holiness. How can they say they have been filled with the *HOLY Spirit* and not be *holy*!! This is a mystery indeed - *the mystery of iniquity*. In the days of the seventh trumpet, all the mysteries will be finished and the deception of Satan will become clear to the whole world. But today God's servants, the prophets, proclaim it (*Rev.10:7*).

V.8-11: And the voice which I heard from heaven, I heard again speaking with me, and saying, 'Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the land.' And I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book. And he said to me, 'Take it, and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.' And I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and it was in my mouth sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter. And they said to me, 'You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.'

Here we see that when John ate the book, it was sweet as honey in his mouth. That is a picture of *the grace of God* that comes to us through His Word. But by the time that Word got inside him, it was bitter. This indicates that there is truth in the Word too - the truth that judges our sin. It is not just grace but truth too. In the Book of *Revelation*, we see alternate pictures of grace and of judgment. It is alternately sweet and bitter - right through the book.

We also see here the right way to prophesy (preach) God's Word. We have to receive the Word of God from the Lord and eat it and digest it ourselves first. Only then will God give us a *prophetic* word for others. This is so different from the way most preachers prepare their messages, who merely study books, listen to tapes and exercise their brains to produce an impressive sermon.

When we receive the Word of God, it is easy for us to be taken up with just the sweet part of it - "*grace*". We can keep that forever in our mouth without allowing the whole counsel of God to penetrate into our system. We don't relish this latter part, because then we have to judge the sin that we discover within us. "*Judgment has to begin with us first*" (*1 Pet.4:17*).

Most Christians chew God's Word like chewing gum. They keep chewing it and chewing it because it is sweet. And then they spit it out!! It never gets down into their hearts to be digested. They do not take the Word of God seriously to judge themselves.

It may be through many *bitter* experiences that God makes the Word we hear to be digested. But in all those bitter experiences, we will experience God's comfort too (*2 Cor.1:4*). Thus alone will we have a prophetic ministry to our generation.

"*Now you must prophesy,*" the Lord told John, after he had digested the Word. Contrast this with what the Lord told him earlier - *not* to write down what he had heard. We must know what to share with others and what we should not.

Paul was once taken up to the third heaven. But for fourteen years he never even mentioned that to anyone and even when he did mention it, all he said was, "*I heard inexpressible words which a man is not permitted to speak*" (*2 Cor.12:4*).

John distinguished clearly between what God had spoken to him personally and what was meant for others. From *chapter 11* onwards, we see John prophesying what he had digested from that book.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The book of *Revelation* is *NOT* written in chronological sequence. We are given a bird's eye-view of the future in *chapter 6*, and then the details are filled out gradually. What we see in the first part of *Chap.11* actually takes place in the last 3½ years before Christ returns.

V.1: And there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, 'Rise and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and those who worship in it.'

Solomon built the temple of the Lord over the rock on which Abraham had offered up Isaac (*2 Chron. 3:1*). That temple was destroyed by the Babylonians. But it was rebuilt by the Jews and later improved by Herod. But this was destroyed by the Roman armies in 70 A.D. Six centuries later, in 691 A.D., when the Arabs ruled Palestine, one of the Caliphs built a mosque on the site of that temple, and called it the '*Dome of the Rock*'.

If this mosque had not been there, the Jews would have built their temple there long ago.

Why don't the Jews build their temple in some other part of Jerusalem? Because the Lord has said "*I will restore the fortunes of the tents of Jacob and have compassion on his dwelling places; and the city shall be rebuilt on its ruins, and the palace* (the temple) *shall stand on its rightful place*" (*Jer. 30:18*). And the rightful place is occupied by a mosque at present.

That teaches us that part of Jerusalem is still being "*trodden down by the Gentiles*" (non-Jews). So the times of the Gentiles are not yet complete, because Jesus said in *Lk. 21:24*, "*Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled*". Most of Jerusalem is no longer trodden by the Gentiles in the sense that the Jews have got control of it. Yet the most sacred part of it (for the Jews) is still being trodden by the Gentiles. The Jews cannot even go there. This is an amazing situation that God in His great wisdom, has permitted.

John was told to measure the temple of God ("*the inner sanctuary*" - margin)- the most holy place - and the altar and those who worship in there. The Old Testament temple had three parts - the outer court, the

holy place and the most holy place. The most holy place was blocked off by a veil, which was rent when Jesus died on the cross. This was the inner sanctuary.

V.2: And leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty two months.

The holy city will continue to be trodden under the feet of the Gentiles. In *Matt. 23:37,38*, Jesus went outside Jerusalem and said, “*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I wanted to gather your children together, but you were unwilling. Now your house is being left to you desolate*”.

Notice that He referred to the temple as *their* house. Just a few days earlier, He had gone into the temple and called it “*My house*” (*Matt. 21:13*). The Lord wanted that temple to be His house, but the Jews would not receive Him. And then it says, “*Jesus came out from the temple.*” (*Matt. 24:1*). He never went there again. The withdrawal of Jesus from the temple at this point is very significant. As far as God was concerned, He had nothing more to do with that temple.

But a day is coming in the future when the Antichrist will make a covenant with the Jews and “*he will take his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as God*” (*2 Thess.2:4*).

The Jews did not receive the Son of God when He came. So He left the temple, saying, “*From now on this is your house. I am leaving it. Your house is left desolate*” (*Matt. 23:38*). But when the Antichrist comes into the temple, they will receive him. Jesus told the Jews, “*I have come in My Father’s Name, and you do not receive Me; if another shall come in his own name, you will receive him*” (*John 5:43*).

Many Old Testament prophecies are yet to be literally fulfilled in the nation of Israel. But we can apply them *spiritually* to our own lives even today. What is the significance of the inner sanctuary alone being measured and not the outer court? It shows that God is not counting all those who *claim to be* “believers”, but only those who come into the most holy place through the rent veil. This is the spiritual application of these verses for us.

The word used in *Rev.11:2*. is very strong. It says, “*Throw out the court*”. The church in Laodicea was in danger of being thrown out, because it was lukewarm (*Rev.3:17*).

John was told to measure only the worshippers in the *inner sanctuary*. The ones in the most holy place are those who have gone through the veil, who have judged themselves, and come into God’s presence. They are the overcomers.

The time period mentioned in *verses 2 and 3* of 42 months (1260 days) occurs a number of times in *Revelation*. Jerusalem is in the hands of Israel now. But there is a time coming in the future when Jerusalem will be ruled by the Antichrist for a period of 42 months, immediately before the second coming of Christ. For the last 3½ years before Christ returns in glory, there will be this “*treading under foot of the holy city*” again.

In *Daniel 9*, we read of a time when Daniel was praying about the restoration of Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity. The prophecy here looks beyond the restoration of Jerusalem, to the future also. “*Seventy weeks (or “units of seven” - margin) have been decreed for your people*” (*Dan.9:24-27*). The word here means ‘seventy sevens’, or 490. This refers to 490 years that had been decreed by God for the Jews, and for Jerusalem, “*to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness*”.

We know that it was at Calvary’s cross that atonement was made for iniquity. But “*bringing in everlasting righteousness*” is still in the future. 2000 years of the church age have come in between the two. Daniel was told that the counting of the years would commence from “*the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem*” (*Dan.9:25*)- not the temple, but the city of Jerusalem.

We read in *Nehemiah 2* that the order for the rebuilding of Jerusalem was given “*in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, in the month Nisan*” (*Neh. 2:1*)- which was around 446 B.C. Daniel was told that from the date that the order was given to rebuild Jerusalem upto “*Messiah the Prince*” would be exactly ‘7 sevens and 62 sevens’ (v. 25)- 483 prophetic years of 360 days each, or 173,880 days. When converted to

solar years, this becomes 476 years, which brings us to the year when Jesus was crucified. This Old Testament prophecy was very exact. So if someone in Israel had studied *Dan. 9:24,25*, when Jesus was on earth, he would have clearly seen that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Messiah.

The period of 69 sevens was split into two parts - one of 7 sevens and another of 62 sevens. During the first 49 (7 x 7) years Jerusalem would be rebuilt - “*the city will be built again with plaza and moat even in times of distress*” (v. 25). After another 62 sevens (434 years), “*the Messiah will be cut off*” (v.26)- that is, He will be crucified. It goes on in the same verse to say that the Messiah would “*have no one*” (*Literal*). That means He would be completely forsaken - by man and even by His Father - on the cross. The prophecy was very exact.

We read further in *verse 26*, that after the crucifixion, “*the people of the prince who is to come will come and destroy the city and the temple*”. The prince who is to come in the future is obviously the world-ruler, the Antichrist. “*The people*”. of that prince would refer to the world rulers of the first century, which was the Roman empire. That was fulfilled, as we have seen, in 70 A.D.

This still leaves a 7-year period out of the 490 years mentioned originally. That is spoken of in *Dan.9:27*: “*He (the Antichrist) will make a firm covenant with the many (referring to the Jews) for seven (years)*.” That is the final 7 year period. The Antichrist will present himself to the Jews as their Messiah and the Jews will accept him.

Dan. 9:27. goes on to say, “*In the middle of the week, he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wings of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.*”

At the middle of this 7-year period (after 42 months), the Antichrist will break his covenant with the Jews. During the remaining 42-months (1260 days) the Antichrist will reign (see *Rev.11:2,3*). It is significant that the reign of the Antichrist is going to be for exactly the same duration as the public ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ which was also for 3½ years. The Antichrist is going to imitate Christ in every possible way.

The abomination of desolation mentioned here is what Jesus spoke of in *Matthew 24:15*, and is a reference to the Antichrist sitting in the temple as God. At the end of that period, it says here that the Antichrist will be “*destroyed completely*”.

V.3,4: And I will grant authority to My two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and the two lamp stands that stand before the Lord of the whole earth.

During that entire period of 1260 days, God is going to have two witnesses in Jerusalem, who will prophesy. They will be clothed in sackcloth - signifying their humility and simple life-style and also their grief at the ungodliness of the Jews.

These prophets are referred to as olive trees. In *Zech.4:11-14*, also we are told of these two olive trees who are “*the two anointed ones, who are standing by the Lord of the whole earth*”.

V.5,6: And, if any one desires to harm them, fire proceeds out of their mouth and devours their enemies; and if anyone desires to harm them, in this manner he must be killed. These have the power to shut up the sky, in order that rain may not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with plague, as often as they desire.

In the Old Testament, we read of only two prophets who destroyed their enemies by fire - Moses and Elijah (*Num.16:35; 2 Kings 1:10*). Elijah was also the one who shut up the sky so that it did not rain for 42 months. (*Jas.5:17*). And Moses was the one who turned the water into blood and smote Egypt with plagues.

Notice also what Moses and Elijah stood for.

When Moses came down from the mountain the whole nation of Israel had gone astray worshipping idols and committing adultery. And Moses told them, “*Whoever is on the Lord’s side, come to me*” (*Exod.32:26*). That was the spirit of Moses.

Elijah too lived at a time when the entire nation of Israel worshipped idols. One day he gathered the Israelites on top of Mount Carmel and told them almost exactly what Moses had said, “*How long are you going to sit on the fence? If the Lord is God, follow Him. If your idol Baal is God, follow him*” (*1 Kings 18:21*).

Elijah lived when Israel was being ruled by the most wicked king and queen that the nation ever had. King Ahab had sold himself to Satan to do evil. (*1 Kings 21:25*), He is a type of the Antichrist. And his wife Jezebel is a type of Babylon the harlot, the false church. We saw the Lord calling a false prophetess by the name Jezebel, in *Chap.2:20*.

Moses too prophesied to Pharaoh (another type of the Antichrist) and opposed and resisted him and his magicians.

The last two prophets mentioned in the Old Testament are Moses and Elijah. (*Mal.4:4,5*).

The two last-day prophets will prophesy in the fiery, uncompromising spirit of Moses and Elijah, for 42 months.

Today, as Christians, we do *not* call fire down on our enemies. When Jesus came to Samaria and the Samaritans did not receive Him, James and John (being good Bible scholars and knowing that Samaria was where Elijah had called down fire on his enemies), said, “*Lord, shall we call down fire from heaven to consume them as Elijah did?*” (*Lk. 9:54 margin*). The Lord replied, “*You don’t know what kind of spirit you are of, for the Son of man has not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them*”. Here lies the difference between the new covenant and the old covenant. Disciples of Jesus do not call down fire to destroy their enemies, but rather follow in the footsteps of Jesus Who said, “*Father, forgive them*”, and of Stephen who said, “*Lord, lay not this sin to their charge*”.

But although we don’t call down fire from heaven, or shut the heavens or call down plagues on the earth, we are to stand in the spirit of Moses and Elijah, in this sense that we challenge people saying, “*Who is on the Lord’s side? Let him come out to me.*”

We do not go into the midst of dead denominations to try and change them, because they cannot be changed. We stand outside of them (like Moses and Elijah) and say, “*Come out of Babylon and stand with me if you are on the Lord’s side. Choose this day what you will follow - the Word of God or the traditions of men?*”

That is how it is going to be in the last days even before the rise of the Antichrist. There is going to be a Moses-cum-Elijah ministry in the church during the last days.

V.7: And when these two prophets have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss (bottomless pit) will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them.

This beast is the Antichrist - a man possessed and ruled by Satan - about whom we will read more in *Chapter 13*. But notice here that he can kill these prophets *ONLY*. when they “*have finished their testimony*”. God had ordained that these prophets should prophesy for 1260 days - and so they will *NOT* die one day before that. That is true of prophets in the church today too.

In *Psa.139:13-16*, David says, “*Thou didst form my inward parts. Thou didst weave me in my mother’s womb...My frame was not hidden from Thee, when I was made in secret and in Thy book they were all written the days that were ordained for me when as yet there was not one of them*”

Before a Christian starts his first day on earth, God has already determined the number of days planned for him. That does not mean however that every Christian will live his full term on earth. Some will die before their time because they live for the world, and live in sin. But those who live to do the will of God alone will live their full term.

The Antichrist may try to kill these two prophets before their time is over, but he won't succeed. They will fulfil their appointed 1260 days of prophesying!! Only after they have finished their testimony, will the beast be able to make "*war with them, overcome them and kill them.*"

It is a wonderful thing to be faithful in serving God. You will then be *immortal* until your life's work is done. There is no life on earth more secure than this. And you don't have to be a full-time worker in order to be a servant of God. Paul was *not* a full-time worker. He had a secular job (as a tentmaker) through which he earned his living. Every believer can be a servant of God, whatever his earthly profession may be.

Jesus too had a public ministry of 1260 days. In *Jn. 7:30*, it says that the enemies of Jesus tried to seize Him. But they could not catch Him. Why? Was it because Jesus was smarter than them or just lucky to escape their clutches. No. The reason given there is simply: "*His hour had not come*". The number of days written in the book concerning Him had not yet run out. In *Jn. 8:20*, we read that Jesus spoke strong words in the temple, but again no-one could capture Him, even though they wanted to - for the same reason: "*His hour had not yet come*".

How wonderful to be able to live like this on the earth - moving around fearlessly, knowing that no one can touch us, if God's time has not yet come. But this promise is only for the wholehearted disciple, and not for compromising, wishy-washy, money-loving "believers". The promise is for those who live before the face of God and who are not interested in the honour or approval of man. If you are like that, it can be written about you too, "*His enemies could not kill him because his hour had not yet come. The devil tried to kill him, but couldn't do it - because his hour had not yet come.*"

When God's hour finally came for Jesus, He said to the soldiers in Gethsemane, "*Here I am*". And when God's hour comes for these two last-day prophets, they too are ready to go. And when God's hour comes for you and me, I hope we won't want the doctors and surgeons to prolong our life on earth. We should be ready to go, saying, "*Thank You, Lord. I have finished my testimony.*"

It is written about David that "*when he had finished serving his own generation by the will of God, he slept*" (*Acts 13:36*). How wonderful it would be if these words could be said about all of us, that we finished serving our generation in the will of God, before we left the earth!

V.8: And their dead bodies will lie in the streets of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.

These two prophets will not be buried after they are killed. They will be put to public shame. Their bodies will lie in the streets of the city. The city is the one where our Lord was crucified - that identifies it as Jerusalem. But it is called Sodom and Egypt here, because it had become like Sodom - full of spiritual harlotry and spiritual adultery. It is called "*the great city*" because it has become like Babylon "*the great city*" (*Rev.18:2*).

It is possible for a Christian testimony to start off as Jerusalem - a place where God manifests Himself - and for it to end as Babylon. Much of what starts off with God's anointing and power in Christendom has ended up after some years in spiritual harlotry, becoming *great* in the eyes of men, but *not holy* in the eyes of God.

V.9,10: And those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations will look at their dead bodies for three days and a half and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb. And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry; and they will send gifts to one another because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.

People in all the nations of the world will see the two dead bodies lying in the streets of Jerusalem through satellite television! This will be prime-time news! And everyone will be delighted to see these two prophets publicly humiliated in their death. The whole world would have hated the two prophets because they tormented the "earth-dwellers" by their constant preaching against their love of money, their love of earthly things and their idolatry.

Even today, a really God-fearing prophet is a torment to worldly people, to worldly believers and to religious Pharisees.

What a lot of lessons we can learn from the spirit of these two prophets - their simplicity, their humility, their faithfulness, their courage, and the fact that they completed their ministry. We too should be able to say at the end of our earthly lives, "*Father, I have finished the work You gave me to do. I have fought a good fight. I have kept the faith. I have finished my course*" (Jn.17:4; 2 Tim.4:7).

V.11,12: And after the three days and a half, the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell upon those who were beholding them. And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Come up here.' And they went up into heaven in the cloud and their enemies beheld them."

The two prophets will be raised from the dead right there on the street in Jerusalem. And in the twinkling of an eye, they will be taken up into the presence of the Lord. And their enemies will watch it. That teaches us that God will normally vindicate His servants only at the final resurrection, and not before that. If we have been faithful to God, and we have been humiliated on the earth in various ways, if people have abused us and said that our messages were hard and tormenting, and if they hated us and spoke evil about us and we have forgiven them and we have borne with them, God may not vindicate us here and now during our earthly life. But at the resurrection, the whole world will know that we were true and faithful servants of God. Are you willing to wait patiently until that time? Or do you want to be vindicated and accepted by the world and the church right now? Even our Lord has not been vindicated as yet. Why should be vindicated before Him?

V.13: And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell, and seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

Even though these people gave glory to God out of fear, they still had no desire to change their lives.

V.14,15: The second woe is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly. And the seventh angel sounded; and there arose loud voices in heaven saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.'

This is the time when our Lord will set up His 1000-year reign on earth. Satan had once shown Jesus "*all the kingdoms of the world*" and said, "*All these will I give you if You fall down and worship me*" (Matt.4:8,9). Jesus rebuked Satan and rejected Satan's offer. Instead He went to the cross and died to win back the world the painful way - the Father's way. Finally, after 2000 years, He receives the kingdom of the world from the Father Himself. Notice that what Satan had showed Jesus were the *kingdoms* (plural) of the world. That is what the world has been and is at present - thousands of kingdoms. But in the final day it will be one *kingdom* (singular) of the world that Jesus receives from the Father.

Jesus once told Pilate, "*My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting*" (Jn. 18:36). We say the same thing too: "Our kingdom is not of the world. We don't want anything from the devil. We don't want the glory of the world which the devil offers us, when he urges us to compromise our convictions just a little bit. We choose the way of the cross, and one day we too will get the kingdom from our Father."

Jesus told His disciples, "*Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom*" (Lk.12:32). Then why do we want it from the devil? Why do we want the honour of this world which the devil offers?

V.16-18: And the twenty four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshipped God, saying, 'We give Thee thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who art and who wast, because Thou has taken Thy great power and hast begun to reign. And the nations were enraged, and Thy wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to give their reward to Thy bond-servants the prophets and to the saints and to those who fear Thy name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth.'

Here we have one more picture of worship and praise in heaven. The 24 elders who sit on their thrones before God fall on their faces and worship God. We find these elders again and again leading the hosts of heaven in worshipping God for His almighty power that has accomplished all things. We find frequent mention of the almighty power of God in *Revelation*. All heaven praises God knowing that He is sovereign and rules over all things everywhere and that He is in complete control of everything at all times - and that is why heaven is a place of such perfect peace. That is how it can be in our lives too - if we also recognise Him as almighty.

Their praise continues for God's judgment on the nations. All nations of the world have turned in rebellion against God, and God has been longsuffering with them for many thousands of years. But finally His wrath has come. There is a limit to God's patience. There is a limited time that He has given people to come to repentance. A time will finally come when this word will be fulfilled: "*Thy wrath has come*". It hasn't come yet. We are in the age of grace now. But one of these days the acceptable year of the Lord will be over.

The time now comes that Jesus had spoken of in *Jn. 5:28,29*, when all the dead hear His voice and "*those who did the good (rise) to the resurrection of life and those who committed evil to a resurrection of judgment.*"

As Jesus said, there are going to be *TWO* resurrections - one to life and one to judgment. The two resurrections however will be separated by a thousand years. But the two are brought together here in the praise of the elders: "*The time has come for the dead to be judged*" and "*the time has also come to give rewards to Thy bond-servants*".

Notice that rewards are for God's *bond-servants*- for those who have been faithful in their earthly lives. In *Mal.3:16- 18*, we read, "*Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another and the Lord gave attention and heard it. And a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who esteem His name. 'And they will be Mine', says the Lord of Hosts, 'on the day I prepare My own possession. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him. So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.'*"

Today it is very difficult to distinguish between one who is really serving God and one who is not serving Him. It is almost impossible to do this because we can only see the externals. And we do not know with what motive a person serves God. Today, we cannot say whether a man is seeking the glory of God or seeking his own honour. We do not know whether mixed up with all a person's zeal for God is also a desire for his own honour, or for money, or for something else. But a day is coming when God will shine His heavenly searchlight on everybody's heart and in that day, the hidden motives and attitudes of every heart will be exposed. Only then will we be able to see clearly as to who really served God and who served their own interests.

And in that day it will be seen, as Jesus said, "*Many who are first now will be last then*". Many whom we considered to be wonderful servants of God will be shown to have been quite corrupt inside - when God exposes their inner lives and their motives. Many believers whom we thought of highly will then be seen to be hypocrites and last of all. At the same time, some others whom we did not think much of will be first among those who receive rewards, because of their sincerity and righteousness of heart before God.

Consider the matter of our speech. Jesus said that "*every careless word that we speak we will have to give an account for on the day of judgment*" (*Matt.12:36*). Malachi reminds us that in God's "*book of remembrance*", He lists the names of those who fear Him in the way they *speak to one another*. I have met very, very few believers in my entire life who fear God in their private conversation and in their private correspondence - probably less than 1% of all the born again believers that I have met. So this "*book of remembrance*" must be a very thin one!! But those listed in it are the ones whom the Lord calls His *special jewels*.

Consider another matter: Jesus said in *Lk. 14:12*, “*When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours lest they also invite you in return and repayment comes to you. But when you give a reception, invite the crippled, the lame and the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous*”. Here is another command of Jesus which I think less than 1% of believers even bother to obey. “ The point is not that we go looking for the lame and the blind, but that we help and bless *those who cannot repay us in any way*. When you do not get repaid thus, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

So this is the time when God is going to repay those who did good to others on earth without seeking any gain for themselves - of money or honour. And in this matter too, we will find that many who are first today will be last in that day. and many who are last will be first.

We read further that the time has also now come *to destroy those who corrupt the earth*. In *Rev. 19:2*, we read that the great harlot Babylon - harlot Christianity, that claims to be engaged to Christ but lives after its own lusts - corrupted the earth with her immorality. Spiritual immorality is what corrupts the earth.

1 Cor. 3:17, states, “*If anyone corrupts the temple of God, God will destroy him*”. The church is the temple of God. If a man corrupts the church in any way, one day the Lord will destroy him. Ananias and Sapphira brought corruption into God’s house and God destroyed them immediately (*Acts 5*). Such immediate judgment has *not* happened too often in these past 2000 years. But that does not mean that those who were corrupt have gotten away with it. No. A day will soon come when God will destroy them.

In *Eph.4:22*, we are told that, “*the old man is corrupt in accordance with the lusts of deceit*”. All the corruption in the world is due to lust. (*2 Pet.1:4*). Now God destroys those who have lived after their lusts and corrupted the earth.

V.19: And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple, and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm.

We read in *Rev. 21:22*, “*The city does not need any temple, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple*”. So what is mentioned here is obviously symbolic language. The temple here symbolises the *presence* of God. The ark symbolises God’s *faithfulness* to His covenant. And the thunder and earthquake etc., symbolise God’s *power*.

CHAPTER TWELVE

V.1,2: And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. And she was with child; and she cried out, being in labour and in pain to give birth.”

Whom does this woman symbolise?

The best way to interpret Scripture is by comparing Scripture with Scripture. There is only one place in the entire Bible where “*the sun, moon and 12 stars*” are used to describe a community of people - and that is in *Genesis 37:9*, where Joseph related his dream to his brothers saying, “*The sun and the moon and eleven stars bowed down to me*”. His father understood what it meant and rebuked him saying, “*Shall I and your mother, and your eleven brothers actually come to bow ourselves before you to the ground?*” But that was what finally happened in Egypt. So the Bible interprets the sun, moon and 12 stars as a

picture of Jacob's family members. So the woman in *Rev.12* is actually a symbol of *the nation of Israel* that came from that family.

The woman was in labour. In *Micah 5:2-4*, we read, "*Bethlehem.....from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel....He will give them up until the time when she who is in labour has borne a child. Then the remainder of His brethren* (the Gentiles who would be converted) *will return to the sons of Israel. And He will arise and shepherd His flock in the strength of the Lord*". There we see the woman Israel being in labour and bringing forth Jesus Christ. (*See also Romans 9:4,5*).

V.3: And another sign appeared in heaven; and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems.

This dragon is Satan (v.9). We will study the seven heads and ten horns in detail when we study *Chapter 13*. But let me just say here that they symbolise a world government and this signifies Satan's control of the governments of the world. We read in *Dan. 10*. of an evil spirit who was in control of the nation of Persia. And we read in *Eph. 6:12*. that we wrestle with the *world's rulers* who sit in the heavenly places. The real world-rulers are not in the capital cities of the world. Those leaders are only the puppets who are pulled by the strings operated by spirit-forces in the heavenlies. This is why the church is told to pray for those who are in authority, so that the activities of those evil spirits are bound. Thus the church has authority to influence the government leaders of every country.

The dragon is red - the colour of blood and murder. Jesus said in *Jn.8:44*. that the devil was a murderer. He also said that Satan comes to steal, to kill and to destroy. That is why he is a *red* dragon.

When God created him, he was not like this. He was the most beautiful of all of God's creation. We read in *Ezek.28:13* that he was an anointed cherub who once ruled over the garden of God. But when pride and a rebellious attitude came into his heart, he became a horrible dragon.

Even one who is as pure as an angel can become like a dragon if he allows *pride* to enter his heart. Or let a little of the spirit of *rebellion* against authority come into your heart - whether that authority be your parents or your boss in the office or your elder in the church - and you will soon become like a dragon. Satan is forever seeking to make people just like himself, just as the Holy Spirit seeks to make people like Jesus! Satan succeeds in making people like himself whenever he is able to infect them with his spirit of pride or rebellion.

V.4: And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven, and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child.

Since the angels are called stars in *Job 38:7* and in *Rev.9:1,2*, this probably indicates that one third of the angelic host joined Satan in his rebellion. In *Isa. 9:15* a *deceiving* prophet is called "*a tail*". So the dragon's tail possibly speaks of the deception of Lucifer with which he led astray millions of God's angels who then became demons.

The dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth so that when she gave birth he might devour her child. This has had a partial fulfilment throughout the history of Israel. In *Exod. 1:16*, we read that Pharaoh gave an order to the Israeli midwives that all newborn males should be killed as soon as they are born. Satan has always been against the Jewish people, because the Messiah was to come through them. In *Esther*, we read of another Satan-inspired man Haman, who tried to destroy the entire Jewish people. But Haman did not succeed. So we see many partial fulfilments of this picture of the dragon waiting to devour the man-child. But Satan has never succeeded in destroying the Jewish people - whether through Pharaoh, or Haman, or Hitler, or through any other world-leader.

Satan knew that the Messiah would be born, because of what God had said in Eden that "*the seed of the woman, will bruise the head of the serpent*". So he waited to destroy the man-child. When Jesus was born, Satan instigated Herod to send his soldiers to Bethlehem to kill all the male Jewish children under the age of two. But the baby Jesus escaped.

V.5: She gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne.

Jesus is the man-child who will “rule all the nations with a rod of iron” (Rev.19:15). He is called here ‘a son’ and ‘a child’, reminding us of Isa. 9:6 where it says, “A Child will be born to us and a Son will be given to us”.

The word “rule” is translated as “shepherd” in the margin. Jesus is not going to rule the world like earthly rulers rule today. He is going to *shepherd* the nations. True rulership in God’s eyes is that which is done in the spirit of a shepherd who leads his sheep from the front by example. All God-appointed leaders can be identified by this mark. They will be shepherds, not bosses.

The child is caught up to *GOD’S* throne. This also proves that the child is Jesus Christ. In Rev. 3:21, we read that the overcomer sits with Jesus on *Jesus’* throne and not on the throne of *God the Father*. Only Jesus Himself sits with the Father on His throne.

What is literally true of Israel is symbolically true of the church. So we could look at the woman also as a picture of the church to learn some spiritual truths from here. Gal.4:26 says, “*The Jerusalem above is free and she is our mother*”. Paul says in Gal. 4:19: “*My children, with whom I am again in labour until Christ is formed in you*”. God is looking for those who have a spirit of travail to bring forth the nature of Christ in others.

V.6: And the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she might be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

This will take place during the reign of the Antichrist, after he breaks his covenant with the Jews. That will be a time of tremendous persecution. But at that time the true “*Israel*” will be protected and nourished by God in the wilderness for a period of 1260 days.

As it says in *Jer. 30:3-7*, “*I heard the sound of terror.....Why do I see every man with his hands on his loins as a woman in childbirth?....Alas! for that day is great. There is none like it. It is the time of Jacob’s distress. But he will be saved from it*”.

V.7: And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. And the dragon and his angels waged war.

We read in *Daniel 12:1*: “*Now at that time Michael the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people (Israel) will arise And there will be a time of distress (the great tribulation) such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time, your people, everyone who is found written in the book will be rescued*”.

And we read further, “*And I heard the man dressed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, as he raised his right hand and his left toward heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever that it would be for a time, times, and half a time (3½ years); and as soon as they finish shattering the power of the holy people, all the events will be completed*” (*Dan. 12:7*).

V.8,9: And they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven, and the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old, who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

This will take place during the final 3½ -year period just before Jesus establishes His kingdom on the earth. Satan will be thrown down to the earth then. At present, Satan is in the heavenly places. Many think that Satan is in hell. But he is not there. He will be cast in the *lake of fire* one day. But right now, he is in the heavenly places. Today, we have to wrestle with the “evil forces of darkness in the *heavenly places*” (as we read in *Eph. 6:12*).

The Bible speaks of *three* heavens. The *first* heaven is the visible heaven of the universe and space (*Psa.8:3*). The *third* heaven, where the apostle Paul was caught up, is also called Paradise - where God’s throne is (*2 Cor.12:2,4*). Between the first and the third heavens must be “*the second heaven*”.

When we pray, we have to penetrate through this second heaven to get to the third heaven. The best way to penetrate is by praising God. The one thing that the devil cannot stand is praise to God! So, if you find it difficult to pray, stop praying, and start praising God. Get connected to the third heaven and then start praying.

The dragon and his angels were thrown down out of heaven. Jesus once said, “*I beheld Satan fall from heaven like a lightning*” (Lk. 10:18). Jesus saw Satan’s fall when he fell initially and became Satan. But He also foresaw Satan being cast down to earth, being locked up in the bottomless pit, and finally being cast into the lake of fire. Then Jesus told His disciples, “*I give you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of Satan. Nothing shall injure you*”.

When we have seen what Jesus saw, we will no longer be afraid of Satan. He is a defeated enemy, for he was defeated on the cross by our Lord. The prince of the world has been judged. It is ridiculous for a believer now to be afraid of Satan. There is no need to be afraid. Ask God to open your eyes to see the fall of Satan. Satan hates the book of *Revelation* because it describes his final doom.

Michael and his angels are the ones who cast Satan out. There was a time long ago when Satan, as Lucifer, was above Michael. But he lifted himself up, and he was cast down. Finally Michael is given the job of clearing the second heaven of Satan and his hosts.

Satan is called here the *serpent* of old and the *devil*. The word ‘*devil*’ in Greek is ‘*diabolos*’ from which we get the English word ‘*diabolical*’. But the word ‘*diabolos*’ in Greek actually means ‘*a slanderer*’ or ‘*a backbiter*’, and is used in 1 Tim. 3:11, where it says, “*Women must not be diabolos*”. What that means is that women must not be *little devils*, who slander others, speaking evil about them behind their backs. Of course, men should not be slanderers either. It says in 2 Tim. 3:2,3, that, “*in the last days, difficult times will come, for men...will be little devils (diabolos).*” It says further in Tit. 2:3, “*Older women should not be diabolos.*” So both men and women are warned against becoming “*devils*” who slander others! A *slanderer gets Satan’s name, just as a Christian gets Christ’s name*.

Another name for the devil is Satan which means ‘*the adversary*,’ the resister of God, resister of the truth, resister of God’s people.

He is also called the *Deceiver*, the deceiver of the whole world.

Satan will be on earth for 1260 days. He is not here yet. If things are already so bad, you can imagine what it is going to be like when Satan is thrown down to earth with his angels. It says here that he will have great wrath at that time.

V.10: And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, ‘Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser (slanderer) of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them before our God day and night.’

Here Satan is called ‘*the accuser of our brethren*’. If anyone slanders his brothers or sisters, let him realise that he is in fellowship with Satan, the chief accuser of the brethren. Satan accuses us before God day and night saying, “See how Your child is behaving there! See how Your child is talking there!” The Devil watches our private life carefully and thereby gets plenty of material to accuse us before God.

Satan accused Job before God saying that Job served God only because God had blessed him. Satan will accuse believers like that today as well. Since God is righteous, He will *not* say that Satan is wrong, if He sees that you are indeed serving God with wrong motives. Jesus Christ is a “*righteous Advocate*” (1 Jn.2:1). He cannot cover up for us if we are wrong. That is why we must always be honest with God in judging and cleansing ourselves, because then the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse us from all sin and there will be no more ground for Satan to accuse us before God.

V.11: And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and because they did not love their life even to death.

These are disciples of Jesus who overcame Satan. They used *three* weapons.

(1) The *blood of Jesus Christ* that cleansed them because they were walking in the light of God.

(2) The *word of their testimony*. They told Satan with their mouths that they had been forgiven and cleansed and that he no longer had any claim on them.

(3) They *did not love their lives even unto death*. They took up the cross and died to Self daily.

It was on the cross of Calvary that Jesus defeated Satan, and it is when we take our place as crucified with Christ, and die to ourselves every day, that we too can overcome Satan.

Why do we speak about taking up the cross *daily*? Because we want to overcome Satan *daily*. The day we are unwilling to die to ourselves, Satan will overcome us.

V.12: For this reason, rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea; because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time.

There are three places in the *New Testament*, where it speaks about heaven rejoicing.

(1) *Lk. 15:7*: There is joy in heaven over a sinner who repents.

(2) *Rev. 12:12*: There is joy in heaven when a believer overcomes.

(3) *Rev. 19:7*: There is joy in heaven at the marriage of the Lamb, because the bride has made herself ready.

These three occasions are actually three stages of our Christian life.

Stage 1: When we repent of our sins.

Stage 2: When we overcome Satan in our personal lives.

Stage 3: When we have made ourselves ready as a bride for the marriage of the Lamb.

Every one of us can be a source of joy to the heavenly hosts, if we are willing to go through these three stages.

Jesus has already overcome Satan. Now He gives us the privilege of executing that victory which He has already won, as it says in *Rom. 16:20*: “*The God of peace shall crush Satan under your feet shortly*”.

Satan tried to devour Christ when He was born (*Rev. 12:4*), but he did not succeed. In heaven he fought with Michael and his angels, but he got thrown out (v.7-9). Now he fights with us. Are we going to be defeated? No! That which Jesus accomplished on the cross, we are to execute today so that the God of peace is able to crush Satan through us in our daily life, and finally completely.

The devil is a student of prophecy and knows that he will have only 3½ years once he comes down to earth. So his wrath will be great. And it is going to be a terrible time on the earth.

V.13: And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child.

Immediately after Satan comes to earth, he will start persecuting the nation of Israel that gave birth to Jesus Christ.

V.14-16: And the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, in order that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. And the serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, so that he might cause her to be swept away with the flood. And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth.

The wings of an eagle may refer to the nation of Israel being airlifted to safety into the wilderness where God has prepared a place to protect them. The river flowing out of the serpent’s mouth refers to a flood of persecution that will seek to sweep Israel away. But there will be even more people then, than in the Second World War, to help the Jews, so that they are not swept away from the earth.

V.17: And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

The dragon was enraged with Israel because he could not harm her. So he goes out to make war with “*the rest of her offspring*”. That refers to wholehearted disciples of Jesus - those who obey God and are

witnesses for Jesus. They are called “the woman’s offspring” because the church was born through the witness of the twelve apostles, who were all Israelites.

This proves that there *will be* Christians on earth at this time, who obey God and hold to the testimony of Jesus Christ. They will overcome Satan and be a powerful testimony for the Lord on earth. God is now preparing His people for that day. So let us be faithful in these days to overcome Satan completely so that he is crushed under our feet.

Jer. 12:5 says that the Lord teaches us now to run with *men* so that one day we can run with *horses*. He trains us in a time of *peace* so that when “*the flood of Jordan*” comes, we will be able to stand. We cannot be prepared overnight. It takes time. So, if we take every opportunity that comes our way now, to humble ourselves and to die to Self now, then when the flood comes (the great tribulation) we will be able to stand true to the Lord and be a testimony for Him on the earth.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

V.1: And he stood on the sand of the seashore. And I saw a beast coming up put of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were diadems, and on his heads were blasphemous names.

The sea represents the nations of the world, as we read in *Rev. 17:15*, “*The waters which you saw...are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues*”. From among the nations of the world comes forth *a beast* having ten horns and seven heads. And on his horns were diadems and on his heads were blasphemous names. This beast is the Antichrist, the world ruler, who is going to rule the world for 3½ years immediately before Jesus establishes His kingdom on earth.

The seven heads are explained in *Rev. 17:9-11*, “*The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come and when he comes, he must remain a little while. And the beast, which was and is not, is himself also an eighth, and is one of the seven and he goes to destruction.*”

The city of Rome is built on seven hills. The heads also represent seven kingdoms. When John was writing this book, (around 96 AD), five world-empires (mentioned in the Bible) had already come and gone. The first was the kingdom of Egypt that we read about in *Exodus*. The second was the Assyrian kingdom, that we read of in *2 Kings*. The third was the kingdom of Babylon, that we read about in *Daniel*. The fourth was the Medo-Persian kingdom, also mentioned in *Daniel*. The fifth was the kingdom of Greece that Daniel prophesied about. The sixth was the Roman empire which was then existing. The seventh kingdom was at that time still to come. And finally the Antichrist would establish the eighth kingdom, which appears to have some link to one of the previous seven kingdoms.

The ten horns are also explained in *Rev. 17:12*, “*The ten horns are the ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour.*”

These ten kingdoms are established at the time of the Antichrist. Ten nations will come together in the last days and will become the world’s greatest superpower, because of its financial muscle. And the Antichrist will be the ruler of this superpower.

John was in the island of Patmos, and the sea from which the beast came out was the Mediterranean Sea. All the six heads of the beast came from near or around the Mediterranean Sea - Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. And so it is most likely that the ten kingdoms will come from there too.

V.2: And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him power and his throne and great authority.

In *Daniel* 2, we read of a dream that Nebuchadnezzar had, of a large statue whose head was made of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet partly of iron and partly of clay.

Notice that the metals decrease in value as you go down from the head to the feet. This was to show that the human race was continuously degenerating. In *Dan.2:38-42*, we see Daniel explaining the meaning of the dream: “*You are the head of gold*”. (Babylon). “*After you will arise another kingdom inferior to you*” (Medo-Persia). The third kingdom of bronze will be Greece. And then, “*the fourth kingdom will be as strong as iron*”. That will be the Roman empire. After that, the dream skips over 2000 years of the church-age and comes to the end of time when the last kingdom is described thus: “*In that you saw the feet and toes partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron, it will be a divided kingdom; but it will have the toughness of iron* (dictatorship), *but mixed with common clay* (democracy), *so that some of the kingdom will be strong and part of it will be brittle.*”

Dictatorship and democracy are common in the last days. How many toes did that statue have? Ten! Those are the ten kingdoms - the ten horns - that we saw in *Rev. 13*, ruled by the Antichrist.

Then Daniel goes on to say, “*In the days of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed*” (v. 44). That will be the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That was pictured in the dream like this: “*A stone was cut out without hands and it struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and crushed them*” (*Dan.2:34*). The stone is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. This stone does not strike the gold, silver, bronze or iron. Those kingdoms are already past and gone. The stone strikes the feet - when the ten kingdoms are ruling the earth. And finally, “*the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth*” (*Dan.2:35*). That is the kingdom of Christ which will fill the whole earth.

This dream showed these kingdoms, *as seen from man’s viewpoint*. Later God showed Daniel how He viewed these same kingdoms - not as valuable metals, but as evil beasts.

In *Daniel 7:2-14*, Daniel describes a dream God gave him: “*I was looking in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea* (the Mediterranean Sea). *Four great beasts were coming up from the sea. The first was like a lion and had the wings of an eagle*”. This was Babylon. Then he saw a bear representing Medo-Persia, and then a leopard, representing Greece. This was followed by “*a fourth beast, dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed, and trampled down the remainder with its feet*” (the Roman empire). “*..It had ten horns*” (the ten kingdoms that will come together in the last days) “*While I was looking at the ten horns, another horn, (the Antichrist) a little one, came up from among them and pulled out three of the first horns, and behold, this horn possessed eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth uttering great boasts*”.

Finally, he saw the Antichrist being killed, and Christ returning and setting up His kingdom on earth: “*I kept looking until thrones were set up, and the Ancient of Days took His seat...thousands were attending Him.....the beast was slain....and behold, with the clouds of heaven one like a Son of Man was coming and He came up to the Ancient of Days, and to Him was given dominion, glory and kingdom that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him, His everlasting dominion*” (v.9-14).

Daniel saw the lion, the bear and the leopard in that order, because these kingdoms were still in the future. John saw a beast having the characteristics of these animals, but in the *reverse* order, because he was looking back at these kingdoms that had already come and gone - the leopard, the bear and the lion (*Rev. 13:2*). This indicates that the Antichrist will have the qualities of the past empires of Babylon, Medo-Persia and Rome - the lion, the bear and the leopard.

In God’s view, all these earthly kingdoms are like beasts. When man does not respond to the call of the Holy Spirit, he degenerates and becomes like a wild animal. God views all the political parties of the world as beasts. One party may be slightly better than the other, but they are all beasts. When you vote,

you are choosing between one wild beast and another. That is why I never vote, because I cannot vote for a wild beast. Instead I *pray* that God will overrule and appoint the one He has chosen to rule a country.

The dragon (Satan) gives the Antichrist his power, his throne and great authority. 2000 years ago, Satan had offered all this to Jesus Christ. But Jesus had refused to receive anything from Satan. But the Antichrist will worship Satan and thus receive the kingdoms of the world from him.

Satan is willing to give his power to all those who want it, if they are willing to sacrifice their conscience and bow down to him. There are many people in the world today who have who have obtained supernatural power from Satan thus. Many heathen religious leaders have supernatural powers because they have sold themselves to the devil.

V.3: I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast.

This appears to be an imitation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Antichrist is going to imitate Christ in every possible way. This will not be an actual resurrection - because no-one can raise the dead other than God. But this will be a very good imitation of it that fools people. It says here "*as if it had been slain*". This is going to be such a wonder to the whole earth and everyone will follow the Antichrist.

V.4: And they worshipped the dragon, because he gave authority to the beast; and they worshipped the beast saying, 'Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?'

The whole earth now worships Satan. This is what Satan has always wanted from the beginning. In *Isaiah 14:14* we read that Lucifer wanted to be like God. God had already given Lucifer many wonderful gifts - wisdom, beauty, ability, and supernatural gifts. What more did he want? He wanted to be worshipped like God was. And that is how he became the devil.

Whenever you desire the admiration of people, remember that you too have the same desire as Satan. To seek the honour of men is Satanic.

Finally, we see here, that Satan *does* get the whole world to worship him. Of course, that is happening in a small measure even today. But it is going to be much more widespread.

They worshipped the Antichrist too. The worship of the Antichrist - the worship of men - is also becoming widespread today. They worshipped the Antichrist saying, "*Who is like the beast?*" Just like we worship God today saying, "*Who is like unto Thee, Oh God,*" people worship Satan and the Antichrist saying the same thing. People will not call the Antichrist, "*The Antichrist*". No. They will call him by a respectable name.

In *1 Jn. 2:18*, we read, "*Children, it is the last hour. And just as you heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us* (from the midst of the church)." This teaches us that there were people who had the spirit of the Antichrist right in the midst of the first-century church. Such people are found in Christendom today too. People with the spirit of the antichrist are found in the political world, in the business world, in the heathen religious world, and among so called "Christian churches" too.

What is the mark of this spirit of the Antichrist? There are many marks. But one of the chief marks is this: *They want others to admire them and exalt them - which is the equivalent of receiving worship from men.* A church that does not fight against this seeking of honour from one another will have the spirit of the antichrist ruling in it very soon.

The desire for the honour of men is found in our flesh. It starts growing like a little seed, like a baby - just a wee desire for admiration, wanting somebody's approval or praise. It finally ends up as desiring worship. This is the spirit of the Antichrist. Therefore, whenever we see this little serpent's egg inside us we must crush it. Otherwise it will bring forth a serpent one day. If this spirit could manifest itself in the highest of angels, why can't it manifest itself in any of us? He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

The whole earth, we are told, will follow after the Antichrist. The world did *not* follow after Christ. They shouted, “*Away with Him. Crucify Him*”. But they will follow the Antichrist, because he will speak with smooth words to them, like the false prophets of old.

The spirit of Christ will bring us reproach, ridicule and opposition from men. When Christians seek popularity in this world, they are on dangerous ground - the ground of the Antichrist. Jesus was not excited when people wanted to crown Him as king. He knew that the opinions of men were only fit for the garbage-bin. So He turned around and told them, “*You must hate your father and mother, your brother and sister, your wife and children, your possessions and your Self-life, before you can follow Me*” (*Lk.14:26-33*). Those were hard words that offended many who heard them. Today, the true church of Jesus Christ preaches those very same words, and they sound just as hard - and they offend people, just as they did in Christ’s day. And the reproach of Christ comes upon us thereby. It is thus that we are protected from the spirit of the Antichrist. But Babylonian Christianity will *not* preach this message and so will be honoured, thus paving the way for the Antichrist to be manifested.

V.5: And there was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies; and authority to act for forty two months was given to him.

This phrase, “*There was given to him*” is repeated six times in this chapter (*v.5,7,14,15*). It is similar to the phrase we saw in *Rev.6* in connection with the rider on the white horse - the Antichrist. This phrase indicates that God is still in control of everything. He is the One Who allows the Antichrist to have this power for a short time - power even to persecute Christians.

Notice also the word ‘*mouth*’ occurring a number of times in this chapter - “*a mouth like a lion*” (*v.2*). Man’s praise of God is expressed through his mouth. And man’s rebellion against God is also expressed through his mouth. It says in *Prov.18:21*, “*Death and life are in the power of the tongue.*”

When man rebelled at the tower of Babel, God brought confusion among the people through the tongue. This is one reason why, on the day of Pentecost, when God was setting right the confusion caused by the rebellion of man, through the Holy Spirit filling people, they spoke in unknown languages. That was the reverse of Babel. God was bringing people out from the spirit of rebellion by which Satan rules humanity. But in the last days, Satan is going to manifest that rebellion to the maximum through the mouth of the Antichrist.

Most believers are *not* careful about the words they send out from their mouths. Each word we send out from our mouths is like a rocket launched. You may regret what you have spoken and say, “Oh, I would like to take back those words.” But it is too late once you have spoken or written them. They have gone out into space. You can only be careful about the next rocket you send out. You cannot do anything about the words that you have already launched. Jesus said, “*Every idle word that men speak* (every careless word they send out from their mouth), *they will have to give an account for, in the day of judgment*” (*Matt.12:36*). The reason is because rebellion is largely centred around the tongue. And we conquer that spirit by the spirit of praise and submission and thanksgiving to God, and by the spirit of grace and goodness coming forth from our tongues when people curse us and speak evil about us.

V.6: And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, that is, those who dwell in heaven.

Three times the Antichrist’s mouth is mentioned (*v.2,5,6*). In *Daniel 7* too, we see much about the speech of the Antichrist. “*A mouth uttering great boasts... the sound of the boastful words which the horn was speaking....he will speak out against the Most High*” (*Dan.7:8,11,25*).

The spirit of rebellion in man is manifested in its fullness through his mouth, and the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart (*Matt.12:34*). If the heart is filled with the Holy Spirit, then words given by the Holy Spirit will come forth from the mouth - whether in an unknown language or a known one. But if you are not filled with the Holy Spirit, and some other spirit rules you, then that other spirit will manifest itself - in tongues or in a *known* language. It is in our hearts that we must crush that spirit of rebellion, if our

tongues are to be pure. This is why it says that “*a gentle and quiet spirit*” is very precious in God’s eyes (1 Pet.3:4).

In Rev. 13:6, we read a reference to the “*heaven-dwellers*”, which is in contrast to the earth-dwellers, that we had seen earlier. Heaven-dwellers include the disciples of Christ, because we are seated with Christ in heavenly places. Here we read that the Antichrist blasphemes all the heaven-dwellers.

V.7: And it was given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them; and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him.

This is another verse that teaches so very clearly that there are going to be saints on the earth during the time of the Antichrist, because he is going to war against them. The word “*saints*” is used throughout the New Testament to refer to born-again Christians.

The Antichrist will overcome them physically - kill them. He cannot overcome their spirits. The devil can only touch our *bodies* - and that too, only after he has obtained God’s permission! In sickness, the devil afflicts our body. But he cannot touch our spirit. We can be conquerors in our spirit at *all times*. Satan’s messenger could afflict Paul’s body with a thorn in the flesh (2 Cor.12:7). But he could not harm Paul himself. Even there, we see that God turned the thorn into a blessing for Paul.

We read in Daniel 7:19-25 that Daniel was puzzled when he saw the Antichrist “*waging war with the saints and overpowering them...he will speak out against (defy) the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One with persecution. And he will make alterations in the laws*”. We see the beginning of that even today - God’s laws being altered to suit man’s lusts. And we are told that at that time, “*God’s people will be helpless in his hands for 3½ years*” (v.25 - Living Bible).

When Daniel asked the angel about this, he was told that this would last only “*until the Ancient of Days (the Father) came and judgment was passed in favour of the saints of the Most High*” (v.22). There is a time when God’s people are going to be vindicated - when Jesus returns in the glory of His Father. And then He will give His saints authority to rule. “*The court will sit for judgment and his (the Antichrist’s) dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever. Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One*” (v.26,27).

V.8: All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.

That phrase, “*from the foundation of the world*” could refer to two things.

(1) The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. The crucifixion of Christ on Calvary was not an afterthought with God. Adam’s sin did not take God by surprise, for He knew all along that Adam would sin and He had already made provision for it, before He created the world.

(2) Our names were written in the book of life from the foundation of the world. We read in Eph.1:4, “*God has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world*”. That means that God knew us by name, before he created even Adam or the angels. Way back in eternity past, He called us to be His own forever. It is very comforting to know that. And because our names are in that book of life, we refuse to bow down to the spirit of the antichrist today and will refuse to do so in the coming days as well. All who are earth-dwellers will worship him. The spirit of the antichrist is already here. If we keep ourselves pure from that spirit today, that will be the best preparation for the days to come.

V.9: If anyone has an ear to hear, let him hear.

This phrase reminds us of what we studied in Chap. 2 and Chap. 3. There we heard the call to the overcomers, “*He who overcomes, I will grant.....He who has ears to hear, let him hear*”. What were we to hear there? The call to overcome! The call to overcome the spirit of the Antichrist is now repeated here: “*Overcome the worship of men. Don’t bow down to any man for the sake of material gain or popularity or whatever. Don’t sacrifice your principles for any earthly gain. Don’t become a*

compromiser to get the honour of man. Don't give a bribe to anyone to get something unrighteous done. Don't defile your hands in that way. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

Of course, not everyone will hear. But a few will.

V.10: If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints.

The Antichrist, will one day be taken into captivity himself. He who killed others will be finally killed himself. And here is the "*the perseverance and the faith of the saints*". All saints must believe that this one who is troubling them will be taken care of by God at the right time.

If we are being troubled by some difficult person today, and we cannot believe that God can handle that person, then how are we going to have faith in God in the final day, when persecution intensifies? Do we really believe in the sovereign power of God? Do we believe that the one who captures us will be captured by God Himself one day, and that the one who kills us today will be killed by God Himself one day? Do we really believe that God will treat people in the final day in the same way as they treated us? If we do, then we will never even desire to take revenge on anyone. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints. That is why we do not fight back. Instead, we commit our cause to Him who judges righteously in every situation. Here is the trial of our faith. It begins now in small things. It will be tested in big things in the day of the Antichrist.

Jesus said, "*The one who takes the sword will perish by the sword*" (Mt.26:52). That sword can be a man's tongue. Those who use their swords (tongues) against others, will find themselves suffering the consequences one day. But if we can leave our swords (tongues) in their scabbards, and leave our vindication to God, He will deal with our enemies righteously one day. If we can trust God, we will be at rest at all times.

Can the saints wait for God Himself to deal with the Antichrist? Can they wait for God to deal with that difficult situation? Or do they want to deal with that themselves, saying, "*I will settle the matter myself*"? We are told in *Heb.6:12*, that it is "*by faith and perseverance (or patience) that we inherit the promises*". It really requires patience when we are tested in this way.

In *Lk. 21:17-19*, we read that we will be hated by all men and betrayed by our parents, brothers, relatives and friends. And when we are betrayed, what are we going to do? Jesus said, "*By your perseverance you will win your souls*". It is by perseverance that we can win our souls and partake of the Divine nature in our souls. That is one reason why God allows us to be tempted now. If only we could see that the temptations that come our way today are God's training school for greater things in the days to come, we would be eager to avail of every opportunity that comes our way to die to ourselves, to be sheared like lambs, to be slaughtered like sheep, and to keep our mouths shut, because by our perseverance we can win our souls.

We read in *Heb. 10:36-38*, "*You have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised*". What is it that God has promised us? Is it heaven? Not primarily. His promise is that we can partake of His nature and be like Jesus. That is a million times more important than being in heaven. We are not promised freedom from sickness or from problems primarily. Not wealth or health, but the divine nature! (2 Pet.1:4). We need to endure in the trial today. After we have done the will of God - taken up the cross, died to Self, kept our mouths shut and humbled ourselves - we still need patience to wait until we receive what God was promised. "*In a little while He who is coming will come, and He will not delay. But My righteous one will live by faith. But if he shrinks back (for example, if he takes the sword and wants to settle matters himself) then My soul will have no pleasure in him*" (*Heb. 10:37,38*).

V.11: And I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spoke as a dragon.

The first ten verses of this chapter dealt with the Antichrist. Here in this verse, we read of another beast. This one comes out of "*the earth*". The first beast came up from *the sea*- which represented the nations of

the world. In the Old Testament “*the land*” always referred to Israel, and “*the sea*” to the other nations. So if “the earth” here means the same as “the land”, then this beast could be a Jew. He will be a religious person because he is a lamb-cum-dragon. He looks like a lamb, but speaks like a dragon.

There are many religious people like that, who look like lambs but who speak like dragons. They look like lambs in the church-meetings but speak like dragons at home and in the office. It is by a man’s speech and not by his appearance that you can make out which kingdom he belongs to. Jesus warned us about such people, when he said, “*Beware of false prophets. They will look like lambs, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves* (dragons)” (Matt. 7:15). So here we see someone who wants to have the testimony of Christ - like a lamb. But he is actually the mouthpiece of Satan. He pretends to be a representative of God, but his mouth is that of a dragon.

V.12: And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed.

This is the false prophet. When Jesus spoke of the last days, He said, “*False Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders and will try to deceive even the elect, if possible*” (Matt.24:24). The false Christ is the Antichrist. The false prophet is this religious person that we see here. This is politics plus religion. In the Old Testament, we read of King Balak and the false prophet Balaam standing together against God’s people. Even today, bishops and political leaders join hands with each other. All this is but the preparation for that final rule by the Antichrist, where religion and politics will go hand in hand. The false prophet is hand in hand with the first beast, the Antichrist. Here you have the Satanic trinity, the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. They rule for the same period that Jesus had a public ministry – 3½ years. The false prophet makes people worship the Antichrist.

V.13: And he performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men.

Satan has got power to send fire. We read in the book of Job that Satan sent fire from heaven and destroyed some of Job’s property (Job 1:16).

V.14: And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life.

The false prophet is going to deceive people with false signs and miracles. We read in 2 Tim. 3:8 about Pharaoh’s magicians, Jannes and Jambres who opposed Moses. Pharaoh there is a type of the Antichrist and his magicians are a type of the the false prophet. Those magicians had supernatural powers. When Moses threw down his rod on the ground and it became a snake, those magicians threw down their rods which became snakes too. Moses turned water into blood, and those magicians could turn water into blood. But at a certain point, their magic became powerless.

After speaking of Pharaoh’s magicians, Paul goes on to say that there will be many magicians in the last days. The Greek word translated as “*impostors*”, in 2 Tim.3:13 is “*go-ace*”, which means “*magicians*”. What it says there is “*Evil men and magicians will increase .. deceiving others and being deceived themselves*”. Don’t imagine that all magic shows are innocent! Some of them are just tricks and sleight of hand. But there is magic that is demonic too. One must be wary and careful of all magic shows.

The purpose of the false prophet is to deceive people (Rev. 13:14). He will be some type of magician who deceives the earth-dwellers, and finally sets up the image of the beast which is the “*abomination of desolation*”.

Here then is a picture of the last days: We will see politicians and religious leaders working hand in glove with each other, increasingly, dominating and ruling people with Satanic power and soul-power. There will also be tricksters and magicians who lead people away from God, because people tend to believe that anything supernatural must be from God.

As Christians we need to be wary. Don't think that anything done in the Name of Jesus Christ supernaturally is necessarily from God. We are commanded to "*test the spirits*". We must ask these questions: Do they confess with their spirit that Jesus Christ came in the flesh? (*1 Jn. 4:1-3*). Do they confess with their spirit that Jesus Christ is Lord? (*1 Cor.12:3*). Do they manifest the humble, pure, free-from-the-love-of-money spirit that Jesus had? Only by discerning the spirit of the preachers and leaders we encounter, will we be able to protect ourselves from the spirit of the Antichrist and the spirit of the false prophet.

In *Acts 8:9* we read of a man called Simon who was practicing magic in Samaria, astonishing the people by the miracles and the signs that he did. And the people of Samaria were taken up with him, calling him "the great power of God." This is how it will be in the last days too: People will be astonished by the signs and wonders that the Antichrist and the false prophet perform.

We can ask ourselves why God allows Satan and evil spirits to exercise supernatural powers. Wouldn't the problem be solved if God withdrew all supernatural abilities from the hands of Satan and the evil spirits?

We read in *Deuteronomy* that there is a purpose with which God allows false prophets and agents of Satan to exercise supernatural power. In *Deut. 13:1-5*, it says that if a prophet arises who does some supernatural miracle, and then teaches things which are contrary to the Word of God, no-one must listen to his words; "*because the Lord your God is testing you!*" God tests us to see if we will be taken up with wonders and supernatural signs or with His Word. So the thing we need to ask ourselves, whenever we see a supernatural sign or miracle done, even in the name of Jesus, is whether the preacher is leading people to obedience to the Word of God or not. If not, we have to write him off as a false prophet. If we do not develop that sense of discernment now, we will be thoroughly deceived, when the false prophet deceives people by his miracles.

This false prophet tells people to make an image to the beast. Just as the Holy Spirit exalts Christ, the false prophet exalts the Antichrist.

"*An image to the beast*" reminds us of Nebuchadnezzar who built a statue of himself in pure gold and got people to bow down to him, under threat of punishment if they disobeyed. But there was a remnant in that day, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who would not bow down. They were a very small number! There will be a few like that in the last days too, who will stand erect and refuse to bow down.

V.15: And there was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast might even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed.

This is going to be a supernatural deception that seeks to imitate creation. Man is today in the pursuit of trying to create life in the laboratory. He has cloned animals and is now trying to clone human beings. But he will never be able to *create life*, because only God can create life. But God will permit people to be *deceived*.

The false prophet was permitted in some way by God "*to give breath to the image of the beast*" and to make it to speak. This could be a computerised imitation of a human being or it could be Satanic magic and deception. This image will probably be placed in Jerusalem, and could be what Jesus referred to as "*the abomination that causes desolation*" (*Matt.24:15*).

Daniel 11 describes something that happened after the Greek empire of Alexander the great had ended, and before the Romans became a world-power. Alexander's kingdom was divided up among his four generals. Two of the most powerful generals ruled over Syria and Egypt. In *Dan.11:31*, we read that "*forces from him* (the northern ruler of Syria) *will arise, desecrate the sanctuary fortress, and do away with the regular sacrifice. And they will set up the abomination of desolation.*"

Around 175 BC, Antiochus Epiphanes the Syrian ruler, came to Jerusalem, stopped the sacrifice in the temple, sacrificed a pig on the altar, and set up the statue of Jupiter in the Most Holy Place. Thus he desecrated the sanctuary. That is the abomination of desolation mentioned in *Daniel 11*. But Jesus said that there would be a repetition of this in the last days.

Antiochus Epiphanes was a type of the Antichrist to come. So the words in *Dan. 11:32* could be taken as a picture of what the Antichrist will do: “*By smooth words he will turn to godlessness those who act wickedly toward the covenant, but the people who know their God will be strong*”. Those who know God like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, will stand upright in that day. All others will be deceived by the Antichrist’s smooth flattering words.

At that time, “*those who have insight among the people will give understanding to the many*” (*v.33*). Those who have revelation on the Word in those days will explain to people that this is the fulfillment of prophecy. “*Yet they will fall by the sword, and some of those who have insight will fall, in order to refine, purge, and make them pure, until the end time*” (*v.35*).

Daniel 11:36-45 refers clearly to the Antichrist, “*The king will do as he pleases, and he will exalt and magnify himself above every god, and will speak monstrous things against the God of gods; and he will prosper until the indignation is finished...he will honour a god of fortresses (rule by military force)..he will take action against the strongest of fortresses with the help of a foreign god (Satan), he will give great honour to those who acknowledge him, and he will cause them to rule over the many, and will parcel out land for a price...he will also enter the beautiful land (Israel) and many countries will fall...yet he will come to his end and no-one will help him*”.

In *2 Thess.2*, we read of the coming of the Antichrist. There it says in *verses 1,2*: “*We request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him, that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure .. to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one deceive you for that day of the Lord will not come unless the apostasy (falling away from faith) comes first, and the man of lawlessness (the Antichrist) is revealed, the son of destruction*”. The falling away is from the faith that leads to a godly life (the message that Jesus and the apostles gave to the world) and it has already begun.

Jesus called Judas Iscariot, “*the son of destruction*”, because Satan entered into him. The Antichrist is also called the son of destruction, because Satan will enter into him too. He will exalt himself above every so called god or object of worship and take his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God (*v.4,5*). The Antichrist is restrained from manifesting himself *before God’s time*, by the power of the Holy Spirit manifested through overcomers in the church in the last days (*v.6*). Then in *Verse 7* we read, “*The mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains (the Holy Spirit who restrains Satan’s power) will do so until he is taken out of the way*”. The Holy Spirit will withdraw His restraining influence (through the overcomers) when the time has come for the Antichrist to be manifested.

Verses 9,10 state that the Antichrist’s coming will be in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false (deceptive) wonders, with all the deception of wickedness. There will be supernatural signs and wonders in abundance - all meant to lead people astray. *Verses 10,11* state that God will allow people to be deceived because they did not love the truth so as to be saved from their sin. So the supernatural signs and wonders in the last days are going to be means by which God will allow people to be deceived who are not interested in being delivered from sin in their lives.

We can be saved from deception only if we love the truth about ourselves and seek with all our hearts to be delivered from all sin. That will be the only protection against deception in the last days.

We saw in *Rev.13:15* about an image that speaks that people worship. In television and video-films, we have images that speak. And people all over the world worship the TV, by spending hours in front of it. They have very little or no time for God or for Bible-study or prayer. The worship of television is a preparation for the Antichrist. Many so-called believers in a Christendom that has a form of godliness but no devotion to Christ, are enslaved to this “*image that speaks*”.

I am not saying that *all* television programs are *evil*. There are programs that are clean. But if we are mastered by anything, we become *slaves* to it. If we worship anything other than the living God, we have become *idolaters*. Satan uses many means to prepare the world for the rise of the Antichrist.

V.16,17: And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead. And he provides that no one should be able to buy or sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of the beast.

This is “*the mark of the beast*”. All people will be given the option by the Antichrist to receive this mark, either on their right hands or on their foreheads. This means that people will be given the option of being either public followers of the Antichrist (with marks on their forehead just like some non-Christian religious people wear marks on their forehead today) or secret followers (with marks on the palm of their hand).

This has an application for us today too: The spirit of the Antichrist is already at work in Christendom. It is possible for people to follow the spirit of the antichrist *publicly* - living openly in sin (as prostitutes, gamblers, drunkards and many film-actors do). It is also possible to follow that spirit *secretly* - doing unrighteous things at one’s place of work (signing false statements with one’s *hand* to make a little more money, giving bribes with one’s *hand* to get something unrighteous done, etc.,) and then to come to the church-meetings and pretend to be “spiritual”. There are “believers” who will not receive the mark of the spirit of the antichrist on their *foreheads*, because their testimony will thereby be ruined. But they will receive it secretly on their hands, because they can retain their testimony and still make unrighteous profit by worldly methods. Here is where our faith and our devotion to Jesus are going to be tested. We must stay away from the mark of the beast in every form - whether on our foreheads or on our right hands. Instead, like the Apostle Paul we say, “*I have the marks of Jesus Christ on my body*” (*Gal. 6:17*). We don’t need any other marks.

This is going to be a very, severe test in the last days. For example, if you cannot buy food unless you have the mark of the beast, imagine what a test that will be.

The test that came to Eve in the garden of Eden was a test of food. And the first temptation that came to Jesus in the wilderness was also a test of food. “*Turn these stones into bread*”, Satan said, “*Otherwise you will die of starvation*”. But Jesus replied saying, “*It is not necessary to live. It is only necessary to obey the Word of God*”. Only believers who have the attitude that *survival is not necessary, but obedience to God is*, will be overcomers in the last days. If we don’t have the attitude that says that *it is better to obey God’s Word and die rather than to compromise and live*, we are going to be drawn away by the falling away that is already taking place in Christendom.

V.18: Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty six.

Since we are encouraged here by the Holy Spirit to *calculate*, let us do some calculation!

The number ‘6’ in the Bible is the number of man. Man was created on the sixth day. ‘666’ (‘6” repeated thrice) therefore represents man’s attempt to be equal to God (the Trinity).

Likewise, the number ‘8’ is the number of the new creation because Jesus rose on the eighth day, the first day of a new week. In music too, every eighth note begins a new octave.

In the Greek language (in which the New Testament was written), each alphabet has a numerical value. The name Jesus in Greek is written “IESOUS” and its numerical value is 888 (*I=10; E=8; S=200; O=70; U=400 and S=200*) - the number of the new creation repeated thrice!

The Antichrist’s number being 666 would therefore mean that the numerical value of his name will add up to 666. This will be confirmed, once we know his name.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

V.1: And I looked and behold the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads.

What we see here is in striking contrast to what we just read in *Chapter 13*. There we saw that the Antichrist offered people the option of acknowledging Him publicly (on the forehead) or secretly (in the right palm).

But here we see that the Lord Jesus Christ offers *no such option* to His disciples. Every disciple of His has to acknowledge Him publicly. The mark *MUST be on their forehead alone*.

We are *not* called to be *secret* followers of Christ. Jesus said, “*Everyone who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heavenFor whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels*” (Mt.10:32,33; Mk.8:38).

If you are working in an office, the mark of the Lord should be on your *forehead*. In other words, everyone in your office should know that you are a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no such thing as having a hidden mark on your hand, that no-one in your place of work knows about. A true follower of Jesus Christ will have the mark on his *forehead*. His colleagues know him as Christ’s disciple!

It is a shame that many “*believers*” are ashamed to be known as followers of Jesus Christ. I have seen non-Christians openly wearing religious marks on their foreheads - unashamedly proclaiming their religion! But Christians are so often ashamed to let it be known whom they follow - perhaps because they are afraid that their chances of promotion in the office will thereby be affected. Such Christians are compromisers and lovers of earthly honour, and not bold witnesses of Jesus Christ. They will certainly not be among those who stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion, for those 144,000 are disciples who are not ashamed to boldly confess that they follow Jesus Christ. They do not compromise in the midst of their relatives, or in their office, or in their neighbourhood. Every time you see a non-Christian wearing his religious marks on his forehead, let that be a challenge to you. If he is not ashamed to proclaim thereby that he worships his god, why should you be ashamed to proclaim that you worship Jesus Christ.

The 144,000 here are *not* the ones we saw earlier in *Chapter 7*. Those were from the tribes of Israel alone - and the tribes of Israel certainly do not follow the Lamb or believe that Jesus Christ is the Messiah. This is another group altogether. These are the ones who are called “*overcomers*” in *Revelation 2* and *3*.

A name represented *character* in the *Old Testament*. So “*the Name of the Lamb and of the Father*” being on the foreheads of these 144,000 indicates that their lives reflected the nature of the Lamb and of the Father.

A good question therefore to ask ourselves is this: In our attitude towards others who are evil toward us, do we reflect the nature of the Lamb Who kept His mouth shut when He was being sheared, Who was silent when He was slaughtered, and Who committed His cause to His Father when He was treated unjustly and stripped of His rights and His reputation? Do we reflect the nature of our Father Who is longsuffering with sinners and Who welcomes repentant backsliders (Lk.15:11-24).

Some may ask, “*Do you mean to say that only such a small number are overcomers?*” But how many believers have you seen in your life who never lose their temper and who have learnt to keep quiet under provocation? That is certainly a small number.

The nature that these 144,000 had acquired inwardly on earth now begins to shine through their personality on their faces - “*the nature of the Father*.” God’s desire for every one of us is that we grow up to maturity and be like Him towards other people. He trains us with that end in view.

When we begin the Christian life we are all *babies*. If we grow up, we will gradually be like *young men*. And if we continue to grow, we will become like *fathers* (1 Jn.2:12-14) - fathers who deny themselves to serve others, fathers who long to lead others to maturity.

This should be our passion - that the nature of the Lamb and of the Father should become so totally ours that it is reflected through our personality.

V.2,3: And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder, and the voice which I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty four thousand who had been purchased from the earth.

Mount Zion is another name for the heavenly Jerusalem. Rev.3:12 tells us who the ones are who get the name of the heavenly Jerusalem written on them. “*He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God*,” says the Lord, “*and I will write upon him the name of My God* (the name of ‘Father’), *and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem which comes down out of heaven from My God and My new name*” (the name of ‘the Lamb’). Notice that - the name of the Father and the name of the Lamb, and the name of the new Jerusalem. That is exactly what we read in Rev.14- the 144,000 stand on Mount Zion (the heavenly Jerusalem) having His name and the Name of the Father on their foreheads. When we compare Scripture with Scripture, everything becomes clear.

These are the overcomers and this is the bride of Christ. They belong to heaven even while they are living on earth.

These overcomers sang a new song before the throne, that no one could learn except those who had been purchased from the earth. Why is it that no one else could learn that song? Is it because the others were not musically minded? No. This has nothing to do with being musically minded. It has everything to do with being *heavenly-minded!!* There are lots of people in the devil’s camp who are musically-minded.

The music in heaven is full of praise, worship and joy - ecstatic joy in the presence of the Father. But these 144,000 who stand on Mount Zion learnt that song of praise even while they were on earth. Unlike other human beings, they had finished with all murmuring, grumbling, criticism, backbiting, judging others and slander. Instead they learnt to give thanks in everything and for everyone, and to praise and worship God at all times.

The new song is: “*Thou art worthy to receive praise and honour, glory, dominion and power*” (Rev.5:12). It is a song which does not have a smell of complaining, of grumbling or murmuring in it. How many of us have learnt it? God gives all of us one lifetime on earth to learn that song of heaven, that song of praise and thanksgiving. How many are there who have learnt to be 100% free from grumbling and complaining?

Most believers complain when the food is not good, or when somebody promises to do something for them and does not do it, or when somebody takes away their rights, or when somebody does some evil to them or to their children or perhaps when somebody speaks evil about them or their family-members. What a lot of opportunity we have in all such circumstances to follow Jesus, to take up the cross and learn the new song! It is impossible to learn that song unless we are willing to take up the cross and die to our rights, honour and reputation.

These 144,000 were the only ones who obeyed the Word of God which says, “*Do all things without grumbling or complaining*,” (Phil. 2:13,14) and “*In everything give thanks*,” (1 Thess. 5:18).

The word ‘*learn*’ in Rev.14:3 indicates an education. We have to *learn* how to sing this new song. To begin with, none of us know it. Why is it that no-one else learnt that song except these 144,000. Because the others heard about taking up the cross, but never *actually* took it up in the moments of temptation. What a sad thing it is when someone has been a believer for 20 years, and still hasn’t got victory over murmuring, anger, grumbling, complaining, slander and backbiting. Most believers imagine that because they have accepted Christ everything is all right with them, and thus live in a world of delusion.

It also says here that they were “*purchased from the earth*”. They were the opposite of the “*earth-dwellers*”. They had been freed from the earth. They were not occupied with the things of the earth. Their minds were set on the things that are above where Christ sits at the right hand of the Father. They were not thinking, “How can I make as much money as possible on earth and still go to heaven when I die? How can I live as comfortable a life as possible and still go to heaven when I die?” Earth-dwellers think that way. But these people were thinking, “How can I do all the will of God in my one earthly life? How can I show my gratitude to the Lord for dying for me on Calvary?” They were not the compromising, half-hearted, wishy-washy, worldly type of people who call themselves “believers” these days. They were in a different category altogether. They were redeemed (freed) from the earth. Their minds were not set on earthly comfort or wealth or honour. Their song was *not*, “*How worthy we are!*”, but *rather*, “*Thou art worthy, O Lord.*” Those who are always wondering, “Do other people think that we are worthy?” don’t belong in this category. These people sing the new song saying, “We are not worthy. He alone is worthy.” How many believers are there who have learnt that? Very, very few. The number of things that believers do in order to get honour and approval from man, shows very clearly that they just don’t belong in this category at all.

V.4: These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. They are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb.

This is not referring to physical virginity or physical harlotry. The women referred to here are the ones mentioned later on in *Rev.17:5*, Babylon the mother of harlots and her harlot-daughters. This verse is stating that these 144,000 did not commit spiritual harlotry. They kept themselves chaste as pure virgins for Christ, undefiled by spiritual adultery with the flesh and the world. Spiritual adultery is explained in *Jas.4:4*: “*You adulteresses. Know you not that friendship with the world is enmity towards God?*” These are the ones who were faithful in moments of temptation, who kept themselves from worldliness. They followed the Lamb wherever He went. In other words, they took up their cross daily - for that is how the Lamb walked on earth.

Notice another phrase here, “*they are purchased from among men*”. We saw that they were freed from the earth. Now we see that they are freed from men too - from men’s opinions. The result is that they become firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.

Firstfruits are those fruits that get ripe first of all on a tree. These are the ones who responded promptly to the Holy Spirit and became ripe during their earthly lifetime. They did not waste their lives. They did not waste the opportunities God gave them to take up their cross. They did not waste their opportunities to follow the Lamb. They took every opportunity that came their way to die to themselves and to follow Jesus, and to obey the leading of the Holy Spirit. The result was that they became ripe quickly. They are the first fruits.

Jas 1:18 says that God “*brought us forth by the word of truth so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures*”.

Not everybody responds in the right way. But there will be a few who will respond aright and be the firstfruits. The number 144,000 is not literal. It is symbolic of a small number of people. Jesus said that the way to life was narrow, and that only few would find it.

There is going to be a great multitude, “*that no man can number*” in the presence of God, who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. We saw that in *Rev.7*. Many of them will be babies of people from all religions, who died before they came to the age of understanding. Millions of them will be the aborted foetuses that there have been in the 20th century. The righteousness of Christ is put to their account and so they are in heaven. But they never had an opportunity to become overcomers. But those who consciously chose the narrow way that leads to life are a group that *CAN* be numbered. They are very, very few. These are the ones who took *Matthew 5,6 and 7* seriously and are first fruits to God and to the Lamb.

V.5: And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless.

All human beings are born liars. But these people had so cleansed themselves from this normal human habit that by the end of their lives it is said about them that no lie is ever found in their mouth.

Don't you believe that the number has to be very small, when you evaluate believers even by just this one qualification? Lying begins from babyhood. It develops into various forms of deception, giving people wrong impressions, exaggerations, adding and subtracting things to the truth to give people a biased opinion, hypocrisy, quoting statistics that have not been verified, pretence etc., Do you think all believers have cleansed themselves from all this? How many believers are there who have taken this matter seriously to cleanse out all lying from their lives, to speak the truth alone always, and whose 'Yes' is always 'Yes' and whose 'No' is always 'No'.

Quite frankly, having seen the condition of many believers, I am surprised that there are even 144,000 people found in the entire human race who have cleansed themselves *totally* from lying. Our calling is to follow the Lamb wherever He went - even here. Do you see any footprint of the Lamb where He told a lie? No! We are to follow in His steps. When we came to Christ we were full of lies. But now the Holy Spirit has come to transform us into the image of Jesus who never spoke a lie, and who could say, "I am the truth." If we cooperate with the Holy Spirit, we can find our place in that number.

Notice again the emphasis on the mouth. We saw that earlier, in relation to the speech of the Antichrist. Here we have the mouth of the overcomers. What great importance the New Testament gives to our speech!

Jesus once said that it would be by evaluating our speech in the final day that we would be either justified or condemned (*Matt.12:37*)!! By our speech we manifest whether it is the spirit of Christ or the spirit of the antichrist that rules in our hearts. Because they had cleansed out all lying from their lives, these overcomers are called "*blameless*". We too can be in that number if we take our calling seriously.

V.6: And I saw another angel flying in mid-heaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people.

The angel here preaches the eternal gospel to the earth-dwellers. They are called here "*those who sit on the earth*" (*margin*). They are people who have decided to sit down and enjoy the comforts, the honour, the pleasures and the wealth of this earth.

V.7: And he said with a loud voice, 'Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and the springs of waters.'

This is a final invitation to earth-dwellers to "*fear God, give Him glory and worship the Creator*", before judgment falls. It is because man does not fear God or give Him glory and worship as the Creator, that he sinks into evil. *Rom.1:20-32* tells us that even though men saw the glory of God in creation, they were not thankful and did not fear God, or give glory to Him. So they sank deeper and deeper into sin and God gave them up.

Notice the contrast between "*the hour* (1 hour) of *judgment*" mentioned here and "*the day* (24 hours) of *salvation*" mentioned in *2 Cor.6:2*. That again teaches us that God would much rather act in grace than in judgment.

Our own Adamic nature however prefers to act in judgment than in grace towards others. We would rather have a *day* of judgment and an *hour* of grace!! We see this in Adam's behaviour in the garden of Eden. As soon as Adam was questioned by God, he pointed an *accusing* finger at his wife. The habit of judging others began in him as soon as he had sinned. Now the Lord seeks to change our evil nature of judging and finding fault with others, to His own gracious and forgiving nature. Only when stretched to the utmost limit, does God act in judgment. He wants us also to have a similar heart of mercy towards all people.

V.8: And another angel, a second one, followed saying, ‘Fallen, fallen, is Babylon the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality.’

Babylon is harlot-Christianity, the counterfeit church, that pretends to follow Jesus, but lives for itself and for the world and for all its lusts and passions. She has made all nations drink of the wine of the passion of her spiritual immorality. We will see more about her in *Chapters 17 and 18*.

V.9-11: And another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or upon his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will 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 goes up forever and ever; and they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.

Those who drink the wine of Babylon will also have to drink of the wine of the wrath of God! You cannot drink one and escape the other. The wrath of God is mentioned here as “*mixed in full strength*” - that means without any mercy in it. The Bible says that those who show no mercy to others will also be judged without mercy by God (*Jas. 2:13*). That means that all those who do not forgive the people who harmed, cheated, robbed or did evil to them will receive a merciless judgment from God, in the final day. Such unforgiving people are placed in the same category here as those who worship the beast and his image. All such people will be tormented with fire and brimstone before the holy angels and the Lamb forever. Their torment is eternal.

In *Rev. 4:8* we saw the living creatures who have no rest day or night because they are always worshipping God. Here we see that the wicked also have no rest day or night because they are always tormented, because instead of worshipping God, they worshipped the beast and his image.

V.12: Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

The saints are described as those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. Notice the two things mentioned: *obedience and faith*. The *Amplified Bible* translates this verse as: “*those who habitually obeyed the commandments of God*”. I hope we are among those who *habitually obey* the commandments of God and have a strong faith in Jesus. These are the two most important requirements to endure until the end.

Jesus Himself is *THE FIRST* overcomer Who invites all of us to overcome even as He overcame (*Rev.3:21*). He stands at the head of all these overcomers on Mount Zion - a small number of people who wholeheartedly followed the Lord in their earthly lives, and overcame the spirit of the antichrist in their own generation.

V.13: And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, ‘Write. Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!’ ‘Yes’, says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labours, for their deeds follow with them.’

Those who die in the Lord are *always BLESSED*. Then why does it say those who die in the Lord *from now on* are blessed. Probably because they will be in their graves only for a very short time - since the end is near.

Notice this phrase too: “*Their deeds follow with them*”.

We read in *1 Tim 5:24* that “*the sins of some men are quite evident going before them to judgment, for others their sins follow after*”. The sinful lives of some people are obvious to everyone. But the sinful lives of others are not so obvious, because their sins are hidden. But everyone’s sins will be revealed in the final day. And many will then be surprised.

In the same way, the good deeds of some people are quite evident. But there are others who have done a lot of good that no-one knows about (*1 Tim.5:25*). Their good deeds will be revealed only on the final day.

In *Rev.14:13* we read of such people who lived in goodness in hidden areas of their lives. And when the books are opened in the day of judgment, those deeds become manifest. Blessed are all those who die like that. There is a godly remnant like that in the world today - whose left hands do not know what their right hands are doing. It is sad indeed if all the good we have ever done has been seen by others, and there is no hidden goodness in our private lives.

V.14-16: And I looked and behold, a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud was one like a Son of man, having a golden crown on His head, and a sharp sickle in His hand. And another angel came out of the temple, crying out with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, 'Put in your sickle and reap, because the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe (withered)'. And He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth; and the earth was reaped.

Here we see Jesus reaping the harvest of *the unsaved*. The angel reports that the harvest of the earth is "withered" (*v.15 - marginal rendering*). The Greek word used here is "xeraino"- which means "withered"- the same word that Jesus used in *Mark 4:6*, in the parable of the sower, where some seed fell on ground that did not have much depth of earth, and where the plant *withered* when the sun arose. So this is the harvest of those people who responded only superficially to the gospel, and whose inner life was withered.

The harvest for the kingdom of God was ready even when Jesus was on earth (*See Jn.4:35*). And that reaping into God's kingdom has been taking place for 2000 years now. The reaping mentioned in *Rev.14:14* is of those who did *not* respond to the Lord's call, and who cry saying, "*The harvest is past, summer is ended and we are not saved*" (*Jerem.8:20*).

Those who do not come into God's kingdom now, are going to remain out in the fields and be withered. The *hour* of reaping referred to here is the same as the *hour* of judgment mentioned earlier in *verse 7*. The *DAY* of Salvation is over and the *HOUR* of judgment has begun. The Lord swings His sickle of judgment over the earth and reaps it.

In *Joel 3:12-16* also we read of this time: "*Let the nations be aroused and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat. From there I will sit to judge all surrounding nations. Put in the sickle for the harvest is ripe. Come tread the winepress for the winepress is full. The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision for the day of the Lord is near, in the valley of decision.*"

V.17-20: And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle, and another angel, the one who has power over fire, came out from the altar; and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle saying, 'Put in your sharp sickle, and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, because her grapes are ripe.' And the angel, swung his sickle to the earth and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the winepress, up to the horses' bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles.

The clusters are being gathered from the vine of the *EARTH*. The true vine of *heaven* is Jesus Christ - (*Jn.15:1*). But this is another vine - the vine of the earth-dwellers! And the grapes of that vine are ripe for judgment.

God judges people only when matters have become ripe. For example, we read in *Gen 15:13*, that the Lord told Abraham, that he would bring his descendants back into Canaan after 400 years in Egypt, because only then would the Canaanites be *ripe for judgment*. We read in *Leviticus 18* that most of the sins that the Canaanites indulged in were sins of sexual perversion. God ordered the destruction of the Canaanites through Joshua, for the same reason that He destroyed the world in the time of Noah - because there was so much sexual perversion that the whole world would have been corrupted if the wicked had not been removed. It was like cutting off a gangrenous leg so that the whole body did not die. In

Abraham's time, the sin of the Canaanites had not yet "come to maturity" (*Gen.15:16*). It was not yet ripe for judgment.

God is patient and longsuffering and He waits a long time. When we look at the sexual perversion and violence and evil in the world today, we would imagine that it is time for God to judge. But God is waiting for it to become ripe. Meanwhile, He wants everyone to repent. He sends forth His servants to preach the word, to tell people to turn from their sins. But they don't turn. And each time they reject the word of God, they become a little more ripe for judgment. A day will finally come, when the angel will report and say, "*The harvest is ripe*".

The winepress is the place where the grapes are put in and trodden for the grape-juice to flow out. This is a picture of the blood that will flow at the final battle of Armageddon - for 200 miles around Jerusalem.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

V.1: And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished.

In *chapter 6* we saw six seals being opened. Most of them did not bring down God's wrath, but only a description of certain events that would take place on earth in the last days. But when the sixth seal was opened, we saw that the word "*WRATH*" occurred for the first time. That is when the wrath of God begins. When God's wrath begins, the church is taken up, because the church is not under God's wrath. Then we saw the seven-fold last trumpet, which was an expression of God's judgment.

Now finally, we see seven bowls of wrath having the seven last plagues. In them the wrath of God is "*FINISHED*". Jesus also had said, "*It is finished*", when He hung on the cross. There He had experienced the fulness of God's wrath and judgment for our sin. And because we are today in Christ, there is no wrath or judgment for us. But there is no hope of escape from God's wrath for anyone who has not taken shelter in Christ's death on the cross.

We read in *Isaiah 13:6-11*: "*Wail, for the day of the Lord is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, cruel with fury and burning anger, to make the land a desolation; and He will exterminate its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellation will not flash forth their light; the sun will be dark when it rises, and the moon will not shed its light. Thus I will punish the world for its evil. And the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end (especially to) ..the ARROGANCE of the PROUD and abase the HAUGHTINESS of the ruthless*".

The wrath of God will be poured out especially on the proud, the arrogant and the haughty of the earth. There we see *how much God hates pride*.

V.2: And I saw, as it were, a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had come off victorious from the beast and from his image and from the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God.

Here we see the overcomers again, who have been raptured to meet Jesus in the air, and who are not going to be here, when God's wrath falls on the earth. We saw this sea of glass in *chap.4:6* too. These overcomers are standing before the throne of God.

In the book of *Revelation*, we have seen frequent flashes of *grace* followed by *judgment*. The book John ate was *sweet* and *bitter* - grace and judgment alternately. So we have a picture of grace here in *chap.15*, before we see judgment again in the next chapter.

Again, we must remember that the book of *Revelation* is not written in chronological sequence. The wrath of God described in *chap.6* under the sixth seal is described more fully in *Chap. 16*.

Those who have overcome are described here as those who have been victorious over the beast - having overcome the spirit of the antichrist, which has been in operation now for 20 centuries. The spirit of the antichrist has built itself up like a mountain since the 1st century, and we are very close to the peak now! One of these days, the Antichrist will be revealed. But in every generation, there have been overcomers who have overcome the spirit of the antichrist.

The world is full of people who behave like beasts and who react like beasts when attacked. But those who have got victory over the beast are those who react in a Christlike way to the beasts around them. These are the overcomers. They follow the Lamb. Even religious people - acted like beasts towards Jesus, when they crucified Him. But He loved them in return and forgave them. This is the path that the overcomers walk.

V.3,4: And they sang the song of Moses the bond-servant of God and the song of the Lamb saying, ‘Great and marvelous are Thy works, O Lord God the Almighty; Righteous and true are Thy Ways, Thou king of the nations. Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Thy Name? For Thou alone art Holy; for all the nations will come and worship before Thee, for Thy righteous acts have been revealed’.

There are two songs of Moses mentioned in the Old Testament - one in *Exodus 15:1-4*, when the Israelites crossed the Red Sea and Pharaoh and his army were drowned therein. Moses then sang saying, “*I will sing to the Lord, for He is highly exalted. The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea*”. We saw in *Rev.6* how the antichrist too is pictured as a rider on a white horse. Here we see the overcomers singing God’s praise for overthrowing that horse and its rider too.

In the final battle of Armageddon, the Antichrist and his forces will come into the land of Israel and attack it. At that time, the Lord Jesus Christ will come down with His saints. His feet will stand upon the mount of Olives, and He will destroy the forces of the antichrist. The people of God will watch and share in that victory without fighting at all.

And that is how we are to win every victory even today. We do not win the battle with human weapons. We stand still and trust in the Lord and the Lord destroys our enemies. So, those who have faith in that can sing the song of Moses even today!! We can sing the song of Moses in life’s battles. We can “*stand still*” and see what the Lord does to our enemies.

The second song of Moses is in *Deut.31:30 to 32:52*. There also he sings “*Rejoice, O nations, with His people; for He (the Lord) will avenge the blood of His servants, and will render vengeance on His adversaries and will atone for His land and His people*” (*Deut.32:42,43*).

In both songs, we see one truth: *The people of God do not take vengeance on their enemies. They stand back and God fights for them and avenges them.*

This is the song that we need to learn now so that we can sing it in glory with the harps of God one day. The daily situations of life are like a choir practice for us, to learn this song.

The overcomers sing saying that God’s ways are perfect. In heaven we will sing that “*Jesus has done all things well*”. In that day, when we look back over the way God led us on earth, we will discover that everything - yes, *everything* - was ordained by God for our *very best*. Today we do not understand why many things happen. But in that day, we will understand perfectly. But the man of faith does not have to wait until that day. He believes and knows it even now. He does not have to wait until God explains the reason for everything that happened to him on earth. Right now he sings, “*Lord! your ways are perfect!*”.

V.5,6: After these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened, and the seven angels who had the seven plagues came out of the temple clothed in linen, clean and bright and girded around their breasts with golden girdles.

The angels are clothed in linen “*clean and bright*”. In *Rev.19:8* we are told that the clean, bright linen typifies the righteousness of the saints. These angels bring forth the judgment of God, and their dress indicates that the judgment is righteous. The golden girdles around their breasts also speak of the same thing.

We read in *Isaiah 11:2,3* about Jesus, that “*He would not judge according to what He saw with His eyes nor according to what He heard with His ears*”. We all have a tendency to pass judgment on others based on what we have seen and heard! But Jesus would not do that, because he did not trust His earthly senses. We are called to follow Jesus’ example. Jesus saw and heard many things. But He took them all to His Father and said, “Father, I am now here as a Man with human limitations. So I will not judge anyone. I want to hear your opinion.” And if His Father told Him something, He would form his judgment on the basis of that. That is why the judgment of Jesus was always righteous. We are commanded never to judge anyone, because we can judge only on the basis of what we see and hear and such information is always insufficient to form a righteous judgment.

V.7: And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever.

The four living creatures had only participated in the *worship* of God until now. Now they also participate in God’s *judgment*. God’s righteousness and God’s judgment are not two different things. One is the direct result of the other. And it is just as natural for these four living creatures to worship God as it is to participate in His judgments, when the time comes. It is perfectly proper for God to manifest goodness and also to execute judgment when necessary - for *both* are manifestations of His perfect love.

V.8: And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power; and no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

When Solomon had completed building the temple in his day, the glory of God filled the temple. That was a manifestation of God’s goodness. But here the glory of God fills the temple when judgment takes place. This teaches us that there is a glory in God’s judgment too.

Here we see the answer to the question that many have as to how we will be able to bear the sight of some unconverted loved one burning in hell forever and ever. None of us can love anyone more than Jesus loves that person. So, if Jesus can bear to see that person eternally damned, we will also be able to bear it, because we will be like Him then. In the presence of God, we will see clearly that the glory of God is manifested in His judgments, just as much as it was manifested when Jesus walked on earth in meekness and love. We cannot understand that fully now, because we are still in the flesh and because our minds are tainted and warped by sin.

Unconverted men cannot understand even the glory of God manifested in Jesus “*full of grace and truth*” (*Jn.1:14*), because their eyes are blinded by seeking *the glory of men*. But we can understand it, because our eyes have been opened by God. We can now see the glory of humility, forgiveness, mercy, not avenging ourselves, loving our enemies etc., - which worldly people cannot see. In the same way, when our eyes are opened a little more in that final day, we will be able to see clearly that it is the *love of God* that sends people to hell too!! For God hates no-one. There is a glory of God manifested in His judgments too, which we may not be able to understand fully now.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

V.1-9: And I heard a loud voice from the temple, saying to the seven angels, ‘Go and pour out the seven bowls of the wrath of God into the earth. And the first angel went and poured out his bowl into the earth; and it became a loathsome and malignant sore upon the men who had the mark of the beast and who worshipped his image. And the second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like that of a dead man and every living thing in the sea died. And the third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and springs of waters and they became blood, and I heard the angel of the waters saying, ‘Righteous art Thou, Who art and Who wast, O Holy One, because Thou didst judge these things, for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and Thou hast given them blood to drink. They deserve it.’ And I heard the altar saying, ‘Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Thy judgments.’ And the fourth angel poured out his bowl upon the sun; and it was given to it to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues; and they did not repent so as to give Him glory.

The judgment of the first four bowls of wrath is similar to that of the first four trumpets (*Chap.8*). It is quite likely that these bowls will be poured out at the same time as those trumpets are blown. Exactly like the first four trumpets, the first bowl was poured out on the earth, the second on the sea, the third on the springs of water and the fourth on the heavenly bodies. Compare that with *Chap.14:7*, where people are asked to worship Him Who made (1) the heaven, (2) the earth, (3) the sea and (4) the springs of waters!!

Verse 2 speaks of the mark of the beast. We could say that as human beings grow up, they all begin to develop the mark of the beast (spiritually speaking), because they begin to behave exactly like beasts. *Eccl.3:18* says, “*I said to myself concerning the sons of men, God has surely tested them* (allowed them to go through various trials and testings) *in order for men to see that they are really ONLY BEASTS*”. When trials come into our lives, and we see ourselves behaving like beasts, God is trying to tell us that we are no better than the animals. But very few have ears to hear what God is saying at that time. Blessed are those who hear Him and repent and say, “*O God, how blind I've been! You created me to be Your son. Instead I have descended to the level of a beast. Have mercy on me and change me.*”

The opposite of the mark of the beast is the mark of the Lamb. The Lamb's mouth was shut when He went through the trials and testings of life. So we could say that in every trial, we get either a little more of the mark of the beast or a little more of the mark of the Lamb. He who has ears to hear let him hear.

When people are given blood to drink in the third plague, we see God making people reap what they have sown. They shed the blood of the saints. So God turns their waters into blood!! That was perfectly righteous of God.

God treats us exactly as we treat others. “*With the merciful, God shows Himself merciful, and with the crooked He shows Himself astute*” (*Psa.18:25*). Those who forgive others are forgiven by Him. Those who are generous to others, find God being generous to them. Those who are stingy towards others find that God is stingy towards them. Those who are unmerciful and hard towards others find that God is hard and unmerciful towards them. Those who shed the blood of others through their tongues or in any other way will find that, God gives them blood to drink one day.

We will find in the day of judgment that there is an exactness, in God's judgment. Exactly according to what we have done, will be our judgment. And our rewards too will be exactly according to what we have done, as the Lord says in *Rev 22:12*.

The angel of the waters says concerning God's exactness in meting out judgment, “*They deserve to drink blood*” or “*They are worthy of that*”. Contrast this with what Jesus said about the overcomers in Sardis, “*They are worthy to walk with me in white*” (*Rev.3:4*). What a contrast!

The words “*righteous*” and “*judgment*” often come together in *Revelation*. We will see clearly in the final day that there is a righteousness in all the judgments of God.

“THEY DID NOT REPENT” is a phrase that we saw in *Rev 9:20 & 21*. We see it again here (v.9). This shows how hard man’s heart has become. Even such severe punishment does not bring repentance.

V.10,11: And the fifth angel poured out his bowl upon the throne of the beast; and his kingdom became darkened; and they gnawed their tongues because of pain, and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they did not repent of their deeds.

This is somewhat similar to the plagues of Egypt. But instead of turning in repentance to God in their pain, they begin to blaspheme God even more. Repentance, is the best medicine for all pains and sores and sicknesses. But men don’t want that medicine. Instead they question God and curse Him. Does that cure them? No. It sends them to hell even sooner.

How blind and foolish can man be?

“THEY DID NOT REPENT !” is the spirit that builds Babylon, the harlot church. All Christians who end up in Babylon do so because *THEY DO NOT REPENT*.

The opposite of that is true for those who become a part of Jerusalem, the Bride of Christ: “THEY DO REPENT”. That is why we find in the Lord’s message to the churches in *Rev 2 and 3*, a repeated emphasis on *repentance*. That is the way to be an overcomer!! Our life must be a life of continuous repentance. We repent because we are not yet like Christ in our life or in our ministry.

Jerusalem, the true church, is built only by people who have a continuous spirit of repentance within them, and who find something to judge within themselves every day. You are in a sorry state indeed, if it has become difficult for you to go and apologize to a brother and to say to him, “I am sorry for what I did (said)”. Because, if so, you are on the road to Babylon. Perhaps you are already there!

It says in *verse 9*, that when we repent “we give glory to God”. How then do we glorify God *continuously*? By *continuous* repentance.

V.12: And the sixth angel poured out his bowl upon the great river, the Euphrates; and its water was dried up, that the way might be prepared for the kings from the east.

In *Chap.9*, we saw that some demons were bound at the River Euphrates. The River Euphrates flows past ancient Babylon that Nebuchadnezzar built. The “*kings from the east*” may possibly refer to the Chinese Army. *Chap.9* refers to 200 million people being in that army. The only country in the world that can raise such an army is China.

V.13,14: And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs. For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.

Here again we see an emphasis on *the mouth* - three times. When people do not repent, unclean spirits take control of their mouths. Here the unclean spirits come out from the mouths of the Satanic trinity - the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. Unclean spirits are likened to frogs here. Every time we speak an evil or unkind word, we must think of it as a frog coming out of our mouths. How sad when believers go around spitting out frogs all over the place - like the plague of frogs in Egypt. There is a great need for all believers to repent in the area of their speech.

These evil spirits perform miracles. Notice that deceptive miracles and signs are again mentioned as something that is going to be found in abundance in the last days.

The nations of the world will be gathered to Jerusalem for the final battle of Armageddon - the war of the great day of Almighty God. Evil words (frogs) that come from man’s mouth often lead to war finally - both in the world and in worldly Christendom. Here they lead to the final battle of Armageddon.

V.15: (Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his garments, lest he walk about naked and men see his shame).

Right in the middle of the war, comes one more warning from the Lord that we should not be found on earth at this time. We won't be here, if we are faithful. So let us keep our garments pure and watch our hearts and our speech. Jesus will come like a thief and if we are ready we will be taken up. And if we are taken up, then we won't be on earth, when all that is described here is happening. That is why this verse is put *in brackets* here.

V.16: And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

Fifty miles north of Jerusalem is a great big field, called the field of Mageds (Armageddon), where this final battle will take place, when Jesus comes down with his saints and destroys the Antichrist and sets up His kingdom on the earth.

During the battle of Armageddon, the spirits of demons will possess many of the rulers of the world - Prime Ministers and Presidents. And they will gather together in Armageddon to war against God.

V.17,18: And the seventh angel poured out his bowl upon the air; and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, 'It is done.' And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was a great earthquake, such as there has not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake was it, and so mighty.

When Jesus sets His feet on the mount of Olives, there is going to be a mighty earthquake - the greatest the world has ever seen - when the mountain will be split into two.

V.19,20: And the great city was split into three parts and the cities of the nations fell. And Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.

This is exactly what we saw when the sixth seal was opened: "*every mountain and island were moved out of their places*" (Rev.6:14).

V.21: And huge hailstones, almost one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe.

Zechariah 14 gives us a description of this battle of Armageddon. There it says, "*Behold, a day is coming for the Lord when I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle*" (v.1,2). 40 years after Jesus was crucified, the Romans came against Jerusalem and destroyed it. In the past 1900 years, many nations have come against Jerusalem - the Crusaders in the 12th and 13th centuries, and later the Turks and the British. But there has never been a time when all the nations of the world have come against it. That is still in the future.

Under the leadership of the Antichrist, all nations will gather in that day against Jerusalem to battle. "*The city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished, and half of the city exiled. Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on the day of battle*" (v.3). The Lord will come down and destroy the forces of the Antichrist and set up His kingdom on earth. "*And in that day, His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives*" (the same mount from which He ascended to heaven), *and the Mount of Olives will be split in the middle from the east to the west by a very long valley, so that half of the mountain will move towards the north and the other half towards the south...Then the Lord, my God, will come, and all the holy ones with Him*" (v.4-6). And then "*living waters will flow out of Jerusalem ..the Lord will be King in all the earth ...all the land will be changed into a plain .. but Jerusalem will rise and remain*" (v.8,9).

It goes on to describe what will happen to people in that final war. Some of it reads like the effects of a nuclear war: "*the plague with which the Lord will strike all the people who have gone to war against Jerusalem; their flesh will rot while they stand on their feet, and their eyes will rot on their sockets and their tongue will rot in their mouths*" (v.12,13).

When the Lord establishes His kingdom on the earth, in that day there will be "*no more merchant (businessman) in the house of the Lord*" (Zech.14:21).

Businessmen are those who make religion a business - those to whom godliness has become a means of material gain, like the money-changers in the temple in Jesus' days, whom Jesus threw out! In the final day all such business men will be driven out of God's house.

The next chapter deals with Babylon which is built by those to whom Christianity has become a source of profit and gain. The Lord is coming a second time to drive out the money changers, this time not from the temple, but from the Christian church.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

V.1: And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, 'Come here, I shall show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters.'

If a betrothed bride goes around with another man she could be called a harlot. The Bible says that if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father cannot be in him. Jesus said, "*You cannot serve two masters*". You cannot have two husbands - and Jesus said that the two possible husbands were God and Mammon (material things) (*Lk.16:13*)!

And these two cannot mix, like oil and water. You have to keep them totally separate. Oil is necessary for running your vehicle. Water is good for drinking. But when you mix the two, you cannot drink it, and you cannot put it in your vehicle either. It becomes useless.

That is what happens when people try to mix God and Mammon. They end up in Babylon. We have to choose - either to serve God or to live for money. But when people use the Christian religion to make profit for themselves, they build Babylon. And Babylon today is a massive structure! When money given for Christian work is used unrighteously for oneself or wasted carelessly, when reports of Christian work are sent out in order to get money in the name of Christ, there we have the essence of Babylon.

Babylon is called a harlot because she claims to be engaged to Christ, but is actually married to money and the world. She wants greatness in the world as well as in heaven. Heathen people cannot belong to Babylon and become harlots, because they do not even claim to be engaged to Christ. They are married to Mammon and they are loyal to their husband!! Only those who claim to be Christians can make up Babylon.

V.2: (Babylon) with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality.

This is the marriage of religion and politics. Political rulers and religious rulers work together, because both can benefit thereby. Both seek to rule over people - and working together achieves this end much better. Christian history reveals how much of this there has been in these 2000 years. When the Roman emperor Constantine, became a "Christian" around 300 A.D. he joined hands with "Christian" bishops and became the head of the church. That was the beginning of Babylonian Christianity. And it started in Rome!

Remember that John wrote *Revelation* at least 200 years before Constantine's time. And he says in v. 9, "*Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits.*"

The harlot was going to have her headquarters in Rome - the city built on seven hills. *Verse 18, "The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth"* confirms that this is referring to Rome.

Through the centuries, Christian leaders have worked hand-in-glove with political leaders - mostly from Rome and the result has been spiritual harlotry and the corruption of Christianity. That is Babylon.

The influence of this corrupt Christianity has now spread all over the earth. Therefore the verse says "*those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality.*"

V.3,4: And he carried me away in the spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality.

Babylon is the bride of the Antichrist. We shall see the bride of Christ later in *Chap. 19*. There is a striking contrast between the way the two are dressed. The bride of Christ is clothed in fine linen, bright and clean (19:8)- simple, clean and pure. But Babylon is clothed in gaudy, purple and scarlet colours, with gold, precious stones and pearls. We may say that since God looks at the heart and man looks at the outward appearance, God cannot be interested in what we wear. But our clothes are very often a revelation of the desire of our hearts - and that is what God sees. Babylon desires to deck herself with the glory of this world. The bride of Christ however clothes herself with "*a gentle and quiet spirit which is precious in the sight of God*" (1 Pet.3:4).

The golden cup full of *abominations* that Babylon holds reminds us of Jesus words in *Lk. 16:15*, "*That which men esteem highly is an abomination in the sight of God*". Everything that man values highly is detestable and an abomination in God's eyes. Whatever we have that brings us the esteem of ungodly people in the world has no value before God. Our cleverness, educational qualifications, wealth, musical abilities, cultured ways, refinement, family-connections, worldly honour and position - all of these have no value at all in God's eyes. The fact that people in the world speak highly of us also has no value in the eyes of God. Even the Nobel prize has no value in the eyes of God, for it is a worldly honour. Would you be thrilled if you got some worldly awards or honours like that? A church that places value on any of these things will certainly become Babylonian.

Babylon's immorality is seen in the fact that she claims to be an ambassador of Christ and yet lives by the principles of the world and seeks to be great in the world. That is how her cup becomes full of abominations.

Here is a test. Ask yourself just one question: *Can you honestly say that you do not care one bit for the approval and esteem of any human being - either of worldly people or of the leaders of your church?*

V.5: and upon her forehead a name was written, a mystery, 'BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH'.

Babylon is a mystery to many people, because she claims to follow Jesus. Thus she fools millions of her devotees across the world.

Babylon is called *GREAT* eleven times in *Revelation*. Notice the contrast with Jerusalem, the bride of Christ which is called "*the HOLY city*" (Rev.21:10). There we see the distinction between the harlot and the bride. The harlot is *great* whereas the bride is *holy*. Those who desire to be great in the world (even in the Christian world) will certainly become a part of Babylon. But if our pursuit is after holiness (Heb.12:14), then we shall be a part of Jerusalem. Babylon may be interested in evangelism and social work. But she has no interest in holiness. Her works are done to impress people in the world. There is a lot of Christian work like that. Statistics are deceptive. The fire on the final day will not test *size* and greatness but *quality* (1 Cor.3:13). Anyone who covets a position of leadership in any Christian organization or church, instead of wanting to be a servant like Jesus was, is heading towards Babylon, if he hasn't already become a part of it!

Babylon is called the *mother* of harlots, because there are many harlots, not just one. This religious Babylon began on a large scale when Christianity joined hands with the Roman empire in the early fourth century. But from that mother has come forth many denominational and independent churches through the centuries that have also ended up as harlots, and become just like the mother. So Babylon is called the

mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth. Is it only in the larger mainline denominations of Christianity that the leaders seek greatness and worldly honour? No. There are just as many leaders in smaller independent churches who seek for it too! Religious harlotry is widespread in Christendom.

But our Lord is not like any of them. He came riding on a donkey. He did not come with gold and silver decorations on His body. How can this Lord be united to a bride that is decked in purple and scarlet with gold and silver and precious stones. The very concept is ridiculous!

V.6: And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. And when I saw her, I wondered greatly.

Through the centuries, many so-called "Christians" of all groups have persecuted the true saints of God. Millions of true saints of God have been persecuted and killed by religious "Christians" of all denominations. Even today, many saints are being slain by their "fellow-Christians" - by their tongues and their writings - for preaching the whole counsel of God. Babylon and her daughters are indeed drunk with the blood of the true witnesses of Jesus.

But God has kept a record of everything and will repay everyone appropriately on the final day. No-one will escape, for God has promised to take vengeance and He always keeps His Word (*Rom.12:19*)

V.7,8: And the angel said to me, 'Why do you wonder? I shall tell you the mystery of the woman and the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns. The beast which you saw was and is not, and is about to come out of the abyss and to go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth will wonder, whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast, that has been, and is not, and will come.'

The beast came from the abyss. Human beings are *not* sent to the bottomless pit (abyss), when they die. If they are unconverted, they go to hell, as Jesus said in *Lk. 16:23*. The bottomless pit is where imprisoned demons dwell. So if someone comes out of the bottomless pit, it must be a demon. This will be an evil spirit who will control the Antichrist, just like there are evil spirits controlling world-rulers today. The phrase "*He was and is not*" could mean that the same demon was in the past in charge of one of the world's great empires. That demon was in the bottomless pit in John's time, but would be permitted by God to come out in the last days to control the Antichrist.

V.9-11: Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while. And the beast which was, and is not, is himself also an eighth, and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction.

In 96 AD, when *Revelation* was written, five world-kingdoms had fallen - Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece. Rome still ruled. One was yet to come. We don't know which the other one is. But it must be referring to some world superpower that existed during the past 1900 years. That empire would remain for a little while. In the last days, the Antichrist will arise. Finally he too will be destroyed.

V.12-14: And the horns which you saw are ten kings, who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour. They have one purpose and they give their power and authority to the beast. These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful.

Ten horns are ten nations. The "*one hour*" mentioned here is the hour of judgment when God is going to judge the world. The ten nations will give all their power and authority to the Antichrist.

We read in *Dan. 7:24,25*, "*As for the ten horns...ten kings will arise; and another will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings*". The Antichrist will subdue three of the ten nations totally and rule the other seven.

The Antichrist will then wage war against the Lamb. It won't be a long war. In just a few moments, the Lord will destroy the armies with the word of His mouth. His bride, the 144,000 - the called, chosen and

faithful - will be with Him in this battle. Many are called, but few are chosen, and fewer still are faithful. Are we faithful? Our faithfulness is tested not in big things as much as in little things. Blessed are those who seek to be faithful to the smallest commandments of Jesus.

V.15-18: And he said to me, ‘The waters which you saw where the harlot sits are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues. And the ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire. For God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God should be fulfilled. And the woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth.’

The harlot has spread her influence around the whole world. But finally the ten-nation kingdom will hate the harlot. The political powers will use the “Christian” religious system for its own ends. Once the rulers have accomplished their ends, they will have nothing more to do with Babylon.

During the elections for the U.S. President, some years ago, both candidates realised that there was a large chunk of the American population that claimed to be born again. So *both* candidates claimed to be born again Christians - *because they could thus get the votes of the born-again people!!*

In India, it has become a common practice now for “Christian” preachers to have non-Christian political leaders sitting with them on the platform and addressing the crowd. Thus the message of the gospel is totally compromised. One cannot imagine Jesus inviting Herod or Pilate to sit with him on a platform when He spoke to the multitudes. But today’s “Christian” preachers follow *another Jesus*. Yet multitudes of Christians are unable to see through this deception!

When the political powers have made use of Babylonian Christianity for their own ends, they will hate her and burn her up with fire. God will thus allow judgment to come upon false, apostate Christianity by the very same political powers they once held hands with.

In this chapter, we have seen the essence of false Christianity - it is religion, money-making and political power all mixed together.

From the beginning of the human race, we find two types of religions - one in Cain and the other in Abel. Cain was not an atheist, but a deeply religious man. He was no idolater. He believed in bringing offerings to the true God. He had a form of godliness. Abel also brought offerings to the same God. Whereas Abel came with the blood of a lamb, Cain brought vegetables from the ground. The Lord accepted Abel’s offering - perhaps by supernatural fire coming down from heaven and consuming it. When Cain saw that, he was jealous, for no such fire came down on his offering. And so he killed Abel. The first murder in the world was a religious murder - committed in jealousy. This was the beginning of what we read in *Rev. 17:6*, “*The woman was drunk with the blood of the saints*”. Cain was the first person to shed the blood of a saint. In Cain, we see the beginning of the Babylonian religion, just as in Abel we see the beginning of the true faith.

Then God wiped out all the descendants of Cain through a flood in Noah’s time, and started all over again. Noah was a descendant of Seth, not of Cain. There is no descendant of Cain in the world today. But a division soon came among the sons of Noah. He had a godly son called Shem, and an ungodly one called Ham. Ham was cursed, and Shem was blessed. Through Shem came Abraham, and the Jewish race and Christ.

Ham was cursed because he did not respect his father (*Gen.9:22-27*). It is interesting to see that the curse on Ham’s descendants came because he did not respect authority. Disrespect for Divinely-appointed authority is an essential part of Babylon. If children are not taught to respect their parents, they are being bred for Babylon. Ham had a son named Cush, who had a son named Nimrod who established the first kingdom of Babylon (Babel). (*Gen.10:6-10*). Then we read how they built the tower of Babel as an act of rebellion against God (*Gen.11*).

Secular history tells us that Nimrod was a great hunter who killed many wild beasts and thus became famous and a world-leader - a type of the Antichrist. Shem, the son of Noah, was prophesying in those

days, as a servant of God. He is a type of the true church standing against the abominations of the Antichrist. Finally Nimrod was slain - possibly supernaturally by Shem. But by that time, Nimrod was almost worshipped by people. History tells us that Nimrod's wife, Semiramis, sensing that she was now in danger of losing her power over the people, did something very clever. Being an immoral woman, she had a child through someone. When the child was born, she told people that it was Nimrod re-incarnated (come back to life again). Thus began the worship of the "*mother and son*", which in later centuries, became the worship of "*Mary and the infant Jesus*". There were images of "*the mother and son*", around the world, hundreds of years before Christ was born. These were the images of Semiramis and her son.

The Israelites also were corrupted by this Babylonian religion. In Jeremiah's time, we read that they used to burn sacrifices to "*the queen of heaven*" (*Jer. 14:15-18*). They were worshipping the queen of heaven 600 years before Mary was even born. In *Ezekiel 8:14*, we read of the Israelites weeping for the son, Tammuz - which was another name for Nimrod who was supposed to have been reincarnated as Semiramis's son. (That was Satan's counterfeit of the resurrection of Christ.) The "*mother and child*" were "*Semiramis and Tammuz*" in those days.

Secular history also tells us that the Babylonian religion included the worship of the sun. And so the idolaters used to eat a round wafer symbolising the sun. Around the heads of their Babylonian deities they would paint a picture of the sun - which we today call "a halo". There would be halos behind Semiramis's head and Tammuz's head. It was this Babylonian idea that finally influenced the pictures drawn of Jesus and Mary with halos.

Idolatry leads to immorality too. History books record the immoral lives led by the heads of "*Christian*" denominations in the Middle Ages. But immorality is not restricted to the middle ages alone. Many "*Christian*" preachers and pastors in the recent past have also been found to be living immoral lives. The daughters also have the harlotry of the mother.

For a detailed, fully-documented study of this subject, you could read the book "*THE TWO BABYLONS*" by Alexander Hislop. There you will see how many rituals and customs that are practiced by many churches today actually began in the ancient Babylonian religion.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

V.1,2: After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory. And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! And she has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird.'

Whereas *Chapter 17* showed Babylon as a religious system, *Chapter 18* shows Babylon as a commercial system. The two are interlinked.

How did Babylon become the dwelling place of demons? How did these evil spirits get a foothold in it? Because purity and holiness were not emphasised. If a church emphasises greatness, honour and prosperity, unclean spirits will very soon build their nests in its midst. If on the other hand, holiness and purity are emphasised, the unclean spirits will be driven away in no time at all. But it is rare to find a church these days that emphasises holiness. If a church begins to emphasise it, they are soon accused of preaching perfectionism - and the leaders of the church soon back off in fear, and stop preaching it. On the other hand, some churches that began with an emphasis on true holiness, have today become full of

legalistic Pharisees. And the unclean birds find a haven among them too! So we must watch both extremes of worldliness and legalism.

V.3: 'For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her; and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality.'

One example will be sufficient to show how worldly businessmen have become rich through Babylon. Think of the millions of rupees and dollars that are spent every year around the world, at Christmas-time, on cards and gifts - all in the name of Christ! Celebrating "the birthday of Christ" has become an opportunity for big business everywhere. Even so-called believers hob-nob with Santa Claus at Christmastime!! All this is Babylon, through and through. But what Christendom is actually celebrating on December 25 is the birthday of the sun god. The people of Europe worshipped the sun-god and celebrated his birthday (for many centuries before they converted to Christianity) on that date, because that was the date of the winter solstice, as per their calculations. (We now know that December 22 is the actual date when the sun moves northwards from the Tropic of Capricorn). The days started getting longer once again in the northern hemisphere after that date - and so that date was celebrated as the birthday of the sun-god. When those pagans changed their religion to "Christianity", they just changed the name of their feast and called it "the birthday of their new god, Christ"!! That has now given businessmen all over the world an opportunity to rake in millions!

V.4,5: And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, 'Come out of her, My people, that you may not participate in her sins and that you may not receive of her plagues. For her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.'

What a grief it must be to God that some of His children too are caught up in this corrupt Babylonian system. So the voice from heaven calls saying, "*Come out of her, My people*". Can you see the grief in the heart of God when He says: "*You are My people. How can you stay in this corrupt system? Come out of her at once, so that you don't take part in her sins. If you don't, then you will also have to share in her punishment.*"

The call to every believer is to come out of every system that has religion without purity, and where man's traditions have replaced the Word of God.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

V.6,7: 'Pay her back even as she has paid, and give back to her double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her. To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, "I sit as a queen, and I am not a widow, and will never see mourning."

Then the voice from heaven proclaims judgment.

Here in these verses we can see in a nutshell the essence of Babylon - "*She glorified herself*". She sought the honour of men. This is what we need to beware of most of all. Anyone who seeks his own glory will soon become a part of the Babylonian system.

The bride of Christ glorifies Christ. She sings the new song: "*Thou alone art worthy, O Lord! We are not worthy*". She does not seek or desire position, greatness, money or honour or anything in this world in the name of religion. She only wants to be a servant and to humble herself constantly.

But Babylon glorifies herself and lives sensuously and luxuriously in the name of Christ - using the money given for God's work to live in luxury. Babylonian leaders justify their lifestyle saying, "We are serving God. The King's sons deserve the best!!" Thus these wicked men live off the offerings of poor widows and poor people, without their conscience convicting them one bit. This is the abomination that is taking place everywhere in Christendom today. We read that God will give such people *DOUBLE* the punishment that He gives others. The one who knew his master's will and disobeyed it will be beaten with more stripes (*Lk.12:47*).

Babylon sits as a queen and does not know what it is to mourn for her sins. She only knows how to have grand parties and picnics and to live in style, spending the Lord's money in the name of Christ.

V.8-10: 'For this reason, in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire, for the Lord God who judges her is strong. And the kings of the earth, who committed acts of immorality and lived sensuously with her, will weep and lament over her when they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, "Woe, woe, the great city Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come."

Babylon's judgment is going to precede the battle of Armageddon. The rulers of the earth will then see her being judged.

V.11-13: 'And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, because no one buys their cargo any more; cargoes of gold and silver and precious stones and pearls and fine linen and purple and silk and scarlet, and every kind of citron wood and every article of ivory and every article made from very costly wood and bronze and iron and marble, and cinnamon and spice and incense and perfume and frankincense and wine and olive oil and fine flour and wheat and cattle and sheep, and cargoes of horses and chariots and slaves and human lives.'

When God's judgment falls on Babylon, the businessmen who made money in the name of religion, will weep and mourn - because their sales drop to zero.

Make sure that you don't have the slightest interest in accumulating luxurious articles for the sake of vanity and honour. *Slaves and human lives* are mentioned at the end of the list - or "*the bodies and souls of men*". When people get involved in the pursuit of unnecessary luxuries, finally their bodies and souls also get enslaved to Babylon.

V.14-20: 'And the fruit you long for has gone from you, and all things that were luxurious and splendid have passed away from you and men will no longer find them. The merchants of these things, who became rich from her, will stand at a distance because of the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning, saying, "Woe, woe, the great city, she who was clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls; for in one hour such great wealth has been laid waste!" And every shipmaster and every passenger and sailor, and as many as make their living by the sea, stood at a distance, and were crying out as they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, "What city is like the great city?" And they threw dust on their heads and were crying out, weeping and mourning, saying, "Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had ships at sea became rich by her wealth, for in one hour she has been laid waste!" Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her.'

God finally brings judgment on a Christianity that lived only for this world and its greatness, honour and wealth.

What do we learn from these two chapters? *Chapter 17* warns us to beware of a religion that seeks greatness instead of purity. And *Chapter 18* warns us to beware of pursuing after luxurious living - especially if it is in the name of Christianity.

Christianity mixed with money has probably led more people away from God than perhaps anything else. Those who don't give heed to this warning and who are not careful to avoid these matters will finally become a part of this commercial, religious "Christian" system called Babylon, that will finally be judged by God. The Word of God comes afresh to such people saying, "*Come out of her, My people*". He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

V.21 And a strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying 'Thus will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence and will not be found any longer'.

In *Chapter 2:20,21*, we read of “Jezebel” the false prophetess. Some of the things said about her there are very similar to the things said about Babylon. She led God’s bond-servants astray so that they became immoral and idolatrous. God gave her time to repent, but she didn’t. Jezebel brought the spirit of Babylon into a Christian church and the elder of the church did not restrain her. In the *Old Testament*, Queen Jezebel was finally *thrown down* and killed (*2 Kings 10:33*). The same fate awaits Babylon.

The difference between Babylon and Jerusalem is one of repentance. The only way to avoid becoming a part of Babylon is by ensuring that there is a spirit of repentance in our lives constantly.

V.22: ‘And the sound of harpists and musicians and flute-players and trumpeters will not be heard in you any longer;; and no craftsman of any craft will be found in you any longer; and the sound of a mill will not be heard in you any longer.’

Notice the mention of music here in Babylon. Music can be a good thing if it is kept under the control of the Holy Spirit. But in much of Christendom today, it is under the control of Satan. We even have “Christian rock-music” nowadays - “Christians” have started imitating Satan!! And believers sit back and accept all this as glorifying to God!!

In *Gen.4:21*, we read that it was the sons of Cain who first invented musical instruments - and they were invented after Cain was driven away by the Lord. Isn’t that significant? Music is not evil. It was created by God, not by Satan. But like many other things that God created, Satan has used music too to lead people to hell. Many young people have committed suicide after going to rock-concerts. Rock musicians have popularised drugs and Satan-worship around the world. And music is found in Babylon too. There is a spirit in all music, and we must discern whether we are worshipping God through music or worshipping the music itself! Many Christians don’t seem to be able to discern between the two.

V.23: ‘and the light of a lamp will not shine in you any longer; and the voice of the bridegroom and bride will not be heard in you any longer; for your merchants were the great men of the earth, because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery’.

The businessmen in Babylon were the great men of the earth. Notice the emphasis again and again on “greatness” in Babylon. If we are the bride of Christ, our calling is to be like our Bridegroom - despised and rejected by men, and certainly not great in the eyes of men.

It says here, that all nations were deceived by her sorcery. The *Amplified Bible* says that the nations were deceived by “*her magic spells*”. It is amazing that the spirit of Babylon has deceived Christians in every nation - by teaching them that they can live for the world - for money, pleasure and honour - and still be pleasing to God and go to heaven when they die, just because they “*believe in Jesus*”. It is exactly as though a spell had been put on them to believe something so contrary to everything that Jesus and the apostles taught and that we read in the entire New Testament. This is the result of the magic spell that Babylon has put upon them, so that they cannot see! It is sorcery!! It is deception!!

Consider just one example: Jesus said, “*You cannot love God and money. If you love the one, you will hate the other*” (*Lk.16:13*). Yet there are multitudes of believers who think they can love both. They will discover in the final day, that Babylon had put a spell upon them - that they only *imagined* that they loved God, whereas they loved only money with all their hearts and actually *hated* God.

V.24: And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth.

Many true servants of God have been slain by this Babylonian system. When a prophet denounces this Babylonian system, he won’t be popular with Christians who are a part of that system. He will be slain or persecuted in one way or the other. Babylon is guilty of the blood of many prophets who through the centuries have stood against her corruption, her immorality and her worldliness. The Lord has nothing to do with this system. So “*COME OUT OF HER IMMEDIATELY*”- before it is too late!

CHAPTER NINETEEN

V.1,2: After these things I heard, as it were, a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying ‘Hallelujah! salvation and glory and power belong to our God; because His judgments are true and righteous; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and He has avenged the blood of His bond-servants on her’.

“*Hallelujah*” is a wonderful word that means “*Praise the Lord*”. It occurs only *FOUR* times in the New Testament - all four here in *Rev.19:1-6.!!*

It is interesting to note that the first time that the word “*Hallelujah*” occurs in the New Testament is when Babylon the harlot has been judged. We too should be shouting “*Hallelujah*” for that! But charismatics who are still sitting in Babylon may not be able to say “*Hallelujah*” to that - because the magic spell of the sorcery of Babylon has deceived them!!

One translation of this verse says that Babylon was “*the one who poisoned the earth with her immorality*”. Only a few drops of poison are needed to make a glass of milk deadly. That’s how Babylon has corrupted the Christian faith - by mixing the poison of man’s traditions with truth. God now avenges the blood of His bondservants on her.

V.3: And a second time they said, ‘Hallelujah! her smoke rises up forever and ever’.

They shout “*Hallelujah*” a second time for the same reason. There is such terrific joy in heaven when the harlot is judged!

“*There is joy in heaven when a sinner repents*” (*Lk.15:10*). We can understand that.

“*There is joy in heaven when a believer overcomes Satan*” (*Rev.12:11,12*). We can understand that too.

But what about when the Word says, “*Rejoice, O heaven and you saints, because God has pronounced judgment on Babylon the harlot*” (*Rev.18:20*). Can we understand that? If we cannot, it is because we have not understood God’s ways.

Satan has hidden God’s judgment over Babylon from most people. But we must see clearly that there is joy in heaven when Babylon is exposed, when her sorcery and her deception are made manifest for all to see, and when she is finally judged once and for all.

We must anticipate that joy even today and say “*Hallelujah! Praise the Lord that one day this corrupt system will be judged - this system that deceives people and dishonours the Name of Christ, that has no interest in following in the footsteps of Jesus or in taking up the cross, but is only interested in having a good time in this world, or in becoming great, or in making money in the name of Christianity. Praise the Lord that all this nonsense that goes on in Your Name - fancy dresses and golden crosses and crowns and feasts and festivals - is going to be destroyed soon. Hallelujah! Her smoke ascends forever and ever*”.

This is the spirit of heaven - and we need to get something of that into us even now. If you are one in spirit with God and the inhabitants of heaven, you will share in their joy over the destruction of Babylon!!

V.4: And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God who sits on the throne saying, ‘Amen, Hallelujah!’

The third “*Hallelujah*” is again for the same reason! Three “*Hallelujahs*” just because the harlot is judged! It is like shouting, “Three cheers that Babylon has been destroyed”!!

V.5-7: And a voice came from the throne, saying, ‘Give praise to our God, all you His bondservants, you who fear Him, the small and the great’. And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude and as the sound many waters and as the sound of mighty peals of thunders, saying, ‘Hallelujah!

for the Lord our God, the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready'.

The fourth time they say “*Hallelujah*” and rejoice in heaven, is when the bride of Christ has made herself ready for her marriage!! Because the Lord God Almighty reigns, He made all the persecution and opposition that the bride faced on earth, to work for her good and to prepare her for her wedding-day!!

Notice that it doesn't say that *the Lord* made the bride ready. No. It says that “*the bride made herself ready*” It is *WE* who are to make ourselves ready for the coming of the Lord. Many believers know that if we walk in the light as God is in the light the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin (*1 Jn.1:7*). But that is only one side of the truth. The other side of the truth is that we too must cleanse ourselves.

Consider these three verses in this connection:

- (1) *1 Jn.3:3: “And everyone who has this hope PURIFIES HIMSELF as He is pure”.* The previous verse speaks about our becoming like Christ, when He returns. But what is the *ONE* mark of those who have the hope of Christ's return in their hearts? *They purify themselves constantly*. And when do they stop? Only when they are as pure as Christ is!! So we could say, quite Scripturally, that, “*everyone who does NOT have the hope of the second coming of Christ can be identified by this fact, that he does NOT purify himself in his daily life upto Christ's standard of purity”*!!
- (2) *2 Cor.7:1: “Having these promises, beloved, let us CLEANSE OURSELVES from ALL defilement of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God”.* The promises referred to here are the ones found in the previous verses (*2 Cor.6:14-18*), which are very similar to the exhortation in *Rev.18:4: “Come out of her, my people”*. Here we read:”*Come out from their midst and be separate*”, *says the Lord*, ‘*and I will receive you and be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters*’”. The condition for those promises to be fulfilled is that we cleanse ourselves. What do we have to cleanse ourselves from? From *ALL* defilement of flesh and spirit. It is thus that the Bride of Christ makes herself ready. So it is obvious now that not all believers can claim to be part of the bride of Christ, because the vast majority of them don't have the slightest interest in cleansing *themselves*.
- (3) *2 Tim. 2:20,21: “In a large house (this is the church) there are not only gold and silver vessels (these are the overcomers), but also vessels of wood and of earthenware and some to honour and some to dishonour. Therefore if a man CLEANSES HIMSELF from these things, he will be a vessel for honour, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work”.* We all start out as dishonourable vessels - converted but not Christlike. But here we are told that we can cleanse ourselves and become honourable, sanctified (set apart from sin) golden vessels, that are useful for the Master for every good work that He has in mind for us. It all depends on how seriously we take our calling to cleanse ourselves.

This is how the bride makes herself ready.

V.8: and it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

The phrase “*given to her*” makes it clear that it was a gift from God. This teaches us that, even the desire and ability to cleanse ourselves is a gift of God. It is God “*Who works in us to will and to do of His good pleasure*” (*Phil.2:13*). We cannot take any credit for that, nor can we boast over other believers in any way. The godly man is a humble man who gives *all* the glory to God for any goodness found in Him. He knows that nothing good is found in his flesh.

If this clothing is a gift, then why don't all receive it? Because God never forces anyone to receive His gifts. Even His gifts can be received only by those who respond to His Word.

The fine linen here is not the righteousness of Christ but “*the righteous acts of the saints*”. It is true that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us as soon as we are born again (*Rom.4:22-24; 1 Cor.1:30*). But

we are also told that “*the righteousness of law* (should then) *be fulfilled in us* (inside of us)” (*Rom.8:4*). That is the dress of the bride here: “*the righteous acts of the saints*”. That is so clear in *Rev.19:8*, that one has to be blind as a bat, not to see it.

Her own righteous acts are her garment. She got it by taking the Lord’s commands to cleanse herself and to purify herself, seriously. She worked out her own salvation “*with fear and trembling*” (*Phil.2:12*). Every time she worked out her salvation with fear and trembling in the power of the Holy Spirit, she put one more stitch, as it were, on her bridal garment. Over a period of years, she wove the whole garment.

What about a Christian who takes all this carelessly, saying, “The blood of Jesus has cleansed me. So I am all right”. To such Christians the Lord says, “*Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his garments, lest HE WALK ABOUT NAKED*” (*Rev.16:15*).

Have you ever seen a bride coming naked to her wedding? The Lord warns His people not to be found naked - naked, because they do not have a garment on the wedding day. They had no righteous acts of their own.

The deception of Babylon, the mystery of iniquity, the magic spell that Babylon has cast on so many Christians is this: “Don’t worry. You are clothed with the righteousness of Christ. It doesn’t really matter how you live.” James clearly warns us that faith without works is dead. Yet Babylon has prevented believers from taking such warnings seriously.

There is a difference between our own righteousnesses, which are like filthy rags in God’s sight (*Isa.64:6*), and the righteousness wrought in us in the power of the Holy Spirit as we take up the cross and walk in Jesus’ footsteps in our daily life. It is this latter which is the bridal garment. When we first come to the Lord all we have as clothing are the filthy rags of our own righteousnesses and even filthier rags of our sins. But when we are born again, God first of all justifies us - imputing the righteousness of Christ to us (*Rom.3:24; 4:5*). Then He writes His laws upon our hearts and minds (*Heb.8:10*), fulfilling the righteousness of the Law within our hearts (*Rom.8:4*). This results in that righteousness gradually becoming our outward attire, and our outward character becoming Christlike.

The bride’s garment is made of fine linen, bright and clean. What a contrast there is between her simplicity, and the gaudy, scarlet dress and gold ornaments of the harlot. In the “*Bridal Psalm*” (*Psalm 45*), we read about the Lord, our Bridegroom, as One Who “*loved righteousness and hated iniquity*” (*v.7*). And the bride is described thus: “*The king’s daughter is all glorious WITHIN*” (*v.13*). She has a meek and quiet spirit (*1 Pet.3:4*). And it is with this inner garment that “*she will be led to the King*” (*v.14*).

That will be fulfilled in *Rev.19:8*.

V.9: And He said to me, ‘Write, “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb”. And he said to me ‘These are true words of God.’

This verse seems to indicate very clearly, that there will be people in heaven who are not a part of the bride of Christ, for they are only *invited* to the supper. No bride is an invitee to her own marriage supper! Who then are these? Perhaps those who, although they left the harlot Babylon, yet were not wholehearted enough to be in the Bride of Christ. Jesus once said that even among the good ground on which the seed fell, there would be three types of people - those who brought forth 30-fold, 60-fold and 100-fold (*Mark 4:20*). None of these three categories of believers were *bad* ground. They were all *good* ground. But yet there was a great difference between the 30-fold believers and the 100-fold believers. The 100-fold believers form the Bride of Christ, for they “*followed the Lamb wherever He went*”. The 30-fold and 60-fold are however invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Even as you read this you may be tempted to think that all this is only the crazy opinion of some religious fanatic. So John is told to add one more sentence: “*These are true words of God*”!!

V.10: And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said to me, ‘Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy’.

John was so excited that he fell down to worship the one who showed him all these things. In the immediate reply of that angel to John, we see the attitude of true servants of God: “*Don’t worship me. Don’t get attached to me*”. A true servant of God will always connect you to Christ the Head, and never allow you to be attached to himself. To attract people to ourselves is to get them to worship us. Anyone who does that is not a servant of God, but a counterfeit. He has the spirit of the Antichrist who draws people to himself.

In Christendom today, unfortunately we have many such counterfeits through whom many believers are deceived. Many believers almost worship some preachers. They live by every word that proceeds out of the mouths of those preachers - instead of living by the words that proceed from God’s mouth. They seek to know God’s will through a man, instead of going directly to God - and these preachers encourage them!! This is idolatry!! There is a lot of so-called “*prophecy*” in some Christian circles today that makes believers dependent on the “*prophet*”. All such prophets are *false prophets*.

But here we see the angel saying, “*I am just a servant of the Lord, as you are. Worship God alone*”.

To hold to “*the testimony of Jesus*” means that we hold forth today the same torch that Jesus held forth in his earthly life. As He did, we too proclaim, “*Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God*”.

Here we have a clear definition of *true prophecy*: “*THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS*”. That means two things basically:

First of all, true prophecy always draws attention to Christ, and exalts Him. When Jesus is lifted up, He draws all men to Himself. The Holy Spirit Who gives the gift of true prophecy always glorifies Christ (*Jn.16:14*). Any prophecy that draws attention to yourself or to another man or that exalts you or any other man can be written off as a *false prophecy*.

Secondly, true prophecy proclaims all that Jesus proclaimed in His preaching. There is no compromise in true prophecy. It will be full of grace and truth, but it will speak ALL of the truth - in love.

So to test prophecy, we must first of all know what Jesus emphasised in His teaching. If we read the gospels and see what Jesus emphasised, we will have a touchstone by which to test all that we hear as “*prophecies*” today. If however, we haven’t studied the gospels carefully, the chances are that we will be deceived. Because 99% of what goes under the guise of “*Christian prophecy*” today is not proclaiming what Jesus proclaimed.

You just have to read through the sermon on the mount (*Matt.5 to 7*) and compare it with what you hear in most churches today to realise that.

V.11-13: And I saw heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He judges and wages war. And His eyes are a flame of fire, and upon His head are many diadems, and He has a name written upon Him which no one knows except Himself. And He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood; and His name is called ‘The Word of God’.

This is the second coming of Christ. In *Chapter 6:2* we saw another man riding a white horse - the Antichrist. But here at last is Christ Himself. Notice the emphasis again here on righteousness and judgment. God’s judgment will always be righteous.

His eyes are a flame of fire, penetrating into the deepest motives and attitudes of our hearts. His head has many diadems - proclaiming Him as King of Kings. He also has a new Name (*see Rev.3:12*).

He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood - symbolizing the fact that Christ’s death on the cross and the blood He shed is something that is going to be remembered for all eternity.

Every person in heaven will be healed of whatever physical disfigurement he had on earth. Those without hands and legs here will have a full body in the resurrection. All wounds too will be healed. But Jesus alone will retain the wounds He got on the cross - for eternity - as a perpetual reminder of His love for us

and the price He paid for our salvation. As we sing in that beautiful song, we will recognize Him by those wounds:

*“I shall know Him, I shall know Him,
By the print of the nails in His hands”.*

Jesus is called “*The Word of God*”, “*Faithful and True*” and also “*King of Kings and Lord of Lords*” (v.16).

V.14: And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses.

The armies of heaven refer to the 144,000 - the overcomers - the called, chosen and faithful.

V.15,16: And from His mouth comes a sharp sword so that with it He may smite the nations; and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty, and on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, ‘King of kings, and Lord of Lords’.

From His mouth comes a sharp sword - which symbolises the Word of God by which all nations will be judged. Jesus said in *Jn.5:22*, that the Father had committed all judgment to the Son. And the Lord Jesus will execute judgment through His Word: “*The word I have spoken will judge people in the final day*” (*Jn.12:48*).

V.17,18: And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in the mid-heaven, ‘Come, assemble for the great supper of God in order that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great’.

From this verse onwards, we see another description of the battle of Armageddon. (As we saw earlier, the book of *Revelation* is not written in sequential, chronological order.)

The battle of Armageddon will be over in one day.

The angel here invites all the birds of the air to assemble for the great supper of God. This is a different type of supper from the marriage supper of the Lamb!! This is a supper of the flesh of dead men! This is what Jesus referred to, when He said in relation to His second coming, that after the rapture of the church (v.30, 34,35), the vultures will be gathered where the body is found (*Luke 17:37*). At Armageddon, the vultures will be gathered around the dead bodies for the *great supper of God*!!

We read of this “*supper*” in *Ezekiel 39:17-21* too, where the Lord says, “*Speak to every kind of bird and to every beast of the field, ‘Assemble and come, for this great sacrifice.. eat the flesh of mighty men.... you will be glutted at my table with horses and charioteers.’*”

V.19: And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies, assembled to make war against Him who sat upon the horse and against His army.

In *Ezekiel 38:2*, we read the Lord saying, “*Set your face toward Gog of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal*”. This refers to Europe which was populated by Meshech and Tubal, the descendants of Noah mentioned here (*Gen.10:2-4*). The prince referred to here is the one who will lead these nations into the battle of Armageddon - the Antichrist. The battle finally ends with the Lord destroying all these armies.

V.20, 21: And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat upon the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.

There were two people who were taken alive into heaven - Enoch and Elijah. Here we see two who are thrown alive into the lake of fire - the Antichrist and the false prophet. All the rest will be killed by the sword (the word of God) - which came from the mouth of Jesus.

Hell and the lake of fire are not the same place. Hell is a small *pond* of fire which is where all unbelievers go today. One day hell itself will be cast into the *lake of fire* (*Rev.20:14*).

In the Old Testament, we read of Korah, Dathan and Abiram and 250 others being cast alive into hell (*Numb.16:31-33*). They were punished in this terrible way because they rebelled against the spiritual authority God had placed over them - Moses. They had the spirit of Lucifer, coveting a position of leadership that God had not given them. And they spoke evil of Moses behind his back. So God sent them *to the same place, where Lucifer belonged*.

At the battle of Armageddon, we find this spirit of rebellion that has built up over 6000 years, finally coming to a peak. Like a massive abcess, filled with the spirit of rebellion, it finally bursts. Today, children, rebel against parents. Students rebel against teachers. And believers rebel against God-appointed leaders - (by that I do *NOT* mean Babylonian priests and pastors, but godly shepherds, whom God Himself has raised up and appointed). We must beware of a spirit of rebellion against such godly authorities, for that is what the Antichrist will finally head up. And that is what Jesus will finally destroy.

All this teaches us that God hates rebellion against authority. We are living now in a time just before the day when the Antichrist who heads up this rebellion will be sent alive into the lake of fire.

CHAPTER TWENTY

V.1,2: And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan and bound him for a thousand years.

When Jesus was casting out demons from a man who had a legion of demons inside him, the demons begged Him not to send them to the bottomless pit. (*Luke 8.31*). They asked Him if He had come to torment them before their time (*Matt.8:29*). They knew they were destined to go to the bottomless pit one day. But they also knew that that time had not yet come then.

But here we see that that time has finally come!! Satan and all his demons are now bound for a thousand years in this bottomless pit.

V.3: And threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he should not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.

At one time, Lucifer had been the head of the angels. But now one of the junior angels comes and locks him up!!

We see four stages in Satan's fall.

- (1) From the third heaven to the second heaven (*Isa.14:12-15*).
- (2) From the second heaven to the earth (*Rev.12:9*).
- (3) From the earth into the bottomless pit (*Rev.20:1-3*).
- (4) Into the lake of fire forever (*Rev.20:10*).

In contrast to this, we see Jesus Who humbled Himself and came down from heaven and descended into the lower parts of the earth, being raised up and ascending to the throne of God.

He who exalts himself, will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted. There are *two* spirits operating in the world - one seeking to go down and humble itself constantly, and the other seeking to go up and exalt itself constantly. All of us are being influenced by one of these two spirits.

The devil is locked up here so that he should not *deceive* anyone. Notice that the emphasis here is on his *deceiving* people and not on his *torturing* them. Many people are afraid of the devil harming them physically. But God's Word warns us much more against his deceiving us. Jesus told us not to be afraid of those who can only kill our bodies. We are warned to be careful of Satan's *wiles* and his *deception*. The magic *spells* of Babylon are more dangerous than its *persecutions*.

This 1000-year reign of Jesus can be likened to the sabbath rest that God ordained for man. God ordained for Adam that he should labour for *six* days and rest on the *seventh* day. 2 Pet 3:8 tells us that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years. So, 6 days will be 6000 years. This is almost the period that man has lived on earth from Adam's time until now. So we must be very close now to the 7th day - the 7th millennium (1000 years) of rest.

The 1000-year reign of Jesus on earth is described briefly in Isa.11:6-9 thus: "*The wolf will dwell with the lamb. The leopard will lie down with the kid goat, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little boy will lead them. And the cow and the bear will graze and their young will lie together. And the lion will eat straw like the ox. And the nursing child will play by the hole of a cobra.*"

Adam was a vegetarian! God allowed him to eat only plants, leaves and fruits. But after the flood, God told Noah, that he could eat meat as well. But in the millennium, all the animals will become vegetarians again. Nature will revert to garden-of-Eden conditions. The serpent will not be poisonous. There will be no more thistles or thorns on the earth. No animal will any longer be fierce. Why? Because Jesus has finally been given His rightful place on earth.

What a pity that even animals suffer, because of man's rebellion against God!! All creation is groaning, waiting for the revelation of the "*sons of God*" (Rom.8:25). The animal-kingdom is waiting for the sons of God to take over this world (which has been ruled for 6000 years by the sons of the devil).

V.4: I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

The ones who came to resurrection-life were, "*those who had been beheaded because of the TESTIMONY OF JESUS*". They were killed, not because they did social work for the poor, but because they held forth the testimony of Jesus. What is the "*testimony of Jesus*"? Jesus said to Pilate, "*My kingdom is not of this world. Therefore, my servants will not fight*". That is the testimony of Jesus - a testimony of purity, goodness and other-worldliness. He lived for the things of heaven and eternity. These disciples had not worshipped the Antichrist, and had not got his marks either on their palms or on their foreheads, and so they reign with Christ for 1000 years.

Do you imagine that every Christian will reign with Christ? The Word of God says very clearly, that only "*if we suffer with Him now, we shall reign with Him then*" (2 Tim.2:12; Rom.8:17). Those who are faithful in their hidden life today will be publicly rewarded and will reign with Him then.

In the light of such verses, we would have to call God a liar if we were to imagine that every so-called "believer" is going to reign with Christ. God's Word is clear that only the *OVERCOMERS* will reign with Christ. Jesus said in Rev.3:21: "*He who overcomes, will sit with Me on My throne*".

V.5,6: The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these,

the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

In *Jn. 5:29*, Jesus said, “*The dead will come forth when they hear the voice of the Son of Man, those who did the good to a resurrection of life and those who committed evil to the resurrection of judgment.*”

The second death has no power over those who are raised in the first resurrection. We note a similar phrase in *Rev.2:11*, where it says, “*He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death*”. So we see that it is only those who have overcome who are going to be raised in the first resurrection - those who have listened to the voice of the Holy Spirit in their earthly lives and overcome the world and sin.

Jesus spoke of, “*those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead*” (*Lk.20:35*). This statement of Jesus also teaches us that the first resurrection is not for everyone. Some will be considered worthy enough to *ATTAIN* it, but not others. Everyone will be raised from the dead one day. But only those who are worthy will be raised in the *first* resurrection.

In *Heb. 11:35*, we read of Old Testament saints, who did not deny their faith, when they were tortured. They had refused to receive the mark of the beast on their forehead or on their hands. They did not accept release at the price of compromise. Why? So that they might take part in the first resurrection - the “*better resurrection*”. This also teaches us clearly that there is a *better* resurrection, and there is another resurrection that is not so good. It was because these Old Testament saints wanted to *attain to that better resurrection*, that they refused to deny their faith.

In *Dan. 12:2*, we read, “*Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, some to everlasting life, and some to disgrace and everlasting contempt.*”

In *Lk. 14:14*, Jesus said that if we help and bless and give to those who are in need who are unable to repay us here in this life, we will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous. God is going to repay the overcomers for all that they have sacrificed for Him, for His kingdom and for others.

In *Phil.3:7-11*, Paul says, “*Whatever things were gain to me I consider as loss for the sake of Christ. I count all things to be loss for the surpassing value of knowing Christ. I count them all as rubbish*”. Everything on earth was rubbish compared to the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. And why did Paul count all as rubbish? For one reason: “*In order that I may attain to the resurrection from among the dead.*”

What Paul was saying was, “*I want to be an overcomer. I want to know the fellowship of His sufferings. Otherwise I will not reign with Him. I want to know the power of His resurrection in my life now so that one day I can attain to that selective resurrection from among the dead that is going to take place.*”

When the Lord comes, and the dead are raised up, they will reign with Christ in resurrected bodies. When we are raised from the dead, we are going to have bodies exactly like the body Jesus had. *Phil.3:21* says that He will change our vile, lowly body into the likeness of His own glorious body. And you know the powers that His body had. His body could pass through walls. He could transport Himself from one place to another in a brief moment of time. We too will have bodies like that. It will be a visible body of flesh and bones (without blood), just like the one that Jesus had (*Lk.24:39*).

We will be able to recognise the saints of God whom we have never met. Peter, James and John *did not need to be introduced* to Moses and Elijah on the Mount of transfiguration. How did they recognise them? They had not seen any paintings of Moses and Elijah anywhere. It was part of the spontaneous recognition of people that takes place in God’s kingdom.

2 Cor. 5:10 tells us that we must *ALL* appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that we can be rewarded for the deeds we have done in our body, according to what we have done, whether good or bad.

Salvation is not by works, but by grace. But rewards will be according to our works.

The Lord Jesus will give out rewards to His disciples at His judgment seat. Those rewards will be according to the degree in which we have been faithful to Him and humbled ourselves here. The highest

reward will be *a closer intimacy and fellowship with God and Christ throughout eternity*. We will discover then that this is indeed the greatest honour and privilege that God can give anyone.

The earth will have peace for 1000 years because Satan is bound and because Jesus Christ reigns over the earth from Jerusalem.

During the millenium, millions of babies will be born on earth, just as they are born today. *Isa.65:20* says, *"No longer will there be an infant who lives but a few days or an old man who does not live out his days; for the youth will die at the age of one hundred, and the one who does not reach the age of one hundred shall be thought accursed"*.

Nowadays there are millions of infants who die in infancy. But it won't be so in the millennium. People will live for hundreds of years because diseases are removed and the curse is partially removed. The curse will not have been removed totally - because death will still be there. Young people's meetings in those days will be for 90-year-olds and 100-year-olds!! It will be like it was in the days from Adam to Noah when people lived up to over 900 years of age (*Zech.8:4,5*). But there will still be unconverted sinners on the earth at that time (*Isa.65:20 - KJV*).

V.7,8: And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore.

At the end of the millenium, Satan will be released from his prison and allowed to visit the earth again.

Why does God permit that? To show everyone the corrupt nature of man.

The 1000-year reign of Christ, will be a time of peace when everyone will see the goodness and humility not only of King Jesus, but also of the saints who rule the earth with Him (unlike the corrupt rulers of today). Even the animals will enjoy that time immensely. But Jesus will still have to rule with a rod of iron, because there will still be sinners who have to be suppressed. Sinful people will continue unchanged, without having given up the rebellion in their hearts. But they will be afraid to disobey.

Having seen all this and compared it with the 6000-year reign of Satan, one would think that the whole world would gladly chose Jesus as King. But, no. They don't. This is the *unbelievable* reality, that when Satan is released for a short time, and goes out across the earth, he is still able to gather *millions* to follow him in rebellion against the Lord.

This is unbelievable that people will still want to follow Satan. But there God will show everyone the corruption in man's heart.

It says here that Satan will go out and *deceive* people - not frighten them. Once again he will tell people, *"God's commandments are burdensome. For a thousand years, you were not able to satisfy your lusts. You could not have any fun because you had to obey God. Now come to me and enjoy yourself."*

These are the words that he has told man for 6000 years and that many men have believed. The amazing thing is that even after the millenium, there will be millions of people who will *believe him again and be led astray*.

Thus God will show this universe the corruption of the race of Adam, that even after they have seen the reign of Christ for a thousand years they still choose Satan in order to live after their lusts.

Gog and Magog are mentioned here again. But this is not the battle of Armageddon. That was before the millenium. But now the descendants of Gog and Magog are going to gather together to fight against the Lord a second time!! Truly the stupidity of man is unbelievable. He never seems to learn the most elementary lessons. As the Bible says, the heart of man is deceitful and no good thing dwells in his flesh (*Jer.17:5; Rom.7:18*). And here is the clearest possible proof of that at the end of time.

V.9: And they came upon the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them.

Those foolish men try to attack the saints, even though they have seen that the resurrection bodies of the saints can never be harmed or killed. That is how Satan makes fools of men. So they surround the camp of the saints - Jerusalem, where Jesus has His throne. But fire comes down and they are destroyed immediately. This battle will be even shorter than the battle of Armageddon. That may have taken a day. This will take only a *moment*.

V.10: And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Notice the number of times the devil is called a deceiver in *Revelation*. That is to warn us. He is finally sent to his eternal home - the lake of fire.

The first occupants of the lake of fire, we already saw, were the Antichrist and the false prophet. The third occupant is Satan. So the entire Satanic trinity will occupy the lake of fire first of all.

The beast and the false prophet are still there after a thousand years. They are not consumed, for the fire is never quenched and the worms never die there (*Mark 9:44,46*). Like Babylon, their smoke rises up forever and ever (*Rev.19:3*).

Many people today feel that men do not follow the Lord Jesus, because they have not seen the goodness of the Lord. But after the millenium, everyone will see that that is not the reason. The real reason is that man does not want to give up his own will.

V.11: And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them.

The first throne - *Christ's judgment-seat*- was set up at the beginning of the millenium, when the saints were rewarded. Now we see the second throne - *the great white throne*- set up at the end of the millenium. It says here that *no place was found for the earth and the heaven*. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, *no place was found for Him to be born*. But now when He sits on the throne, no place is found for the earth that rejected Him.

V.12: And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.

Even after these unbelievers are raised from their graves, notice that they are still referred to as "*the dead*". They are still not really alive, for they are spiritually dead. They are physically alive because they have been raised from the graves, but they are spiritually dead.

"*The dead*" stand before the throne and the books are opened. The marginal rendering reads, "*the scrolls were opened*". In 96 A.D., there were no bound books, as we have today. They only had scrolls - long parchments that were rolled up on a spindle. One had to roll up one end to go to the next page. The nearest thing we have today to a scroll is the magnetic tape such as are used in tape-recorders and video-recorders. So we could paraphrase this verse as: "*The video-tapes were brought out and replayed*". What tapes? The recordings of the entire lives of every man that lived on earth since Adam, who was not raised at the first resurrection. These recordings are actually stored accurately in each person's memory - every deed he did, every word he spoke, and every thought, attitude and motive that he ever had, during his entire life.

And they are judged according to the recordings on their own tapes. Salvation is by grace. But rewards and punishment are according to one's works. There will be different degrees of punishment for different people in the lake of fire. God would be unrighteous if He punished all men alike. Everyone will be judged according to his works. The Lord will rewind the tape of each person's life as he comes forward, and play it back on a screen for all to see. The video tape of a man's own memory cannot lie. It will faithfully playback everything. He will not be able to argue against the recording for it is his own memory that is playing it back. And the whole world will see the record and agree with God that each man *deserves* the punishment that he is going to be given for all eternity. This judgment will prove to everyone

the righteousness of God in punishing people. There is a saying that “*justice must not only be done but also be seen to be done*”. It will be seen by one and all in that day that justice was done perfectly by God.

In that day, the word that Jesus spoke will be fulfilled, “*Every careless word than men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the day of judgment*” (*Matt.12:36*). You may think that the idle words you have spoken have all been forgotten? But they haven’t. They have been recorded faithfully on the video tape of your own memory. The words you spoke in anger and in bitterness, the words of backbiting and slander etc., have all been faithfully recorded on the tape.

Rom.2:16 says that God will judge the *secrets* of men. *1 Cor. 4:5* states that God will bring the hidden things and motives to light. Babylonian “Christians” who made money in the name of Christ to build their own financial empire, will be exposed in that day. No one will escape. The dead will be judged according to their deeds.

V.13: And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds.

The *sea* giving up its dead could possibly refer to some evil spirits who have been imprisoned. Death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them - this refers to all unbelievers. The sea seems to contain some others.

2 Pet.2:4 says that God committed certain angels who sinned to pits of darkness and reserved them for judgment. The context there is the time of Noah (*v.5*), when some angels sinned, by lustng after women and possessing men in order to commit sexual sin with those women. Those angels are not allowed to move around freely today like other evil spirits are. They have been reserved for judgment. Their judgment could also be at this time. This could possibly be what is meant by “*the sea giving up its dead*”.

The sea was not part of God’s *original* creation. *Gen.1:1* says that God created only the heaven and the earth originally. The sea (waters) came as a result of Lucifer’s sin - between *verses 1 and 2 of Genesis 1*.

V.14: And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

Jesus spoke very clearly about what happens after death in the story of the rich man and Lazarus (*Lk.16:19-31*). This is not a parable but a true story. From the fires of Hell, the rich man saw Abraham and Lazarus in Paradise, and cried out for water to cool his tongue. Actually he had no tongue, for his body had been buried on earth and it was only his soul that was in Hell. But having had a tongue all his life, he imagines that he still has one now!! People who die are conscious of their surroundings immediately. Those in Paradise and Hell could see each other and also speak to one another. But between these two places was a great gulf that could not be crossed.

Hades (the word used for the place of departed spirits, in the Greek language) or Sheol (the word used in the Hebrew language), had two sections. One was *Hell*, where the rich man went. The other was *Paradise* or *Abraham’s bosom*, where Lazarus went.

When Jesus died on the cross, He told the repentant thief, “*Today you shall be with me in Paradise*” (*Lk.23:43*). We read in *Acts 2:27*, that Jesus went down to Hades. Putting these Scriptures together, we see that Jesus and the thief went to the Paradise-section of Hades. In *Matt.12:40*, Jesus said, “*As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*”. Jesus’ body was in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea on the surface of the earth. But He Himself was in the heart of the earth, as He had said! So that teaches us that Hades, the place of departed spirits, was in the heart of the earth at the time when Jesus died. Jesus, Lazarus and the repentant thief all went to the *Paradise* section where Abraham was.

But when Jesus ascended to heaven after His resurrection, we read in *Eph. 4:8* that He took the captives captive and ascended with them. That means that He took all the people in the *Paradise* section of Hades and took them up to the third heaven, the presence of God. Today *Paradise* is no longer in the heart of the

earth. It is in the third heaven in the presence of God Almighty. We know this from 2 Cor.12:4, where Paul says, “*I was caught up to Paradise, to the third heaven*”.

But Hell is still in the heart of the earth. Hell will finally be cast into the lake of fire.

V.15: And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

This is the lake of fire that Jesus spoke of in Matt. 5:29, when He said, “*It is better for you to pull out your eyes if your eye is causing you to lust after women, rather than have both eyes and go to the lake of fire*”, and “*It is better for you to cut off your right hand if your right hand is causing you to sin than have both hands and go to the lake of fire, where the worm never dies and the fire is never quenched*”. In the same spirit, it would also be true to say, “It is better for you to cut out your tongue or any other part of your body that makes you sin and that will send you to the lake of fire.”

Jesus spoke about Hell and the lake of fire more than any other preacher. This was because He knew more than anyone else about the awful reality of these places, and of the danger of damnation for those who did not turn from their sins.

At last the final judgment is over, after 7000 years of man's history - 2000 years from Adam to Abraham, 2000 years from Abraham to Christ, 2000 years between the first and second coming of Christ, and 1000 years of the millenium.

What happens after man has laboured for 6000 years (6 days) and rested for 1000 years (1 day)? Something new!

We read about that in the next two chapters of *Revelation*.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

V.1: “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea.

The Bible begins with the words “*In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth*” (Gen.1:1). But that heaven and earth were defiled by the sins of the angels and the human race. So God will destroy that heaven and earth, as we read in 2 Pet. 3:10: “*The heaven will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up*”. It will be a mighty atomic explosion. When one atom is split, the energy generated thereby is enough to destroy a whole city. Imagine what it will be like when God splits all the atoms on the earth!!

Then God will make a fresh beginning. Once again, as at the beginning, there will be no sea, but only the heaven and the earth.

Peter goes on to say, “*Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat*” (2 Pet.3:11,12).

The *day of God* mentioned here is different from *the day of the Lord*. The day of *the Lord* is when Jesus comes and establishes His thousand year reign. At the end of that day of the Lord, the heavens and the earth will be destroyed and then will begin the *day of God*.

“But according to His promise, we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet.3:13).

During the 1000-year reign of Jesus, there will still be sinners with unrighteousness in their hearts. But when eternity begins with a new heaven and a new earth only righteousness will be found in it. This verse can also be translated as, “...in which righteousness feels at home”. We all know that there is a lot of difference between *living* in a house and *feeling at home* there. In some people’s homes, we feel at home. In other people’s homes, although they may be hospitable, we don’t feel at home. Righteousness does not feel at home here on this earth at present. But a day is coming, when righteousness will at last feel at home, in the new heaven and the new earth. To prepare us for that kingdom, God has begun to do a work in our hearts.

2 Cor. 5:17 says, “*If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation*”. What we see in *Rev.21* is this same new creation. The work that God does in creating a new heaven and earth is the same work that He does when He makes us His children. He establishes His kingdom within our hearts - a kingdom of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit - where righteousness feels at home. If righteousness feels *at home* in your life then you have entered into this new-creation life, not otherwise.

And just as God will one day burn up the old heaven and the old earth with fire, He will also burn up the remnants of the Adamic nature within us and make us totally like Jesus - when Christ returns - so that we can be prepared for that new heaven and new earth. That is the work that God has already begun doing in the hearts of those who are purifying themselves as Christ is pure.

Jesus said in *Jn. 14:2*, “*In My Father’s house are many dwelling places. I go to prepare a place for you*”. He has gone to prepare a place for those who are sick and tired of sin and unrighteousness, and who are longing for righteousness. Jesus Himself loved righteousness and hated iniquity, and the home He is preparing is for those who have the same attitude.

V.2: And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.

Jerusalem is called the *holy* city unlike Babylon which is called a *great* city. This is the bride of Christ. She is adorned for her Divine Husband. We read that word “*adornment*” in *1 Pet. 3:4*, where Christian women are told to adorn themselves, not with gold, braided hair and fancy clothes, but with a gentle and quiet spirit which God values greatly. It is those who have learned gentleness and humility from Jesus who are adorned. The bride of Christ does not have any external glory or greatness, but rather inner character. We do not possess gentleness in our nature. We are all harsh, rude, crude and proud by nature. But once we receive Christ, the Holy Spirit begins His work of adorning us with humility and gentleness. The only question now is whether we are allowing the Holy Spirit to do that work in our hearts.

V.3: And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them.’

God has always wanted to dwell among men. And His desire is finally fulfilled. In *2 Cor.6:16-18*, God says, “*I will dwell in them and walk among them...Therefore come out from their midst and be separate, and do not touch what is unclean and I will welcome you and I will be a Father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me*”.

There is a condition for God to dwell among men: *We must stay away from all that is unclean.*

V.4: And He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.

The curse is finally removed totally. Even in the millennium, people will die. But finally in eternity, there will no longer be any death. There will no longer be any mourning or crying or pain.

V.5: And He who sits on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’ And He said, ‘Write, for these words are faithful and true.’

The book of *Revelation* is full of new things - a new *name*, a new *song*, a new *heaven*, a new *earth* - and now *all things* are made new.

John was told to write it all down, so that God's people can know what their future home is going to be like.

V.6: And He said to me, 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost.'

All that Christ died and rose again for is finally fully accomplished. He is the Beginning and the End. He said "*It is finished*" on the cross. Now we see the fulfilment of the work begun there: "*It is done*".

God's promises are only for those who thirst. Jesus said in *Matt.5:6*, "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied*". The springs of the water of life refer to the manifestation and the experience of the Holy Spirit. They are freely given by God to all who thirst - and they don't have to pay for it - either with money or with good works or with 'tarrying' or fasting or anything. It is without any cost.

V.7: He who overcomes shall inherit these things, and I will be His God and he will be My son.

There is a difference between a child and a son. God says here, "*He will be my son*" - NOT "*My child*"!! The Father is delighted to hand over His entire inheritance to His sons, saying, "*My sons, I have proved you and tested you. Now everything that I have created is yours*". How blessed it will be in that day for the overcomers.

V.8: But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

Those listed here are in contrast to the overcomers mentioned in the previous verse. These are the ones who did *not* overcome. There are *eight* classes of people mentioned here who will be cast into the lake of fire.

Notice the category of people that *heads* the list. We would probably have put murderers at the top of the list. But murderers are only Number Four and immoral persons are only Number Five.

At the top of the list here are the *cowardly* - the people who were afraid of the opinions of men and who therefore compromised. These are the ones who, before they took any step, asked themselves, "*What will So-and-so think of me if I do that?*"

It is not enough to give up murder and adultery. We must cleanse ourselves from cowardliness too. God hates this because it is idolatry - worshipping the creature, seeking the honour of men, and being concerned about man's opinion rather than God's.

The overcomers are those who have overcome the eight sins listed here.

First of all they overcome cowardliness.

Second in the list are the *unbelieving*. This has two meanings - those who do not trust God, and those who are unfaithful in their lives. When God says something, if we don't believe it, that is insulting God and it is sin.

Third in the list are the *abominable*. This refers to people who indulged in sexual perversions, - abominable, filthy things, that even animals would not do.

Fourth are the *murderers*. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer. Those who hate their brothers will finally go to the lake of fire.

Fifth are the *immoral* persons. These people may not have sinned in this area publicly. But they did not "*pluck out their eyes*" or "*cut off their hands*", and radically eliminate sinful lusts from their lives.

Sixth are the *sorcerers* - those who played around with magic, astrology, what the stars foretell, palm reading, ouija boards, demonic games. The word '*sorcerers*' in the Greek is '*pharmakeus*', from which

we get the English word ‘*pharmacy*’ - those who deal with drugs. So this also refers to those who sell harmful drugs that destroy people. (We saw this mentioned in *chap.9:21* too)

Seventh are the *idolaters* - those who give anything other than God the Number One place in their hearts. This includes those who worship money, pleasure or anything of this world.

Finally, eighth in the list are *all liars*. In all the other categories, the word “*all*” is not mentioned. But when it comes to liars, it says “*all liars*”. Why? Because there are many types of lies - black lies and white lies!! And just in case the white liars think that it refers only to the black liars, the Holy Spirit assures them that *all liars* are included. Every category of liar - grey, brown or yellow - *all liars* will burn in the lake of fire. Lying dwells deep in our flesh. Blessed are those who cleanse themselves from it wholeheartedly *now*.

V.9: And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, came and spoke with me, saying, ‘Come here, I shall show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.’

The angel mentioned here showed John the bride, the one who overcame all these sins. She had the same flesh as the ones who went to the lake of fire. But she was an overcomer, because she followed in the footsteps of Jesus, trusted in the Lord, and mortified the deeds of the body through the power of the Holy Spirit

V.10,11: And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal clear jasper.

The first thing mentioned about the church - the holy city - here is that she had the glory of God. That was what John mentioned about our Lord too in *Jn. 1:14*: “*We beheld His glory, the glory as the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth*”. The bride partook of grace and truth from Christ and was thus increasingly filled with the glory of God. She is spoken of as *crystal clear*. This means that she was transparent, without any hypocrisy. She had cleansed herself from guile. She was transparent. What she was on the outside she was on the inside too.

V.12: It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are those of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel.

It is interesting to note that the description of Jerusalem, the church, begins with the wall. What would we have begun with? With the high towers perhaps. But the Holy Spirit begins with the wall. The wall was “*great and high*” and this speaks of separation from the world and from all that is unclean. “*Outside (the wall) are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying*” (*Rev.22:15*).

Blessed are those who build the wall, great and high, around the church even today. Because then it won’t be easy for people to climb over and get into the church. They will have to come through the narrow gate (which is the size of a needle’s eye!!). We must *not* make it easy for those who love the world and money and for those who don’t want to give up their sins to become a part of the church. We must point such people to the narrow gate - just like Jesus did to the rich young ruler who loved money more than God and yet wanted to have eternal life! The way to life is narrow and there are few who find it. There are multitudes of preachers - hirelings - who have broadened the gate and lowered the wall for people to get into their church. But that is *THEIR* church and not the church that Jesus is building. Jerusalem has a great and high wall.

Jerusalem had twelve gates. Here the Holy Spirit is *NOT* picturing the narrow gate of salvation, but something quite different. *Isa. 60:18* tells us “*Your walls shall be called Salvation* (salvation from sin and separation from the world) *and your gates shall be called Praise*”.

There are twelve gates - three each in the north, south, east and west. This teaches us that we must always enter God’s presence, whichever side we come from, with a spirit of praise and thanksgiving always. There is absolutely no room for murmuring, grumbling or complaining in the church. These are the first

two things mentioned about the new Jerusalem - the wall of separation and the gates of praise. These are the *TWO* things we need to constantly speak about in the church.

It is interesting to see that the names written on the twelve gates are the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, This teaches us clearly that Old Testament saints will also be a part of the bride of Christ - no matter what the dispensational Bible-scholars may say about that!!!

V.13,14: There were three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west. And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on these were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The twelve apostles of the Lamb are not the foundation of the city, but the foundation of the wall. The foundation of the city is Jesus Christ Himself (*1 Cor.3:11*). The apostles were the foundation stones of the wall, because they were the ones who laid the foundation first of all for the high wall of separation. It is on that foundation that we build the high wall of separation today.

V.15,16: And the one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, and its gates and its wall. And the city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as its width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal.

The city is a cube. In the Old Testament tabernacle, the Most Holy Place was a cube, exactly fifteen feet in height, length and width. In the temple too, the Most Holy Place was a cube. The city of Jerusalem will have no outer court or Holy Place. It will be *entirely the Most Holy Place* alone. This teaches us that the Bride comprises of those who have valued fellowship with God more than anything else - (for God dwelt in the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle). In the outer court and the Holy Place, people concentrate on *serving* God, whereas in the Most Holy Place, we *worship and fellowship* with God. There, we sit, like Mary, at the feet of the Lord, and worship Him and listen to His words.

Jerusalem being a cube also symbolises that those who are a part of it have as much *depth* to their lives as *length* and *breadth*. In other words, God sees as much depth in their inner lives as people see in their outer lives.

Most Christians' lives however are like a square, and not a cube. Their front face - what people see - is large. But if you were to look inside, there is no depth. Their squares becomes bigger and bigger as their reputation increases before men. But in the day of judgment, when God turns all these squares sideways it will be seen that many of them were as thin as paper. They were not cubes at all, but only squares. Such people will not be a part of Jerusalem. We must fear to live with merely a reputation before men. It is better to be a very small cube than to be a large square.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

V.17,18: And he measured its wall, seventy two yards, according to human measurements, which are also angelic measurements. And the material of the wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass.

Again we see the emphasis is on purity - clear like transparent glass. God is not looking for *perfect* people to populate Jerusalem with, but for *sincere* people - those who have no guile in them.

V.19,20: The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stones. The first foundation stone was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst.

Precious stones are not formed overnight. They are formed over a period of many years, under tremendous pressure, hidden from the eyes of men, deep under the surface of the earth. And this is how the saints of God are formed to fit into the new Jerusalem - through the many pressures of daily life and circumstances. They humbled themselves under these pressures, and as a result, over a period of many years, they became precious stones.

In *Ezekiel 28:13*, we read that Lucifer was decorated with these very stones. But he was cast out of God's presence. These stones then appear in the garment of Aaron, the high priest *Ex.28:17-20*. This symbolised that what Lucifer had lost was going to come to man through Christ, whom Aaron typified. And those stones are finally found in the bride of Christ. That glory of God has come to the church, the new Jerusalem.

V.21: And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

Every gate is a pearl. Pearls too are formed through the reaction of an oyster to a foreign substance entering its body. Everything is a picture of glory that has come through suffering - as Jesus told the two disciples who were walking to Emmaus: "*Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?*" (*Lk.24:26*).

The street of the city was pure gold. In heaven we are not going to *put on* gold, we are going to *walk on* gold. Here on earth, people place a high value on gold. They wear it on their *heads*. But it will be *under our feet* in heaven - and it is under the feet of those who are heavenly-minded, even today! These are the ones who have overcome the lust for gold and are ready for heaven!

The street of the city was like transparent glass too. We know the difference between glass and water. Water can be made impure easily, by just putting something into it. In fact, almost all the water in the world is impure. But glass cannot be made impure by putting something on to it. Dirt just washes off glass without any problem. That is a picture of how our eternal state will be. We are going to be in a place where it will be impossible to sin again. In this world, we may fall, but in heaven it will be impossible.

V.22-27: And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or the moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. And the nations shall walk by its light, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it. And in the day time (for there shall be no night there) its gates shall never be closed; and they shall bring the glory and the honour of the nations into it; and nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come to it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

The light of heaven will be God Himself. There we will not need anything else to give us light or to make us happy. God will be All-in-all and He will be sufficient for our every need. We will not need the sun or moon or any other light. This is picture-language that shows that to be a part of this Jerusalem is the greatest glory that one can ever imagine on earth - far greater than the glory of any earthly king or nation. No liar however will be found inside that city. Have we realised the tremendous privilege it is to belong to Christ's Bride?

In *John3:12*, Jesus, speaking to Nicodemus said "*If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how shall you believe if I tell you heavenly things*". There are many things the Word of God tells us for our life on earth. And many find it difficult to trust the Lord even for those earthly things. For example, even though Jesus clearly taught that the God Who provides for the birds, will provide for us, yet anxiety grips the hearts of many believers concerning earthly things. If it is so difficult for us to believe what the Lord has said about earthly things, then it will be impossible for us to understand much of the things of heaven! So it is good to humble ourselves and to recognise that many things concerning heaven and the eternal state that are mentioned in *Revelation* are not matters on which we can speak dogmatically and with a perfectly, clear understanding. We see through a glass darkly. One day everything will be clear.

We can be absolutely certain of one thing though: *It's going to be far more glorious than we can ever imagine*. When the Queen of Sheba heard of Solomon's glory, and came to Israel to see it, she exclaimed, in amazement, "*Even half was not told me of what I have seen here. This is far more than I had thought*" (*1 Kings 10:7*). When we get up to glory and see the eternal state, we shall say similar words.

It is not necessary for us to understand every detail about the eternal state. Because of the limitation of our minds, we will never be able to understand everything about heaven and eternity. The important thing is to be certain that we will be a part of the new Jerusalem.

We sing in a chorus, "*Heaven came down and glory filled my soul*". God wants to give us a little foretaste of heaven in our hearts, here and now, through the Holy Spirit. Here are some examples of what I mean:

"The city has no need of the sun or the moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb": We don't need any external circumstances to make our joy full. Our joy is always full now, because we are in the Lord. He *ALONE* is our light. We need no other. We don't need the approval of people, or health, or wealth now, to make us happy. We don't need any earthly sun or moon to shine on us, because, the Lord God Himself has become our joy and our light.

"The nations shall walk by its light": Whatever this may mean literally in the future, today it is true that the church is to be a light for all the nations of the earth.

"There shall be no night there": The Lord wants us to walk in the light always. There must never be a moment of darkness in our lives,

"Its gates shall never be closed": There must be an open-heartedness to all people at all times. The gates of the church must always be open to all people.

"Nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall even come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life": The church must take a strong stand against uncleanness penetrating into it. Jesus said that all that is big and great in the eyes of men is an *abomination* in the sight of God (Lk.16:15). So all those who are interested in what the world considers big and great - e.g. worldly music and worldly methods - must *not* be permitted to bring such *abominations* into the church. Likewise, no lying must be tolerated in the church. Liars may sneak in, but they must tremble and fear when they hear the Word in the meetings of the church.

In the church we value all whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life! No-one is excluded - even if they don't agree with us in everything. Our fellowship in the church is based on life and not on intellectual agreement.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

V.1: And he showed me a river of water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

This is obviously a picture of the Holy Spirit. In *Ezekiel 47:1-12*, we read of a river, about which it says that "*every living creature which swarms in every place where the river goes, will live*" (v.9). The river brings life wherever it goes. Jesus referred to this passage and said, "*He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water*" (Jn.7:37,38).

Ezekiel went deeper and deeper into this river until he came to the place where his feet had to leave the earth. Thereafter he was carried by the river. That is a picture of the Spirit-filled life - where we are no longer earth-bound. Our feet leave the earth and the Holy Spirit carries us onward and upward

We see the emphasis on “*clear as crystal*” once again in relation to this river. We find a repeated emphasis on purity and transparency, again and again in *chapters 21 and 22*, with words such as “*clear*”, “*transparent*”, “*pure as glass*”, etc.,

We notice that the river flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb, teaching us that the Holy Spirit works in power only where God and Christ are given their rightful place on the throne.

V.2: In the middle of its street and on either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

The opportunity that Adam lost to take part in the tree of life has now been restored to man. We find a lot of similarity between *Gen 2 and Rev.22*.

The tree of life symbolizes the life of God Himself - eternal life or the divine nature that we can now partake of. Eternal life, does not mean “existing for ever” for those who go to the lake of fire also exist for ever. But they do not have eternal life. Eternal life means a life which *had no beginning* and has no end. That is the life of God himself. That is what is symbolized in the tree of life. Adam foolishly went to the tree of knowledge, instead of to the tree of life, just like many do today, who seek for Bible-knowledge rather than life. The tree of knowledge of good and evil is not found in *Rev.22*. It has disappeared.

As we have studied through this book of *Revelation*, you may have noticed that we have sought to come to the tree of *life* and not to the tree of *knowledge*.

In front of the tree of life God placed a flaming sword (*Gen.3:24*). This teaches us that a sword must fall upon our Self-life, if we are to take part of the tree of life. This is why most Christians would rather go to the tree of knowledge, in front of which there is no sword. To get Bible knowledge, we don’t have to die to our Self-life or take up the cross daily. But to partake of God’s nature, we have to “*bear the dying of Jesus in our body*” always (*2 Cor.4:10*). We have to allow the sword to fall upon us.

The way of the cross is the way to the tree of life. The sword fell upon Jesus and He was crucified. Since we too were crucified with Him, the sword is to fall upon us too. Thus we can partake of the tree of life, which bears a new kind of fruit every month, and whose leaves bring healing.

V.3: And there shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it and his bondservants shall serve him.

Gal.3:13 says that Christ became a curse for us on the cross, so that we might receive the blessing of God upon our lives. He had to be crucified, because it says “*Cursed is everyone who hangs on the tree*”. And because he has taken that curse fully, it is removed from over us completely. We do not experience the full effect of that deliverance in this life. Death, for example, is a part of the curse, and believers still die, proving that we are not totally free from *all* the effects of the curse. But we do experience a foretaste of total deliverance even now. We are not afraid of death now, because Jesus Christ has overcome death. Although we still experience pain, and the thorns still poke our feet, and we have aches and pains and sicknesses, we rejoice over the fact that we are *not under* the curse, but under the blessing of God. One day, every single effect of the curse will be removed completely.

Whenever the Lord heals our bodies, we are experiencing a foretaste of total freedom from the curse that we shall experience fully one day.

Notice the emphasis on the bondservants (or slaves) of God in the book of *Revelation*. We saw “*bondslaves*” mentioned in *Chap.1:1*, and we see them being mentioned in this last chapter too (*Chap.22:3*). God is looking for those who will give themselves to Him totally. Here we read that “*they shall serve Him*”. This teaches us that, even in eternity, there will be some way in which we will be serving God. We are not going to just keep our hands raised through all eternity praising and worshipping God. That is certainly one part of what we are going to do for all eternity: *worshipping God*. But there is also going to be some form of service that we will do for God in eternity, which even if it were explained here, our minds would not be able to understand.

Those who have rejoiced to serve the Lord here on earth will consider it a joy and an honour to serve Him in eternity too.

V.4: And they shall see his face and his name shall be on their foreheads.

It is going to be a fantastic privilege *to see God face to face*. It was said about Moses that there was no man to whom the Lord spoke face to face as He did to Moses (*Deut.34:10*). This is the greatest privilege that a human being can have on earth, to be able to speak to God face to face as a man speaks to his friend. And that is how it will be between us and the Lord in eternity. We shall see His face. His name will be on our foreheads means that His nature will be manifested through our personality.

V.5: And there shall no longer be any night and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them and they shall reign forever and ever.

Once again we read that God Himself is the source of Light for His people. The “*reigning*” mentioned here is also something that we have a foretaste of here on earth - not reigning over people, but over our lusts. The heathen desire to reign over people but the sons of God desire to reign over their own passions - their anger and their greed etc., These are the areas we must begin to rule over first. That will prepare us to reign with Christ forever and ever.

With this verse the description of the eternal state ends.

V.6: And he said to me, ‘These words are faithful and true.’ And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show to his bond-servants the things which must shortly take place.

From here on until the end of the chapter, we have a number of exhortations and promises.

From the beginning of *Revelation*, we have noticed how often this phrase occurs: “*These are the words of God*”. This is to remind us repeatedly not to take what is said in this book lightly.

God speaks to us through His servants. But He also wants to speak to us directly. No man should ever come between us and the Lord.

I trust this study of *Revelation* has given you an appetite to dig into the book yourself and to hear God speak to you directly through it.

V.7: And behold I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book.

The Lord does not say here that He is coming *soon*. No. He says He is coming *quickly - suddenly*- like a thief in the night, without any warning.

The book of Revelation began in *Chapter 1:3* with this same phrase that we see here at the end of the book: “*Blessed is he who keeps the words written in this book*”.

V.8,9: And I John am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. And he said unto me ‘Do not do that; I am also a fellow servant of yours of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God.’

Once again John made the mistake of being taken up with the person whom God had used to teach him all these truths. He fell down in worship at the feet of the angel who showed him all these things.

But the angel quickly said, “*Do not do that. I am only a fellow servant of yours. Worship only God*”. That is one mark of a true servant of God, that whenever he sees anyone getting attached to him, he detaches himself from that person at once, so that the person can cling to the Lord and not to man!

In heaven they sing only one song - the new song - saying, “*Thou alone art worthy*”. This angel had learnt that song and so he was quick to shake John off and to ask him to give the glory to God alone.

V.10: And he said to me, ‘Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.’

The book of *Revelation* is an *unsealed* book. So everyone can understand it. There is one book in the Bible however which was sealed until recently. We read in *Daniel 12:4*, “*As for you, Daniel, conceal these words and seal up the book UNTIL THE END OF TIME*”. This is repeated in *verse 9*. The prophecies in the book of *Daniel* were sealed, but have now been opened for God’s people to understand. This proves that we are “*at the end of time*”.

The Lord told John in 96 A.D. that the time was near even then. How much nearer we are now.!

V.11: Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong and let the one who is filthy, still be filthy: and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness and let the one who is holy, still keep himself holy.

This is an amazing exhortation that we find on the last page of the Bible. It tells people to continue to “*Be filthy*” and to continue to “*Do wrong*”.

The implication is this: “*If you have read through the whole Bible and come to the last page and you still don’t want to repent or to give up your sins, then go ahead and be filthy and keep on doing wrong. There is no hope for you*”.

If after reading about God’s judgments on sin in the book of *Revelation*, you still want to indulge in your lusts and to seek after the pleasures of sin, and to read filthy books and to look at pornographic movies, if you still want to retain your bitterness against someone, and to be unforgiving, if you still want to slander and backbite, and be jealous and to live for yourself and for this rotten world, then go ahead and do it. God will not stop you.

But see what is written for the righteous in the second part of *v.11*. “*Let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness. Let the one who is holy, still keep himself holy*”. There is never an end to this pursuit of holiness. So pursue after righteousness and holiness yet more.

The state in which we end our lives is going to determine how we spend our eternity. If we have lived in sin and filthiness, we will continue in sin and filthiness and wrongdoing for eternal ages in the lake of fire. If we have pursued righteousness and holiness in this life, then that will be our pursuit in eternity too. Our state is going to be fixed for all eternity when we die. “*Whether a tree falls toward the south or toward the north, wherever the tree falls, there it lies*” (*Eccl.11:3*).

V.12: Behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with me to render to every man according to what he has done.

Salvation is by grace, but rewards are according to our works.

It is wrong to look for a reward from men. We should not even expect a “*Thank you*” from men. We are to do everything as unto the Lord and expect our “*Thank you*” and “*Well done*”, from Him alone.

At the same time, we do not serve *for reward*, because if we did, then all our works would be *dead works*. But it is still true that we will be rewarded for faithfulness. The apostle Paul said at the end of his life, “*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing*” (*2 Tim. 4:7,8*).

V.13,14: I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Blessed are those who wash their robes that they may have the right to the tree of life and may enter by the gates into the city.

In the *NASB translation*, the ones who have access to the tree of life are described as “*those who wash their robes*”. In the *KJV translation*, it says, “*Blessed are those who keep His commandments that they may have right to the tree of life*”. There is no conflict between these two renderings, because all who genuinely wash their robes will also keep God’s commandments. Their obedience to God is the proof that their faith is genuine.

This the last of the Seven “*Blessed*”s in the book of *Revelation*. Let us look at all seven of them together.

1. **Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it (Rev.1:3).**
2. **Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on, that they may rest from their labours, for their deeds follow with them (Rev.14:13).**
3. **Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his garments, lest he walk about naked and men see his shame (Rev.16:15).**
4. **Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev.19:9).**
5. **Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection, over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years (Rev.20:6).**
6. **Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book (Rev.22:7).**
7. **Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city (Rev.22:14).**

V.15: Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and murderers and the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices lying.

The dogs are backsliders, who initially vomit out something they don't like (give up sin and come to Christ) and who then go and eat what they have vomited out (despise Christ and live in the same sins again) (2 Pet.2:22).

Once again the sorcerers (those who dabble with the occult), the immoral, the murderers and the idolaters are mentioned as being outside the kingdom of God. And likewise, those who love to tell lies and who practise it. Three times in the end of the Bible we are reminded that "liars" are outside the kingdom of God. (Rev.21:8,27; 22:15).

The *first sin* mentioned in the Bible is *lying*. Satan told Eve a lie (Gen.3:4).

The *first sin* judged in the early church was *lying* (Acts 5:3).

THE LAST SIN MENTIONED IN THE BIBLE IS ALSO LYING.

This teaches us the great need to cleanse ourselves from this habit - perhaps more than any other habit. Those who stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion are those who have cleansed out lying and pretence and hypocrisy from their lives totally (Rev.14:5).

V.16: I Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright and morning star.

"*The root of David*" means "*The Lord, through whom David was born, David's Creator*".

"*The offspring of David*" means, "*The one who was born through David's seed, in the flesh*". This is one of the last titles of Jesus Christ mentioned in Scripture - emphasising His Deity and His humanity.

"*I am the bright morning star*". In the last book of the *Old Testament*, in *Malachi 4:2*, Christ is called the "*The Sun of Righteousness*". For the Jews under the old covenant, He rises as the Sun, at the beginning of the millennial day. For the church, He is "*The Bright and Morning Star*", which appears just a little while before the sun rises. That is when the church is going to be raptured, just before the wrath of God falls upon the earth, just a little while before Jesus comes down with His saints to the earth as the Sun of righteousness.

V.17: And the spirit and the bride say 'Come'. And let the one who hears say, 'Come'. And let the one who is thirsty come; Let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.

This is the final invitation in Scripture. God has already told those who want to be filthy, to remain filthy. But His heart still yearns that all will repent and be saved. So here we find both the Spirit and the bride inviting sinners to come and drink of Jesus, the Fountain of life. Those who hear are encouraged to invite

the others too. So we see Scripture ending with a challenge to preach the gospel to every creature - not as a doctrine, but as an invitation to come to Jesus Himself.

V.18,19: I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book. If anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book. And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.

The plagues which are written in this book of (*Revelation*) are the wrath of God.

God will not permit anyone to trifle with His sacred Word. A severe warning is given to those who add to or subtract from this book - and this principle applies to all of Scripture, since this warning is found on the last page of the Bible.

The first blunder that Eve committed in *Genesis 3* was to add and take away from God's word. God had said to Adam in *Genesis 2:17* "*From the tree of knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat, because, the day you will eat from it, you will surely die*". Adam had undoubtedly communicated this accurately to Eve. But when Eve was asked by the serpent in *Gen.3:1*, "*What has God said?*", Eve added and subtracted from God's command in her reply. First of all she added something. She said, "*God has said, 'You shall not eat from it nor touch it'*" (*Gen.3:3*). God had never said anything about *touching* the tree. And then Eve subtracted. She said, "*...lest you die*" (*Gen 3:3*), weakening the stern warning of God Who had said, "*You shall surely die*". The phrase "*lest you die*" implies that there is a possibility that you may not die. So we see in the beginning of the Bible that sin began through adding to and subtracting from God's Word. And so, right at the end of the Bible, there is a strong warning against adding to or subtracting from God's Word.

Today, many have added their human traditions to the Word of God and made them almost equally important. Likewise, many have subtracted from God's Word by saying that obedience to certain small commandments is unimportant.

We must be very careful to eliminate from our lives and our homes, everything that is contrary to God's Word. And we must be equally careful to add to our lives and our homes, everything that we have missed out from God's Word.

Through our attitude to His Word, God tests us to see whether we are ready to live with him for eternity or not.

Ps.138.2 states that God has magnified His Word above His Name. So if we dishonour God's word, we dishonour God's Name. Many denominations in "*Christianity*" have added to and subtracted from God's Word. Thus they have ended in spiritual harlotry. We need to be warned by their failure.

V.20: He who testifies to these things says 'Yes, I am coming quickly.' 'Amen, come Lord Jesus.'

Here is the last prayer in the Bible - a good prayer for all of us to pray - "*Come, Lord Jesus!*"

We cannot pray this prayer, if we are not ready to meet Him.

We cannot pray it, if we are adding to or subtracting from God's words.

We cannot pray it, if we are seeking the honour of men.

We cannot pray it, if we are not purifying ourselves as He is pure.

"Come, Lord Jesus. We are sick and tired of sin. We are sick and tired of this rotten world. We are longing for that world where righteousness dwells. Come, Lord Jesus."

V.21: The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

It is wonderful to see how the Word of God ends. It is only by grace that we can be a part of the New Jerusalem. Only by the strength and help that God gives, can we be free from the bondages that have enslaved us for so many years. Grace forgives our sins! And grace helps us to overcome sin, the world and Satan!

Contrast this word with the last word of the *Old Testament*- which is “*curse*”.

In *Mal.4:6*, God says, “*lest I come and smite the land with a curse*”.

The *New Testament* begins with the birth of Jesus and ends with a benediction that “*the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all.*”

How wonderful that we can be free from the curse with which the *Old Testament* ends and come under grace in the *New Testament*, experience the blessing of God in every area of our lives, and be a part of the dwelling place of God, for all eternity.

Hallelujah! All glory and praise and honour be unto God and to the Lamb Who was slain for our sins.

Amen and Amen!

A SUMMARY OF “REVELATION”

Chapter 1: Christ Himself

Verses 1 and 3 are very important. This book is the revelation of *Jesus Christ*. It is primarily an unveiling of Jesus Christ, and not of the future. It is not the revelation of a prophetic programme but a revelation of Jesus Christ as Lord, as the Lamb Who was slain, and as the One Who has all authority in heaven and earth and Who is therefore in complete control of everything that is happening in the world at any time. The book has been given to His bondservants for obedience and for proclamation to others. Blessed are those who share the truths in the book of *Revelation* with others.

Verse 7: The theme of the whole book is: “*Behold He is coming with the clouds and every eye will see Him*”. This is the climax of human history.

Verses 10-17: We find here that everything begins with a new revelation of Christ. The first thing is not the prophetic plan of plagues and judgments that are coming. God was, as it were, saying to John, “*First of all, you need to see Jesus*”. We all need to see the glory of Jesus first. Every new revelation of truth must begin with a new revelation of Jesus Christ Himself that makes us fall at His feet and say, “*Oh Lord, You alone are worthy!*” Even if we don’t understand anything else in *Revelation*, if we have learnt how to fall at His feet and worship him and see His glory, then we have learnt the most important thing.

Verse 19: The threefold division of the book:

- (1) The things which you have seen - a revelation of Jesus Christ Himself. (*Rev.1*).
- (2) The things which are - Jesus Christ and His church. (*Rev.2,3*).
- (3) The things which shall take place after these things - Jesus Christ and His kingdom. (*Rev.4 to 22*).

Chapters 2 & 3: Christ And His Church

Here we come to the messages to the seven churches and to their messengers. Here Christ is seen as a Purifier of His people, exposing what is wrong with each leader and each church. Like a doctor, diagnosing a patient’s problem, Christ diagnoses each case, telling each one which parts of their lives are healthy and which parts are sick. Among the 7 churches, only 2 are healthy, without any sickness at all. One is the church at Smyrna, which suffered persecution faithfully. The other is the church at Philadelphia, which remained in fervent brotherly love. This teaches us that there are two things that the Lord looks for: (1) faithfulness in suffering; and (2) fervent, brotherly love. Those who are faithful in these two things will be ready for the coming of Christ. On the other hand, those like the ones in the

church at Laodicea who are lukewarm and compromising, will be spat out of the mouth of the Lord in the final day and revealed to be a part of Babylon the harlot.

Seven times in these messages to the seven churches, we hear the call of the Spirit saying, “*He who has ears, let him hear what the Spirit is saying*”. And what is the Spirit saying? Two things primarily:

- (1) Seven times He says, “*OVERCOME!*”
- (2) Seven times He says, “*REPENT!*”

(Note: There is no exhortation to repent to 2 of the churches, but yet the word repent comes 7 times in the letters to the other 5 churches.)

So, we see that there is a connection between a spirit of repentance and being an overcomer. An overcomer is one who lives in continual repentance over the sin that he constantly discovers within himself.

Chapters 4 To 22: Christ And His Kingdom

From *Chap.4* to the end of the book, we see the things relating to the future. Here again John is first given a vision of heaven (*Chap.4 & 5*). John was shown the Central Control Room in heaven from where everything was being monitored constantly. That is what we need to see first of all. Everything that happens on earth is monitored and controlled from heaven, because God is totally sovereign. If we don’t see this first, we will become anxious and fearful. As God remembered Noah when he sent the judgment of flood upon the earth, God watches over each of His children at all times.

In *Chap.6*, six of the seven seals of the book are opened. This is a preview of what will happen on earth during the last 7 years before Christ returns. The 6 seals correspond exactly with Jesus’ description of the last days in *Matthew 24*: (1) The antichrist going forth; (2) War; (3) Famine; (4) Pestilences; (5) The great tribulation; (6) The return of Christ. When the sixth seal is opened, we read the word ‘wrath’ occurring for the first time in *Revelation*. This is when Christ appears in the clouds and the church is raptured - that is, after the Antichrist is manifested and after the great tribulation (*Chap.7:9,10*).

In *Chap.7:1-8*, we see the faithful Jews on earth being sealed, so that they are protected from the wrath of God.

Then begins the outburst of the wrath and judgment of God at the last trumpet. This trumpet is divided into 7 parts and called 7 trumpets. This is the trumpet that will sound at Christ’s coming, when we will be transformed (*1 Thess.4:16; 1 Cor.15:52*). The first 4 parts of the last trumpet are described in *Chap.8*, bringing judgment on the earth, the sea, the springs of waters and the heavenly bodies. Two more are described in *Chap.9* - demons coming out of the bottomless pit and demons being released from the River Euphrates (the site of ancient Babylon) and gathering 200 million soldiers for the final battle of Armageddon.

In *Chap.9:20,21*, we find the phrase “*they did not repent*” occurring twice. The word “*repent*” occurs more often in *Revelation* than in any book of the Bible. It indicates God’s longsuffering in hoping that men will repent, so that He does not have to judge them.

In *Chap.10*, we see the book fully opened and John being asked to eat it. It is sweet as honey in his mouth but bitter in his stomach, symbolising that there is grace as well as judgment in God’s Word.

In *Chapters 11 to 13*, we are given greater details of the events that will take place during the last 3½ years of those final 7 years. In *Chap.11*, we see two witnesses who will prophesy in the spirit of Moses and Elijah. In *Chap.12*, we see Satan being cast down to the earth. The overcomers on earth overcome Satan, but the others do not. In *Chap.13*, we see the Antichrist and the false prophet in power.

In *Chap.14*, we see the overcomers standing with the Lord. They are very few in number - the few who went through the narrow gate (the needle’s eye), followed the Lamb everywhere, learnt to sing the new song (of giving thanks in all things and for all men) and cleansed out lying totally from their lives. Then we see a brief preview of the final battle of Armageddon. In *Chap.15*, we see the overcomers again praising God.

In *Chap.16*, we see 7 angels pouring out 7 bowls of wrath on the earth. These are very similar to the 7-fold last trumpet, and will probably take place at the same time as the 7-fold last trumpet. Again, we find that people blaspheme God and do not repent.

In *Chap.17 and 18*, we are given a description of Babylon, the harlot who claimed to belong to Christ, but who lived in spiritual adultery with the world. Religious Babylon is described in *Chap.17*, and commercial Babylon in *Chap.18*. Babylonian Christianity is that which sought to serve both God and money. It sought to love Christ and to be friendly with the world as well. It mixed the Word of God with the traditions of men. Getting rid of the traditions of religious Babylon does not ensure deliverance, for one can still get caught in the web of commercial Babylon, through the love of money. We have to beware of the commercial harlot even more than the religious harlot.

In *Chap.19*, we see the Bride of Christ, who has stood pure - pure from the religious harlot and pure from the commercial harlot - clothed in simplicity and purity, ready for her marriage with the Lamb. Then we see the Lamb coming with His bride for the final battle of Armageddon, where the Antichrist and his armies are defeated. The Antichrist and the false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire.

In *Chap.20*, we see the millennial reign of Christ, when Satan is bound. At the end of the 1000 years of peace, we see Satan being released and going out and deceiving people again and stirring them once again to rebellion against God. But they are all destroyed in a moment. Then we see the final judgment of the great white throne.

Finally in *Chap.21,22*, we see the new heaven and the new earth and the Bride of Christ shining forth in all her glory. The last chapter closes with a few final warnings and a final invitation to sinners to come to Christ and ends with the words: "*The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all*".

The call of the Holy Spirit comes resounding to us today:

To unconverted sinners: "*Come. Drink freely of the water of life.*"

To the believer: "*Repent. Be an overcomer.*"

He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Amen.