

Revelation

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The Judicial Glory of Christ 1

All history is moving toward a grand finale in which the universal government of Heaven will at last come to earth in the form of a socio-political empire over which Christ will exercise His uncontested sovereignty for a thousand years. History has both meaning and direction. God in His eternal purpose plans to sum up all things under one exalted person – His son – and climax His dispensational scheme in one glorious age. The book of Revelation traces the final preparation and realization of that coming kingdom of Christ.

The Introductory Details of the Book (Revelation 1: 1-8)

The last book of the Bible is a "revelation of Jesus Christ"; it unveils him (verse 1). It purports to be a disclosure, not a riddle or mystery. The Lord Jesus Christ himself is the leading character. It is not a revelation of the antichrist or even a revelation of the future. The whole book concentrates on bringing Christ into full view.

The word "signified" indicates the symbolic character of the book. A symbol stands for or represents something else. Everyone admits that this portion of the Word of God contains more symbolism than any other, but not everyone agrees about the meaning of the symbolism or the reason for it. The allegorical interpreters see no chronology or literalism anywhere in the book. The preterist position regards the book as a symbolic history of early Christianity while it endures persecution from Rome. The historical approach finds the total history of the church written in Revelation. The futurist viewpoint treats the book as prophetic from chapters 4-22. Futurists believe that the imagery of the book refers to something real and literal. The book of Revelation itself and other portions of the Bible contain clues to the actual meaning of the symbolism.

The human author of the book is John – the same person "who bare record of the word of God" – that is, who wrote the gospel of John (verse 2). The style of revelation corresponds to the style that we meet in both the gospel and the epistles of John. Despite the continued attack of critics from the time of the third century, none has proved or can prove that the book was not written by the man whose name it bears. The book is authentic and genuine.

The very words of this prophecy deserve the most solemn consideration (verse 3). The imminence of prophetic fulfillment gives them an added urgency. The word "prophecy" implies more than a forecast of the future. It denotes the divine origin of the contents of the whole book. The revelation in its entirety, including the most minute parts, proceeds from God to Christ, from Christ to an angel, from an angel to John, and from John to God's servants everywhere. The blessing pronounced upon all who read this prophecy anticipates the neglect with which the book has suffered from the church at large.

Although much that the book of Revelation contains does not apply directly to the churches, nevertheless the churches were to receive this revelation of Christ's ultimate victory in history

(verse 4). The epistles of the New Testament make repeated reference to the kingdom, but we need the book of Revelation for complete and comprehensive view of the church's relationship to the kingdom.

John recorded what he saw and heard and sent the message to the seven churches. Seven is a symbolic number which has an obvious prominence in the book of Revelation. In chapter 1, we encounter seven spirits, seven golden lampstands, seven features of Christ, and seven stars. Seven appears to be the number of perfection and completion. The word "grace" depicts the estate of the churches; they are the special objects of God's sovereign and undeserved favor. The word "peace" describes the experience of the churches; they enjoy a divine tranquility. Grace and peace derive from the self-existing and unchangeable God and are communicated to the churches by the agency of the Holy Spirit, who operates in a sevenfold ministry toward them.

Grace and peace are mediated through Jesus Christ (verse 5). The fact that Christ participates with the father and the spirit in divine works proves that Christ is God. The triunity of the believing of God clearly shines through in verses four and five. In the work of redemption the father is the planner; the spirit is the performer, the son is the procurer – He obtained our salvation. By what he did at the cross Christ provided the basis and ground upon which God can emancipate sinners from their sins. The shedding of his blood was the random price for liberating the captives.

The work of Christ at Calvary also provides the only basis for the millennial reign at which time Christ will rule as "the prince of the kings of the earth." The blood of Christ is the guarantee (the seal) that the promises to David about a king sitting upon His throne will be fulfilled. The resurrection of Christ from the dead is the final proof that He was the prophet like Moses whom God promised to raise up. The resurrection corroborates the fact that He is the faithful witness.

In the kingdom reign Christ will rule as a king priest. Like Melchizedek of old, Christ will exercise both royal and religious prerogatives. All of those who participate in the first resurrection will share kingly and priestly duties with Christ; they are constituted a Kingdom of priests (verse 6). Moreover, all saved Jewish survivors of the tribulation will enter the period of the King's ring and serve Him as priestly rulers on earth. Those saved Jewish survivors are especially in view in verse seven. Thousands of Jews from the twelve tribes will live to see their Messiah coming in the clouds of glory. The terrible woes of tribulation will play a part in bringing them to repent of their sins and to call upon Christ to save them from their enemies. He will not return until Israel is prepared to give Him a royal welcome.

The absolute assurance of the fulfillment of these events rests entirely upon who Christ is (verse 8). Because Christ stands outside time and history, nothing can prevent Him from invading history again to accomplish His eternal purposes. Because He is almighty, He has sufficient power to subdue His foes and inaugurate His Kingdom. He is the Lord of history and the sovereign of eternity.

The Initial Disclosure of the Book (Revelation 1: 9-20)

If we can depend upon the accuracy of tradition, the apostle John was banished to the island of Patmos during the reign of Domitian, about A.D. 96. When the Emperor Nerva succeeded Domitian, John returned to Ephesus, where he died of old age – the only one of the Twelve not to suffer martyrdom. Still, John knew from experience what it meant to fellowship in Christ's sufferings. Tradition says that he miraculously survived being thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil and that later during his exile on Patmos was forced into hard labor in the mines. However that may be, he considered himself "a companion in tribulation ... and patience."

When imperial persecutions aimed to silence his witness, John continued boldly to preach and teach that Jesus had arisen from the dead. To put a stop to his ministry, the Roman official sent him to a concentration camp, but that only enhanced his service, for there God communicated to him the contents of the book of Revelation. Like John Bunyan who wrote *Pilgrim's Progress* while he was serving a prison sentence, the apostle John made his greatest contribution to prophecy as a result of his dreary confinement.

The expositors of verse 10 still debate the issue of whether John's experience occurred on the first day of the week (Sunday) or whether he was projected in vision to the day of the Lord (the tribulation). The "Lord's day" could refer to either time. It is true, of course, that most of the book describes conditions that will come to pass in the tribulation period. Verse 10 speaks of a voice and trumpet, and it is perhaps significant that voices and trumpets characterize the day of the Lord. No matter, John underwent a spiritual transformation which enabled him to receive divine disclosures.

The voice that spoke to John commanded him to record on a roll everything he would see and hear, and then dispatch it to a select group of churches in Asia: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea (verse 11). Each church was to have a copy of the whole book of Revelation. The voice came from One who stood in the midst of seven golden stands (verses 12, 13). The lampstands represent the seven churches (verse 20). Gold pictures the glory and perfection of the churches. Christ's position in the center of the lampstands calls attention to the fact that they are dependent upon Him for their real light and direction.

More symbolism follows in the most elaborate description we have of Christ anywhere in the Bible. He is the Son of man. This title emphasizes His humanity – His connection with the human race – and His Messianic functions. Daniel informs us that dominion, glory, and the kingdom will be given to the Son of man (7: 14). God will commit universal judgment to the Son of man (John 5: 22, 27). The description which ensues has all of the ingredients of a judgment scene. Christ is clothed in the vesture of a judge. The golden girdle suggests a righteous character of His justice (Isaiah 11: 5).

Christ possesses the dignity and majesty of a judge; the white hair and head portray His authority and purity (verse 14). No one can bribe this Judge, no one can reverse His unalterable

decision. The eyes of Christ indicate something of the intelligence of the Judge. He will not judge on hearsay evidence; He will know all of the true facts of the case.

Copper or bronze is emblematic of judgment in Scripture. Fire is indicative of wrath and destruction. When Christ comes in judgment, He will trample out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored (verse 15). Isaiah 42: 13 is the best commentary on the significance of His voice. The seven stars which Christ holds in His right hand are the angels of the seven churches. This may be a reference to the pastors of the churches.

The two-edged sword that proceeds from the mouth of Christ signifies the Word of His power whereby He will judge men. The visage of Christ wears also a judicial appearance. The brightness of His coming will consume sinners (II Thessalonians 1: 8).

When Daniel received a vision of Christ in glory, no strength remained in Him, and His comeliness turned to corruption (Daniel 10: 8). When John saw a similar vision, he fell at His feet as dead. If those holy men could not endure the presence of Christ in his dazzling purity, how can any Sinner dare to boast, "I'll take my chances"? All Heaven and earth will flee away in His presence. "And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (I Peter 4: 18).

The saints, on the other hand, have nothing to fear. They are identified with the One who entered the domain of death and came forth victorious over its jurisdiction and terrors (verse 18). Because He lives the power of an endless life, we too shall live eternally.

Epistles from Christ 2

It is especially significant that only seven select churches receive correspondence from the Lord Jesus through the Apostle John: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea – just in that irreversible order. Why seven? Why these seven? Other churches existed in the vicinity at Colossae, Hierapolis, Magnesia, Troas, and Tralles; yet they get no mention. And why are the seven churches listed in this particular sequence?

Doubtlessly, the Lord chose these particular seven churches because the conditions found in them are typical of all churches at some time in their history. Also, individual believers often reflect some of these spiritual conditions in their own lives. Furthermore, these letters have a prophetic application; if we do not press details too far, we can discern in each of the churches a remarkable similarity to the sequence of church history.

The Churches Along the Coast (Revelation 2: 1-11)

The church at Ephesus is the destination of the first letter. Paul has resided in Ephesus for three years, and during that time a powerful witness affected all of Asia. Without a doubt, the churches of Asia were founded at this time. Later on, Timothy labored in Ephesus, and toward the end of the first century John presided over the church here.

The first item of interest is that Christ holds the stars in His hand (verse 1). Without the firm hand of Christ upon them, pastors would be nothing more than wandering or falling stars. He gives them direction, support, and control. They are all the objects of His special protection and care. Whatever good they do, they are able to accomplish by His hand. Consider that, although Christ is in Heaven, at the same time He walks on earth among the churches, giving His estimation of their character and conduct.

What Christ has to say about the Ephesian church, or any church, He says from the standpoint of personal acquaintance with its affairs. He is not so far distance that He does not know all about us (verse 2). If we pour out our energies in His cause, display a godly endurance through suffering, and feel repugnance for all that is evil, Christ takes notice of it. Allied to Him who is the embodiment of truth, we are thus unable to detect what is false. But we do not reject the counterfeits until we first give them a fair trial. All men – even false apostles – are innocent until proven guilty. But as soon as their lies become manifest to us, we must not permit our patience and love to make us lenient with them.

Steadfastness, toil, and perseverance in the things of Christ are not always the result of our love for Him (verses 3, 4). Many Christians are still zealous for sound doctrine long after they have lost their ardor for Christ Himself. The Ephesians even abhorred the immoral practices of the Nicolaitans (verse 6), and yet their disgust was perhaps more aesthetic than spiritual, for they were not motivated particularly by their love for Christ. Unless our love for Christ constrains and stimulates us, our deeds amount to nothing in His sight.

Sometimes a divine threat is the only measure that can bring defective Saints back to their original affection for Christ. The Lord warned the efficient church that He would remove them from service if they did not repent of their coldness toward Him and learn to appreciate again the spiritual heights from which they had tumbled (first 5). To dally would be to incur His displeasure and to forfeit their privileges in gospel ministry. On the other hand, to return immediately to a former frame of mind would be to have the assurance that nothing could ever sever them from His fellowship in favor (verse 7).

The letter to the church at Smyrna is the shortest of the messages from Christ. To this suffering group of Christians He sent assurances about His victory over death (verse 8). He knows the end from the beginning because He is the first and the last. Inseparably united to the One who stood outside time and beyond the power of death, we have nothing to fear.

Outward circumstances are no gauge of our spiritual condition. Troubles are not necessarily chastisement for sinning, and material prosperity is not necessarily the evidence of godliness. Quite often, however, material impoverishment leads to spiritual enrichment (verse 9). The Lord may strip away from us our earthly comforts in order to fasten our hopes on heavenly objects. He weans us away from worldly delights by causing them to disappoint us. When we are rich towards God and spiritually healthy, we can readily distinguish those who pretend to be God's people and are not.

Because Christ is the first and the last, He fully knows the future of every Christian. He knows the future, not simply because He foresees it but because He has foreordained it. He has determined the lot of His people. Some are destined to suffer; others are going to spend time in prison; many will become martyrs (verse 10). All will experience various trials which will work toward refining the pure gold of their faith. Severe testings will come. But they will not continue indefinitely. He knows the limit of our endurance and will not permit us to be tested beyond our strength. For remaining faithful to Christ amid temptations, though they take us down to the valley of the shadow of death, we shall receive the crown of life and remain untouched by eternal separation from Him who is our life (verse 11).

The Churches Away from the Coast (Revelation 2: 12-29)

Christ comes to the church at Pergamum with a sharp, two-edged sword in His hand (verse 12). The sword, of course, represents His penetrating word. No heart is so hard that He cannot pierce it. No alliance is so secure that He cannot separate the parties. Pergamum needed to be reminded that Christ disapproved of its unholy associations with the world and would not spare judging them with His authoritative word.

Some Christians live in more hazardous places than others do. At Pergamum they found themselves in an area where Satan reigned (verse 13). Pergamum was the devil's base of operations on earth. In view of the situation which surrounded them, the believers here deserve

special commendation for their adherence to sound doctrine and sober deportment. They were not ashamed of their identification with Christ. They were defenders of the faith. Some in their number had suffered martyrdom rather than yield to the influences of a satanic environment.

Others, however, had allowed corrupt people and principles to weaken the moral fiber of the church. Fearing that someone would label them intolerant, they may concessions to the world, which became a detriment to the church's purity (verse 14). When any church loses the distinctiveness of its Pilgrim character, secularism begins more and more to predominate, and the church accommodates itself to the moral and intellectual climate of the times. Soon you cannot tell the difference between the people of God and the people of the world. Little by little the worldly church develops an appetite for the very things God detests (verse 15).

When the Lord comes to any church to punish those who engage in wickedness, He will not excuse those members whose entertained and indulgent attitude toward the unruly (verse 16). Inevitably the word of God will deal with sinners, whether they are Christians or otherwise. If the storm of His righteous indignation breaks over a church, even the faithful are likely to get wet. Even though the whole church may feel the effect of Christ's judgment upon a few, the overcomers will enter into a more intimate fellowship with Christ, receive acquittal from guilt, and possess a special title to glory (verse 17). The victories which they achieved in secret will be acclaimed in public.

The church at Thyatira was the recipient of the longest letter from Christ, and yet this church was the smallest and seemingly the most insignificant. We must remember that God's values are different from man's. He has chosen the foolish, the weak, the base, and the despised; He has more or less ignored the wise, the mighty, and the noble. His ways are not our ways; they are past searching out.

The Lord Jesus presented Himself to this church as the Son of God (verse 18). It is the only time in the Book of Revelation where He so introduces Himself. Revelation emphasizes His messianic role and therefore calls Him "the Son of man." Evidently the Thyatiras needed a reminder of His absolute and unqualified deity. Perhaps they had lost sight of His omniscience and righteousness. If we would remember that the God with whom we have to do seize all of our motives and moves, we would give a second thought to pursuing our fleshly whims. If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.

The son of God overlooks none of our virtues. He knows whether we love in the spirit and whether we are fervent in the spirit, serving the Lord (verse 19). He sees the faith which works by love. He discerns every increase of spiritual fruit. Every child of God ought to be ambitious that the good deeds which He performs at the end of His life should exceed in quantity and quality the good deeds which He rendered when He was but a babe in Christ.

Likewise, no vice escapes the all-seeing eye of the Son of God. If He is faithful to commend our diligence, He is also faithful to criticize our defects. In the Thyatira church He noticed that the membership had submitted to the self-assumed authority of a vile woman (verse 20). That Jezebel pretended to be a teacher of the oracles of God, but in reality she was enticing the Lord's

people into all sorts of impurities. The men in that church were mere puppets in her hand, kowtowing to her filthy suggestions and they did it under the guise of patience!

Jezebel had refused many opportunities to repent of her immoral practices (verse 21); she had reached the point of no return. Nothing remained but judgment (verse 22). The bed in which she found her sensual pleasure became the place of her pain. All the lovers whom she seduced would suffer a similar fate unless they repented of their iniquities. Moreover, the children born of her illicit unions were destined for death (verse 23). The Lord intended that the destruction of these sinners would be a means of instruction for others who might not take moral purity too seriously.

God always reserves for Himself a faithful remnant who keep themselves undefiled from the contamination of the world. The Thyatirans were no exception. Certain ones had not been deceived by the pretensions of the wicked. They recognized the teachings of the libertines for exactly what they were – diabolical delusions and devices (verse 24). The Lord laid upon the believers no further responsibility than to cling tenaciously to the truth until the danger passed. He expects us also to be good stewards of what we have already received (verse 25).

In His own time Christ will compensate believers for all of the inconveniences and injury which came to His loyal servants. He will give them authority to shepherd the nations (verses 26, 27). They will exercise royal rights in the coming kingdom, when Christ will tolerate no opposition to His kingly rule. Overcomers will have a special portion of Christ, the morning star (verse 28). They will shine with Him in His millennial glory. All of these promises, threats, criticisms, and condemnations are the voice of the spirit to the believers of the whole church age (verse 29). Those who hear will heed.

More Messages to the Churches 3

In the first four letters of Christ to the churches of Asia Minor, the Lord Jesus identifies Himself by referring to a description of Himself in chapter 1 of Revelation. In the last three letters He gives fresh revelations of Himself that do not appear in the vision of chapter 1. The Sardians learned that Christ "hath the seven Spirits of God." The Philadelphians found out that He "hath the key of David." The Laodiceans became acquainted with "the Amen ... the beginning of the creation of God."

To the Church of Sardis (Revelation 3:1-16)

Sardis was synonymous with wealth. The story of King Midas and the golden touch originated here. Sardians introduced the system of coinage to the world. Easy money, however, made the citizens careless and corrupt. They took things easy in a geographically sheltered place and gave their devotion to Cybele – a worship that involved the most degrading orgies.

Like the woman of whom Paul spoke in first Timothy 5: 6, the church at Sardis was dead while it lived (verse 1). It had a form of godliness but denied the power thereof. It was decent but dead. It rested comfortably in orthodoxy but lacked the glow of the Spirit. Despite this defect of the church, it still belonged to Christ. He is the living head of the church who owns, orders and operates it. Furthermore, at His disposal are the sole means of revitalizing a dead church. The Holy Spirit in the fullness of His power is the only One who can bring life out of death.

The almost universal condition of lifeless religion has a tendency even to influence true Christians, and therefore we have to be continually alert in order not to give room in our churches and lives to the prevailing mood (verse 2). In order to avoid the danger of lapsing into a dead formalism, we must "go on to perfection." It involves cooperating with the Spirit, who began a good work in us and promises to complete it. It means following the Lord wholly. Sometimes it means rushing a spiritual resuscitator to someone who seems to be breathing his last, reviving his spirits and transferring a new vitality by our encouragement.

When Christians are wide awake to God's mercies, watchful in prayer, strong in the spirits might, and mindful of the way in which they have received the Word, they have the necessary equipment to stand in the day of battle (verse 3); they are the ones who are serving at their posts when the Captain of their salvation makes a sudden tour of inspection. They need no reprimand.

At the conclusion of the conflict a select few will receive a Medal of Honor for giving their wholehearted attention to the King's business without becoming entangled in the affairs of this world (verse 4). They will March in the victory parade with Christ; by His grace they have earned that privilege. In the millennial kingdom they are worthy to celebrate His triumph.

Other distinctions will come to them. They will shine in the splendor of glorification. All the remnants of Adam's corruption in them will undergo extinction. Their names will be indelibly

inscribed on the honor roll of Heaven (verse 5). As long as eternity, endures the courts of Heaven will recognize and remember the valiant deeds of these soldiers of the cross. Christ will call universal attention to those who have fought the good fight of faith and won the victory.

To the Church of Philadelphia (Revelation 3: 7-13)

The Philadelphian church loved the truth and aspired to be holy, and so the Lord Jesus identified Himself to it as the One who is holy and true (verse 7). Those who know Him in His holiness and truth cannot be polluted by worldly attachments or intimidated by the father of lies. They are partakers of Christ's holiness, and they "do the truth."

The Christians at Philadelphia glory not only in Christ sanctifying power but also in His sovereign majesty. What He does no mortal can undo (verse 8). What He does He does because He wills to do it. He opens the door to some and closes it to others. He opens the door for missionary activity in South America; He closes it in China. The combined forces of Christian missions cannot open the doors that Christ has shut and locked. The combined forces of communism, fascism, Nazism, totalitarianism, and humanism cannot close the door of gospel activity that Christ holds open.

A Judaizing fifth column was at work in the Philadelphia church to undermine its ministry and corrupt the purity of its doctrine (verse 9). It was a ruthless moment of God's free grace. According to them, salvation was impossible apart from law keeping. True believers discerned the error because they had a firm grip on the truth as it was presented in God's Word. They patiently awaited the day when Christ would put down the heretics and force them to acknowledge their false doctrine and also admit that the Philadelphian Christians were the objects of Christ's special love.

To "keep the word" is to study it, obey it, uphold it, and treasure it. With what little strength they had, the believers at Philadelphia kept the Word of Christ. They were feeble but faithful. They had identified themselves with all that Christ stood for in His holiness and truth. They also manifested His patience. He patiently waited to receive them to glory in the rapture and they patiently waited for Him to come to rescue them from danger (verse 10). He has promised to keep the church out of the period in which the worldwide catastrophe will strike this planet.

Earth dwellers will be the objects of the wrath of the Lamb of God during the tribulation period. They have cast their lot with the earth, made it the supreme end of their living, and deliberately chosen it rather than Christ. The church, on the other hand, has associated itself with Christ; its citizenship is in Heaven. God, therefore, has not appointed the church to wrath but to obtain salvation – that is, deliverance and escape from the tribulation woes which will descend upon the whole inhabited earth.

The Lord's direction to the church is to continue to hold fast (verse 11). Some churches think it is their main duty to build an empire, to dazzle the community with its growth and its

programs, to promote welfare systems, or the champion human rights. The Lord of the church merely says, "hold fast," cling tenaciously to the truth, struggle on in the defense of the gospel. To do otherwise is to lose our reward. Someone else will receive the crown we could have won had we tended to the Lord's business.

Weakness may be set us here, but when Christ comes, He will make us permanently strong pillars which never more stand in jeopardy of being shaken to the ground. The two pillars of Solomon's temple are called Jachin (meaning "established") and Boaz (meaning "strength"). These two characteristics will ultimately distinguish all of God's glorified people. They will be safe from attack in the New Jerusalem. Christ will communicate to them the traits of His character that have been heretofore undisclosed; they will have firsthand knowledge of every new manifestation of His person. In Him they will be forever established and strong.

To the Church of Laodicea (Revelation 3: 14-22)

Many Bible teachers believe that Epaphras founded the church at Laodicea. Paul told the Colossians that Epaphras had "a great zeal for ... them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hieropolis" (Colossians 4:13). Although Paul had not visited the churches of Colossae, Laodicea, or Hieropolis at the time he wrote the epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon (Colossians 2: 1), he had sent the Laodiceans a letter in which he exhorted Archippus to pay attention to the ministry (Colossians 4: 16, 17). Perhaps the carelessness of Archippus was a contributing factor to the conditions of the Laodicean church at the time when Christ addressed the lackadaisical membership.

A changeable, undependable, self-satisfied church is anything but a proper representative of the changeless, reliable, and self-sacrificing Christ (verse 14). Nothing could deflect him from the path of duty and fidelity. He does not make adjustment or accommodate Himself to moral decline. His conduct corresponds to His rank; He is the source of creation and supreme over it. In His relationship to the whole creation He remains faithful and true. Creation itself is a true reflection of the Creator, for it bears everywhere the evidence is of His handiwork.

The Laodicean church is a picture of the new neutralism which bends over backwards to avoid every issue and keep everybody happy. The Laodiceans stirred up no controversies, drew no radical distinctions, and maintained no special standards. They avoided all extremes (verse 15). They adhered to the policy of peaceful coexistence; appeasement and conciliation were their particular strategy. No one opposed them; they were all things to all men. They flattered themselves with their open mindedness, but it made Christ sick (verse 16).

The Laodiceans rated their condition highly. They were well-to-do; business was booming; they never had to appeal to anyone for help. They considered themselves sufficient. But man's appraisal of its own condition always falls short of the real truth. The Lord sees the actual state of people in their spiritual bankruptcy. Unless men are properly related to the Holy Spirit, they are destitute of blessing, cut off from the riches of grace, incapable of producing a harvest of fruit, independent of Christ, and naked of any righteousness. Even Christians sometimes forget

that Christ alone can satisfy and enrich the soul. He is our joy, our light, our sufficiency, and our righteousness.

When we come to Christ, we receive forgiveness and a brand-new life. By means of the fires of testing He will refine the goal of our faith until it emerges without alloy (verse 18). He will clothe us in the vesture of His own righteousness. He will apply the kind of medicine to our eyes that will enlighten our understanding. Whatever we need in time or eternity Christ will supply out of these storehouse of his infinite grace.

Ultimately, the corrective for materialistic attitudes, unhealthy contentment, exaggerated pride, shortsightedness, and all spiritual defects is an old-fashioned spanking (verse 19). Christ will apply the rod to stubborn Saints. He determines to conquer them one way or the other. He fully intends to subdue all things unto Himself, and that includes our lust for earthly things.

If the professing church as a whole will not hear the gentle voice of Christ, at least true believers will hear His call and respond to His entreaty. Some will repent at His rebuke and thereby open the way for a new and intimate fellowship with Christ (verse 20). He and they will sit down to an unhurried feast at His banquet table. At last they will join with Him at the marriage supper of the lamb. After the nuptial celebration ends, they will begin the 1000-year reign with Christ and His kingdom (verse 21). Sitting with Him on David's throne they will become co-regents during the Millennium.

Preparation for Messiah's Kingdom 4

The third division of the book of Revelation begins with chapter 4. It contains prophecies of those events which will occur after the close of the church age. Chapters 4 and 5 are a unit; together they give us a proper orientation to heavenly realities before we read about those terrible judgments which start in chapter 6. We need to realize that the period of coming judgment is the preparation for the introduction of Heaven's government on earth.

The Government of God (Revelation 4: 1-11)

We take for granted that the church no longer figures into the earthly scene after Revelation 3:22. The catching away of John into Heaven bears all the marks of the rapture of the church, although John himself actually had the experience of being transformed into a spiritual state to enable him to view the glories of Heaven (verses 1, 2). There are at least five parallels between John's experience and the rapture of the church: (1) the voice – at the rapture the voice of the archangel will sound; (2) the trumpet – at the rapture the trump of God will be heard; (3) the transport to Heaven – at the rapture the church will be caught up into the air; (4) the immediate response – the rapture event will occur in the twinkling of an eye; (5) the change of condition – dead church Saints will undergo a change from corruption to incorruption and living church saints will experience a change from mortality to immortality.

If the elders of verse 4 represent the entire church body and if the Book of Revelation has any chronological sequence, as we believe it does, then the entire church has been removed to Heaven before the judgments of chapter 6 – 18 fall upon earth dwellers. Revelation 4: 1, 2 may not specifically teach the removal of the church to Heaven before the tribulation judgments descend but these verses certainly illustrate this fact.

Leaving all these prophetic details for the moment, we can glean several general truths from the text. First, Heaven is a definite reality. It is just as actual place as earth is. Second, Heaven is an accessible place, for a door is open there. Third, no one enters there without an invitation. Fourth, without special preparation even those who are invited there have no ability to make the ascent. Fifth, only from the perspective of Heaven does anyone really understand what God has decreed to bring to pass on earth.

In Heaven John saw God sitting upon the throne of the universe. Verses 2b, 3 afford us the information that God is an absolute Ruler whose judgment is permanent and universal. Earthly empires rise and wane; temporal rulers come and go. God is still sitting on his throne, unperturbed by all of the commotions of earth and even the wicked schemes of the kingdom of evil. Nothing can thwart His purpose. He is more glorious than sparkling gems and unqualifiedly faithful to covenant promise; His mercies are everlasting.

John beheld the twenty-four elder sitting on the thrones, clothed in white raiment, and crowned (verse 4). Because not all of the Levitical priests could minister at once, Solomon divided them into twenty-four orders, each one taking his turn in officiating at the Temple, where

they ministered as representatives of all the people. In all probability, then, the twenty-four elders are a specific group of church saints who represent the whole church body in Heaven. As the bride of Christ the church will share in regal authority; hence, the elders sit on thrones. The crowns of gold indicate that the church has already been transferred to Heaven and has already appeared at the judgment seat of Christ to receive the awards of achievement.

The resurrection, rapture, and rescue of the church precede the manifestation of God's wrath. The church may hear the rumblings and see the flashes of God's anger at a distance, but the storm will never fall upon the church (verse 5). Even now we can perceive the indications of the coming cyclone, but when it hits, we shall be safe in the father's house, as was Enoch, who God transported to glory before the universal deluge swept over the earth.

When earth staggers in the throes of convulsion, Heaven remains placid and tranquil (verse 6). Nothing can enter to disturb or disquiet. While all on earth is dark and opaque, all is clear and translucent in Heaven. On earth all knowledge is incomplete; in Heaven we shall have foresight as well as hindsight; we shall know even also as we are known.

The four living creatures represent Heaven's government (verse 7). Earthly governments are fraught with inherent weaknesses; the government of Heaven has the strength and sovereignty of a lion. Earthly empires are savage and inhumane; the government of Heaven has the patience and long-suffering of a calf. Earthly dominions are governed by irrational and beastlike men; God's government displays intelligence and order. Earthly realms deteriorate into mundane and the materialistic; God's government soars above what is earthly, sensual, and devilish.

The four living creatures have some of the characteristics of the cherubim as depicted in Ezekiel 1:5-15 and some of the characteristics of the seraphim (especially the six wings) as described in Isaiah 6:2, 3. The living creatures of Revelation 4 seem to be an order of angels distinguishable from both cherubim and seraphim. At any rate, the four living creatures make haste to carry out God's governmental decrees. Their six wings indicate speed. They possess insight into the nature of the governmental program. They engage in ceaseless activity on behalf of the universal kingdom. They are preoccupied with God's sanctity, potency, and eternity. They recognize God's glory and honor and do not detract from it by claiming it for themselves (verse 9).

The twenty-four elders join enthusiastically in the worship (verse 10). They prostrate themselves in utter abasement before Him alone to whom belong glory, honor, and power. By casting their crowns before the eternal God, they acknowledge both their authority to rule and their achievements and the Christian life derived from God Himself (verse 11). Because God created all things and because all things are dependent upon His sovereign will and good pleasure, He alone is worthy of worship (verse 11).

The Grace of God (Revelation 5: 1-14)

Owing to the fall of Adam and the subsequent rebellion of his posterity, God has been carrying out the operations of His government on earth by means of redeeming grace. The Kingdom program on earth will eventually result in the establishment of a perfect theocratic

government which is grounded in the atoning work of Christ and which is governed by the Messiah Himself. For the inauguration of that future government on earth chapter 5 continues to prepare us by introducing a sealed scroll which contains the preliminaries to the establishment of the millennial kingdom.

The "book" sets forth the judicial proceedings which will purge out everything that is antagonistic to the coming kingdom of Messiah (verse 1). Whoever has the right to break the seven seals also has the authority to execute judgment and justice on the earth. But not a single creature in the entire universe accepts the mighty angel's challenge to open the book (verses 2, 3). For a moment it looked as if the kingdom program would fail because nothing could be done about the rebels who oppose God's government on earth and who set up rival empires. John wept that the long-delayed kingdom now had no apparent prospect of fulfillment.

One and only one representative from the human race has the qualifications to exercise judicial and kingly authority. He is a descendant of the royal tribe of Judah to whom God gave the scepter of rulership. Moreover, He has His literal roots in King David to whom God promised an everlasting kingdom on earth (verse 5). By submitting to suffering and death, David's son and heir proved His moral qualifications to reign. His descent from David gives Him the legal right to reign.

Before the millennial king can conquer social, ecclesiastical, political, and ecological evils, he must prevail against the principles of sin and death. This He did in laying down His life as a substitutionary sacrifice. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (verse 6). The atoning work of the Lamb provides the only sufficient basis for His millennial government. The seven horns of the Lamb symbolize His omnipotence, and the seven eyes portray His omniscience. The "seven spirits of God" indicates the Messiah's full endowment of the Spirit for the millennial rule.

Now the Lamb gets up from where He has been sitting on the Father's throne. The Lamb is ready to set in motion those events which will enable Him to sit upon the throne of David – His own throne. The Father invests the Son of man with governmental power. Christ is about to exercise His God-given authority to execute judgment on the earth (John 5: 27). He has the title deed to the throne of David, but He must put down His enemies before His peaceful reign commences.

Angelic orders and glorified Saints combine their worshipful praise. The prospect that the rejected Messiah will at last be vindicated in history fills them with adoration. They give expression to their joy by bursting forth in song (verse 9). They celebrate the new occasion with a suitable doxology.

Many New Testament manuscripts omit the words "us" in verse 9 and read "them" and "they" instead of "us" and "we" in verse 10. If these readings are correct then the elders in Heaven are talking about a redeemed company of tribulation saints who lived through the tribulation period and who are destined to reign as priests *on* earth.

Countless angels swell the volume of praise (verse 11). Note in verse 12 that angels do not say “slain for us.” They have special interests in the redemptive work of Christ, but angels are not the objects of that work. They know nothing more about the grace of God than what they see evidence of in the transformed lives of human beings who have experienced it.

Finally the full crescendo of praise echoes throughout the universe of created beings (verse 13). All creatures without exception fully recognize the blessing, honor, glory, and power of the Lamb upon His throne. The four living creatures are firmament, and the twenty-four elders manifest their assent to it by prostrating themselves before the Lamb and giving to Him the worship that is His due (verse 14). The celestial spheres resound with speech and song to worship the Lamb.

Preliminary and Summary Judgements 5

The tribulation period is a time of transition from one order to another from the church age to the kingdom age. The judgments of the tribulation are designed to purge the earth of wickedness in preparation for the millennial reign of Christ. During the tribulation God will preserve the remnant of Jews to whom he can fulfill the promises of the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New covenants. He will also save a great company of Gentiles who will populate the earth during the millennium. Revelation 6 describes the first of the judgments which will fall upon the inhabitants of the earth after the removal of the church.

Providential Powers (Revelation 6:1-17)

All of the events of chapter 6 belong to the first half of the tribulation period, unless perhaps the judgments under the sixth seal are an exception. The first horse with its rider depicts a brief period of imaginary security and safety which occurs immediately after the rapture of the church (verse 2). By this time Israel will have ratified a military treaty with the Western Allies which guarantees her protection against the Russian conqueror to the North. The northern aggressor has been talking peace, and the western allies have a defense contract with Israel; these two situations prompt Jews to rest comfortably in "peace and safety."

The second horse with its rider pictures a disruption of the peaceful scene (verse 4). It may be that Western Europe is suddenly embroiled in civil war. Perhaps this is what will be necessary before Europe finally unites in a ten-nation confederacy and before the ten kings of Europe will give their sovereignty to the Roman prince who will arise on the European scene and take dictatorial power by subduing three opponents (Daniel 7: 24).

The third horse with its rider points out the aftermath of war; famine and infectious diseases always follow in the wake of battle (verse 5). The rank and file will suffer first. For a full day's work their wages will purchase just enough to keep body and soul together. The more affluent people in society will not at first feel the effects of this judgment; they will still enjoy their luxuries, for they are still able to cope with inflation (verse 6).

The fourth horse with its rider pictures the end result of war, famine, and pestilence namely, death (verse 8). Death will stalk the earth, claiming its victims and taking them down to the compartment of the damned and Hades. In this judgment God will providentially use the sword, hunger, death, and wild beasts to destroy the wicked.

The terrors of the tribulation will bring about the death of many believers. Asked to renounce their faith in Jesus Christ, they will refuse and suffer the consequences (verse 9). These martyred tribulation saints are fully conscious of their surroundings and Heaven, and they appeal to the Master to avenge the wrongs which wicked men have perpetrated upon them (verse 10). They are jealous for God's honor and long for Him to exercise His governmental authority by dealing in justice with the opposers of His will. But God's time had not yet come, so the martyrs must

rest patiently until the full contingent of martyrs is complete; then God will avenge them by destroying their killers (verse 11).

The judgment under the sixth seal has cosmic implications. It affects the sun and the moon (verse 12). The phenomenon of the sun in eclipse and the moon turned red will constitute a sign to the believers that the kingdom is pending. It will doubtlessly strike fear into the hearts of unbelievers. There is no reason to interpret this sun as a major world government and the moon as the lesser power, although it is true that the judgments of the tribulation will cause nations and kingdoms to topple. The “stars” of Heaven probably refers to what we call “shooting stars” (verse 13). Earth will undergo a shower of meteors, and without a doubt much of the present space junk will reenter the Earth's atmosphere, burning up in its descent to our planet. God will bring it down as easily as a breeze can shake down overripe fruit. The breakup of the orderly processes of nature both in the sky and on the soil (verse 14) will so terrify the wicked of every category of society that they will seek refuge in bomb shelters and other underground retreats (verse 15).

The wide scope of these judgments, however, does not turn sinners to Christ. Unless God's grace does its mighty work of enlightening the mind, emancipating the will, and empowering the emotions, no disaster – however great – can change their fright to faith. Instead of calling on Christ to have mercy on their doomed souls, they say their prayers to the rocks and mountains (verse 16). They persist in their idolatry and hope to get from earth what only Heaven can provide.

The initial and introductory judgments of the tribulation period are manifestations of the wrath of the Lamb (verse 17). Wrath characterizes the full seven years of tribulation. When the great and notable day of the Lord comes, people will recognize it by unprecedented and unique catastrophes – the kind that have never occurred before in human history.

Parentetical Pause (Revelation 7: 1-17)

Chapter 7 marks a temporary suspension in the chronology of events. It gives us an opportunity to find out more about what is happening to the believers during the whole tribulation period. The events of this chapter illustrate the truth that in judgment God remembers mercy.

The angels who restrain the universal forces of evil from breaking their bounds are the administrative angels of God's providential government (verse 1). Human agencies may rage restlessly to escape their confines, but they are continuously under God's control and could do nothing without divine permission. When the king of the north, for instance, finally invades Palestine, it is only because God removes the restraints that now prevent the Russian aggressor from carrying out his long ambition to destroy Israel and take possession of the Mideast.

The “angel” who seals the remnant of Israel is different from the four angels of the whole back the four winds (verse 2). The sealing Angel descends from the east – the same direction from which Christ will come – and he has the authority to command four angels (verse 3). This angel uses the word “we” in connection with the sealing. We know from John 6:27 that the father

seals and from Ephesians 4:30 that the spirit seals. Perhaps, then, the angel or messenger is the Holy Spirit, who identifies His own in cooperation with the seal of the father.

The seals suggest that the 144,000 Jews of the tribulation period are saved and safe. They are born of the Spirit, washed in the blood of Christ, and kept by the power of God. They will come to Christ through reading the Word of God, especially the prophetic portions. God chooses them for a unique and universal mission – to carry the gospel of the kingdom to the ends of the earth before the end of the tribulation and the return of Christ to the earth. They will take the preaching ministry where John the Baptist and Jesus left it – by announcing, “the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15). But unlike John and Jesus, the 144,000 will not be put to death because of their preaching.

The 144,000 Jewish evangelists and teachers are not the only Jews scheduled for salvation during the tribulation. Great numbers of other Jews will come to Christ also. The 144,000 is a group of special Jews – a remnant within the remnant. Thousands of Gentiles will also be saved during the tribulation and live through the ordeal of judgment. The Apostle John sees them as innumerable company and representing every nation under Heaven (verse 9). They are on earth, waiting to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles at the beginning of the millennial reign. They have been saved by grace through faith in Christ (verse 10). They have survived the tribulation woes, and their lives have been purified in the fires of that awful period (verse 14).

Their prospect is a bright and happy one; they have satisfaction, shelter, and solace in the coming Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ (verses 16, 17).

Disaster for the Middle East 6

The state of Israel is a twentieth-century wonder. Israelis have not only possessed the land of their forefathers and eked out a living in Palestine, but they have restored the land to fertility and beauty. The land is like the Garden of Eden (Joel 2: 3a). The military forces of Israel have successfully repelled Arab attacks in three wars, and Israel has managed to keep the Russian bear at bay.

According to God's word, however, the present picture will drastically change. In the middle of the tribulation period Egypt will launch another attack against Israel, apparently without Russian consent. Russia will retaliate by driving her armies southward through Israel into Egypt, Ethiopia, and Libya. In the invasions the land of Israel will be utterly devastated and reduced once more to a howling wilderness (Joel 2:3b).

Angels of the Disaster (Revelation 8: 1-13)

In God's providential government certain angels have the responsibility of bringing destruction and death to the human race in order to punish sinners for their rebellion against God. When Pharaoh defied the living God, the death Angel stalked through the land of Egypt smiting all the first born creatures that were not protected by the application of blood (Exodus 12:23). God employs the services of special angels to administer judgment. During the tribulation the seven angels of judgment will carry out the sentence of disaster (verse 2).

The calamities of the tribulation period will occur in answer to the prayers of the tribulation Saints who are still alive on earth (verses 3, 4). They have been pleading with God to manifest His wrath against wicked men and to make a way of escape for His own people. Christ intercedes for the tribulation Saints on the basis of the provisions of Calvary and upon His own merits. The petitions of the Lord's people are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ, and in response Christ removes some of the coals from off of the altar of burnt sacrifice and showers earth with the sparks of judgment (verse 5). The voices, thunderings, lightnings, and earthquake give sufficient warning to the inhabitants of the earth that unmitigated catastrophe is about to follow. The angelic ministers of God's wrath ready themselves to sound the trumpet judgments (verse 6).

The first trumpet marks the middle of the tribulation period, at which time several events occur simultaneously: (1) the Roman prince of Europe will request the Jewish antichrist in Palestine to erect a statue of the Roman prince in the rebuilt Jewish temple; (2) the devil and his angels will be confined to earth; (3) Enraged, Satan will lose the imprisoned angels from the bottomless pit and use them to influence Russia to invade the Middle East; (4) The godly Jews will flee the land in a final time of dispersion.

The judgments under the first trumpet seem to describe what the northern invader will do to the eastern parts of the Mediterranean world when he sweeps through Palestine like a roaring fire (verse 7). Isaiah 28:2, 17, describes the Assyrian invader (the king of the North) as a "tempest of

hail.” Joel sees the invader as a devouring fire which will burn up Israel (2:3). John relates the consequence which the invasion will have on agriculture, navigation, commerce, and the fishing industry (Revelation 8:7-9). Isaiah predicts the destruction of Egypt by the king of the north in virtually the same terms (19:4-10).

Israel will have to contend not only with destruction from the Russian invader from the North but also the deceptions of a Jewish king in their midst. The judgment under the third trumpet seems to bear this out (verses 10, 11). The “great star” is probably a symbolic reference to the antichrist who rises up in the land and convinces Israel it is safe from the king of the North because Israel has concluded a military alliance with the Western Allies.

Just as the great star pollutes the waters, so the antichrist will corrupt Israel with his lies. He will be responsible for reintroducing idolatry to the land; And because of the idolatry God intends to send the Russian desolator into the land to make life bitter for Israel and reduce the population. God will employ the king of the North to annul the military covenant (Isaiah 28:18). In the process of the invasion the antichrist will flee the scene, and his European colleague (the Roman prince) will not make a move to rescue Israel from the invader.

The judgments under the fourth trumpet are identical to the conditions which Joel 2:2, 10 describes of the northern invasion. It is the day of darkness – thick darkness – in which the sun and the moon will be dark and the stars will withdraw their shining. There is no doubt that the northern army is in view, for Joel specifically names it (2:20). The darkness will be a great benefit to the godly Jews; they will escape to the mountains of Judea and to the remote recesses of Edom, Moab, and Ammon under the protective cover of early darkness.

In Revelation 8:13 the word "angel" should be "eagle." It suggests the reaction of the Western Allies to the invasion from the North and to the destruction of the invader upon the mountains of Israel after the king of the north has ravaged North Africa. The eagle is interested in devouring the carcasses of the slain; likewise, the Western Allies will be eager to make profit out of the supernatural liquidation of the Russian armies. The arrival of the European dictator and Palestine will only add to Israel's woes. Then, too, after Russia's defeat the Antichrist will return from his hiding place to join with the Roman prince in conspiring to divide the land of Israel, to change the Jewish feasts, and wear out the Jewish saints with a fierce persecution.

The Agents in the Disaster (Revelation 9:1-21)

This chapter provides us with a glimpse of those demon intelligences who inspired the king of the North to invade the Middle East. It is true that God himself will bring the army down upon Israel. God is in complete control of all events. On the other hand, God will accomplish this work by using the wrath of Satan against Israel. Satan in turn will direct the demons to influence the kings of the North and all of his armies. So, at no time during the tribulation will demons be visibly present on earth; they are behind the scenes, controlling the visible army from the North.

There is little doubt that Revelation 9 describes the northern invasion, for most of the imagery in the chapter comes directly from Joel, chapters 1 and 2, which predict the northern invasion. The prophet Joel begins with the prediction of a plague of locusts (chapter 1), but then

he shows (chapter 2) that he has more terrible plagues in view than actual locusts. The northern invasion will do to the land what locusts do – strip it of all vegetation and reduce it to a wilderness.

Joel's approach is John's approach, for John, 2, begins with a description of an invasion of locusts; but before John concludes the section, he clearly indicates that the locusts are actually a cavalry of 200 million men (verse 16). But in Revelation even the locusts are not ordinary locusts; they are demons which energize the army of horsemen to perpetrate their atrocious deeds.

Joel and John correspond in their description of the northern invader. Joel says “a great people and strong” (2: 2); John gives the exact and literal number (9: 16). Joel mentions the horses (2:4); John concurs (9:7, 9, 17). Joel speaks of chariots (2: 5), and so does John (9: 9). Joel says that if any one falls on the sword, he will not they wounded (2: 8); John's report is parallel (9: 6). Joel refers to the teeth of lions (1: 6); John does likewise (9: 8). Joel says that the trumpet will sound the alarm of the approaching invasion (2:1), and John introduces the entire series of calamities by six trumpets. Joel associates blood, fire, smoke, darkness with the invasion (2:30, 31); John follows the same pattern (8:7, 8, 12; 9:2). John says that all trees were withered and burned (1:12, 19); John agrees (8:7). Joel also involves Egypt (3:19); John refers to several of the Egyptian plagues.

One third of the Mediterranean world – the Middle East – will fall to the invader. It seems that the Arab world will not come under the jurisdiction of the Roman prince of Europe and the Jewish king in Palestine until after Russia has conquered these lands and has been supernaturally destroyed. With Russia off the scene, the Roman prince and the Jewish antichrist will have an opportunity to rule the region from the Atlantic Ocean to the Persian Gulf without any opposition from the North.

An Interlude between the Judgement Scenes 7

When a worried looking man applied for settlement of a claim for fire insurance, the agent asked, "much damage?"

"Not much," the man said; "just a door."

"How much would a new door cost?"

"About \$5."

"When did the fire occur?"

The man hesitated a moment and then replied,

"about 30 years ago."

"30 years ago?"

"Yes."

"And you've waited all these years to report it?"

"Yes."

"How did that happen?"

"Well," the man said, "my wife has been at me to do something about that door ever since it was burned, and I could stand it no longer."

The saints of all ages have been pleading with God to do something about the reign of wickedness on the earth. During the tribulation period especially will the Lord's people beg for justice and vindication. At that time God's patience with sinners will be exhausted, and he will do something about it. Unlike the man with the door, God has valid reasons for delay and has appointed a time for the just retribution to come.

The Welcome Word (Revelation 10:1-11:2)

The delay between the sixth and seventh trumpets is calculated to give sinners plenty of opportunity to repent before final judgments descend from Heaven. God's patience endures a bit longer. In the interlude the saints receive more assurances that the judgments will end, that Christ will come to establish His kingdom, and that God has everything under control.

Commentators are divided in their opinions about the mighty angel with the little book (verse 1). Some believe that the messenger or angel is a literal angel – a being of exalted rank, like the seraphim or cherubim. Others hold that the mighty angel is Christ because, they say, the description here is inappropriate for a mere creature. If Christ can be a servant, He can also be an angel – that is, a messenger; and He is thus designated and Malachi 3:1. The angel mentioned in Revelation 7:2 functions as a prophet. The angel of 8:5 acts as a priest. The angel here in 10:1-5 officiates as a king. It is possible that all three passages refer to the same person – the Lord Jesus Christ, who is a prophet, priest, and king.

The mighty angel holds a little book in His hand (verse 2). It is an unrolled scroll which probably contains that part of God's purpose which pertains to judgment. It may explain what

God intends to do to those rebels who have had time and reason to repent but refused to do so. Christ is about to repossess the earth. In order to do so, He will have to "gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity." At this point He determines to gain the mastery of the sea and the earth – His very own property.

The roar of the lion is a signal of attack (Isaiah 31: 4). Like a lion long deprived of satisfaction, Christ will suddenly seize the prey (verse 3). The loud cry is also like the war whoop of soldiers who are charging the enemy. The battle shouts tend to encourage the combatants and confuse the foe. Somehow, the voices of seven thunders contribute to the destruction, but we do not know what these voices said (verse 4). Here is an illustration of revelation without inspiration. Something was revealed but not recorded.

The oath which the angel swears by the Creator has nothing to do with the end of the world or the end of time. It does not mark the beginning of eternity. Rather, the oath guarantees that Christ will no longer delay to exercise the full measure of judgment upon those who have illegally seized upon His property (verses 5, 6). The seventh trumpet is about to sound – a judgment which contains the worst catastrophes of all and which will bring an end to the mystery of God (verse 7). The welcome word about the kingdom which God had disclosed to Old Testament saints was about to be clarified and completed. With the establishment of the kingdom will come a full manifestation of God's power and purpose. We shall understand then why the kingdom was postponed for so long.

The prophetic word about the consummation deserves more than a fleeting glance. John had seen it and been aware of it; now the angel commands him to make it his own possession by taking it and digesting its contents (verses 8, 9). While the words remain in John's mouth, he enjoyed the experience of this psalmist who said, "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! Yay, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" But once the words entered deeper into John's being, they turned bitter (verse 10).

A superficial sampling of tidbits from God's Word often leads us with a pleasant feeling. But a deeper explanation of the whole counsel of God causes anxiety. God's Word quickens and kills; It delights and distresses; It brings both gladness and grief. It portrays the blessings and bliss of the redeemed, but it also depicts the wretchedness and woe of the reprobate. The description which the Word gives of human depravity and its consequences is not a pleasant picture.

The Apostle John understood that the same Word which promised to preserve Israel also threatened to punish her. The instrument which God intends to employ to chastise the nation is the gentile nations (verse 11). God's Word promises Israel that her people will be regathered, her temple rebuilt, her worship resumed (11:1). All of this is sweet to contemplate. But soon after Israel reinstates the temple rites, the Gentile nations of the West will take absolute control of Jerusalem again; this is bitter to anticipate (verse 2).

The measuring of the temple, the altar, and the worshippers suggests God's approval. He will accept the worship of save tribulation Jews who love God's house and look for the Messiah to fill it with His glory. The reason the angel forbids John to measure the court of the Temple is that the

Jews who occupy this area have evidently identified themselves with their Gentile masters and comply with idolatrous rites which will be initiated by a Gentile dictator who resides in the West and implemented by Jewish deceiver who lives in Jerusalem. Jerusalem will remain under Gentile jurisdiction for forty-two months – the exact period of time that the Western dictator will exercised sovereign power in Europe.

The Wondrous Witnesses (Revelation 11:3-14)

God has never left Himself without an adequate witness. In the darkest days of Israel's apostasy God reserved 7,000 who had not bowed to bail. In the future, 144,000 Jews will keep the truth aglow after the church has disappeared from the earth. During the last half of the tribulation two witnesses maintain a faithful testimony (verse 3). Their ministry coincides exactly with the reign of the Gentile dictator in Europe. Their garments of sackcloth reflect sorrowful circumstances in which they will minister.

Whatever the witnesses need to carry out their commission God will supply. They will experience the enabling grace of the spirit (verse 4). In them will be a concentration of light and power. Their lives will bear the fruit of the Spirit. They represent the God who created the earth and who will judge those who defile it. The work of the witnesses is not to save but to destroy (verse 5). Like Moses, they will use their miraculous power to bring disaster. They will protect themselves by slaying their enemies.

Like Elijah, the two witnesses turn off the faucets of Heaven so that it will not rain for three and one-half years (verse 6). In these two witnesses the greatest powers of Moses and Elijah will combine. For this reason many Bible teachers believe that the witnesses are Moses and Elijah returned to earth. Others take the view that the witnesses are unidentifiable; they only come in the spirit and power of their predecessors.

The days of the witnesses are exactly numbered. They cannot die a second before God permits it, and they cannot live a moment beyond their allocated time. Until their service for God concludes, they are invulnerable. But as soon as their work on earth is done, God allows their enemies to kill them (verse 7). The instigator of their death is the beast out of the abyss. This is the first specific mention of the beast in the book of Revelation. During the first half of the tribulation the beast – whom we know to be a gentile dictator in Europe – will be an active politician but not an absolute ruler. Not until the middle of the tribulation does he arise to dictatorial power and crusade against Israel.

Toward the end of the tribulation the beast will succeed in silencing the two witnesses by coming personally to Jerusalem. What his troops and his colleague, the Jewish antichrist have not been able to do the Western dictator will accomplish. To add insult to injury, the beast will not permit the burial of the two corpses (verses 8, 9). They will lie exposed on the street in Jerusalem for the whole world to see, giving mute evidence of the city's wickedness. Until the very end of the age Jerusalem will be continuing its murderous treatment of God's prophets.

The residents of Jerusalem will think that the end of the witnesses indicates the end of the city's misery, and so they will celebrate the occasion by acts of generosity towards each other

(verse 10). The wicked will be deliriously happy. But their triumph will turn to terror when they see the resurrection of the witnesses and their bodily ascent to Heaven (verses 11, 12). Sinners will suddenly sense that God is omnipotent and that he will employ his power to manifest His awful wrath.

The populace of Jerusalem will not have long to wait before they experience a dramatic exhibition of God's holy anger. The same hour and earthquake will wreck a tenth of the city and claim the lives of 7,000 people (verse 13). The survivors will recognize the disaster as an act of God but they will not turn to Christ.

The Wholehearted Worship (Revelation 11:15-19)

The announcement of the imminent arrival of the King to set-up His kingdom inspires the adoration of the residents of Heaven (verses 15-17). The information comes at the exact moment when the Gentile dictator reaches the pinnacle of his power. The saints in Heaven will rejoice; the saints on earth will take new courage. The fact that the martyred dead are soon to be raised, vindicated, and rewarded also evokes worship from the heavenly company (verse 18). All of the Old Testament saints will also be raised and rewarded at this time.

The promises which God made to the prophets are inviolable. They rest upon covenant transactions and an infallible Word which is forever settled in Heaven (verse 19). But the fulfillment of those promises requires that judgment do its full work of weeding out the rebels of Israel and the nations. Not until then will the kingdom come in fact.

The Accumulation of Israel's Enemies 8

Your understanding of chapters 8-13 of Revelation depends somewhat upon your awareness that at the midway point of the tribulation many events occur simultaneously or at least follow each other in rapid succession – sometimes with a cause and effect pattern. These chapters do not put the events in chronological order, but the sequence seems to be as follows: (1) The erection of an idol in the temple at Jerusalem (8:11; 11:2; 13:2); (2) the escape of many Jews to a wilderness retreat (12:6, 14); (3) the ejection of Satan and his angels from the "heavenlies" (12:8-10); (4) the eruption of demons from the abyss (9:1-11); (5) the entrance of the northern armies to Palestine (8:1-13; 9:13-21); (6) the elimination of the Russian armies (12:16); (7) the expansion of the kingdom of the two beasts (13:1-18); (8) Israel's endurance of persecution from beasts (11:7, 13:7, 15). Moreover, these chapters have special application to the coming crisis in the Mideast.

The Flight of Israel (Revelation 12:1-17)

As soon as the Jews learn that an idol has been erected in the restored Temple, many of them will heed the warning of Christ in Matthew 24:16-26 and flee to a place where they will be safe from the northern desolator (Russia). Revelation 12 describes this flight. The woman in verse 1 represents Israel. It makes no sense at all to identify the woman with Eve, the Virgin Mary, or the church. The church is the bride of Christ, not the woman in this chapter. John sees Israel in the governmental role which God destines for her to fulfill in the millennial kingdom. The man child in verses 2, 4, 5 is Christ, for He alone will rule the nations with a rod of iron. Israel produced Christ "after the flesh." Israel was the matrix from which He came into the human race.

The dragon is Satan (verses 3, 7, 9). Satan, the old serpent, heard the pronouncement of Genesis 3:15, and from that moment He entered into a conflict with "the seed of woman" (Christ). When Christ was born of Mary, the devil sensed the significance of this event and discerned in it an end of his ignominious career. Hence He moved King Herod to slaughter the innocents, hoping thereby to kill Christ (verse 4c). All of the devil's engines of destruction failed to eliminate his arch enemy. Even death did not defeat Him, for God raised Him from the dead and caught Him up to Heaven in the ascension (verse 5).

The supernatural child which Israel brought into the world had the authority to sit upon David's throne as Israel's sovereign ruler, but the representatives of the nation rejected His kingly credentials and instigated His crucifixion. That official repudiation of their Messiah has brought and will yet bring Israel indescribable anguish (verse 2). The "child" will remain in Heaven until Israel acknowledges its ill-treatment of Him and calls for Him to come to deliver them from destruction.

When God removes the church from the earth at the rapture, He will resume his special dealings with Israel again. In order to bring the nation to the end of itself, He will permit external enemies (the northern king and the western king) to persecute her. He will also permit an internal enemy (the Jewish king) to persecute her. Caught in this awful maelstrom of affliction, Israel

will cast themselves on Christ for deliverance. These sufferings of Israel during the tribulation are her travail and her birth pangs.

The instrumental cause of Israel's immediate sufferings right after the middle of the tribulation is the invasion of Russia from the north. Many Jews will escape this horrible Holocaust possibly by chartering planes and flying out of Israel to the remote recesses of Jordan and probably other adjacent lands. The northern aggressor will not ravage these districts. Jews will be secure here for the remainder of the tribulation period (verse 6).

As the King of the North is the instrumental cause of the suffering, the devil and his angels are the procuring cause of the agony (verses 7-13). At the middle of the tribulation Michael will cast Satan out of the airways and confine the devil's activities to earth. Satan will determine to exhaust his fury on Israel because Israel has produced the man child who will ultimately execute the devil's death warrant. In looking for a likely tool to use in destroying Israel, the devil will lay hold of the armies of the North and inspire them to attack Israel (verses 13, 15). Of course, in all of this activity, God himself is the efficient cause of Israel's suffering. God will use the wrath of the devil, and the devil will use the anti-Semitism of Russia to bring it all about.

Israel would be annihilated by this formidable invasion if it were not for God's early warning system. The erection of the idol in the temple is the signal for Jews to leave the land; the invasion will occur almost immediately afterward. God will cause a supernatural darkness to enable Jews to escape under its protective cover. God will hinder the Russian armies from venturing into those areas where Jews will be hiding. Finally God will super naturally intervene and liquidate the Russian army by causing the earth to swallow them up (verse 16), just as they were about to capture the city of Jerusalem. This unexpected turn of events will bring many Jews to Christ.

The Foes of Israel (Revelation 13:1-18)

Satan will not cease his endeavors to destroy Israel when the armies of the North lie still in death. Indeed, He will raise up another enemy of Israel in the person of the European dictator and still another in the person of the Jewish antichrist. Satan will resolve to destroy those Jews who have not fled to safety (12:17). This time He will use as his instrument the expanding empire of nations that encompasses Western Europe in the Middle East.

The devil stands upon the sand of the sea (verse 1). The result is the appearance of a beast that arises out of the sea. The beast is both an empire and an emperor. Some of the descriptions here apply to the empire, others to the emperor, and a few two both. The ten horns signify that when the Roman Empire makes its appearance again in history, it will consist of a ten-nation unification – a political and military community, a United States of Europe.

The ten-nation confederacy will likely not gain much progress until God removes Russia from the scene; but with Russia out of the picture, the Roman Empire will expand until it incorporates into its domains all of the territories once occupied by Greece (the leopard), Persia (the bear), and Babylon (the lion). This empire will probably exist as a ten-nation unity at the

beginning of the tribulation, but not until the middle of the tribulation will Satan take possession of this political entity and use it in his last desperate struggle to oppose the coming kingdom of Christ and to destroy those people who are destined to become the ruling citizenry of that kingdom.

The devil will seize this empire by enabling an obscure politician, who He energizes, to put down all opposition from three of the ten ruling kings. The man will accomplish this feat in the middle of the tribulation, and the kings will thereupon grant him the powers of an absolute dictator. The whole world will stand in awe of these proceedings (verse 3). Then the devil will motivate the dictator to assume divine titles and prerogatives (verse 4). At this point no contestants trouble the dictator; later, it seems, the kings of the East will attack him and defeat him (verse 10; compare with 16:12; 19:20, 21).

While the dictator has absolute powers – 42 months only – He will distinguish himself by his blasphemous oratory (verses 5, 6). His wicked word will precede his atrocious deeds. He will initiate a program calculated to exterminate the tribulation saints (verse 7). No part of the planet will go unaffected by the dictator's policies. He will commit the crowning infamy by introducing emperor worship (verse 8). Only God's elect people will refuse to pay him the divine honors He demands. Living by the sword, however, He will die by the sword (verse 10).

The first beast is a gentile, resides in Western Europe, and controls political and military affairs. Daniel 7 refers to him as the "little horn." Daniel 9:26 calls him "the [Roman] prince." The second beast, a Jew, resides in Palestine, and controls commercial and religious affairs. Daniel 11:36 calls him "the king." The European dictator and the Jewish deceiver are allies – an alliance that Israel got mixed up in at the beginning of the tribulation before the dictator took possession of the ten-nation empire. The second beast, as the official representative of the Jews, concluded a treaty of defense with the ten-nation empire in order to secure Israel against an attack from the king of the north (Russia). Now, in the middle of the tribulation, the European dictator comes to absolute power in the West, and he informs the second beast that if he wants continued protection, the second beast will have to promote the worship of the first beast.

The second beast subsequently puts a statue of the first beast in the restored Jewish temple – and He does so willingly, not by compulsion (verse 12). The second beast is not a slave of the first beast. The second beast exercises absolute power in the Middle East, while the first beast exercises sovereign authority in Europe. Both beasts demand and receive worship. Both beasts are diabolical. But the second beast seems to be the more energetic and active of the two. He is certainly more dramatic, for with the supernatural powers He gets from the devil, He will convince wide-eyed Jews he is their long-awaited Messianic King and therefore has the right to assume also priestly and prophetic functions.

The chief characteristic of the second beast is his ability to perform miracles and deceive people (verses 13, 14). The first beast is never so described. The second beast is the religious actor of the future; it is the second beast who sits in the Temple at Jerusalem, receiving worship and working "with all powers and signs and lying wonders" (II Thessalonians 2:4-10). It is the second beast who is eminently the deceiver, the liar, the false prophet, and the fountain of error. The Apostle John associates the word "antichrist" with false prophets, the spirit of error, liars,

and deceivers. Every description applies to the second beast, not the first, and for this reason the title "antichrist" rightly belongs on the second beast, not the first. It is the second beast who poses as Christ, not the first. It is the second beast who gives an identifying mark, not the first.

The second beast – the Jewish antichrist – has the power to boycott goods and control all trade in the empire which He jointly rules with the first beast (verses 16, 17). Babylon will once again become the world center of commerce, and in all probability the second beast will be responsible for smooth operation of restored Babylon on the Euphrates River.

Encouragements for Suffering Saints 9

Proverbs 29:1 aptly applies to the situation that comes before us in Revelation 14-15: "He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy." Proverbs 6:15 is also to the point: "Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly, suddenly shall he be broken without remedy. When the warning cries of men and angels go unheeded, nothing remains but untempered judgment.

Dividing Jews (Revelation 14:1-20)

Thousands of Jews – both saved and unsaved – will die during the entire tribulation period. Saved Jews will die as martyrs; unsaved Jews will be caught in the various invasions that will sweep the land of Palestine. At the very end of the tribulation period just before Christ returns to earth, two classes of Jews will be alive: the godly Jews who have defied the beast and godless Jews who have allied themselves with the beast and have survived the general judgments. When Christ comes, He will deal personally with any unsaved survivors by destroying them. He will gather out the tares (the wicked) and leave the wheat (the righteous). One shall be taken (the wicked), and the other left (the righteous).

None of these events actually occur in Revelation 14-15; they are only announced. John anticipates the millennial reign of Christ from Jerusalem (verse 1). He sees the 144,000 Jews of Revelation 7 still safe and in the company of the reigning King. John mentions these items at this point in Revelation in order to encourage the tribulation saints who are still suffering at the hands of their enemies. Their victory is ultimately assured, and so they have reason to hold steady in their opposition to the beast and the Antichrist.

The war-weary saints on earth are the objects of the sympathy of the Jews martyrs who are singing a new song in Heaven (verse 3). Heaven and earth are very near. The great cloud of martyred witnesses in Heaven are a challenge to the Jewish survivors on earth. The example of the Jews who sacrificed their lives for Christ will spur their comrades on to heroic deeds. The song which the martyrs sing in Heaven somehow pertains to the endurance of the 144,000 who are delivered from the present evil world. Perhaps they are singing praises to God, who has kept his promise to preserve the 144,000 through the tribulation period.

The 144,000 are "virgins" in the sense that they have maintained purity of doctrine and life despite inducements to apostatize (verse 4). The threats of the beast and the false prophet could not influence them to abandon Christ. They had given Him their undivided allegiance and refused to stray from His leading. God had purchased them as a special act of sovereign grace. They belonged exclusively to Him and therefore acknowledged the ownership of no other. Like the first fruits and the harvest which follows, the 144,000 will be the earnest of a large group of saved Jews who will also participate in the millennial kingdom.

The 144,000 stand in sharp contrast to the prevailing principles of the tribulation era. Falsehood and deceit will everywhere abound but the 144,000 pay strictest attention to the truth (verse 5). Other Jews on all hands will identify themselves with the man of sin and adultery, but the 144,000 regulate their lives according to God's Word. At the time when the majority of Jews are guilty of the worst form of apostasy the 144,000 are blameless in God's sight.

Verses 6-20 give the order of events that lead up to the fulfillment which verses 1-3 anticipate. The everlasting gospel becomes the subject of a worldwide proclamation. It is the good news that the persecuted remnant of Jews is waiting to hear (verses 6, 7). It is the announcement of God's vengeance upon Israel's enemies. It presses the claims of the Creator upon the creature. The message is perfectly consistent with the old-age principle that judgment will overtake sinners eventually. But before the cup of God's wrath overflows, He calls upon sinners universally to fear, glorify, and worship him. This is their last opportunity to repent of their sins and own God's sovereignty over all things.

Those who are depending upon commercial Babylon to sustain and safeguard them are due for a bitter disappointment. God warns them of their false confidence by announcing that Babylon will collapse; it will be in no position to help anyone. Regardless of how widespread its influence becomes during the tribulation and how many people are caught in the orbit of its activities, Babylon is destined for oblivion (verse 8). It will corrupt the nations no more.

With the fall of Babylon occurs the destruction of the empire of the beast, for the same armies which God will use to destroy Babylon will also destroy the empire of the beast. In the everlasting gospel God warns sinners that they cannot identify with the beast or false prophet and get away with it (verse 9). When the empire of the beast topples, the followers of the beast will be overtaken in the judgement. Their lot is punishment in eternal Hell (verses 10, 11). They have associated with the beast and his wicked projects, and they have associated with him in his everlasting torment.

The hope, based on divine promises, that the prosecutors will soon find themselves in the hands of an angry God enables the Jewish tribulation Saints to be patient a little longer and to endure a little more (verse 12). Regardless of what the beast demands, they obey commandments of God and remain faithful to Christ. Some will pay the supreme sacrifice for their faith (verse 13), but their death is especially precious to the Lord for whom they suffer martyrdom. Their labors were more abundant and their words more accomplished under the most trying circumstances; therefore, a special blessing is their portion. Other saints will suffer affliction before their martyrdom, but none will suffer so severely as those who oppose the Roman prince and his minister of religion.

Yet another thing greets John's eye. He sees the Son of man coming with a sharp sickle to reap the harvest of the earth (verses 14-16). This refers to a harvest of judgment. With the sickle Christ will cut down the apostate Jews and sever them from the godly Jews. The work is not a single act. This weeding-out process will go on all during the second half of the tribulation. Christ will use providential agencies for accomplishing this judgment. The trumpet judgments will provide for the invasion of Russia, and during that invasion many of apostate Jews will be

killed. The harvest here refers to these general calamities which will bring death to thousands of godless Jews.

The judgment of verses 17-20 appears to be the very last stage in God's process of separating saved Jews from unsaved Jews. The general judgments under the trumpets will not succeed in destroying all rebel Jews. Some will survive and be alive after the destruction of the empire of the beast. Christ will, it seems, come personally to slay the wicked who still remain after the tribulation judgments are finished. He will send his angels to remove from earth all those wicked survivors. Only save Jews will then remain on earth to populate the millennial kingdom.

Jews in Palestine are chiefly in the view in both the harvest judgment (verses 14-16) and the vineyard judgment (verses 17-20). Figuratively, apostate Israel is in the vine that yields only sour grapes (Isaiah 5:1-7). Nothing can remedy this situation except for God to tread the vine under foot. The final stage of this judgment upon Israel will occur in the valley of Jehoshaphat outside the city of Jerusalem. But the whole of the land of Israel will be drenched in blood – from Dan to Beersheba (verse 20).

Dispensing Judgment (Revelation 15:1-8)

Before describing the nature, source, scope, and duration of the final judgments, John takes account of a group of people who get the victory over the beast while the beast is in the height of his power (verses 2-4). Most interpreters believe that this is a martyred company who are in Heaven. If the sea of glass here is the same as that in Revelation 4, then they are probably right. If, however, the sea of glass here is not the same as that in Revelation 4, then perhaps the victorious company represents those Jews who survived their tribulation despite the fact they have defied the beast.

The fact that the company of victors sing the song of Moses may indicate they are the survivors of the tribulation and not martyrs. Moses and the Israelites did not win over Pharaoh by dying and going to Heaven. The song of Moses celebrated the overthrow of the armies of Pharaoh and the physical escape of Israel from his clutches. The Jews stood on the shore of the Red Sea and exalted in God's greatness and power. Many of the tribulation saints will have the same experience. Pursued by the Gentile dictator, they will pass through the ordeal of fire and flood and emerge triumphant. God will destroy the enemy by acts of power, and the rescued Israelites will compose songs appropriate to the occasion.

God will demonstrate afresh that He is the King of nations. In His sovereignty He raises them up to serve His purposes and He strips them of their power by His mere pleasure. The ruination of the empire of the beast will inspire the Gentiles to fear the Lord God almighty (verse 4), just as the destruction of Pharaoh's troops caused the surrounding nations to feel a fear and dread of God's great power.

One last detail now remains before the events of 14:1-15:5 can actually come to pass: the appointment of seven angels who will pour out the vials of God's wrath and destroy the kingdom

of the beast (verses 5-8). Although these angels are invested with the authority to ravage earth, they do not act until commanded to do so (16:1). At last all is ready for final disasters to descend upon Israel's foes.

The End of Godless Politics and Religion 10

The world stage is already set for European unification and ecumenical union. Statesman everywhere are talking more and more about the consolidation of Europe eventually eclipsing the United States in economic growth. Changes in the Roman Catholic Church are a preparation for the return of apostate Protestantism to the papal fold. The Vatican is taking an increasingly active role in influencing governments for peace. The world Council of Churches is putting more and more pressure on politics.

The climax of all these political and religious maneuvers will occur in the tribulation when the ten-nation confederation and the one-world church will become super-powers. The godless state and the corrupt religion will continue only a brief time before God destroys both by a blast of His unmitigated wrath.

The Seven Bowls (Revelation 16: 1-21)

Many of the voices which the apostle John heard are unidentifiable. Sometimes they represent angelic voices; at other times they represent the voice of God. They are always symbolic of an intelligent Providence. Nothing happens by chance or without divine permission. God controls all events.

One such voice now directs seven angels to empty their saucers upon the earth which has entered the final stage of its revolt against God (verse 1). They pour out without measure divine wrath. The seal judgments are a sprinkle of judgement. The trumpet judgments are a shower of judgment. The bowl or vial judgments are a storm of judgment unleashed in all its fury.

During Jesus' residence on earth his followers received miraculous cures for their diseases. The followers of the beast, however, are destined to receive miraculous diseases for their unholy association with the beast. The first bowl judgment brings an offensive and painful pestilence upon the worshippers of the beast (verse 2). Whatever the affliction, it will be an appropriate exhibition of their inward corruption.

The beast will depend upon seaways in order to maintain its vast political and commercial empire. Rebuilt Babylon will become the financial center of the reorganized Roman Empire and will ply its "trade by sea" (Revelation 18:17). The second bowl judgment will turn the oceans into stinking, rotting cesspools in which nothing can survive (verse 3). Imagine ships trying to plow through millions of Dead Sea creatures floating on the surface of the water!

Our present ecological crisis is nothing compared to what the divine judgments will produce in the final days of the tribulation period. The third bowl judgment will make all fresh water in the Kingdom of the beast unfit to drink (verse 4). The pollution of the rivers and streams will

reach maximum proportions. Death will overtake those who drink from them. The turning of the freshwater to blood is not too severe a penalty for people who never seem to get enough of the blood of the Saints (verses 5, 6). They shed blood and now they must sup blood. In his justice God suits the punishment to the crime.

Whether something goes haywire with the sun itself or with the atmosphere that filters out the sun's rays we cannot be sure. At any rate, the effect of the fourth bowl judgment will be the same as if the temperature of the sun suddenly increases (verse 9). From the fourth day of creation God has caused his sun to shine on the just and the unjust for their mutual benefit. Under the fourth bowl judgment the drastic increase of heat in the congested cities of the Roman Empire will result in thousands of people dying from sunstroke, suffocation, and third degree burns. Sunshine will become sunscorch. The boils will be made worse by blisters. But neither death nor discomfort is sufficient to bring sinners to repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ (verse 11).

Donald Grey Barnhouse conjectures that God will first cause the sun to flare up to an intense magnitude and subsequently dim until thick darkness covers the earth. Similar astronomical phenomena have been observed in the stars outside our solar system. Solar disturbances will cause electrical failures, leaving the kingdom of the beast in darkness. This is the result of the fifth bowl judgment (verse 10). Beast worshippers will nurse their boils and blisters in perpetual night and curse God as the source of their miseries (verse 11).

The great sleeping giant of the east will now be fully awake. The rulers of the Orient will take advantage of the disasters which the beast is suffering all across his empire and launch a full-scale invasion upon Babylon – a literal city on the eastern frontier of the beast's empire. God will aid the Far Easterners by drying up the Euphrates River. This is the result of the sixth bowl judgment (verse 12). The dry riverbed of the Euphrates will provide a natural highway for the mobilization of China's millions. Oriental troops were marched northward and swooped down upon Palestine from the north. Communist China's dream of world conquest will seem to be imminent.

It may be that at this time Satan forsakes the Roman prince and his colleague in Jerusalem in favor of bigger game in the Eastern kings (verse 13). However that may be, demon spirits worked the sorts of miracles that convinced the Oriental kings it is time to invade Palestine and thus assumed global control (verse 14). Perhaps God will use these demon intelligences to dry up the Euphrates. That in itself would be enough to lure the kings of the East into the Holy Land. But eventually other miracles will contribute to the enterprise. The massive military movements need not alarm saved Gentiles. They are looking to Christ for deliverance, and in a view of His imminent public appearing they maintain a good testimony of life and lip (verse 15).

The beast with his armies will confront the kings of the East with their armies in the valley of Esdraelon for the focal point near the Hill of Megiddo (verse 16). This event has often been called the Battle of Armageddon. In a way this is true, but actually the Greek word translated "battle" in verse 14 should be rendered "war" or "campaign." What takes place in Megiddo is only one phase – the last phase – of a long campaign in which military troops ravage the whole of the Middle East.

The seventh bowl judgment brings God's purposes of wrath to a conclusion (verse 17). We cannot be certain how the contents of the bowl will affect the air. Conceivably this marks the end of the beast's air force. Or, perhaps his or somebody else's space satellites containing warheads suddenly descend. Whatever it means, the greatest earthquake in recorded history will follow (verse 18). It will devastate all the cities in the territory of the beasts, including Babylon (verse 19). The wreckage will involve even the islands and mountains (verse 20). Out of the air will fall hailstones weighing as much as 100 pounds each (verse 21). Under such celestial bombardments and terrestrial convulsions the empire of the beast will sink into oblivion.

The Sacrilegious Babylon (Revelation 17:1-18)

Having described the destruction of the political empire of the beast, John now concentrates on the destruction of the religious system of the tribulation period. It is helpful to keep in mind, however, that apostate Christendom meets its doom long before the empire collapses. Chronologically, the contents of chapter 17 belonged to the early part of the second half of the tribulation.

Counterfeit religion deserves the epithet "the great whore" because it has forsaken fidelity to God and illicitly embraced a succession of lovers (verse 1). It has entered into alliances with the state and worked to seduce politicians (verse 2). The ten kings of the Roman Empire will find themselves under the control of the ecumenical harlot in the first half of the tribulation. Indeed, the woman dominates the empire and uses the state to enforce church decrees (verse 3).

Although the false Church of the future masquerades behind the costume of respectability, its real character is idolatrous, adulterous, and licentious (verse 4). Mystery Babylon – the apostate church – is vicious and murderous as well (verses 5, 6). One of its main objectives is to put true believers to death. Ecumenism's hatred for believers betrays its real attitude towards Christ. If the apostates love Him, they would also love those who honored and served Him.

We are not left in doubt about the meaning of the beast, the woman, the heads, the horns, and the waters. The seventh angel interprets all. The beast is none other than the final future form of the Roman Empire which for a short time supports the ecumenical church of the tribulation period (verse 7). The government of the Roman Empire has already passed through several phases in its long history. Kings, consuls, dictators, decimvirs, tribunes, and emperors all successively ruled ancient Rome at the time of its historic existence ("the beast that was" – verse 8).

In A.D. 476 the Empire ceased to exist as a political entity ("and is not"). For centuries the principles of Rome have persisted, but the power has undergone an eclipse while various states of Europe remained fragmented and isolated. But the Empire will return to the historical scene once more in the tribulation period ("and yet is"). The seven heads represent seven successive stages in the development of the Roman Empire (verse 9). The seven kings belong to the seven successive stages of Roman government (verse 10). Five of them had passed off the scene in

John's day. A sixth – an emperor – ruled the Roman Empire in John's day. The reorganized Roman Empire, as ruled by the ten kings in the tribulation, will constitute the seventh stage. When the Roman prince moves in to assume absolute power in the middle of the tribulation, the eighth stage will be complete (verses 11-13).

None of the political alignments will help the Roman prince in the long run. When He directs his personal venom towards the Lord Jesus Christ, his end will come suddenly and finally (verse 14). Christ will descend from Heaven with the raptured and resurrected church saints and slaughter the combined armies of the beast and the armies of the Orient.

Having anticipated the outcome of the beast's career, the angel resumes his description of the beast's activity (verses 16-18). When the Roman prince takes over the whole territory ruled by the ten kings, He will show his contempt for apostate Christendom by stripping religious authorities of their wealth and power (verse 16). God will use the utter disgust of the Roman prince to put an end to the ecumenical church (verse 17).

Much of the same thing will occur in the future that happened in the sixteenth century. Henry the VIII used cardinal Thomas Wolsey's genius to make England a great international power. Later Henry accused Woosley of high treason and had him executed. Then Henry proclaimed himself to be the head of the English church, confiscated the property of the Roman Church, stripped bishops of their power, and also put many Protestant theologians to death. In it all Henry resembles the Roman prince that will dominate politics and religion in the tribulation era..

The Fall of Commercial Babylon 11

Regardless of how attractive cities may be to us, God takes a dim view of the city, for it represents a center in which men cluster in order to consolidate their strength against God. It is a place where men think they can hide from God amid congestion where they can forget God in the bustle. The city is man's attempt to achieve by cultural emphasis what only God can accomplish by redemptive processes. It is a substitute paradise and a point of unity outside fellowship with God.

Cain along with his descendants, in flagrant disobedience to God, settled in a city – a walled enclosure – in which He felt more secure than in trusting God's promise to protect him from his enemies. The Noachian flood wiped out civilization on a global scale. Soon after the deluge, however, survivors once more defied God's command to disperse and concentrated their energies on building a commercial empire by means of slave labor (Genesis 10: 8-10). Later the human race migrated to Babel in the land of Shinar where they engaged in a common labor, employed a common language, inhabited a common location (Genesis 11: 1-9). They, too, defied the living God.

What had its commencement in Genesis will have its conclusion in Revelation. Civilization arose in the Mesopotamia valley, and it seems that it will move back to that vicinity where it will sink into oblivion once and for all. Babylon of the future, although probably a literal city to be rebuilt on the Euphrates river, also stands for all godless civilization, culture, politics, society, and government – national and municipal. God intends to bring a dramatic and final end to everything that man develops for the purpose of glorifying and deifying himself.

Reason for the Fall of Babylon (Revelation 18: 1-8)

The opening words of chapter 18, "and after these things", indicates that this section deals with a different set of circumstances from those in chapter 17. Chapter 17 depicts religious Babylon; chapter 18 discusses commercial Babylon. The first fact we learn from the heavenly messenger is that Babylon has at last come to an abrupt end (verses 1, 2). Men have deserted the city and abandon it to demons. The waste places are haunted by the impure spirits which wants obsessed if not possessed the residents of the city. The whole area has become a kind of Hell on earth; it is a prison House of vultures. All of these descriptions suggest utter debasement of the once prosperous and magnificent city.

What did Babylon do to deserve such a fate? She corrupted the nations and polluted the kings of the earth (verse 3). Their association with her enabled them to grow fabulously rich, but in the process her "suitors" imbibed her spirit of materialism, commercialism, and imperialism. She commended the God of mammon to her companions, and they worshipped at his shrine. Babylon seduced them to regard luxury and lasciviousness as the chief aim of life. They were drunk with pretensions and extravagance. In all likelihood, during the last half of the tribulation the cities of the restored Roman Empire and perhaps even the cities of the Far East will depend upon trade

with Babylon to enhance their economy. These cities will reflect Babylon's insatiable thirst for monopolies. Babylon will yet become the home of the world bank.

During the seventy years of exile Israelites settled down in Babylon, raise families, engaged in business, and obeyed the laws of the land. When the 70 years expired and Cyrus gave Jews an opportunity to return to Jerusalem, it is not surprising that most of the Jews preferred to remain in Babylon where life was comfortable rather than face the rigorous life of Palestine. In the future many believers will live in Babylon and other cities of the empire of the beast. Their natural impulse will be to remain where they are, but a special summons from God will cause them to evacuate the city lest they be overtaken in the destruction (verse 4). God will not devastate this citadel of commerce until His own people are at a safe distance. God demands complete break of relations with sinful Babylon.

Babylon of the future will consist of a gigantic building program, and endeavor to consolidate all business, and a blasphemous defiance of God. But though her arrogance reaches to the moon, God will bring her down to earth (verse 5). Babylon will eventually get what's coming to her (verse 6). She will get more than a taste of the wine of wrath which she has been supplying to the nation; she will drink the full draw. In all probability God will use the advancing armies of the Orient to destroy Babylon of the future, just as He used Cyrus, a king from the East, to destroy Babylon of the past.

The torment and sorrow of Babylon will be proportionate to her self-glorification. Her debasement will correspond in degree to her elevation. Her poverty will measure up to her prosperity. As is the case with all sinners, Babylon will imagine that no change can reverse her position of authority and affluence (verse 7). The thought never occurs to her that she will suddenly be abandoned by her lovers. She rests in a false security, fancying that her lifestyle will persist indefinitely. Suddenly God will cut her down (verse 8). The element of surprise will greatly aggravate her misery. "To think I have come to this when I didn't dream such a thing could ever happen!"

Reaction to the Fall of Babylon (Revelation 18: 9-24)

Babylon's sudden demise will affect every city in the reorganized Roman Empire and perhaps far beyond those boundaries. It is possible that whatever brings instant catastrophe to Babylon will also reduce other cities of the Middle East to rubble – for instance, Tyre, Haifa, Alexandria, and Istanbul. For all we know, the disaster will include also New York, London, Toronto, Paris, Athens, Peking, Tokyo, and San Francisco; for all of these cities and a thousands more belonged to Babylonish commercialism.

The reduction of Babylon to ashes will be felt throughout the length and breadth of the civilized world. Presidents, princess, prime ministers, kings, and dictators alike will grieve over the loss of the main source of their profits (verse 9). Satellites will eventually carry televised reports of the devastation of Babylon, for they shall see the smoke of her burning. Fear of contamination will keep government officials at bay (verse 10). It is not impossible that a

hydrogen bomb will destroy the city. In that case, radiation would make the whole territory inaccessible. It will be too late to send Babylon emergency relief; the kings of the earth can only declare it a disaster area and post notices to keep out.

Merchants and monarchs will mingle their tears (verse 11). Not a soul will remain alive in Babylon to purchase the variety of wares which the manufacturers offer. Granite and gems, cloth and crockery, food and furniture, sheep and slaves – these luxuries or necessities are of no more use to the residents of Babylon now (verses 12-14). In the early judgments of the tribulation the rich did not feel the effects (6:6b). The oil and the wine were exempt from damage. In the judgment of Babylon, however, the affluent are the special objects of God's wrath. Everything they lusted for now slips through their grasping fingers (verse 14). All dissolves in one infernal judgment, and the businessmen of the earth are instantly deprived of their lucrative market. Their lamentations bespeak of the sorrow they feel for themselves at losing Babylon's trade (verse 16). What especially dumbfounds them is that such a calamity could occur so suddenly and unexpectedly (verse 17a).

The monarchs and merchants are not alone in their anguish. Mariners are also stricken to grief (verse 17b). Ship owners, captains, sailors, passengers, dockmen – all who contribute to the maritime industry – bewail the loss of Babylon from their vantage point at sea or down the river Euphrates. They exhibit their frenzy of despair by beating their breasts and throwing dirt in their hair (verse 19). They acknowledge that they have never heard of any destruction so thorough, on so large a scale, or so quick.

The one company that rejoices over the fall of Babylon is the family of Saints in Heaven (verse 20). In destroying Babylon, God will avenge those whom the Babylonish world power persecuted and murdered. They had suffered violently at Babylon's hand, now God recompenses Babylon by delivering it into the hands of the violent. It is an abiding principle of God's government that those who live by the sword will die by the sword. The action of Babylon against believers of the tribulation period will be the last instance in which the kingdom of God suffers violence at the hands of wicked men (Matthew 11:12). After Babylon's fall the kingdom will come to earth, and all opposition will terminate.

With a giant stone tide to her neck Babylon will plummet to the briny deep where her body will never be recovered. The city that provided musical and chorographical entertainment for myriads of tourists will be dead silent (verse 22). Not a single artist will remain in the city. Domestic and social life will cease (verse 23). The drug culture will at last disappear from the scene. The blood of men and women, boys and girls who became the sacrificial victims of Babylon's fanatical hatred will testify against Babylon's crimes in the day of judgment (verse 24). That blood will cry out until God visits the world system in vengeance and punishes the blood-guilty culprit.

Although many Bible teachers argue that Babylon is only a symbol of God-defying world government and that the prophecies of a destruction of literal Babylon were fully fulfilled in the time of Cyrus and shortly thereafter, it is difficult, if not impossible, to find in history a destruction of Babylon that fully fits the destruction Isaiah 13 predicts. Isaiah distinctly puts the time of the disaster in the day of the Lord (verse 9)-the tribulation period. The meteorological

phenomena of verse ten did not accompany the historical destruction of Babylon. Furthermore the past destruction of Babylon did not resemble the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, as verse 19 requires.

But the future destruction of Babylon, as described in Revelation 18:21-24, certainly corresponds to what occurred to the wicked cities of the plain. Isaiah's prophecy requires that no inhabitant ever again dwell in Babylon after its destruction. But after its destruction in the past, people lived in Babylon at least until the nineteenth century A.D. After the future destruction of Babylon in the tribulation period, of course, the area will never again support a populace. The final and full fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies about the fallen Babylon awaits the tribulation period when the city of Babylon will be rebuilt on the Euphrates River and later destroyed.

A Summary of Final Events 12

The view which teaches that Christ will return to earth, banish evil, and begin a new social order is not only an optimistic view but a biblical view of history. Premillennialists believe that the preaching of the gospel will never gradually conquer the world. They know from scripture and experience that apostasy will increase, that wicked men will "wax worse and worse," and that morality will decline even though great advances will come in science and technology.

Premillennialists believe that Christ is the Lord of history and that He will triumph over the forces of evil in history. They hold that the coming of a 1,000-year reign of Christ is only logical goal of history. The millennial reign of Christ is the crowning dispensation of God's purposes for man and earth. At that time Christ will be vindicated in history.

Premillennial Events (Revelation 19:1-20:6)

The Hallelujah Chorus celebrates the destruction of the whole Babylonish system and the dawning of the millennial age (verses 1-6). Four times in this passage the word "alleluia" occurs. This song celebrates the deliverance of the tribulation saints from their enemies (verse 1). The scene is Heaven. The singers include tribulation martyrs, the church saints, and the four living creatures (verse 4). God is the sole object of their worship. The heavenly company praise Him for what He is and for what He has done. He is altogether true and righteous; He has destroyed Babylon and thus avenged the tribulation martyrs (verse 2). What He has done to Babylon is evidence of His perfect justice. The continual smoke of Babylon will be an ever-present reminder to the millennial populace of the consequences of defying a holy God (verse 3).

The harlot church of the beast and the chaste virgin-bride of Christ cannot coexist in earth's golden age, so the great horror must be removed from the scene before the wife of the lamb can come forth in her coronation robes. The forthcoming marriage festival is cause for thanksgiving (verse 7). The bridegroom with His bride will come from the private marriage ceremony in Heaven to the public marriage celebration on earth. Saved Jewish tribulation survivors will act as ladies in waiting to the bride at the reception. Saved Gentile tribulation survivors will act as servants at this occasion. All unsaved Jews and Gentiles will be barred entrance to the wedding feast; in fact, Christ will cast them into hades before the celebration begins.

The bride is all glorious within. She is without spot or wrinkle or any such thing (verse 8). Both her standing in righteousness and her state are "granted" – that is, a gift of grace. By grace God clothes every believer in the righteousness of Christ positionally and instantly; by grace God produces Christlikeness in every believer practically and progressively. That divine work will not cease until God presents us to Christ at the wedding ceremony in Heaven.

Those who receive invitations to the marriage feast are a group quite distinguishable from the bride wife (verse 9). The bride does not need an invitation to her own reception. All of the Saints

of all the ages belong to the family of God, but the members of this family are not related to Christ in precisely the same way. The relationship between Christ and his church is unique for intimacy. The church alone is the bride and body. Israel was related to God as the wife of Jehovah. That wife entered into adulterous relations with other lovers and thus repudiated her marriage status. Eventually God will cleanse Israel and restore her to His good graces. The church, however, must never be identified with Israel. The church is not an adulterous wife who will be reinstated in favor; the church is a chaste virgin, unsullied and unsoiled.

Contrary to our modern custom to give special attention to the bride, the Word of God focuses the interest of all upon the bridegroom. He will be the chief attraction at the wedding ritual and the reception which follows. Christ Himself is the very heart of prophecy. Prophetic Scripture unfolds the loveliness of Christ (verse 10). He is worthy of all the honors. True prophecy always bears witness to His sovereignty, His sinlessness, His Saviorhood, and His substitutionary sacrifice for our sins.

In vision John sees the gates of Heaven thrown open so that the celestial armies can exit (verse 11). The Commander-in-Chief appears astride a white charger – emblematic of His conquering power. He will wage a legal and justifiable war against the enemies of His government. In His truthfulness and faithfulness Christ will prove Himself a drastic contrast to the antichrist.

The second advent of Jesus Christ will settle earth's destiny for 1,000 years. He will reveal Himself as a universal warrior, governor, and judge. His enemies cannot escape His all surging eye (verse 12). Every form of human government will come under His authoritative sway. At the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that He is the Lord of history as well as the Ruler of eternity. In the exercise of His governmental powers, Christ will bring to public attention qualities of His person hitherto hidden in his own inscrutable being. Every opposing force will fill the fury of His wrath (verse 13). The same word which brought worlds into being and sustains them in their orbital flight will slay the wicked. In all that He does Christ is the communicator of the nature and purposes of the Father.

Christ is the Captain of the Lord's host. Angelic squadrons will accompany Him in His dissent from outer space (verse 14). The angels that had no permission to rescue Christ from the cross will now arrive en masse to deliver earth from the clutches of Satan and to purge sinners out of it. In the process Enoch's ancient prophecy will be fulfilled as reported by Jude, verses 14, 15.

The word which proceeds from the mouth of Christ suggests immediate and incisive judgment. The rod of iron conveys the thought of inflexible and invincible rule. The winepress is an emblem of Christ extreme wrath. These figures all contradict modern notions about the "man upstairs" who indulgently overlooks the frailties of man. Our God will display not only His wrath but the fierceness of His wrath. Not a single rival will remain to contest his supremacy (verse 16). He alone will have the title of universal dominion.

Birds of prey will have a banquet the like of which surpasses anything else in the world of nature (verse 17). In advance of the slaughter of the armies of the earth, vultures will gather in

preparation to pick clean the rotting corpses (verse 18). In death, generals are no more fortunate than privates. All men alike will be bread for the buzzards.

Verse 19 presupposes that the Roman Prince and his European troops have dug in near Megiddo in order to withstand the attack of the Eastern kings and their armies who will approach Israel from the north by following the Euphrates River from Babylon. The Western armies will prepare to meet the Eastern armies in the Plain of Esdraelon. Whether these military giants ever fight each other we do not know. It appears that they will team up in order to repel an invasion from space. Little good will it do the armies of earth to combine their strength. The Roman Prince and his renegade Jewish colleague will be the first to leave the scene of battle. Their exodus is unprecedented in history. They will present a sorry contrast to the church which goes to Heaven without dying, for they will be consigned to the flames of everlasting hell without dying (verse 20). The hostile armies will then meet the flaming fire of Christ's vengeance and sink down to physical death by a blast of his glorious power (verse 21).

The next item on the list of premillennial events is the confinement of Satan to the abyss for the duration of the kingdom period (verses 1-3). Irresistible power will curtail his activities for 1,000 years. Nothing now hinders the Saints of the tribulation period from taking possession of messiah's kingdom (Daniel 7: 18, 27). Christ will assign them legislative and judicial functions in the Kingdom (Revelation 20: 4). Regal authority awaits all of the Saints. Church Saints will have joint-rulership with Christ. Tribulation survivors will reign with Christ and His church. Tribulation survivors will govern various cities as a reward for their faithfulness in suffering. The apostles will sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

All of the righteous dead will rise to a condition of glorification before the millennial reign begins. All of the wicked dead will rise to a condition of being undead at the close of the millennial reign (verse 5). At least 1,000 years will separate these two resurrections. The first resurrection involves only the righteous dead, but the righteous dead will arise with glorified bodies at various intervals in several stages. The final resurrection is a resurrection unto damnation.

Postmillennial Events (Revelation 20:7-15)

The 1,000-year reign will continue until its appointed moment of consummation. Then God will unshackle the devil in one last test of millennial populace. Are all the residents in the last 100 years of the kingdom period regenerate people? Will a near-perfect environment gradually eradicate Adam's nature in man so that He is impervious to the solicitations of Satan? Do unregenerate people willingly and gladly give their allegiance to Christ? The answer to these questions is a resounding no. An innumerable company of people will welcome Satan's return as an opportunity to rid themselves of divine restraints (verses 7, 8). Inwardly they hate theocratic rule and the Messiah King, although outwardly they comply with his decrees.

This great throng of rebel citizens will give a repeat performance of their Russian invasion. Their chief objective is Zion's Hill. But their efforts will be as futile as were those of their ancient

predecessor. As with Russia so with the assembled host, God will intervene supernaturally and cause the earth to swallow up the invader (verse 9). Satan's career is finished forever. The lake of fire is prepared place for the devil and his angels. In this eternal flame he will suffer excruciating torment without abatement and without cessation (verse 10).

Now comes the moment for Christ to raise the wicked dead of all ages and relegate them to their final and eternal destiny. The judgment of the great white throne will convene somewhere in space (verse 11). Christ will hold the wicked before Him by bare omnipotence. Each will hear the record of his deeds and receive punishment to fit the deeds (verses 12, 13). He will transfer all of the occupants of Hades to the lake of fire (Hell). They will enter the state of eternal separation from God (verse 14). The second death is not an annihilation or cessation of existence. The wicked will suffer in Hell as long as the throne of God itself endures. Eternal life is the blessed portion of those whose names are inscribed in the Lamb's book of eternal life; eternal death is the baneful lot of those whose names are missing from this record (verse 15). We do well to ask with the hymn writer:

Is my name written there,
On the page white and fair?
In the book of Thy Kingdom,
Is my name written there?

The Eternal Home of the Saints 13

God is building a city. In its size, beauty, accessibility, durability, facilities, and caliber of residence it staggers human imagination. Jesus returned to Heaven to begin construction of the city; when it is complete, this home of the glorified Saints will make its grand appearance in the skies. It will make the combined effort of man's engineering genius look amateurishly by comparison.

The Eternal Home of the Saints (Revelation 21:1-22:21)

The first eight verses of chapter 21 describe the condition of things as they will be on earth after the millennial reign and the mediatorial rule of Christ merges into the universal and eternal government of God. At this point time blends into timelessness, and history is swallowed up by eternity. Both our earth and the heavens that pertain to our earth will undergo drastic changes (verse 1). The natural world will revert to an order altogether different from our present biological and geological system. Now earth's surface is three-fourths oceans; then oceans will be nonexistent.

The regeneration of earth is preparatory for the descent of the heavenly Jerusalem out of Heaven to the earth (verse 2). The earth that has for many millennial opposed Heaven will become Heaven. The eternal government of Heaven will be localized on the very planet whose inhabitants had formerly instigated revolt against the rule of God. Glorified earth will become the permanent abode of the Triune God (verse 3). In this new condition of things every trace of earth's past history will be gone. God will banish disappointment, death, and distress forever (verse 4). And all likelihood even the remembrance of sadness will fade into forgetfulness. The state of earth will resemble the new man (verse 5): He is a new creature, the product of omnipotence, and intended to reflect the glories and graces of the Creator.

Those who thirst for God and righteousness now will be fully satisfied in the eternal state (verse 6). The Alpha and Omega guarantees it. Those who overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil now – and all regenerate people without exception do overcome these enemies – will become the joyous recipients of all the promises, and they will embark upon a relationship as his eternal sons to the eternal father (verse 7). Then "all things" which the saints inherit may even include all of the universe. In that case, the glorified Saints will probably busy themselves in eternity by visiting their possessions throughout the uttermost bounds of space.

In all their travels at every corner and cranny of the countless constellations, however, the saints will never encounter the wicked, for sinners will reside in a place entirely beyond the reach of all other immortal creatures (verse 8). We do not know where in Heaven the prison house of the damned will be located, but exist it definitely will. In the last glimpse we get of the eternal state, we see sinners writhing in the flames of eternal Hell. That scene ought to spur us on to greater evangelistic endeavors while the gates of divine mercy still stand ajar.

Beginning with verse 9 we get a description of the heavenly Jerusalem as it will appear during the millennial age. At the beginning of the kingdom period God will transport the home of church saints, Old Testament saints, and tribulation martyrs to a spot in space within view of earth (verses 9, 10). The first descent of the holy city resembles the rapture, in which Christ comes in the air. The second descent of the city (Revelation 21: 2) is similar to the second advent of Christ, in which He comes to the earth. The New Jerusalem is a bridal city, holy city, a heavenly city, and a glorious city (verses 9-11).

The fact that the names of the twelve tribes of Israel are inscribed on the gates of the city suggests that Old Testament Saints will dwell there (verse 12). The fact that the names of the apostles are written on the foundations of the city may imply that the twelve Thrones on which they will sit to judge the twelve tribes are situated in the city. From whatever direction people approached the city they will find ready entry (verse 13). The foundations symbolize the stability of the city (verse 14). The dimensions indicate the spaciousness of the city (verses 15, 16); there is plenty of room for all of the glorified saints of all of the ages. The precious stones which garnish the walls, foundations, gates, and streets picture the beauty and purity of the city (verses 18-21).

The city is especially conspicuous for what it is absent from it; no sorrow, no separation, no sickness, and no sighing (21: 4), no sinners (21: 8), nothing sullied or soiled, nothing chintzy or cheap, no temple (21: 22), no danger, no night (21: 25), no idolatry, no defilement, no deceit (21: 27), no shortages of water or food (21: 1,2), no curse, no idleness, no disorder (22:3), and no anonymous Saints (22: 4).

The Declaration of Jesus (Revelation 22:6-21)

The description of the New Jerusalem is almost too good to be true, yet it comes with the same authority and integrity that the Old Testament prophets exercised in their ministry of speaking for God and communicating with His will (verse 6). The spirit who inspired the Old Testament Canon also inspired the content of the book of Revelation. John was a much a prophet as was Daniel. The authoritative word declares that Jesus Christ returned to establish his promised Kingdom would soon come to pass (verse 7).

If our study of the book of Revelation only increases our interest in angels, demons, antichrist, or prophetic events, we have missed the main importance of the book (verse 8). Rather our study ought to inspire our worship of God and the lamb (verse 9). He alone is worthy of our unflagging devotion. No one has any excuse for neglecting the portion of God's Word – or any portion, for that matter. If Revelation were a book closed and sealed, all endeavors to understand it would prove useless. But the book is open and invites our interests (verse 10).

A man's reaction to the word of prophecy tends to confirm him in his state (verse 11). An unrighteous man rejects the word of truth and becomes fixed in his wickedness. The saint eagerly embraces the word of truth and becomes confirmed in practical righteousness. The essentially corrupt man keeps on increasing in corruption; the essentially holy man keeps on advancing in

holiness. When Christ suddenly returns, there will be no time for making amends or changing our ways. He will recompense the wicked according to their deserts and will reward the righteous according to their deeds (verse 12).

Adam and his posterity were cut off from the tree of life because of their defiance of God's express and explicit commandment. In the millennial earth this situation will be reversed, and the saved millennial citizens will once more have access to the tree of life (verse 14). These unglorified Saints will probably use space vehicles for transport between earth and heavenly Jerusalem. Something in the quality of the fruit evidently prevents the power of physical death from operating on them. At the end of the millennial age these Saints will receive glorified bodies and enter to the eternal state. Unsaved millennial citizens will never enter the heavenly Jerusalem (verse 15).

The whole content of the book of Revelation belongs to the churches for their encouragement in time of distress and for their enlightenment about the final outcome of history (verse 16). But not everything in Revelation will be fulfilled in and to the church. Most of the book has primary reference to what the tribulation saints will suffer before David's offspring – Jesus Christ – will introduce a bright new day to earth's history. Meanwhile, the Holy Spirit activates the church to keep on making appeals to sinners to come to the fountain of life – Christ himself (verse 17). The only condition for receiving the proffered salvation is willingness.

The last message of the book of Revelation is a promise of Christ's speedy return and a promise of grace upon all God's people to enable them to respond with a grand Amen to the good news of the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.