

Exploring the Apocalypse and the Future

PREFACE

This book has been written reluctantly. Despite a life-long interest in Revelation, I resisted for many years all suggestions that I should put my thoughts into writing. For this reluctance there was a good reason. I have always been acutely conscious of the heavy responsibility that rests on one who presumes to expound the Scriptures. There is an ever-present danger that meanings will be attached to God's Word that God did not intend. The more difficult the portion of Scripture expounded, the greater the danger — and Revelation is, by common consent, an exceptionally difficult book. Frankly, the very thought that I could lead brethren in the wrong direction frightened me. Indeed it still does.

More recently, however, another thought has asserted itself. Clearly there is an urgent need for something to fill the void in our understanding of latter-day prophecy. If it is wrong to produce interpretations which could mislead, it may also be wrong to withhold interpretations which could help brethren to an understanding of the difficult days that lie ahead. This thought was put to me by a number of people, and ultimately prevailed. And so, after many years of prayerful study and much self-imposed restraint, this book appears.

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1 "Who may abide the day of his coming?"

PART ONE

"To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Isaiah 66:2).

Time is precious. Such time as we have is a gift from God; it provides us with an opportunity to make diligent preparation for our Lord's return. God expects us to use this time in cultivating a humble, teachable attitude to the Scriptures, including the word of prophecy.

Part One of this book is primarily concerned with latter-day prophecy. The question of attitudes is frankly discussed, and suggestions are offered concerning "things which must shortly come to pass". Some of these suggestions have startling consequences. If they are true, they are also important.

1 "WHO MAY ABIDE THE DAY OF HIS COMING?"

The second coming of Christ is one of our great Christian themes. We have considered it our duty to declare publicly that recent developments in Israel are a sure sign that the Lord's return is near. He is coming to raise the dead; to judge his servants; to reward the righteous; to establish a kingdom; to bring peace to a troubled world — these are important elements of the gospel that we have been proclaiming. And this is as it should be. Week by week we break bread "until he come". Our public prayers usually include the petition that God will send Jesus soon. Our hymns are full of this great theme.

Those who love his appearing

In 2 Timothy 4 Paul refers to two types of people — those who love the Lord's appearing, and those who love this present world: "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing . . . For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world" (verses 8,10). Our eternal destiny depends upon whether or not we love the Lord's appearing. Despite the publicity that we give to the second coming, I feel constrained to ask: do we really love his appearing, or do we just love talking about it? This question may sound offensive, but it is asked seriously by one who is deeply concerned. It is disturbing to observe that some modern attitudes seem to be remarkably similar to those of certain Jews who lived many hundreds of years ago. They also attached a great deal of importance to the coming of their Messiah. Their prophets had taught them to look forward to the Messiah's coming, and this expectation became a central feature of their religion.

Yet God instructed Amos to write: "*Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord! to what end is it for you? the day of the Lord is darkness, and not light*" (5:18).

And Malachi: "*The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts: But who may abide the day of his coming?*" (3:1,2).

Events proved that the warning note sounded by the prophets was justified. When the news came that the long-promised Messiah had been born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, Herod was troubled, *and all Jerusalem with him* (Matthew 2:1-3). Just think of it! The people who had said that they desired the day of the Lord were troubled by the report that he had arrived. Why? Because their consciences told them that they were not ready. As long as the Messiah remained away they could declare boldly that they were ready and waiting for him. But the report of his coming frightened them, and the actual confrontation proved disastrous. To use an expression, these people who professed to desire the day of the Lord didn't know what they were letting themselves in for. The circumstances of the Lord's coming were dramatically different from what they had expected. And the Messiah who came was dramatically different from the messiah they had been expecting.

The reason for Israel's failure

Why were the people of Israel not prepared? What went wrong? Let Paul explain: "They that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him" (Acts 13:27). They knew him not! They did not recognise him. Yes, the Messiah who came must have been altogether different from the messiah they were expecting. They had a mental picture of the person they wanted, and because Jesus of Nazareth did not match this mental picture they did not recognise him. Consequently they rejected him, and were themselves rejected.

But surely these Jews could have obtained a more accurate picture of the promised Messiah by reading the Old Testament Scriptures? All the information is provided there. Why did they neglect these Scriptures? The amazing fact is that they did not neglect *to read* their Scriptures. According to Paul (in Acts 13:27 — just quoted) they read them every sabbath day. They read the Scriptures, and yet they did not know "the voices of the prophets". They would have read Psalm 22, Isaiah 42 and Isaiah 53, but they gained nothing from their reading. Because their minds were already filled with their own ideas about the coming deliverer, they were not open to receive the truths revealed in the Scriptures. They could not receive the teaching that their saviour would be despised and would suffer — they read but they did not understand; and ironically they became the very people who despised him and caused him to suffer. They fulfilled these scriptures to their own confusion.

These Jews must have read their Scriptures as a religious duty, a ritual, and this exercise probably made them feel good. They did not read to gain instruction; they thought they knew all the answers already. And because they regarded themselves as a holy people, full of wisdom and knowledge, they were altogether unaware of how unreceptive they were.

The power of prejudice

Please do not miss the point! We have seen that these Jews had already made up their minds. They did not read with minds alert, and hearts open to receive divine instruction. Those truths that they did not like were automatically rejected. Yet they were no different from other men. Prejudice is a deep-rooted human weakness. All men tend to reject unpleasant truths; they have "itching ears" — they love to hear things that please and flatter. Prophets of "smooth things" have always been more popular than those who have fearlessly spoken the truth. Now let us think about ourselves. Are *we* willing to face unpleasant truths? To begin with, are we

willing to face the unpleasant truth that, like others, we have this tendency to reject what we do not like?

While admitting that we also share this human weakness, we might want to add that we would never dream of acting as those Jews did. But that is just what those Jews had said! Earnestly they told themselves and others that *they* would not have killed the prophets, as their fathers had done — "If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets" (Matthew 23:30); yet they proved that they were true sons of their fathers by killing the very man whose coming those prophets had foretold.

The prejudice of the Lord's disciples

Even the best of men are deeply prejudiced. Think of the Lord's most faithful followers. Although they were willing to sit at their Master's feet and learn; although they were far more teachable than other men — yet even *their* minds were closed to some unpleasant truths. So strong was their prejudice that it almost destroyed their faith. Consider: "He taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day. But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him" (Mark 9: 31,32).

Simple words! The Lord was spelling out to them in plain, literal language the things that were going to happen to him. Could he have expressed himself more simply? Read the words again and see how clear the message is. Yet they could not understand. Prejudice had closed their minds. Are we better than they? If these humble, teachable disciples could be so prejudiced, we ought to be humble enough to admit frankly that we are likely to be at least as prejudiced as they — probably more so.

We must therefore seriously face the possibility that our mental picture of the coming Christ, and our ideas about the events related to the second coming, may be shaped as much by human prejudice as by Scripture. At least let us have the grace to admit the possibility that we may, unwittingly, be rejecting those Bible predictions concerning events related to the second coming that we find offensive.

Trouble and more trouble

We profess to be waiting for the Lord's return. Do *we* know what we are letting ourselves in for? Do we sufficiently appreciate the fact that the day of the Lord will be a day of darkness? Repeatedly the Scriptures give warning of the trouble that will prevail in the last days. Isaiah speaks of a time when the earth will be turned upside down; of cities being turned into heaps; of the earth being made desolate with few men left.¹ Jeremiah states that the cup of God's wrath will be drunk by *all* nations, beginning at Jerusalem.² Jerusalem has twice drunk of this cup — once when the city was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar; and again when it was destroyed by the Romans. In his Lamentations, Jeremiah recounts the degradation and misery of the first occasion; and the historian Josephus has told the world about the fearful sufferings that came upon that once splendid city when the Romans besieged and destroyed it. From these accounts we have some idea of the scale and intensity of the trouble that will engulf the world. Indeed, God assures the nations of the world that they will be punished as Jerusalem was:

"For, lo, I begin to bring evil on the city which is called by my name, and should ye be utterly unpunished? Ye shall not be unpunished: for I will call for a sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth, saith the Lord of hosts" (Jeremiah 25:29). No wonder Daniel says that there shall be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation. The time when this universal trouble will prevail is stated — it is the time when resurrection and judgment will take place; and we should know that this will be when the Lord returns:

"... and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:1,2). The Lord's return cannot be far away. The extraordinary events that we have recently witnessed in Israel are proof enough of this. The time of unprecedented trouble will soon be upon us. Indeed it is already overtaking us. Even now the consequences of plundered resources, pollution and over-population are being felt keenly. Millions of people are on the breadline, and most nations have serious economic problems. Materialism and Islam are engulfing the world. Democracy is dwindling and becoming impotent.

Are we who believe in the second coming acting like people who expect the world to be turned upside down? Do we comfort ourselves with the thought that, as servants of God, we shall be removed from the wrath to come? It is true that God's servants will be delivered from the ultimate outpouring of divine wrath on the nations, but the Scriptures also teach that before the last, irrevocable judgments there will be a time of tribulation for the people of God. In fact, their faithfulness to God will bring them into disfavour with men and make life even more difficult for them.

We need reserves of spiritual strength to enable us to endure the physical and political earthquakes that are already beginning to rock the world. Are we building up these reserves now? Or are we pursuing the vanities that the nations of the world seek after? There may be some excuse for unenlightened worldlings, but what excuse shall we be able to offer?

When the last terrible shaking occurs, people will cast their idols of silver and their idols of gold to the moles and to the bats.³ The crisis will reveal the uselessness of these coveted possessions, these things for which men have laboured and in which they have placed their trust. Happy are those who, *before the crisis*, will have learned how vain and foolish are the idols of the Gentiles. Happy are those who will have learned to put their trust in the Living God in a time when He may be found.

It is profitable to ponder the words that God instructed the prophet Jeremiah to speak to Baruch the son of Neriah: "The Lord saith thus: Behold, that which I have built will I break down, and that which I have planted I will pluck up, even this whole land. And seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not: for, behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh, saith the Lord: but thy life will I give unto thee for a prey in all places whither thou goest" (Jeremiah 45:4,5).

Baruch was on God's side when judgment was about to descend upon impenitent Israel. But his faithfulness was marred by a little self-interest and, perhaps, a touch of self-pity. Hence the rebuke. This message has an even greater relevance to us than it had to Baruch. God is about to destroy, not just one nation, but the whole of civilisation. And are we, at such a time, seeking great things for ourselves?

Seek them not, brethren! Seek, rather, the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Persecution to come

There is evidence in Scripture that some believers will suffer persecution before the final deliverance. We cannot be certain that this will include us, but it is a distinct possibility. Certainly some of our brethren will be persecuted. This is another reason why we should be preparing diligently now.

Yet, far from preparing for persecution, most of our number have never carefully examined the Scriptures that warn us of the testing time to come. Those of us who are impressed by the weight of Bible evidence concerning persecution find it difficult to get brethren to take the matter seriously. From time to time, however, we do meet those who regard it as their duty indignantly to resist the idea.

The Book of Revelation

The pages that follow will be concerned largely with the book of Revelation, because this book has so much to do with the Lord's second coming, and can help us to prepare for that occasion.

It has to be stated plainly here that there is a great deal of prejudice against the straightforward, scriptural study of this book amongst people who ought to know better. Those who, in other contexts, readily approve of the principle that the Bible must be the ultimate authority, seem to forget that this principle also applies to Revelation. They prefer to base their interpretations of Revelation on the writings of brethren who have gone before rather than on the Bible itself. Our pioneers in the faith have helped to lead us to the Truth by courageously rejecting the traditions of men and turning to the Word of God! How ironical that some of those who profess to follow these pioneers should have done the opposite by setting the writings of these brethren above the Word of God.

It is sad that zealous brethren should regard it as their duty to oppose any non-traditional exposition of any part of Revelation, however tentatively it is submitted. The attitude of some to the book of Revelation is a good example of the power of prejudice in our community. Recalling the failure of Israel, what a warning this should be.

A quotation from the writings of Brother John Thomas may be appropriate here:

"All writers and speakers must be unceremoniously tried by this [the Word of God]; for, God hath said, that "if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them". It matters not who the sinner may be; pope, cardinal, archbishop, bishop, minister, or their admirers; or, even one of the saints of God, or an angel himself; nothing he may say, or write, must be received unless in strict conformity to this word; and of this the people must judge for themselves upon their own responsibility; and in the face of their eternal weal, or rejection from the Kingdom of God. To this Book, then, we appeal for light — for information concerning the things which shall be hereafter."⁴

Non-dogmatic approach

The responsibility of expounding a portion of God's Word is a heavy one. The present writer is acutely conscious of this fact. It would be seriously wrong to try to persuade people to accept interpretations of God's Word that could be contrary to that which God Himself intended.

The book of Revelation is doubly difficult. It concerns prophecies that are yet to be fulfilled — this is bound to present problems; and there is such an amazing concentration of symbols that one must admit the possibility of following wrong clues and coming to wrong conclusions. Conscience compels me to say this, although some may be quick to interpret it as a confession of weakness. Unreasonable dogmatism too often masquerades as strength. Nevertheless, because of the possibility of misleading people, I shall proceed tentatively, suggesting rather than asserting whenever there appears to be an element of doubt. If, occasionally, enthusiasm should sound like dogmatism, I hope that this assurance will not be forgotten.

Readers are earnestly requested to act in accordance with the worthiest New Testament tradition and test these suggestions prayerfully, and by reference to Scripture. Remember those noble Bereans!⁵ The Bible, and the Bible alone, must be the standard of appeal.

Challenge!

Some readers of the Bible are so confused by the complex and conflicting attempts that are made to expound the book of Revelation that they have decided it is quite out of their reach. "The book of Revelation is not for me", they say.

What a tragedy it would be if this were true! Here is a message that comes from the Lord Jesus and, in large measure, concerns the Lord Jesus. It is given for the purpose of showing the Lord's servants things which must shortly come to pass. Clearly our Lord regards this message as important: so much so that he says: "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand" (1:3). This promise of special blessing makes Revelation unique. Dare we neglect it? Others excuse themselves because they are "not clever enough". Frankly, the book is difficult — but therein lies the challenge. However, let us be clear on one thing: if we measure our wisdom against this great prophecy, it will not just be difficult to understand — it will be impossible. This is why it is so important to approach this study with humility and to seek help from God, who has promised His wisdom to those who ask in faith (James 1:5).

Students of Revelation need to develop an intense desire to understand. Those who have this desire will read the book of Revelation, and they will keep reading it. In this way they will make themselves familiar with the subject matter of the book, even before they understand what it means. Constantly they will be on the look-out for links with other scriptures. Their assurance that the Bible is indeed its own interpreter will spur them on.

They will also pray earnestly, as Daniel did, for an understanding of problems that are too deep and wonderful for mere human intellect to resolve. "*He* giveth wisdom unto the wise." Adapting Psalm 119:18, their prayer will be: Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of the book of Revelation.

If only . . .

We believe that the Lord Jesus is coming back soon because a great prophetic programme, based largely on Daniel's prophecies, has almost run its course, and because of the remarkable revival of Jewish life in the land of Israel. We believe that there will be a day of reckoning, and that a kingdom will be established on the earth. An invasion of the land of Israel must also be fitted into the picture, somehow. But what is the sequence? What can we expect very soon? Where do we go from here?

As far as the immediate future is concerned there is a great void. Nay, it is even more serious. To the extent that we thought we understood the details, we have been proved wrong. We thought that the kingdom would have been established by this time — but we are still waiting. Contrary to our expectations — *which were based on an interpretation of prophecy which we believed and proclaimed dogmatically* — Britain forsook Israel and left her to the mercy of implacable Arab enemies. Suddenly and dramatically the State of Israel was born; and although the people of Israel are, for the most part, still unbelievers, they have performed exploits.

The State of Israel has been in existence since 1948. We were right in expecting the people of Israel to settle in their ancient land: our expectations have been realised. But we were not expecting the independent State of Israel to be established before the Lord's return, and we certainly did not reckon on these thirty years since Israel became independent.

It is disturbing that we were not prepared for these developments, but it is a graver cause for concern that hardly anybody seems troubled about it.

The way things have happened, and the way things have *not* happened, should have rebuked our misguided dogmatism, shaken us out of our complacency and made us very humble. Our failure to understand should also have prompted us to review our approach to latter-day prophecy. How many more shocks do we need before we realise how unprepared we are?

Now imagine, if you will, something that is distinctly possible. Imagine that you have got some of your prophetic sequences wrong. You are expecting (let us suppose) a certain important event to *precede* the Lord's advent, which is actually scheduled to come after it. In this case, the "important event" will not be a sign of the Lord's coming after all. If you are waiting for this event, comforting yourself with the thought that it will alert you and give you an opportunity to make your final preparation for the great day, then you will wait too long.

Or suppose that the book of Revelation reveals that some utterly unexpected political developments will take place before the kingdom: is it not important that we should know about them? If we are not prepared for these developments the shock may be too great for us. We may be so shattered by the sudden realisation that our understanding of prophecy has been wrong that our faith could be shaken to its very foundations. We could start having doubts about truths that are assured and fundamental to our faith; worse, we could have devastating doubts about our own standing before God.

Already it has been intimated that there are predictions of persecution to come. We shall look at the evidence later. If it proves true, we cannot afford to remain in ignorance.

Important developments could take place soon. Changes could be sudden.

Remember: a major war was fought and finished in six days. It was in a context concerned with the signs of his coming that the Lord Jesus told the parable of the fig tree:

"Now learn a parable of the fig tree; when his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled" (Matthew 24:32-34).

Does this mean that the generation that witnesses the birth of the State of Israel will also witness the Lord's return? It looks like it. A passage in the preceding chapter in Matthew, where the word "generation" is used in a comparable context, may give us some idea of the length of time involved. Speaking about the vengeance on Jerusalem that would follow his own ministry, the Lord said: "Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation" (23:36). These words were spoken about A.D. 30 and it was all over by A.D. 70 — 40 years later.

Compare this period with the time that has elapsed since the State of Israel was born. This book is being written in 1978 — thirty years later. Time seems to be running out. A great deal may have to happen in a short time.

The consequences of Israel's ignorance were calamitous. The Lord Jesus wept when he thought of the misery and desolation that would soon overtake Jerusalem. Proud and ignorant, the people preferred darkness to light. If only they had known!

How tragic if we shall have to exclaim when it is too late: If only we had known!

References

1. Isaiah 24:1; 25:2; 24:6
2. Jeremiah 25:15-29
3. Isaiah 2:19-21
4. *Elpis Israel*, page 170
5. Acts 17:10,11

2 Prophetic Perspective

2 PROPHETIC PERSPECTIVE

Imagine that you are driving on a long, straight road. Things that lie far ahead appear foreshortened and flat. Only when you get nearer do you begin to see them in depth and detail. The nearer one gets to a scene the more detail one can see.

Spiritual vision

So too with things that lie before us in time. From a distance an elaborate prophetic sequence can look like a single event. The recent return of the Jews to the land of Israel is an example. When it lay well ahead, students of Scripture tended to view it as a fact of prophecy that would soon become a fact of history. But we who have been privileged to see the fulfilment of this prophecy have witnessed, not a single, simple event, but a protracted series of happenings — a chain, every link of which is important.

There are advantages in not seeing too much in detail too soon. It could be distracting and discouraging to see more than one is ready to receive. Patience could be put to too severe a test. Spiritual short-sightedness is one of our human limitations which God seems to take into account. The way that He both provides and withholds knowledge concerning future events suggests this.

Messiah's coming

How discouraging it would have been for the faithful in Old Testament times if they had known that after his coming, Messiah would ascend to heaven and remain there for about 2000 years before returning to reign.

Nor would it have helped those Jews who were about to witness the Lord's first coming to know that there was, in fact, to be an ascension to heaven followed by a second coming. At least, this knowledge would not have helped them *at the beginning* of the Lord's ministry, though afterwards, when the time was appropriate and they were able to receive it, the disciples were told.

Those Jews were being tested, and one important reason why the kingdom did not come then was because they rejected their king. It has to be recognised, of course, that God already knew

how they would respond and, in a way that is beyond our understanding, made His plans accordingly. But it would have been bewildering to the Jews who were then being tested if the two comings of Christ had been spelt out plainly in the Old Testament.

Thus God takes into account man's limited spiritual vision, and reveals to His servants as much as they can receive. Those servants who live nearer to important events on the divine calendar are shown them in greater detail. The principle is expressed by the Lord Jesus himself: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now" (John 16:12).

Hence the Old Testament speaks simply of *the* coming of Messiah. Needless to say, there are passages in the Old Testament that predict the Lord's ascension, and there are also hints of two advents in the Old Testament, which we, from our vantage point in time, are able to discern because the very course of events has made us wiser. But one looks in vain for simple, direct statements to the effect that the Messiah would come, would go away, and then would come again.

Even the great panoramic prophecies of Daniel, chapters 2,7,8 and 11 do not distinguish between the advents. They are skilfully designed by the Spirit of God in such a way that they seem to reach their climax at each of the Lord's comings.

Consider, for example, the 'image' prophecy of Daniel 2. We recognise Christ as the "stone cut out of the mountain without hands", and note that both his first and second advents come after a succession of four great kingdoms, starting with Babylon.

Prophecies concealed and prophecies revealed

Daniel himself was required by God to record many wonderful things concerning the future. In response to his prayers, the interpretation of some of these prophecies was given to him personally. But some of the information was withheld: "But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased" (12:4).

Daniel explains that his prayer for further enlightenment was not granted:

"And I [Daniel] heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end" (verses 8,9). It is Peter who tells us, hundreds of years later, that the Old Testament prophets were not able to understand some of the prophecies that they were required to commit to writing because, by God's grace, those prophets were ministering for later generations:

"... of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you ..." (1 Peter 1:10-12).

Two more examples

Here are two more examples of the same principle:

"As it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1 Corinthians 2:9,10).

and:

"By revelation he made known unto me the mystery; . . . which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel" (Ephesians 3:3-6).

The Second Coming — A New Testament theme

Although the Old Testament does not speak explicitly of a *second* coming, the New Testament does. It is a well known fact that there are numerous references to the second coming in the New Testament.

Yet even those who lived in New Testament times were still a long way off in time from the second coming, and not able to receive too much detail. Thus, when the disciples asked: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" the Lord replied, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" (Acts 1:6,7).

Light for later days

Just as some Old Testament prophecies were given for the benefit of God's servants who lived in New Testament times, so some New Testament prophecies have been given for the special enlightenment of God's servants who should live in later days. It is an extension of the same principle.

Luke 21 provides an excellent example. Readers will readily recall the passage that begins with the words: "And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars ..." Here the Lord Jesus, after speaking about the destruction of Jerusalem and its subsequent downtreading by the Gentiles, gives the signs of his second coming. A vivid description of the trouble and fear that would prevail at the end of Gentile times is followed by the announcement:

"And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory . . ." (verse 27). Then the Lord adds:

"And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" (verse 28).

Quite obviously those who were with Jesus on the occasion and heard him speaking would not witness the signs to be fulfilled at the end of Gentile times. Whereas the first section of Luke 21, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, would have great relevance for them, the words concerning the latter-day signs would convey less. Yet the Lord said: "When these things begin to come to pass then look up . . ." He must therefore have been addressing disciples who had not yet been born — those who would be his followers many centuries later — those who *would* see these things beginning to come to pass. Can we not say that he was speaking to us, for we are disciples who live at the end of the times of the Gentiles? He that hath an ear, let him hear!

So some scriptures are there for the special benefit of believers living at the end of the times of the Gentiles. Here we remind ourselves that there are evident tokens that we are living in the last days. We have been watching the restoration of Israel; we are witnessing the

beginning of the trouble and fear predicted in Luke 21. We should be in a position to see, in greater detail than any of God's servants who have gone before, the sequence of events that leads to the second coming, and the programme that will be fulfilled when the Lord comes. We are on the spot, so to speak. The latter-day prophecies have been written primarily for our instruction.

God has indeed made generous provision for us. Those words of Luke 21 are only a part of this provision. More, much more, is provided in the book of Revelation.

We must be careful not to 'telescope' events that ought to be arranged in series. For example: there seems to be evidence that more than one attempted invasion of Israel is to take place in the latter days. Our tendency, however, is to treat the different accounts of the different occasions as one event. Inevitably a blurred, misleading picture emerges.

Nor ought we to think of the Lord's coming as a simple event: it is the beginning of an elaborate divine programme.

The transition from human government to divine government will not be completed overnight. From Daniel 2 we learn that the kingdom begins as a stone. The stone destroys the image and then grows, becoming a mountain and ultimately filling the whole earth. The growth of the stone is a process, not an event, and it could take a long time. The book of Revelation fills in some of the details.

A Book relevant to every generation

It is recognised, of course, that Revelation has its relevance for every generation. The seven letters were addressed in the first place to churches of the first century, commenting on their spiritual state in their special circumstances. The lessons, however, applied not only to the seven but to all churches of that time, and indeed to all believers of succeeding generations — "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

Likewise the exhortations to endure, and the promise of glory and fulfilment in the age to come, have relevance to all saints of all ages.

It is sometimes forgotten that there is a great spiritual content' in Revelation that is bound to be helpful to all who are waiting for the Lord's return. But more about this later!

And there are prophecies that bridge the great gulf between the first and second comings. More also concerning this!

Meanwhile, readers are invited to ponder the thought that, because we are living immediately before the Lord's second coming, it is especially important that *we* should understand the book of Revelation.

3 The Great Theme

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

This announcement is the first great message of Revelation; it comes straight after the title, the introductory explanations and the blessings. Indeed, it soon becomes evident that the second coming of Christ is the main theme of the book of Revelation. The evidence for this is overwhelming, as a quick review of the subject matter of Revelation will demonstrate.

Some readers will already have discovered for themselves that the great theme of Revelation is the Lord's return. For them the merest glance at the main section of this chapter should suffice. But they are recommended to read more carefully the section of the chapter that begins with the sub-heading *Other themes*.

So to the quick review.

Chapter 1

The vision of "one like unto the Son of man" is a picture of Christ in glory — the Christ who will soon confront the world. In figure, John died and was raised to life again. His experiences and the words addressed to him are a vivid reminder that the faithful will be raised and made immortal at the Lord's coming:

"And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death" (verses 17,18).

Chapters 2 and 3

The messages to the seven churches could be described as interim judgments. The invisible Lord moves amongst the churches and beholds the things that are hidden from human gaze. "I know thy works", is the solemn assurance he gives to each church, and to all who have ears to hear. There are repeated reminders that a day of reckoning is coming. The Lord's standards are the basis of judgment — do we measure up to them? Soon the Lord's coming will determine irrevocably the destiny of all who claim to be saints. "Be watchful"; "Hold fast and repent"; "Behold I come as a thief"; "Behold I stand at the door and knock". Those who overcome will enjoy great blessings — when the Lord returns.

Chapter 4

In the large section of Revelation that follows, there are references, again and again, to the glorious and terrible day of the Lord. Although the heavenly temple, described in chapter 4, reads like a contemporary and a continuing picture of heaven and what could be described as the angelic hierarchy, it also helps us to understand what conditions will be like when God's will is done on earth, as *it is in heaven*. The picture presented in chapter 4 contains such blessings as are promised to those who overcome in chapters 2 and 3. It is therefore, in a sense, a 'kingdom' picture.

Chapter 5

There is an expanding programme of praise in chapter 5. The second of three songs of praise concerns the destiny of the redeemed when Christ will reign on earth. The third and last song of praise involves all creation. It can only be sung when the Lord has returned and completed his great purpose with the earth.

Chapter 6

Revelation 6 is about four horsemen. An attempt will be made to expound this symbolism later. The point to be noted now is that the last, decisive phase in the conquering career of the rider of the white horse is described in chapter 19. The rider's name is "The Word of God". An army of white horses follows him, and they destroy the army of the beast and the false prophet. This destruction evidently takes place after the Lord's return.

The name of the rider of the fourth horse of Revelation 6 is Death, and "Hell follows". Chapter 20 speaks of the time when Death and Hell are cast into the lake of fire — also after the advent.

The souls under the altar (referred to in the prophecy of the fifth seal of chapter 6) cry out for vengeance — a vengeance that awaits the Lord's return.

A series of catastrophic events are set in motion by the opening of the sixth seal. The climax to these catastrophes is a great confrontation — when the Lord returns.

"And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" (6: 15-17).

The fact that some features of the sixth seal could well be descriptive of judgments relating to Jerusalem in A.D. 70 does not detract from the greater fulfilment at the Lord's return.

Chapter 7

The triumphal song of the great multitude of chapter 7 can only be sung when the saints are glorified — at the Lord's coming.

Chapters 8 and 9

Although the great theme is not referred to directly in chapter 8, there is an intriguing similarity between the last two verses of this chapter, where the consequences of the sounding of the fourth trumpet are described, and the words concerning the signs of the Lord's coming in the 'Olivet' prophecy of Luke 21. The two passages are set out here for comparison:

Revelation 8: 12,13

Luke 21:25,26

<p>"And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of <i>the sun</i> was smitten, and the third part of <i>the moon</i>, and the third part of the <i>stars</i> . . . And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of <i>the earth</i> by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!"</p>	<p>"And there shall be signs in <i>the sun</i>, and in <i>the moon</i>, and in <i>the stars</i>; and upon <i>the earth</i> distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; <i>nuVs</i> hearts failing them for fear, and for looking aftfc those things which are coming on the earth ..."</p>
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The words quoted from Luke 21 certainly describe the L'tate of the world immediately before the Lord's return. Could not the fact that the language of Revelation 8:12,13 is so similar be an intimation that the fourth trumpet is likewise related to the latter days? It is not difficult to see that the trumpet series of Revelation is in chronological sequence. From the concluding section of chapter 8 (quoted above) we learn that the last three trumpets introduce three woes. Now see the force of the following statements: "One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter" (9: 12); and "The second woe is past; and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly" (11:14). Thus the woes, and the trumpets that herald them, follow in order: number five, number six and number seven. It has already been suggested that the fourth trumpet (of chapter 8, verses 12 and 13) concerns the latter days. If this is true, the fifth, sixth and seventh trumpets must bring us nearer and nearer to that great day.

Chapters 10 and 11

In fact the seventh trumpet announces that the great day has come. Revelation chapters 10 and 11 make this plain. Here is a quotation from chapter 10 (verses 5-7): "And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, and swore by him that liveth for ever and ever . . . that there should be time no longer: but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets."

These words should be compared with those of Daniel (12:7): "And I heard the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and swore by him that liveth for ever that it shall be for a time, times, and an half; and when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished."

Lifting up hands to heaven, swearing by him that liveth for ever — clearly there is a connection of thought here. From Daniel we learn that the promise and the oath are in response to the question: "How long?" This must therefore be the question implied in Revelation 11 - "How long?"

And the answer? The waiting of the saints will come to an end when the seventh trumpet sounds.

The concluding section of chapter 11 concerns this momentous occasion:

"And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned. And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth" (11:15-18).

The seventh trumpet announces that the time of the kingdom has come; the time of resurrection and judgment. The last of a series of trumpets, it is surely the great trumpet of the Gospels and the Epistles¹ —the trumpet that proclaims the Lord's intervention, the gathering of the saints and resurrection. It is the "last trump".

Chapter 12

Whichever interpretation of Revelation 12 one adopts — and there are several interesting possibilities — the great day is clearly anticipated by the words:

"Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night" (verse 10).

Chapters 13,15 and 16

Chapter 13 is about the beast. This is a power that emerges at the end of the times of the Gentiles: the clash between the beast and the Lord Jesus is only one of the evidences of this fact. But more concerning the beast later! Chapters 15 and 16 are about God's judgments (the vials) on a beast-worshipping world. They imply divine intervention.

Chapter 14

The opening scene of this chapter depicts the Lamb standing on Mount Zion with the 144,000. Then, following the sequence in the chapter itself, three heralds warn of impending judgments — against the world, against Babylon and against the beast. Finally there are two reapings — the harvest of the earth and the vine of the earth. All these scenes and messages are obviously connected with the second coming.

Chapters 17 and 18

The main theme of chapters 17 and 18 is the destruction of the great whore called Babylon. Need more be said concerning the time of fulfilment?

Chapter 19

The marriage of the Lamb; the destruction of the beast and his army by the Lamb and his army — the central character, the Lamb, is on the earth.

Chapter 20

The theme is resurrection and judgment. This fact is enough to tell us that it is post-adventual.

Chapter 21

New heavens and a new earth; Jerusalem coming down from heaven, prepared as a bride for her husband; the tabernacle of God is with men — the Lamb is there. Indeed, "the Lamb is the light thereof".

Chapter 22

The concluding chapter of the Revelation is full of reminders about the Lord's coming. The final words are impressive:

"He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen." (22:20,21).

Other themes

Does someone want to say incredulously: "So everything in Revelation is about the second coming?"

No, not quite! The second coming is indeed the central prophetic theme of the book, but some prophecies are not *directly* concerned with this great event.

It has been remarked that the heavenly temple of chapter 4 would seem to be a continuing vision (expressed in symbol) of heaven and the angelic hierarchy. We catch glimpses of it again and again in Revelation.

The seven-sealed book is another great theme. The problem of finding one worthy to unseal the book was a problem related to John's day; it affected John personally, for he wept much. And the processes revealed by the unsealing operations span the centuries.

The sealing of the 144,000 of chapter 7: the view that will be presented later is that this takes us right back to Jewish times.

Likewise the earlier trumpets of chapter 8 would seem to be concerned with judgments on unrepentant Jewry.

And there could well be a 'panoramic' picture that spreads over a long period of time in the great prophecy of Revelation 12 concerning the woman, the dragon and the man child.

Nor should it be forgotten that there is a substantial *spiritual* content in Revelation that has a long-term relevance. This is often overlooked.

"Behold I come quickly"

What is the meaning of this urgent announcement that occurs three times in the last chapter of Revelation (with a slight variation on the third occasion)? The same announcement occurs twice in Revelation 2 — once to Ephesus and once to Pergamos. In each case there is a rebuke and a call to repentance, followed by the warning — introduced in the first instance

by "or else", and in the second by "lest" — "I will come unto thee quickly". The coming concerning which Ephesus and Pergamos were warned was a coming to judgment and destruction, and in *these contexts*, would hardly have been the second coming.

Impending judgment is likewise implied in Revelation 22. But here the judgment would not be a catastrophic intervention prior to the second coming, but the second coming itself.

But what about that word "quickly"? Various explanations have been offered. It has been suggested, for example, that it is there to remind us that there can never be too much time to prepare, and that the Lord's coming is always nearer than we think; that because of the shortness and precariousness of human life, the available time before the Lord's coming is very limited. Since the book of Revelation has a message for every generation, these explanations could well have their relevance. Even the ambiguities of some Bible expressions are there by design.

To us, however, who are living immediately before the second coming, these words have a special relevance. Indeed the whole of the book of Revelation has a special relevance to believers who live in the last days. To us the word "quickly" means "quickly" in the most immediate and urgent sense.

"What shall this man do?"

Does the fact that the main theme of Revelation is the Lord's return suggest an explanation of those mysterious words at the end of John's gospel? Peter had asked a question about John's future

— "What shall this man do?" — and the Lord's answer was: "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" (John 21: 21,22). More than a way of telling Peter to mind his own business, this may have been an intimation that John would be privileged to receive a preview of the Lord's coming when he witnessed the Revelation on the island of Patmos.

It could thus be compared with the preview that the same John had been given earlier of the Lord's "coming in his kingdom", when he was on the Mount of Transfiguration with Peter and James.

The title of the book

It seems likely that the very title of the book, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, is an announcement that the book is about the occasion when the Lord Jesus will be *revealed* to the world, in other words, that this book is about the Lord's second coming. Try saying the words slowly: The Revelation of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is revealed in this dramatised prophecy.

Certainly the word "revelation" (Greek *apokalupsis*) is applied to the Lord's second coming in the Gospels and the Epistles. Here are some examples from the Epistles:

"Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: so that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the *coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Corinthians 1:6,7).

In the Greek, the phrase "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" is almost the same as "The revelation of Jesus Christ" of Revelation 1:1. Both passages are about the *apokalupsis* of

Jesus Christ, and 1 Corinthians 1:7 so obviously refers to the Lord's coming that the translators have actually translated it as "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ".

". . . and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God ..." (2 Thessalonians 1:7,8).

Here again the word *apokalupsis* is used, and here again it refers to the Lord's coming. Notice, incidentally, that the related verb, *apokalupto* is used in a similar way concerning a very different type of person in chapter 2 of this epistle. The reference here is to the revelation of the man of sin. In effect, Paul is saying that the revelation of Jesus Christ will not take place until the man of sin has been revealed.

"Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:13).

"The revelation of Jesus Christ": *exactly* the same form of words as the title of the book of Revelation — and it obviously has reference to the Lord's coming. This is also true of verse 7 of the same chapter, where again the same phrase occurs in the original:

"That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

Here then, it is submitted, is a preview of the glorious appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. What then, one might ask, is the meaning of ". . . which God gave unto him" (1:1)? The suggestion is that this preview of the Lord's coming and events relating to it was first given by God to the Lord Jesus himself, who then "sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John".

The beast

It was intimated earlier that another theme is woven into the symbolism of Revelation — that concerning the beast.

Several beasts are actually referred to, but one plays a dominant role. Sometimes it is called "the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit"; sometimes, "the beast whose deadly wound was healed"; and sometimes it is simply "the beast". The part that it plays is immensely important. This can quickly be demonstrated by taking into account the amount of space that is devoted to this power in the book of Revelation. Direct references to the beast occur in chapters 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19 and 20. It is a subject that we dare not neglect.

By evident tokens the 'beast' prophecies of Revelation relate to the end of the times of the Gentiles. Apart from other indications, the confrontation of the beast with Christ establishes this fact.

This means we can expect the emergence of the beast in our day — if it has not already appeared. This is more than interesting, it is extremely important. Are we preparing for this great testing time?

References

1. Matthew 24:31; 1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16

4 Key Prophecies from the Old Testament

The framework

Before delving more deeply into the book of Revelation, we need now to glance at some Old Testament prophecies concerning the end of the age and the coming kingdom of God.

The first part of this chapter will traverse what is familiar ground to most readers, and they may feel tempted to run through it very rapidly. This is reasonable, but I would ask them to resist the temptation to skip it altogether, because this is the beginning of an excursion that will lead into less familiar territory. To change the metaphor, this is the framework into which other facts of prophecy will be fitted.

In any case there will be points to ponder, and that section of the chapter beginning with the sub-heading *Re-think* may also provide food for thought.

A well-known passage from Ezekiel makes a good starting point: "And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end, thus saith the Lord God; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him" (21:25-27). This message of doom was addressed to Zedekiah, the last king of Israel. He was soon deposed and the kingdom completely overthrown; the prophetic declaration "it shall be no more" was speedily fulfilled. But the words that follow — "... until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him" — will not be fulfilled until the Lord Jesus Christ returns and reigns.

Three periods

From the point of view of this prophecy there are therefore three periods:

1. The period of the Old Testament kingdom of God.
2. The "no-more" period.
3. The period of the restored, universal kingdom of God.

The "no-more" period is called by the Lord Jesus "the times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24). It began when Zedekiah was deposed, and it will end when the Lord Jesus reigns.

Points to ponder

The kingdom of God will be no more *until he comes*. This means that the present State of Israel is not recognised by God. Its existence is certainly a sign that God's purpose is working out, and the circumstances of its establishment could be described as a near-miracle: *but it is not a divine kingdom*.

The present State of Israel is similar in this respect to the independent Jewish kingdom that was established in the period between the Testaments. Although there was a certain nobility about the exploits of Judas Maccabeus and his brothers (which gave way later to arrogance

and wickedness), that ancient independent State of Israel was not recognised by God — "... it shall be no more until he come whose right it is". Indeed God repudiated that Jewish kingdom and it was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70.

Three overturnings?

Think now of the words: "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it". Threefold emphasis, yes: but could it not also be a prediction of *three* overturnings? History records two to date: the first when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Zedekiah's kingdom; the second, when Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70. Can we expect a third overturning when the present State of Israel is destroyed? Remember — it is not recognised by God.

Nebuchadnezzar's Image

We must emphasize the point that the image fits into that long period of Gentile rule between the ancient Jewish kingdom of God and the future, universal kingdom of God. It began when the times of the Gentiles began, and it will finish when the restored kingdom is established.

RE-THINK

It was hinted in chapter 1 that we may have got some of our prophetic sequences wrong. Let me now be more specific.

There is a familiar prophecy in Ezekiel 38 about a group of nations under the leadership of a power called Gog, invading Israel from the north. This is obviously a latter-day prophecy, and many are convinced that the time for its fulfilment is very near. Indeed, several things seem to point to this conclusion. After hundreds of years of exile, the nation of Israel is once again established in the land of Israel. To the north, poised for action, is a great power. This power is known to have designs on Israel, and it commands a number of satellite nations, just like Gog of Ezekiel 38.

However, we have already slipped up in our interpretation of Ezekiel 38 with regard to Tarshish, and we must be careful.

There are two serious difficulties:

1. If Gog of Ezekiel 38 represents Russia *now*, how are we to understand the statement that Gog invades for the purpose of taking a spoil of silver, gold, cattle and goods? Even if these desirable things are figurative of the wealth of Israel, the problem remains. Strategically Palestine is important, but in its present condition the wealth of Israel would not be a great attraction.
2. Although up to now Israel has kept her Arab foes at bay, and even increased her territory at their expense, she certainly cannot be described as dwelling safely. Yet this is how Ezekiel describes Israel immediately before the Gogian invasion. The first difficulty has escaped almost unnoticed, but strenuous attempts have been made to resolve the second. Some have been careful to point out that the word "safely" means "confidently". This does not help. The general picture is one of Israel being relaxed and unafraid because she is secure. She is not concerned with strengthening her defences, for she fears no invader. Thus Gog is represented as saying:

"I will go up to the land of unwallled villages; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates, to take a spoil, and to take a prey; to turn thine hand upon the desolate places that are now inhabited, and upon the people that are gathered out of the nations, which have gotten cattle and goods, that dwell in the midst of the land" (verses 11 and 12). Some have argued that "dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates" refers to Israel's freedom from the ghettos of Europe. Obviously those who have returned to the land do enjoy a freedom that was denied their fathers, but surely this is not the real burden of these words. If we link the words concerning unwallled villages with the description of a people dwelling confidently, it becomes evident that they describe a nation that sees no need to fortify itself.

Others have maintained that there was a period of confidence and prosperity in the years immediately following the Balfour Declaration, and before the Arabs started applying pressure. Even if this were granted, it would not fit the terms of the prophecy. According to Ezekiel 38, Israel dwells safely or confidently *immediately before* the invasion. In fact, the relaxed mood of Israel emboldens the aggressor: an easy victory seems assured.

It looks as if these references to Israel's prosperity, safety and confidence are an embarrassment to many of our expositors. Hence their attempts to explain away what should be recognised as essential features of the prophecy.

The embarrassment is removed and the chapter makes sense if we stop trying to fit the prophecy into a place in the prophetic programme where it does not properly belong. Although some of the facts seem to match the present situation, others manifestly do not. We must therefore open our minds to the possibility that the time is not yet ripe for the Gogian invasion.

A "kingdom" scene

The suggestion offered here is that the conditions described in Ezekiel 38 are *kingdom* conditions. The invasion takes place after the Lord Jesus has returned to Israel. The people are enjoying the blessings of his beneficent reign. They have good reason to feel supremely confident. It will be seen at once that this interpretation satisfies the terms of the prophecy with regard to Israel's prosperity and peace.¹

But there are other things to commend it too. See how it accords with the prophetic context. Chapters 38 and 39 are a continuation of the prophecy commenced in chapter 37. The three chapters together describe a dramatic reversal of fortune. In chapter 37 the bones of Israel are scattered in heathen territory; in chapter 39 the bones of the heathen are scattered on the mountains of Israel. The action moves on therefore from chapter 37 to chapters 38 and 39. Now observe that it is stated in the concluding section of chapter 37 that God's servant David (a prophetic name for Christ?) is king over Israel. It is after this that Israel becomes confident with a godly confidence; it is when the king is enthroned that the nation becomes prosperous.

The stage is set. Gog thinks an evil thought, attempts to invade and is destroyed upon the mountains of Israel.

There is further evidence that this is a kingdom scene. Consider the following words from Ezekiel 34 (verses 23-28):

"And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it. And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods. And I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing. And the tree of the field shall yield her fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase, and they shall be safe in their land, and shall know that I am the Lord, when I have broken the bands of their yoke, and delivered them out of the hand of those that served themselves of them. And they shall no more be a prey to the heathen, neither shall the beast of the land devour them; but they shall dwell safely, and none shall make them afraid."

Do not miss the fact that this description of safety and prosperity in Israel, so similar to that of Ezekiel 38, is in the same section of the same book of Ezekiel. And see how these blessed conditions follow the statement that "David" will be a shepherd and a prince. Zechariah 2:4,5 may also have relevance:

"Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein: for I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her."

Note the connection between the thoughts: 1. Jerusalem is inhabited, has an abundance of cattle and is not walled; and 2. the Lord is a wall of fire around her and the glory in the midst of her.

So the Gogian invasion of Ezekiel 38 takes place after the establishment of the kingdom. Does this mean that this invasion is the same as the Gogian invasion of Revelation 20? This is an interesting question to which we shall return later.²

The valley of dry bones

Now let us look at the prophecy concerning the valley of dry bones, and see how this fits into the picture. Most of the details of this symbolic prophecy are well known, and there is no need to guess at their meaning: it is spelt out for us in Ezekiel 37. It concerns the restoration of Israel in the last days — their restoration to their land and to favour with God.

It is not always appreciated that there are two major operations in the 'dry bones' prophecy, and not just one. First, the bones come together, "bone to his bone", and sinews and flesh come on them and skin covers them. *Then* the spirit or breath of God enters, and they live and stand on their feet, "an exceeding great army". The two major operations are therefore: 1. the re-creation of bodies from dry bones; 2. the breathing of life into these bodies. This work of re-creation parallels the creation of man as recorded in Genesis 2:7, when God first created man from the dust of the ground, and then breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.

Reverting to Ezekiel 37, there is a hiatus between the two main operations. After the first operation, involving bones, sinews, flesh and skin, the statement is made: "but there was no breath in them". Then Ezekiel, who has already prophesied to the dry bones and thus initiated the first impressive operation, is instructed to prophesy again: "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." In response to Ezekiel's prophesying, the breath comes into these re-created people and they live.

The two operations have already been explained in more literal terms in Ezekiel 36. Observe that both accounts concern the restoration of Israel in the latter days; and that each of them states that the spirit of God comes into the restored people. Because there are two accounts of the same events in two consecutive chapters, each can help us to understand the other. Here is the account of Ezekiel 36 (verses 24-30):

"For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. I will also save you from all your un-cleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and I will increase it, and lay no famine upon you. And I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen." Notice the sequence. First the people of Israel are taken from among the heathen and brought to their own land; then they are cleansed from their filthiness and receive God's spirit or breath — it is the same word in Hebrew — after which they become willing and obedient, and are permitted to enjoy the fruit of the land.

The cleansing process is emphasised in chapter 36, but it is not described. It evidently implies the reformation and transformation of a people who are confronted by the stark reality of their own wretched condition:

"Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations. Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel" (verses 31,32).

For emphasis, the fact that prosperity will come to the people *after* God has cleansed them is repeated:

"Thus saith the Lord God: In the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities I will also cause you to dwell in the cities, and the wastes shall be builded. And the desolate land shall be tilled, whereas it lay desolate in the sight of all that passed by. And they shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are become fenced, and are inhabited" (verses 33-35). By comparing the two accounts in the two consecutive chapters, it becomes clear that the re-creation of bodies from bones corresponds to the return of the unbelieving people to their land. Then comes the washing or cleansing, not specifically referred to in chapter 37, after which, as both chapters testify, the breath of God gives the people life. It is after all this has happened that Israel *really* lives and enjoys God's favour. Their subsequent prosperity is described in Ezekiel 38, where, in the language of Isaiah, people and land are married and blessed.

This is the setting of the attempted invasion by the northern army of Ezekiel 38. Inevitably it fails. Israel suffers no harm, but the enemy is annihilated.

This means that what we have witnessed within recent years is the first of the two great restoration operations of Ezekiel 37. The people of Israel are now in their land, but they do not recognise their loathsome condition; they have not been purified and enlivened by the breath of God. To God they are still dead — dead in trespasses and sins.

So it does not look as if the Gogian host will come down on Israel yet. But other things could happen very soon.

A different prophecy concerning a different time

More often than not, the prophecy of Zechariah 14:1,2 and that of Ezekiel 38 are treated like two accounts of the same event. Although they are both latter-day prophecies, and although they are both concerned with invasions of Israel, there are important differences. Zechariah 14:1,2 describes a siege of Jerusalem with all the attendant suffering:

"Behold the day of the Lord cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cutoff from the city."

However, there is not a single word concerning Israel's suffering in Ezekiel 38.

When the dreadful scene of the first two verses of Zechariah 14 takes place, there is no divinely appointed king in their midst. Of this we may be sure because the next verse speaks of the Lord's return and intervention:

"Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives ..."

Ezekiel 38, on the other hand, does not mention the Lord's intervention. He has already come, as the end of Ezekiel 37 reveals. If the two prophecies are kept separate there is no problem. Indeed, the problems are resolved. The full story may run something like this: Israel, proud after her spectacular victories, has to be humbled. In the language of Ezekiel 36, she has to be cleansed. Zechariah 14:1,2 describes how this happens. Jerusalem is be-seiged, and there is great suffering. In their extremity the Jews are compelled to cry to God for deliverance. God's response is to send the long-promised Messiah, whom the people come to see is none other than Jesus of Nazareth, whom their fathers crucified.

The intervention of the Messiah is the *ultimate* answer; but before that, the Lord goes forth to fight against those nations, as *when he fought in the day of battle*. This could mean that God uses Israel to punish other nations although she herself is still an unbelieving nation. Some spectacular victories have already been won by unbelieving Israel: there may be more punishment for hostile nations at the hands of Israel before she herself becomes so hard-pressed that only the intervention of the Messiah can save her. This could be the background of that moving occasion described in Zechariah 12:10:

"And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn."

When the Lord Jesus is recognised and accepted by the nation of Israel, or by a remnant of the nation, he becomes king. Thus the kingdom is established in Israel. Israel enjoys great prosperity; the people are secure and confident.

After this Gog of the land of Magog thinks an evil thought. The rest of the story we know . . .

Psalm 83

Some might feel tempted to equate the anti-Israel confederacy of Psalm 83 with that of Ezekiel 38. It may be remembered that the Psalm speaks of certain nations taking "crafty counsel" against Israel: "Come and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance" (verses 3,4).

There is, however, an important difference. The conspirators of Psalm 83 are children of Shem, and most of them are closely related to Israel; but the hostile forces of Ezekiel 38 are Japhethites, as a glance at Genesis 10:1-4 will reveal.

The question as to whether there is a connection between Psalm 83 and Zechariah 14 is another matter, which the reader might like to ponder.

References and Notes

1. It might interest readers to learn that Bro. John Thomas expressed this thought in *Eureka*, Vol. III, pages 404,405.

2. For further thoughts on Ezekiel 38, see Part 2, chapter 16.

See also *Appendix I — The Gogian Invasion and the Beast*, page 212.

5 The Revelation of the Beast

Challenge

We turn now to a subject that occupies a very important place in the book of Revelation — that of the beast. Perhaps an earlier warning should be repeated here: the prophecies of Revelation point to some startling conclusions. Bible prophecy is given to prepare God's servants for unexpected developments. There would be no great advantage in receiving predictions of events that one could have guessed about. We of all people ought to know that Bible prophecies about the fate of ancient cities, the history of the Jewish nation, the birth, life and death of the Son of God, read like fantasy. Yet these unlikely predictions have become facts; unbelievable things have come to pass. So do not dismiss too lightly the interpretations that follow if they should seem unlikely by human reckoning. The book of Revelation invites us to expect the unexpected. For example:

"... they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life . . . when they behold the beast . . ." (17:8).

A challenge indeed!

Here the reader must come to terms with the fact that from now on progress is bound to be much slower. There are long passages of Scripture to be read and details to be scrutinised; parallels to be noted; conclusions to be drawn. It will help if, before following the arguments and pondering the conclusions offered here, the reader prepares himself by reading the relevant scriptures very carefully. Obviously only those who are thoroughly acquainted with the parts of Scripture expounded are in a position to assess the exposition.

The Old Testament background

Most students of prophecy would agree that there is a parallel between the 'image' prophecy of Daniel 2 and the 'four beasts' prophecy of Daniel 7. The first section of Nebuchadnezzar's image — the head — corresponds to the first beast — the lion; the second section of the image to the second beast, and so on. The four parts of the image and the four beasts are symbols of the same four empires. Following this thought through, the fourth part of the image, the iron 'leg' portion corresponds to the fourth beast; and the horns of this fourth beast answer to the toes of the image.

This points to an important conclusion. Because the horns of the fourth beast correspond to the toes of the image, it can be said of the 'horn' kingdoms of chapter 7, as it is written of the 'toe' kingdoms of chapter 2: "In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom". So *the horns are there when Christ comes to reign*.

The little horn

There is one significant difference between these parallel prophecies of Daniel 2 and Daniel 7. Chapter 7 includes one important item that is omitted from chapter 2 — the little horn. (The word "little" probably describes its small beginnings. Certainly this seems to be true of the little horn of Daniel 8 — "and out of one of them came forth a little horn, which waxed exceeding great".)

Now note the information given concerning the time of the little horn. It is expressly stated that the little horn emerges after the ten horns:

"And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise: and another shall rise after them; and he shall be diverse from the first . . ." (verse 24).

Remembering that the ten horns are there when the God of heaven sets up a kingdom, and taking into account the fact that the little horn emerges *after* the other horns, we can only conclude that this power holds sway *right at the end of the times of the Gentiles*. (This does not entitle us to say that it has not existed before; but if it has been before, it will have disappeared from the scene, only to erupt suddenly in the last days.)

This latter-day power is a blasphemous power — "he shall speak great words against the most High"; it is also a persecuting power — "the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them". Notice too that this persecution lasts "until the Ancient of days came" — "the same horn made war with the saints . . . until the Ancient of days came" (verses 21,22).

One further point. This little horn has power "until a time and times and the dividing of time" (verse 25). This seems to add up to three and a half; and a comparison with other scriptures, to be examined later, seems to indicate that it is three and a half *years*.

It cannot be emphasised too much that because we are living in the last days, *we* are the people who can most profit by this information. It is there chiefly for our sakes.

The man of sin

Now to Paul's second epistle to the Thessalonians. Already we have taken account of the fact that in chapter 1 of this epistle Paul speaks of the revelation of the Lord Jesus — "And to you who are troubled [God will recompense] rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven . . ." (1:?).¹

Then in chapter 2 Paul explains that the coming — the revelation — of the Lord will not take place until something else happens. Indeed two things are to be expected, not just one, as is so often imagined:

1. "... a falling away first";
2. "and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition". Paul's actual words are:

"Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition . . ." (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3).

The falling away is a process. It is commonly thought that this refers to the great apostacy — the corruption of Christianity — and this makes good sense.

The revelation of the man of sin is not a process. It is an event which must not be confused with the protracted decline of Christianity.

The following description is given of the man of sin: "... who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God . . . And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved . . ." (2 Thessalonians 2:4 and 8, 9,10).

Two revelations

So there are two revelations in the second epistle to the Thessalonians — the revelation of the Lord Jesus (referred to in chapter 1) and the revelation of the man of sin. Paul explains that before the revelation of the Lord Jesus, the man of sin must be revealed. The fact that there is a confrontation, and that the Lord Jesus destroys the man of sin, implies that this power will appear immediately before the Lord Jesus sets up the kingdom of God.

Does this suggest *a* connection with another scripture? To say the least, it should alert us to the possibility that this is the same power as the little horn of Daniel 7, which also appears at the end of the times of the Gentiles.

Other facts concerning the man of sin are: like Judas, he is called "the son of perdition"; he sets himself against "all that is called God, or that is worshipped"; he claims all worship for himself. Further reminders here of the arrogant, loud-mouthed little horn of Daniel 7.

To some readers the next proposition may come as *a* shock. *This power cannot be the papacy*. Whereas the "falling away" refers to the corruption of Christianity that becomes the papacy, there are good reasons for believing that the man of sin refers to something quite different.

Although this power employs deceit to gain control of people, its opposition to Christianity, and indeed to all existing religion is direct, whereas the papacy never formally rejects Christianity. Please do not misunderstand me. I am not suggesting that the papacy is too good to answer this description, but rather that the abomination described as the papacy does not match this description. A different kind of abomination is here described.

The papacy has counterfeited Christianity. Although it has retained the names and titles associated with the Christian religion — indeed, the Pope claims to be the vicar of Christ — it has presented the world with a false Christianity, a contemptible substitute for the real thing. But the man of sin is different. Formally and deliberately he repudiates Christianity and the worship of God. The "falling away first" is certainly a forecast of papal apostacy, but the eruption of the man of sin is dramatically different. It is atheistic and humanistic, and presents a direct challenge to God.

A further point. The man of sin is destroyed by Christ, but the great whore of Revelation 17, which most of us take to be the papacy, or at least the city where the Pope is enthroned, is destroyed by the beast and the ten horns (Revelation 17:16-18).

The fact (stated in Revelation 17 and developed in Revelation 19) that the beast is subsequently destroyed by Christ could, however, be an indication that the man of sin of Thessalonians is another name for the beast.

Revelation 13

There are many references to a special beast — *the* beast — in Revelation, but the two chapters that provide most of the information concerning this monstrous latter-day power are chapters 13 and 17. There are excellent reasons for believing that the power described in these chapters is the same, though to some extent different symbols are employed. The emergence of the beast is described as follows:

"And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority" (13:1,2).

Here is a beast that has features of each of the four beasts of Daniel 7. It is like a leopard; has the feet of a bear; the mouth of a lion; the ten horns of Daniel's fourth beast. This beast has seven heads and ten horns — the sum of the heads and horns of Daniel's four beasts.²

One detail of this beast of Revelation 13 should not be missed. There are crowns on the *horns*. (Compare this with the dragon of Revelation 12, where there are also seven heads and ten horns, but the crowns are on the *heads*.) Horns bearing crowns: this means that the kings represented by the horns have secured their power by this time. A quick glance at Revelation 17 can help us here: "And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast" (17:12).

Here then, in Revelation 13, we are brought to the time of the ten 'horn' kingdoms — or, in terms of Daniel 2, it is the time of the 'toe' period of the image. So *we are witnessing things that take place immediately before the God of heaven sets up His kingdom*.

Out of the sea

The spotlight is not on the horns, although it is the time of their power. The beast itself commands the greatest attention. He has climbed out of the sea — what does this mean? Bible students hardly need to be told that the sea represents the unregenerate nations — "the wicked are like the troubled sea . . ." (Isaiah 57: 20). A nation that has been submerged amongst the other nations suddenly emerges.

The deadly wound that is healed

The beast recovers from a deadly wound and the world is filled with astonishment and admiration:

"And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast" (13:3).

It will be appreciated that the heads of this composite monster represent phases of its political existence. One only sees seven heads when viewing the beast 'panoramically'. The heads usually appear one at a time. When therefore one of the heads is seen "as it were wounded to death" (13:3), the beast itself is suffering from a deadly wound. Hence the reference later (verse 12) to the *beast* whose deadly wound was healed.

There are impressive points of correspondence between the beast described in Revelation 13 and the little horn of Daniel 7. It has been noted that the little horn erupts at the end of the times of the Gentiles; and we have also seen from the crowned horns that the beast whose deadly wound is healed appears at the time of the end. Ten horns are associated with both powers. Furthermore, both are spoken of as being blasphemous, and both are persecutors of saints. The language used to describe these features in Daniel 7 and Revelation 13 is strikingly similar — indicating surely that the same power is being described. A comparison of two sets of passages will establish the fact that the little horn of Daniel 7 is the beast of Revelation 13:

Daniel 7	Revelation 13
"... a mouth speaking great things" (verse 8) "And he shall speak great words against the most High ..." (verse 25)	"And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies . . . And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven" (verses 5,6) "And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them" (verse 7)
"I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them" (verse 21)	

Notice that the little horn of Daniel 7 is actually called "the beast":

"I beheld then because of the voice of the great words which the horn spake: I beheld even till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame" (Daniel 7:11).

One further point concerning the beast from Revelation 13: his domain is exceedingly great, and the respect that he commands is immense:

"... and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations. And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life . . ." (verses 7,8).

We have now looked at three passages of Scripture that describe the same latter-day power: Daniel 7 (the little horn); 2 Thessa-lonians 2 (the man of sin); Revelation 13 (the beast whose deadly wound was healed). Two important extra pieces of information that we have gathered from Revelation 13 are that this power recovers from a fatal wound, and that his domain is very extensive.

The beast of the earth

"And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon" (Revelation 13:11).

These words come straight after the description of the beast whose deadly wound is healed. From all the information given in Revelation 13, it can be seen that this second beast is not an independent political power that exists at the same time as *the* beast. Rather, it is a publicity agent for the first beast. It "causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed" (verse 12).

This second beast conies up out of the earth. Three sets of people are referred to in Revelation: those that dwell in heaven; those that dwell upon the earth; those that live in (or are symbolised by) the sea. Earth dwellers are in the middle position in their relationship to God. The faithful saints are figuratively in heaven, as expounded in Ephesians and Colossians;³ the unregenerate nations are symbolised by the sea; and earth dwellers could well be those who, while professing to believe in God, are not numbered amongst the saints. People like orthodox Jews, backsliding Christians and Moslems could perhaps be categorised as earth dwellers. This beast has two horns like the ram of Daniel 8. In Daniel an explanation is provided: "The ram which thou sawest having two

horns are the kings of Media and Persia" (8:20). Whereas this hardly entitles us to interpret the two horns of the second beast of Revelation 13 in precisely the same way, it may at least indicate an approach to the problem. Here is a publicity agent for *the* beast that represents two groups of people. This thought may be worth keeping in mind.

From the position that the description of the second beast occupies in Revelation 13, and from the way this beast is introduced, one gets the impression that it flourishes after the healing of the deadly wound of the first beast. This may provide us with another clue.

This second beast works by deceit. Looking (in one respect, at least) like a lamb, it speaks like a dragon. From Revelation 12 we learn that the dragon — also called the devil and satan — speaks words of condemnation against the people of God. It is implied therefore that the two-horned beast does the same.

It is a powerful and deceitful wonder-worker. Like Elijah of old, he makes fire come down from heaven. Moreover he creates an image to the beast whose deadly wound is healed, and compels people to worship this image. In the kingdom of the beast, he imposes a system of registration designed to make life impossible for those who do not worship the beast.

"And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name" (verses 16,17).

All this bespeaks a ruthless, totalitarian power, and implies a severe testing time for the people of God.

The false prophet

The terms by which this second beast is described, and its special relationship to the first beast, are sufficient reasons for believing that the beast that comes out of the earth is the organisation that is also called the false prophet. Revelation 19:20 establishes this:

"And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone."

The beast of the earth, or the false prophet — to use its other name — must therefore be thought of as an organisation that arises in the latter days and gives great publicity to that power called "the beast". Its philosophy is humanistic — a conclusion confirmed by 2 Thessalonians 2. Humanism, or communism, breeds on apostate Christianity and apostate Judaism and virtually persuades people that man is himself God. Here then is an organisation that propagates an atheistic philosophy and that impresses people by its startling scientific and technological achievements. Those who are not impressed by the philosophy and the technology of the false prophet are compelled by his ruthlessness — all except those whose names are written in the book of life.

The beast from the bottomless pit

So to Revelation 17 and still more information concerning the beast. Seven heads and ten horns again! Successive phases of God-defying world government are symbolised by the series of heads. The spotlight of interest is first directed to the phase when the beast carries, and is controlled by, an infamous woman; and ultimately to the last, or 'eighth head' phase when the woman is destroyed.

During the final phase the beast is associated with ten kings, represented by ten horns. Reference is first made, in Revelation 17, to a time when the kings have not received their kingdom. Then, during the last phase of the beast's power, these kings are, in the language of Revelation 13, wearing their crowns:

"And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; *but receive power as kings one hour with the beast*" (verse 12).

Although the ten kings are crowned, they soon become puppets, acknowledging the leadership of a greater king. They "give their power and strength unto the beast" (verse 13).

The beast has *seven* heads. Yet the last head is called the *eighth* head. Seven equals eight: how can this be? The answer is found in the chapter. The eighth head is not a new head — it is one of the seven revived. Hence the statement that "the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth; and is of the seven" (verse 11).

The sudden emergence of the final, or eighth head phase of the beast is a feature calling for special attention:

"The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names are not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is" (verse 8).

The bottomless pit — what does this represent? The original Greek word is *abussos* from which the English word "abyss" is derived. In Luke 8:31 the same Greek word is translated "deep" — "And they besought him that he would not command them to go into the deep" — and obviously refers to the sea. Moreover the same word is used several times for the sea in

the Septuagint.⁴ Would it not be reasonable then to regard the bottomless pit of Revelation 17 as the sea? In view of the fact that it is stated in Revelation 13 that the same beast comes up out of the sea, the conclusion seems inescapable.

Returning to the thought that the sea is a symbol of unregenerate nations: here then is a further reference to the fact that a power that has been obliterated by submergence in a sea of other nations emerges again. In this part of Revelation the sheer unexpectedness of this emergence is highlighted. The amazement of earth dwellers who witness this revival is the measure of its unexpectedness. It is utterly unpredictable.

When a nation is swallowed up by other nations it ceases to exist as a separate power. In the language of Revelation 17 it "is not". Thus there is a time when the beast is; then he is *not*; then he emerges from the sea of nations (the equivalent of "is not") and bursts on the scene again.

Readers will remember that the symbol of "the deep" — the bottomless pit — is used in the same way in Revelation 20. It is the place where the dragon is bound for a thousand years.

We have taken note of the fact that the final phase of the beast's existence, after its remarkable recovery, is the eighth head phase. The eighth head of Revelation 17 is thus to be equated with the little horn of Daniel 7. For the benefit of any who might want to protest that it is unreasonable to equate a horn with a head, it is recalled that the Scriptures themselves provide a precedent; indeed Daniel does, for that which is symbolised by the four heads of a leopard in Daniel 7 is represented by the four horns of a he-goat in Daniel 8.⁵

One point must be stressed: this prophecy of Revelation 17, like the others just considered, brings us to the end of the times of the Gentiles. The defeat of this power by the Lord Jesus Christ establishes this fact. It is at the Lord's hands that the beast goes into perdition — an expression that brings to mind the fact that the man of sin of 2 Thessalonians 2 is called the son of perdition.

The very words that speak of the beast's fate are instructive. First comes the statement that the ten horns "give their power and strength to the beast". This means that ten kings ask the beast to be king over them. Because they are themselves kings, they virtually invite the beast to be *king of kings*. Hence the comment: "The Lamb shall overcome them: for *he* [not the beast] is Lord of lords, and King of kings" (verse 14).

The fate of the beast is described in more detail in Revelation 19. There, as may be remembered, the Lord is represented as the rider of a white horse. Accompanied by an army of men riding on white horses, he routs the army of the beast and the false prophet, who are then cast into the lake of fire. Irrevocable destruction is their destiny.

The great whore

Before the beast is destroyed by Christ, this God-defying power performs a destructive work himself. In association with the ten kings, the beast destroys the great whore:

"And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. For God hath put

in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled" (17:16,17).

Thus the whore is completely annihilated. Let it be noted that this destructive work is done by a political power, and not directly by the Lord Jesus. After this the destroyer of the whore is destroyed by the Lord. The sequence is therefore this: 1) the beast and the ten horns destroy the whore; 2) the beast itself is destroyed by the Lord Jesus Christ.

For the moment we shall defer detailed discussion of the question of the identity of the woman. A separate chapter is devoted to this theme —chapter 7 (Part One).

To summarise this portion of our study, our findings concerning this latter-day power called the beast are tabulated. (See the table on page 66.) Reference is made to the information provided in Daniel 7, 2 Thessalonians 2, Revelation 13,17 and 19.

It will be seen from the table that there is a vast web of interconnections between the passages relating to the beast. And further information from Daniel 8 and 11 and other parts of Revelation has not been taken into account.

Particularly impressive is the fact that the same language is used to describe this power in widely-spaced parts of Scripture. Not only does this remind us that the Bible is one book, written by one Author, but it also tells us that the subject of the beast is an exceedingly important subject.

A number of questions are still outstanding. The identity of the beast; the associations of the false prophet; the identity of the whore; the meaning of the image of the beast; the mystery of the number of the beast; the status of Christians in a beast-worshipping world — these are questions that suggest themselves immediately. The present writer does not claim to know all the answers, but a few suggestions can perhaps be offered.

References and Notes

1. Part 1, chapter 3, page 42 - *The title of the book*.

2. Lion = 1 head; bear = 1 head; leopard = 4 heads; 4th beast = 1 head. Total = 7 heads. See also Part 1, chapter 9.

3 Ephesians 2:6; Colossians 3:1-5.

4. e.g. Septuagint-Job 28:14; Psalm 33:7; 77:16; 106:9; 107:26.

5. See Daniel 7:6 and 8:8.

THE BEAST

Daniel 7	2 Thess. 2	Rev. 13	Rev. 17	Rev. 19
1. <i>Called:</i>				
The beast		The beast	The beast	The beast
<i>Also called:</i>				

	The little horn*	The man of sin		The eighth head	
2.			Comes out of the sea	Comes out of the deep (i.e. the sea)	
3.	Associated with 10 horns		10 horns	10 horns	10 horns
4.	Emerges at end of Gentile times	End of Gentile times	End of Gentile times	End of Gentile times	End of Gentile times
5.			Amazing recovery	Amazing emergence	
6.	A mouth speaking great things against the Most High	God-defying	Opens mouth in blasphemy against God	Full of names of blasphemy	
7.		Deceitful signs and lying wonders	Deceitful signs and lying wonders t		Deceives them that had received the mark of the beast t
8.			Given publicity by the beast out the earth	Given publicity by the false prophet(i.e. the beast of the earth)	
9.		All deceived who do not believe the truth	All that dwell upon the earth worship the beast, whose names are not written in the book of life	They that dwell on the earth, whose names are not written in the book of life, wonder at the revival of the beast	
10	Persecutes and overcomes saints	Intolerant of all religions	Persecutes and overcomes the saints	Persecutes the saints t Destroys the whore	
11	Duration of 3V2(?) years		Duration of 3 Vi years		

12	The son of perdition	Goes to perdition	
13	Destroyed by Christ	Destroyed by Christ	Destroyed by Christ

* When the little horn holds sway, he is the beast — Daniel 7:11.

t According to Revelation 13 the deceitful signs and wonders are done by the publicity agent of the beast, called the beast of the earth (the false prophet of Revelation 19).

* The beast of Revelation 17 comes out of the bottomless pit; and according to Revelation 11 the beast from the bottomless pit persecutes the witnesses.

6 The Two Witnesses

We move on now to another challenging subject closely connected with that of the beast — the prophecy concerning the two witnesses. *The* chapter concerning the witnesses is Revelation 11, where there is a great deal of detail waiting to be interpreted.

But first let us get our bearings in the book of Revelation as a whole. The 'seal' prophecies of Revelation are for the most part in chapter 6. One of the great features of the next chapter — chapter 7— is the sealing of the 144,000. Then, in chapter 8, the trumpet series begins.¹ Chapter 8 deals with the first four trumpets, and the last three are accounted for in chapters 9 to 11. The prophecy concerning the two witnesses is found in what could be described as the period of the consequences of the sounding of the sixth trumpet. It is after the vindication of the witnesses that the seventh trumpet sounds.

Any reader who is not thoroughly conversant with the text of the 'trumpet' section of Revelation would be well advised to put this book down now and read Revelation chapters 8, 9, 10 and 11.

No summary of the events relating to the two witnesses could pack so much detail into so little space as the account supplied in the book of Revelation, itself:

"And I [the 'rainbow' angel of chapter 10] will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth. And if any man will hurt them, fire proceed-eth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will. And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them. And their dead

bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves. And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth. And after three days and an half the spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them. And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them" (Revelation 11:3-12).

Concerning the word "witness"

A comment here about the way the word *witness* is used in the book of Revelation generally. It is a key word, though unfortunately this fact has been somewhat obscured by translation. In the King James' Version, words like "bear record", "testify", "witness", "martyr", "testimony" are all translations of the same little family of Greek words that can be recognised by the letters *martu-*. The table below will demonstrate the importance of witnessing in Revelation more effectively than a multitude of words.

WORDS RELATING TO WITNESSING IN REVELATION

Greek word	Translated in the KJV	Occurrences in Revelation
<i>MARTUS</i>	witness martyr	1:5;3:14;11:3 2:13; 17:6
<i>MARTURIA</i>	testimony	1:2;1:9;6:9;11:7; 12:11;12:17;19:10
	witness	20:4
<i>MARTUREO</i>	bear record testify	1:2 22:16; 22:20

These passages are all concerned with witnessing; the people involved are all witnesses. And — coming to the point — in nearly every case those who do the witnessing are saints, or believers. The reader might like to check this for himself by turning up all the passages listed.

The identity of the two witnesses

The question that has now to be resolved is this: are the two witnesses of Revelation 11 also saints? The fact that nearly all the other witnesses in Revelation are saints makes it seem likely, but this does not amount to absolute proof. However, by taking into account the information provided in the chapter and elsewhere in Revelation, we can quickly assure ourselves that these witnesses must also be saints.

First consider the words: "I will give power [or authority] unto my two witnesses" (11:3). These words are spoken by the angel of verse 1 — the same mighty angel as we read about in chapter 10 (see verses 1—3), who by the most evident tokens represents the Lord Jesus Christ.² The *Lord's* witnesses — who can they be but saints? Remember how the Lord appointed the apostles and their fellow-believers as witnesses in the Acts?

Human weakness is equipped with divine strength for a great witnessing operation. The witnesses, clothed in sackcloth, are empowered to do mighty works. They are called "the two olive trees and the two candlesticks". This symbolism comes straight from Zechariah, where the essential message for the enquiring prophet was: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6). This is another intimation that the witnesses are saints, not wizard wonder-workers or unregenerate warriors. We recall too that Revelation itself explains the meaning of candlesticks: "The seven candlesticks . . . are the seven churches" (1:20).

Observe now how the witnesses re-enact in their day the experiences of their Lord. Like Jesus they prophesy for three and a half years; like him they suffer death; their bodies lie in the place "where also *their* [RV] Lord was crucified"; like him they are resurrected; like him they ascend to heaven.

The question as to whether or not these details are to be taken literally is not the immediate issue. However these things are to be understood, the link with the Lord's own experiences is unmistakable. And this would be altogether inappropriate unless the witnesses were people who had identified themselves with the Lord Jesus — in other words, saints.

Fellowservants

There is an important link between the prophecy of the two witnesses and the fifth seal of chapter 6. It may be recalled that chapter 6:9 speaks of people who are "slain for the word of God and for the *testimony* which they held". That word "testimony" is *marturia* in Greek; and this tells us that these people are witnesses, martyrs. They are also *saints* who have suffered and died for witnessing faithfully. In response to the cry "How long?" comes the answer that they must wait "until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled" (6:11). So the saints, the witnesses, who have been killed must wait for "fellowservants", "brethren", to be killed as they were. More saints therefore are to be killed before God will intervene to avenge their blood. The waiting period comes to an end after the death of the later witnesses, spoken of in chapter 11. The seventh trumpet announces the intervention of God and the vindication of His people.

The point should not be missed that the witnesses of chapter 11 are the fellowservants and brethren of the earlier witnesses. Saints and more saints.

Further evidence is based on a parallel between Revelation 13: 7,8 and a section of the chapter under consideration — chapter 11:7-9. (Incidentally, it is not difficult to see that there is a break in the book of Revelation at the end of chapter 11, and a new section, concerning signs and wonders, begins with chapter 12. Much can be learned by studying the parallels between these two sections.³)

Revelation 11:7-9	Revelation 13:7,8
"And when they [the witnesses] shall have finished their testimony,	"And it was given unto him
<i>[the beast whose deadly wound is out of the bottomless pit healed]</i>	<i>to make</i>
<i>shall make war against them, and shall overcome them,</i>	<i>war with the saints, and to overcome them:</i>
and their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city .	and power was given him over
. And they of the <i>people</i>	all <i>kindreds, and</i>
<i>and kindreds and tongues and nations</i>	<i>nations. And all that dwell upon</i>
shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves. And	<i>the earth shall worship him ..."</i>
<i>they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them ..."</i>	

Comparing these two passages, it will be seen that both speak of the same latter-day power. In chapter 11 this power is called "the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit" — a name explained in chapter 17 — whereas in chapter 13 it is referred to as the beast whose deadly wound is healed. Both passages state that the beast makes war against, and overcomes, certain people; then both refer to "kindreds and tongues and nations", one of them

stating and the other implying subjection to the beast; and finally, reference is made in both passages to them "that dwell upon the earth", and it is evident that these people are on the beast's side. There is, however, one significant difference between the two passages. Whereas Revelation 11 states that the beast makes war against, and overcomes, *the witnesses*, Revelation 13 says that the beast makes war against, and overcomes, *the saints*. Can one reasonably resist the conclusion that this is an equation and that the witnesses are saints?

This does not necessarily mean that all the saints are involved in the high-powered witnessing of Revelation 11. Indeed this would seem most unlikely. But almost inevitably many of those not engaged in this distinctive witnessing operation would play a supporting role.

Some expositors have tried to distinguish between one and the other of the two witnesses. They have asserted that they represent two different classes of people. All the evidence is against this. No distinction is made, and everything the witnesses do, they *do as a team*. If there should be any doubts in the reader's mind concerning this point, it might be worth his reading the relevant verses again.

There are certainly pointers to the conclusion that the witnesses will be required to speak to two classes of people — Jews and Gentiles; and they could themselves be drawn from the two great sections of humanity (Jew and Gentile again): but these possibilities do not contradict the fact that the witnesses are united in their work, and that they work as a team.

Bible students will not need to be told that *two* is a number associated in Scripture with witnessing. The Lord sent his disciples out in twos. Moreover there are several pairs of witnesses who played important roles in God's purpose. Moses and Aaron, Moses and Elijah, Haggai and Zechariah — these are examples that come readily to mind. It may be helpful to keep these names in mind and to compare their experiences with the information given concerning the two witnesses of Revelation 11. Indeed, further reference will be made to some of these characters later.

The time of witnessing

When do these saints perform the witnessing work described in chapter 11?

It has been remarked that their work is done in the period between the sounding of the sixth and seventh trumpets. To be more precise: just before the sounding of the seventh trumpet — for many things happen after the sounding of the sixth trumpet, but only the great earthquake comes between the vindication of the witnesses and the seventh trumpet's blast.

Although there are good reasons for not regarding all the events of Revelation as in chronological sequence, there is not the slightest doubt about the fact that the last three trumpets come after the first four, and that they follow each other in strict sequence.

This point was briefly discussed in chapter 3 (*THE GREAT THEME*), but it is important enough to examine again in a little more detail.

After the first four trumpets (sometimes called the "wind" trumpets) have been sounded, a loud announcement is made: "Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound" (8:13). Thus the fifth trumpet introduces the first woe, the sixth trumpet, the second woe, and the seventh trumpet,

the third woe. The woes are to be thought of as tribulations that follow the trumpet blasts. Now notice how a strict chronological sequence is marked by further announcements. After the fifth trumpet — the first woe — it is announced: "One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter" (9:12). Then the sixth angel sounds, and there follows a relatively long account of its consequences — the second woe. And then, after the account of the events relating to the 'rainbow' angel of chapter 10 and the witnessing activities of chapter 11 and the great earthquake, all of which take place in the period of the second woe, the announcement is made: "The second woe is past; and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly" (11:14). Then immediately afterwards it is stated: "And the seventh angel sounded ..."

So the witnesses do their work just before the sounding of the seventh trumpet. What do we know about the seventh trumpet? Let the scriptures speak:

"And the angel. . . swore by him that liveth for ever and ever . . . that there should be time no longer: but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets" (10:5-7).

These words are spoken by the mighty angel of chapter 10, who has a rainbow upon his head. From Genesis 9 we learn that rainbows are associated with covenants, and this is the occasion of a covenant. When the solemn assurance concerning the seventh trumpet is given, the angel lifts his hand to heaven and swears by him that liveth for ever and ever. There is a remarkable similarity between these words and those of Daniel 12:7. Here also an angel lifts up his hands to heaven and swears by him that liveth for ever and ever. But the assurance given to Daniel is that "it shall be for a time, times, and an half; and when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished". These words, recorded in Daniel, are in reply to the question: "How long?"; and this must be the question that calls forth the assurance of Revelation 10. The waiting saints cry, "How long?", and a solemn promise, an oath, assures all who wait that their time of waiting will end when the seventh trumpet sounds.

A similar oath is made by the Almighty Himself in Deuteronomy 32. He will judge His people, avenge the blood of His servants, render vengeance to His enemies. The assurance is given against a background of wickedness and oppression, and is intended to give comfort to God's suffering servants. The similarity of language is an invitation to regard the promise of Revelation 10 as another such message of comfort to people who are longing for deliverance from oppression. Just wait for the seventh trumpet — when it shall *begin* to sound! No longer!

Abundant confirmation of this is provided by the words from Revelation 11 that follow the announcement that "the seventh angel sounded":

"And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever . . . And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth" (verses 15-18).

The seventh trumpet is therefore the trumpet of the Gospels and the Epistles. It is the "last trump" that is associated with resurrection and the gathering together of the saints.⁴

Now consider! If our conclusion is correct and the witnesses fulfil their mission immediately before the kingdom, it is reasonable to conclude that they operate at the same time as the beast, for it will be recalled that the beast prevails immediately before the Lord sets up his kingdom, at the end of the times of the Gentiles.

At the same time as the beast! Our conclusion *is* correct because it is stated explicitly that the two witnesses work at the same time as the beast. We have already taken account of the fact that the enemy of the witnesses who makes war against them is none other than "the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit". This is stated categorically in Revelation 11:7, and should settle once and for all the question of when the witnesses operate. The evidence has been adduced that the beast is a power of the last days: and the witnesses play their part in the affairs of nations *at the same time*.

Here then are two important conclusions:

1. The witnesses are saints, or believers.
2. They witness at the end of the times of the Gentiles. The fact that the beast is the mortal enemy of the witnesses is the measure of the importance of their mission.

The beast and the witnesses

The power of the beast is immense. He thinks he is god, and expects everybody else to think the same. That is why he destroys the great whore (Revelation 17), and that is why he persecutes and tries to destroy the witnesses. That which tests the true destroys the counterfeit.

The beast pays the witnesses a compliment by persecuting them so vigorously. Evidently they are a power to be reckoned with. Their witness is effective; their words make an impact. Their importance is also implied by the fact that earth dwellers rejoice when they are slain (11:10).

It is when the witnesses have finished their testimony that the beast is permitted to overcome them. Everything is in God's hands. Just as God permitted Herod to behead John the Baptist when he had completed his ministry, and just as John's decline was a signal for great things to happen, so also with the witnesses. But the beast-worshippers and all worldlings are blind to God's purpose. The witnesses are their enemies because they have stood between them and their wicked desires; and there is rejoicing when these witnessing enemies are put out of action. To what extent the details are to be taken literally is an interesting question, but according to the narrative the dead bodies of the witnesses are on show, and this gives savage satisfaction to those whose evil purposes have hitherto been frustrated.

It seems clear that more than two saints are involved. The parallel with chapter 13 points to the conclusion that the witnesses represent a larger number of saints. Moreover the two witnesses are called *candlesticks*, and it is explained in Revelation chapter 1 (verse 20) that candlesticks represent *churches*. However, it is possible that, although a community is involved in witnessing and suffering, two individuals play a dominant role.

Scriptural principles

Powerful witnessing comes before great divine judgments. Thus it was before the flood; so too before the destruction of the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel; also before the captivity of the two-tribe kingdom of Judah; and again before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D.70. It is reassuring to find that this interpretation of Revelation 11 accords with general scriptural principles. There will be witnessing on a massive scale before the destruction of civilisation and the setting up of the kingdom of God.

The more vigorous the witnessing, the more ruthless the persecution. This is an obvious truth and it is abundantly illustrated in Scripture. This is also in line with Revelation.

And — to mention another principle — the travail is most intense when deliverance is near.

Power from on high

"Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6).

This was the lesson of the candlesticks and olive trees of Zechariah's vision, and this is the lesson of the candlesticks and olive trees of Revelation 11. The witnesses are equipped by God to do their work. Their witnessing is called *prophesying*, and their powerful words are matched by powerful works:

"And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. These have power to shut heaven; that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will" (Revelation 11:5,6). The finger of God is there!

Most studious readers of Scripture seem to be agreed that there is to be a second fulfilment of Joel's prophecy concerning the outpouring of the Spirit.⁵ Could this be it? The sequence of the first two chapters of Joel is interesting: first, locusts; second, horsemen; third, an outpouring of the Spirit; fourth, irrevocable divine judgment. Is it pure coincidence that the same sequence is followed in Revelation, chapters 9-11?

The one fact that is beyond dispute is that the witnesses are specially equipped by God to fulfil their ministry.

Elijah

"And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth . . . These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not ..." (11:5,6).

Surely these words are intended to make us think of the prophet Elijah who commanded fire for the destruction of those servants of king Ahaziah who came to arrest him;⁶ and who had also called for three and a half years' drought in the days of Ahab.⁷

On the occasion of the Lord's first coming, John the Baptist fulfilled what could be described as an 'Elijah' mission. Both Isaiah and Malachi foretold the coming of one who would prepare the way of the Lord,⁸ and Malachi actually calls this messenger Elijah; and we have it on the authority of the Lord himself that these prophecies were fulfilled by John the Baptist — "this is Elias, which was for to come".⁹

If John could fulfil an 'Elijah' mission with regard to the Lord's first coming, could not the witnesses of Revelation 11 do so in connection with the second coming? And if these witnesses are to fulfil a mission comparable to that of Elijah, it seems likely that their work is, in some special way, related to Israel. This thought must be kept in mind.

Echoes of the Exodus

One fascinating feature of the time of the beast and the witnesses is the way it parallels the events of the Exodus.

"These . . . have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will" (11:6). These words, which apply to the witnesses, are bound to take our minds back to God's great witnesses in Egypt, Moses and Aaron.

In Egypt, the magicians presented a challenge to Moses and Aaron, and tried to discredit these servants of God by imitating the miracles which they performed.¹⁰ There is a comparable situation in the time of the latter-day witnesses. Acting as a publicity agent for the beast, the organisation called the false prophet (or the two-horned beast of the earth) imitates the signs performed by the witnesses:

"And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast" (13:13,14).

These words should be compared with those of Revelation 11:6 concerning the witnesses.

Still pursuing parallels with the Exodus: Pharaoh is the prototype of the beast. That is why those who have gotten the victory over the beast sing the song of Moses (15:2,3).

As there were plagues in Egypt, so plagues will be inflicted on the kingdom of the beast. It is not always appreciated that the vials, the seven last plagues, are poured out on a beast-worshipping world. There are decisive pointers to this conclusion in Revelation 15 and 16, to which reference will be made later in this chapter.

Indeed, some of the vial-plagues are reminiscent of those that destroyed ancient Egypt — a grievous sore, water into blood, darkness, frogs, hail.¹¹ As in Egypt, so in the beast-worshipping world, hearts are hardened, and resistance to the power of God turns to madness. Pharaoh and his host pursued a course of self-destruction and came to their end in the Red Sea. The beast, the false prophet and their armies will be destroyed in the lake of fire (chapter 19). The lake of fire is also called the second death and is a symbol of irrevocable destruction.

The scope of the witnesses' work

From the fact that the witnesses fulfil an 'Elijah' mission, it was inferred that their prophecies were directed towards Israel. There is further evidence that they work in an Israelitish context.

This may be the place to say that the role of Israel is sadly overlooked in most expositions of the Revelation. Yet there are good reasons for believing that a large part of this book of prophecy concerns the destiny of the people of the Bible.¹² So to Revelation 11:2:

"But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months." Prompt as an echo, our minds go to the Lord's words in Luke 21: 24: "And Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." Here then, in Revelation 11, we see the dramatic final phase of Jerusalem's down treading — the very end of the times of the Gentiles. It is at this time that the witnesses prophesy.

So the spotlight of interest is on Jerusalem. When Jerusalem is grievously oppressed, the witnesses speak. But to whom do they speak?

Both Joel and Zechariah seem to hint at a change of heart and repentance amongst some in Israel when the pressure on them is very heavy.¹³ The two witnesses could well be God's instruments calling the people of Israel to repentance. Like Elijah of old, they could provide an opportunity for a remnant to be saved.

Psalm 79

Psalm 79 has several features in common with Revelation 11. The first three verses read as follows:

"O God, the heathen are come into thine inheritance; thy holy temple have they defiled; they have laid Jerusalem on heaps. The dead bodies of thy servants have they given to be meat unto the fowls of the heaven, the flesh of thy saints unto the beasts of the earth. Their blood have they shed like water round about Jerusalem; and there was none to bury them." The down-treading of Jerusalem by the heathen; the slaying of God's servants; the refusal to permit their burial — these are also features of Revelation 11. The question is asked in verse 5 of the Psalm: "How long, Lord?" And the entreaty of verse 6 is expressed in the language of the vials: "Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen." Verse 10 is a plea for the blood of God's servants to be avenged. If there is a valid connection between Psalm 79 and Revelation 11 (and a number of people have been impressed by the similarity of language, including the compilers of the marginal references of the AV), it reinforces three conclusions: that the setting of the prophecy of Revelation 11 is Jerusalem; that Jerusalem is to be down-trodden once again by the Gentiles; and that the witnesses suffer brutal treatment.

Men of sign

The Old Testament prophets were men of sign. Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel all acted out in their lives the things that were happening, or would happen to the nation of Israel. The two witnesses, who are actually called prophets in Revelation 11:10 are likewise men of sign. Just as the eyes of the people were on Ezekiel — note the recurring expression "in their sight" (Ezekiel 12:3-7) — so people will be watching the remarkable things that happen to the witnesses. This is the intention, for the things that they do and suffer are acted prophecies.

One of the witnesses' signs is specially important. After the death of the witnesses "the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet" (Revelation 11:11). The words "stood upon their feet" are also found in Ezekiel 37:10, and they also follow the

statement that spirit or breath came into certain people. Concerning that vast company of Israelites who experience a national regathering in the valley of dry bones, it is written: "So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army." Here then, in the experiences of the witnesses of Revelation 11, is an Ezekiel-type, dramatised prophecy of the ultimate favour that Israel will receive from God. This is an assurance, at a time when an assurance is very much needed, that there will be a restoration of God's kingdom to Israel. And despite appearances, it happens quickly. After the resurrection and vindication of the witnesses comes the great earthquake; then the seventh trumpet; *then* the fulfilment of the acted prophecy. *The kingdom of God comes to Israel.*

One point is frequently missed. The breathing of the breath of God into the bones, referred to in Ezekiel 37, is a separate process from their uniting "bone to his bone". Indeed there is a space of time between the two processes as a careful reading of Ezekiel 37 will reveal. By comparing Ezekiel 37 with Ezekiel 36 (verses 25-28), it can be seen that there are two distinct phases in the restoration of Israel. First, an impure nation, a fleshly-minded people devoid of spiritual life is restored to its land; *then* the spirit (or breath) of God is breathed upon this company and they find favour in His sight.

The revival of the witnesses is an acted prophecy of the second phase whereby a restored Israel, or at least that section of them that has responded to the ministry of the witnesses, receives the blessing of God.

World witness

The witnessing of Revelation 11 is not restricted to Israel. The previous chapter describes a symbolic operation: John is bidden to eat a little book. On behalf of God's servants, whom he represents, John ingests a prophetic message: "Thou must prophesy again before many people, and nations, and tongues, and kings." This surely is fulfilled by the work of the witnesses that follows almost immediately in the narrative. If not, then to what does this prophesying refer?

Moreover the fact that "they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations" together with them "that dwell upon the earth" show such hostility to the witnesses also implies that the message of the witnesses is heard by vast numbers of people all over the world — and they resent it.

The testing time to come

It is not only those saints who are involved in witnessing who will suffer persecution. Inevitably those who abhor the witnesses will also abhor their brethren. Those who share the faith of the witnesses will also share their suffering.

It should be appreciated that the proposition that the saints will be persecuted does not stand or fall according to one's interpretation of the prophecy of the two witnesses. It will be recalled that the little horn of Daniel 7 "made war with *the saints*, and prevailed against them; until the Ancient of days came" (verses 21,22); and that it is written of the beast in Revelation 13: "And it was given unto him to make war with *the saints*, and to overcome them . . ." (verse 7).

Of course this raises the question of the extent of the beast's territory. Revelation 13 states that the beast controls "all kindreds, and tongues, and nations" and is worshipped by "all that dwell upon the earth", except those whose names are written in the book of life (verses 7,8). Certainly these expressions convey the impression of vast territories that could be big enough to include the country where we live.

Reference was made earlier to the fact that there will be a system of registration in the kingdom of the beast that is designed to make life impossible for those who are not loyal supporters of that government. The relevant quotation is:

"And he [the beast's publicity agent] causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name" (Revelation 13:16,17).

The image of the beast

But look now at verse 14. Of the beast's propaganda agency it is written:

"[He] deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live. And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed" (13:14,15).

These words remind one of the great image that Nebuchadnezzar set up on the plains of Dura.¹⁴ Death is the penalty for refusing to worship the image of the beast.

It would be naive to imagine a grotesque piece of sculpture of the kind men worshipped in the ancient world. In some way the image of the beast has life; it functions; absolute authority is claimed for it; it is cunningly devised to eliminate ruthlessly those who do not yield to its authority. Could it be a sophisticated piece of electronic equipment — a computer to end all computers, into which is fed all the wisdom of the top brains of the beast organisation? One gets the impression that, even now, much of the work of governments is done by computers. This could be the logical conclusion of modern trends — a computer programmed to give instant, unemotional, 'infallible' answers to all questions that would be deemed relevant in a beast-conditioned society. It would be the ultimate in the rejection of God. In the eyes of beast-worshippers this human invention — this god created in man's image — would provide 'decisive proof that the God of the Bible was outdated; a hangover from an age of ignorance and superstition.

Admittedly this is speculative. The image of the beast may be something entirely different. But three facts remain: first, that however this feature of the prophecy is to be interpreted, it concerns monstrous developments in the near future; second, that there are already movements in the world in the direction envisaged in the previous paragraph; third, that life will be hard for the saints in the kingdom of the beast.

It is human to reject what one does not like. If all this should sound too grim, just reflect on the fact that now — yes, *now* — thousands of people are suffering in prisons and in labour

camps, and many have been put to death because of their love for the Scriptures. Persecution is almost inevitable under humanistic, totalitarian governments.

The trial of faith

The tyrannical reign of the beast will provide an effective test of faith. At one and the same time Christ and the beast will be competing, as it were, for the obedience of men. And in the immediate sense life will be much easier for those who surrender to the authority of the beast. Hence the stern warning and the warm encouragement of these words:

"If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascend-eth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name. Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (14:9-13).

The seven last plagues

To repeat a statement made earlier: the vials are God's judgments on a beast-worshipping world. The tribulation of the saints will be over before the vials of God's wrath are poured out. As with the last seven of the ten plagues of Egypt, so with the seven last plagues of the Apocalypse, God makes a distinction between His people and His enemies.

The first vial causes "a grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image" (16:2). The third vial (when rivers and fountains of water become blood) must involve the avenging of the blood of saints, because the words are spoken: "Thou art righteous, O Lord . . . because thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy" (16:5,6). There is a progression, and whereas the first vial punishes beast-worshippers, the fifth is poured out on the seat, or centre of government of the beast: "... and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain" (verse 10). This does not mean the destruction of the beast, for after the pouring out of the next (sixth) vial there is a massive conspiracy in which the beast, and the false prophet are involved. Their destruction is recorded in chapter 19, verses 19-21:

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

References and Notes

1. See Part 2, chapter 13.
2. An objection to this conclusion is based on the erroneous assumption that the Lord Jesus is never called an angel. The Hebrew word for angel is *malak*, and it is sometimes translated "messenger"; twice it is thus translated in Malachi 3:1. The first messenger of Malachi 3:1 is John the Baptist ("he shall prepare the way before me"); and the second messenger ("the messenger of the covenant") must be the Lord Jesus. The covenant bow about the head of the messenger of Revelation 10 is perhaps there to identify him as the messenger of the covenant.
3. See Part 2, chapter 12, page 147 — *The great division*.
4. Matthew 24:31; 1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16
5. Joel 2:28-32
6. 2 Kings 1
7. 1 Kings 17:1
8. Isaiah 40:3-8; Malachi 3:1; 4:5,6
9. Matthew 11:14
10. Exodus 7:11 etc.
11. Exodus 7-10
12. The involvement of Israel in the 'seal' and 'trumpet' prophecies is discussed in Part 2, chapter 13.
13. Joel 2:12-20; Zechariah 12:10-14
14. Daniel 3:1

7 Babylon the Great

Babylon — ancient and modern

Babylon was a proud and splendid city on the river Euphrates. In the reign of Belshazzar it was conquered with startling suddenness. Thereafter it declined and became a ruin, and was never built again. Babylon was also the first of four great empires that dominated the world. The kingdom of Israel was destroyed by Babylon.

But the story of Babylon goes much further back than the days of Nebuchadnezzar — to Babel, that ancient arena of pride, rebellion and confusion of tongues.

The connection between the Babylon of the Old Testament and the great city of Revelation is not immediately apparent. But the fact that the Spirit uses this Old Testament name in such an important prophetic context ought to convince us that there is an important common factor.

The important common factor is surely this: each Babylon is, in its time, the great enemy of the people of God. The woman named Babylon is drunk with the blood of the saints and martyrs of Jesus (17:6). What ancient Babylon was to natural Israel, apocalyptic Babylon is to spiritual Israel.

Moreover, the desolation that befell ancient Babylon is more than matched by the destruction of the Babylon of Revelation. In "one hour" she is completely removed, and the great men of the earth are left gasping with amazement.

There are other links between the two Babylons, but these will emerge as we proceed.

The harlot

Like its Old Testament prototype, Babylon of Revelation is referred to as a city — a *great* city.

As well as being a city, ancient Babylon was also a kingdom, an empire. In contrast, apocalyptic Babylon is not an independent political power. Like its predecessor it controls nations, but does so in a different way. It is famous, or rather infamous, for its compromising relationship with political powers. It both depends upon them and directs them, as a rider depends upon and directs the movements of his beast. Yet the scene in Revelation 17 is not the dignified relationship of a wise and intelligent rider and his strong, obedient horse. The scene here is bizarre and offensive. Babylon is depicted as a wicked, gaudily attired woman, riding on a vicious, hideous monster. Supported, elevated and borne along by this hybrid creature, she manages, in a precarious way, to direct its movements. She plays a dubious, dishonourable role that involves selling herself for political advantage.

Yes, Babylon is a harlot. In Scripture a harlot is often more than a prostitute. She is an unfaithful wife who has turned prostitute. Thus Israel was called a harlot in Hosea chapter 1 because she had forsaken God, whose spiritual relationship to the nation could be compared with that of a loving, protective husband, and had instead pursued, and been spoiled by idolatrous paramours.

An interesting suggestion that makes no claim to originality is handed on here. It is that the story of Babylon the harlot begins in Revelation 12. There a woman who has fulfilled an honourable role and given birth to a child destined to become a world ruler, is chased into the wilderness. The inference is that she is corrupted in the wilderness, and becomes the harlot of Revelation 17.

Two phases

The career of this wanton woman is presented in two phases:

1. The phase when she sits on a beast.
2. The later phase (after the fall of the seventh head) when she sits upon many waters.

It is when the woman sits upon many waters that she is destroyed by the beast and the ten horns.

Dramatic destruction

Babylon's relationship with the kings of the earth is interesting. She rules over kings (17:18); her relationship with kings is one of wanton wickedness (18:3); she is destroyed by kings (17:16); and other kings lament her destruction (18:9).

The account of her destruction is brief: but it is a drama of cataclysmic dimensions. Following this account, which is found in the concluding section of Revelation 17, is a long chapter which tells of the great void that her annihilation creates, and of the sickening impact that this sudden catastrophe makes on the great people of the world. Kings, merchants and shipmasters lament her loss, but the people of God are invited to rejoice (18:20 and 19: 1.2).¹

Immediately after the story of the harlot's destruction comes the marriage of the true bride of Christ in Revelation 19.

Identification

Who is this great Babylon? A city on seven hills (17:9); reigning over kings (17:18); serving and controlling these kings by spiritual prostitution (18:3 etc.); a persecutor of the true church (17:6 and 18:20); and, by implication, one who is disgracefully unfaithful to the Man who should have been her spiritual husband — who else but Rome?

As Babylon was *the* city of the ancient world, so Rome became *the* city of the mediaeval world. Rich and splendid, the authority of ancient Babylon reached vast territories far beyond the confines of the city. So too with the city where counterfeit Christianity is enthroned. In the language of the Apocalypse, she sat upon many waters — and waters are "peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues" (17:15).

Some have argued that whereas the woman of Revelation 17 sits upon seven *mountains*, Rome stands on a cluster of little hills. The fact is that the Greek word translated "mountains" in the AV (but not in all translations), can also be rendered "hills"; and this the AV has done in three places. For example, the same Greek word (*oros*) is translated "hill" in Luke 4:29 ("the brow of the hill") with regard to an eminence about 12 or 15 metres high.

Rome has been known for centuries, and is known to this day, as the city of the seven hills; and the fact that the city of Revelation 17 is referred to in this way is surely an invitation for us to think here of Rome.

It is true that Israel is also called a harlot in the Old Testament (e.g. Hosea 1, 2 and 3), and this has emboldened some expositors to say that the harlot of Revelation 17 must be Jerusalem, the capital city of Israel.

This method of interpreting symbols is not good enough. Because a symbol is applied to a place, or person, or nation in one part of Scripture, it does not necessarily imply that it is to be applied in precisely the same way in different circumstances hundreds of years later. Especially must we beware of this too-facile way of interpreting symbols when other facts do not fit.

Instead, we should ask ourselves what the principles underlying the first application are, and then make appropriate application in the new context.

In the same way as Jerusalem became the centre of an apostate nation in Old Testament times, so Rome became the centre of an apostate community in the Christian era. And just as Israel forsook God and "went a whoring" after the gods of other nations — all except a faithful remnant — so most of the members of the church that was espoused as a chaste virgin to Christ, became corrupted.² It is fitting that this community should be described as a harlot, or an unfaithful wife; and it is a fact of history that this harlot community has made the seven-hilled city its centre.

One notable mark of infidelity has been the illicit union between the so-called Christian church and the State — a relationship forbidden by the apostles of Christ, including that apostle whom the apostate church has gratuitously called its first pope. (See how Peter refers to the believers as strangers and pilgrims in his first Epistle — 1:1; 2:11; and notice how he enjoins submissive obedience to secular authorities — 2:13,14.)

Not only is Babylon a harlot: she is the mother of harlots (17: 5). As Jezebel bore Athaliah, so the "mother church" has given birth to rebellious daughters — churches that have resented the matriachal dictatorship of Rome, but have not submitted to the authority of Christ.

How appropriate that the announcement of the marriage of the true bride of Christ (19:7) comes immediately after the destruction of the Babylonian harlot.

Appropriate too is the fact that Christ's true bride is also described as a city — the New Jerusalem:

"And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal . . ." (21:9-11). Corresponding to the two phases of the woman of Revelation 17 are the two phases of the apostate church:

1. When she was carried by the Roman Empire (from the time of Constantine).

2. When (since the fall of the Roman Empire) she has dictated to "peoples, multitudes, nations and tongues" (17:15).

Muddled thinking Many would readily assent to the proposition that the woman of

Revelation 17 is a symbol of the Roman church. Beyond this point, however, the thinking often becomes muddled. Some of those who regard the woman as a symbol of the papacy also seem to have a vague idea that the beast represents the papacy. This produces an impossible expository situation, for according to Revelation 17, verses 16 and 17, the beast (in its association with the ten horns) destroys the woman:

"And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled."

This brings us to another extraordinary blindspot in the thinking of many. The fate of the harlot is stated clearly in the passage quoted above. It is the beast (with its horns) that destroys the woman. And the destruction is complete: "And the ten horns . . . shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire." Utter annihilation, surely! This in no way contradicts the fact that the destruction is providentially directed — "God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will". Like the Assyrian of Isaiah 10, the beast (with the kings) is the rod of God's anger. Despite the plain teaching of Revelation 17 concerning the destruction of the harlot, many cling to the belief that Christ himself will destroy this counterfeit-Christian organisation personally. Let it be stated categorically: the beast and the horns (a political power and its satellites) destroy the whore (17:16,17). Then the beast itself is destroyed by Christ (17:14).

The scale of destruction

The whore is utterly destroyed: what does this really mean? Revelation 17 says that the woman is a seven-hilled city: does this imply that the 'eternal city' is scheduled for demolition? To predict the annihilation of Rome must sound offensive to some people, but it would be far more offensive to pretend that the prophecy of Revelation 17 was not there. Ancient Babylon was reduced to a heap of rubble and never rebuilt. This will be the destiny of her modern counterpart.

This is not the whole story. In its apocalyptic context, Babylon is more than a city: it is also a system of religion that emanates from the city. Counterfeit Christianity will also be destroyed.

Babylon — or Rome — can be thought of as a number of concentric circles. In the middle is the city; around it is the community that bows to the authority of the bishop of Rome; outside that is the vast area where, in varying degrees of concentration, papal teaching has permeated. It is sometimes called "Christendom", and sometimes "the Western World".

It is noteworthy that the great segment of the world that vaguely thinks of itself as Christian has for many years been deeply involved in commerce and transportation of merchandise. These features are highlighted nostalgically in the lamentations that follow the destruction of the whore. Even the merchandise that Babylon dealt in is catalogued. Does this suggest a

connection? Does it not strengthen the conclusion that the whore is deeply involved in the economics of Christendom?

This may also help to explain why the elaborate description of apocalyptic Babylon's mercantile interests reminds us so much of Tyre of the Old Testament, *the* mercantile power of the ancient world. Ezekiel (chapters 26-28) speaks of God's judgments on Tyre, and the language is strikingly similar to that applied to Babylon in Revelation 18.

It is not easy to define the limits of the destruction. The centre of the circle will certainly be demolished, and the system of religion directly associated with it will also have to go. It seems likely that many people will also perish; hence the urgent call, "Come out of her, my people."

There are those too who will stand afar off and witness with sorrow the destruction of their beloved Babylon:

"And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning, standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come" (Revelation 18:9,10). Merchants and shipmasters will likewise lament.

Babel

Several Old Testament prophecies speak of "all nations" uniting to make war on Jerusalem. The best known are probably Joel 3:2 and Zechariah 14:2. These Scriptures tell of a gathering together of the nations of the world, in the latter days, for a common, wicked purpose — the destruction of Israel.

This forthcoming international confederacy recalls the first united nations conspiracy — the one recorded in Genesis 11 that took place in Babel.

But there is a difference. On the first occasion the speech of the nations was confounded. On the next occasion, after the nations have been judged, there will be a "pure language", as Zephaniah declares:

"Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the Lord, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy. For then I will turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent" (Zephaniah 3:8,9).

Babel is Babylon. Are we then to conclude that this aggressive conspiracy against Israel will be carried out in the name of the apocalyptic Babylon — the infamous harlot of Revelation 17?

Ancient Babylon stood on the river Euphrates. It seems reasonable therefore to assume a connection with apocalyptic Babylon when the name of Euphrates occurs in Revelation. One such occurrence is Revelation 9:14-16 (the sixth trumpet) which speaks of an incredibly large army, apparently waiting in readiness at the Euphrates for the precise moment to attack.

To attack whom? In ancient days invading armies came from the Euphrates to destroy Israel. The suggestion therefore is that because this great company, bent on destroying Israel, comes from the Euphrates, it represents the Babylonian harlot-organisation of Revelation 17.

No wonder Babylon herself is destroyed so utterly!

References and Notes

1. There is a reversal of chronological sequence in chapters 17 and 18 of Revelation. Whereas chapter 17 describes the destruction of the great whore, the chapter that follows predicts this destruction, and warns God's people to come out of Babylon because her plagues are to come in one day (verses 4-8).

2. 2 Corinthians 11:3.

8 "Take heed that no man deceive you"

The beast — a false Christ

The warning comes from the Lord Jesus himself, and we do well to heed it. It concerns the coming of false christs and false prophets.

False christs and false prophets often work together. One function of a false prophet is to give publicity to a false christ: certainly this is the case when false christs and false prophets are mentioned in the same context.

The expression, *the false prophet*, occurs three times in the book of Revelation.¹ The three references are to the same person or organisation. Because this false prophet has a confrontation with the Lord himself on the occasion of the Lord's return to the earth, it can be inferred that this is the last of the series of false prophets that were to arise.

Which prompts the question: who then is the false christ for whom the ultimate false prophet provides publicity?

There can be only one answer — the beast. See how a false christ/false prophet relationship is implied by the following words:

"And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image ..." (Revelation 19:20).

It has already been observed that the false prophet of Revelation is referred to by another name. He is the second beast of Revelation 13 — the two-horned beast that comes up out of the earth. There is a convincing similarity between the terms by which the false prophet and this two-horned beast are described; and they both have the same relationship to *the* beast.²

For a fuller account then of the work of the false prophet and of the false christ for whom he works as a propaganda agent, the reader is referred back to Revelation 13.

A rival

A word here about the expression "false Christ". *Christ* means "anointed": it is the title of a king. A false christ would therefore be an impostor king who challenges the authority of the true king. This is certainly what the beast of Revelation does:

"And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. .. These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings" (17:12,14).

The beast of Revelation is the ultimate false christ — we must come to terms with this appalling truth. Its implications are revolting and frightening.

Warnings and more warnings

So to the prophetic message that the Lord Jesus gave on the Mount of Olives. Each of the Gospel accounts of this prophecy contains warnings about false christs and false prophets. Matthew 24 contains warnings in two different parts of the same discourse,³ and this is also true of Mark 13.⁴

It is common knowledge that the Olivet prophecy relates both to the destruction of Jerusalem and the signs of the Lord's coming. It would be an over-simplification to divide Matthew 24 and Mark 13 in two, and relate the first half of each exclusively to Jerusalem's judgments, and the second half exclusively to the signs of the second coming. Nevertheless, the duplication of warnings leaves us in no doubt that false christs and false prophets are to be expected on both these occasions. But there is no need to stress the point that a latter-day 'false christ/false prophet' team is yet to be expected according to the Olivet prophecy. This has already been established by reference to Revelation.

What needs stressing now is that which the Lord himself stresses. *The deceit of false christs and false prophets constitutes a serious threat to the people of God.*

"Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together" (Matthew 24:23-28). This is very impressive. God's greatest prophet is able to

foresee and warn against the false prophets before they arrive — "Behold, I have told you before." The true prophet shows his superiority — but his servants need to be warned.

The Lord warns us, in fact, against two opposite dangers. The first danger is to imagine that the Lord has come when, instead, a false christ has appeared; the second danger is to imagine that the Lord's coming is remote at the very time when he appears — "in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Matthew 24:44).

Paul develops the theme of false christs. He speaks of the ultimate false christ in these terms:

"Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12).

Also both in Revelation 13 and 19 the deceitfulness of this power is emphasised. So deceitful is it that "all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (13: 8). An aura of power and mystery surrounds the beast, and wondering people exclaim: "Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" (13:4).

But why are the people of God in such danger of being deceived? One would have thought that they, of all people, ought to be able to tell the difference between a true Christ and a false

christ. The immediate reason is given: the signs and wonders of the false christs and false prophets are extraordinarily impressive. But still the question must be asked: why are the people of God in danger of being deceived by these signs?

One reason is because the ultimate false christ (the beast) is, like his predecessors, to be viewed in an Israelitish context. If one who claimed to be Christ were to emerge suddenly in Nepal or Honolulu, readers of the Bible would probably not be very impressed. But his appearance in or near the land of Israel could make a great difference. At the time when the saints are expecting the Lord's return to the Promised Land, a wonder-working power emerges in the same land. Time and place would seem to be right, and the signs would carry conviction. Unwary saints would be easy victims.

There is no want of evidence that the land of Israel is to be the centre of the beast's operations. There are indications that the invading army of the sixth trumpet (whose operations are described in the latter part of Revelation 9) descends upon Israel; that the two witnesses of Revelation 11 who prophesy in the same (sixth trumpet) period, make this land the centre of their witnessing activity, though it does extend beyond the land and the people of Israel. The fact that the beast is the enemy of the witnesses encourages us to look particularly to the land of Israel for 'beast' operations as well. Indeed, it is stated that the bodies of those witnesses who are slain by the beast lie "where also our Lord was crucified" (11:8). Later, it is recorded that three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouths of dragon, beast and false prophet and incite rebellion against the Lord. Observe that the people are gathered together into "a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon" (16:13-16). Again the location is the land of Israel.

The role of the false prophet

The false prophet is another name for the second beast of Revelation 13. This fact has already been noted. Deceit and treachery are implied by the comment that this second beast, though he has two horns like a lamb, speaks like a dragon.

The false prophet is an exceedingly clever and utterly ruthless promoter of beast worship. A great deceiver, "he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles. . ." (13:13,14).

It has also been remarked that, by his deceit, the false prophet produces signs that resemble the genuine miracles of the two witnesses, just as the magicians of Egypt imitated the miracles of Moses and Aaron. This means that the false prophet is the rival of the witnesses. When the one promotes the beast, the other preaches Christ.

Rival Movements

There are therefore two mutually hostile movements:

Israel's involvement

The deceit of the beast/false prophet organisation is heightened by another factor, an exceedingly disturbing one. Not only does the false christ appear in the land of Israel: he seems to emanate from the people of Israel.

An Israeli beast! Inevitably one recoils from such a monstrous proposition. So offensive was this thought to the writer of this book that, whenever his studies seemed to lead him to this conclusion (and this happened several times over the years) he hurled it indignantly out of his mind. But it kept coming back!

And now, in conscience, he has to ask readers to examine the evidence presented and the relevant scriptures very carefully and to pray for guidance. He recognises that he could have taken a wrong turning somewhere, and he certainly does not want the responsibility of misleading students of prophecy on a matter of such importance. On the other hand, if this conclusion happens to be right after all, he does not want the responsibility of having kept silence when he should have spoken. If the Scriptures do indeed lead us to expect this hideous development, then we ought not to remain in ignorance of the fact. Ignorant people would more easily be deceived and unprepared when overtaken by the events.

Consider then the following points. This summary of evidence that the beast is Israelitish includes some matters that have already been mentioned. The chapter that follows (*Seven Heads and Ten Horns*) develops the theme and provides still further evidence.

1. The beast of Revelation is a false christ. Its association with the false prophet establishes this. A false christ is a rival of the true Christ. Because the true Christ is of Israelitish stock and works in an Israelitish context, one could reasonably expect the same to be true of the false christ.

2. It has already been noted that the centre of 'beast' operations is the land of Israel.

3. The sudden, dramatic emergence of Israel as a military power, contrary to all human expectations, satisfies the terms of the prophecies about the revival of the beast. This power emerges from a bottomless pit (Revelation 17:8). We have seen that this is another way of saying that the beast comes up out the sea.⁵ Indeed, its revival is expressed in these terms in Revelation 13: 1 — "And I... saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns." Remembering that the sea represents the

The beast or false Christ
christ

— supported by the two -horned beast out of the earth ; also called the false prophet	— supported by the two witnesses
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nations, two points should be noted: 1) that a power which has ceased to exist emerges suddenly and unexpectedly; and 2) that it emerges *out of the nations* of the world amongst which its people have been scattered and submerged. Here is something more remarkable than the recovery of an oppressed or devastated nation living in its own land. This prophecy concerns the recovery of a nation disintegrated and lost amongst the peoples of the world: a nation which is not even living in its own land. This is what is predicted in Revelation 13 and 17: *and this extraordinary political development has happened to Israel in our time.*

4. Excesses of wickedness — arrogance, blasphemy, persecution — are characteristics of the beast. This sort of vile behaviour is typical of people who, after being blessed by God, have

turned their backs on Him. Examples are not wanting in the history of Israel. Remember the rebels in the wilderness in the days of Moses.⁶ Think not only of the ringleaders, like Korah, Dathan and Abiram, but also of the congregation who followed their lead. Despite the fact that God had given the clearest evidence of His opposition to the attitude of Korah, Dathan and Abiram by destroying them with dramatic suddenness, the whole congregation murmured against Moses and Aaron, saying: "Ye have killed the people of the Lord" (Numbers 16:41). Think also of the wickedness of the priests and the Pharisees in the time of our Lord; and of the mad fanaticism of the Jews when Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D.70. The beast of the latter days is of this sort. It represents a nation that has turned its back on God — modern Israel.

5. Following this up, the beast in its final phase — the 'eighth head' phase of Revelation 17, or the 'little horn' phase of Daniel 7 — is depicted in Daniel 7 as standing before the judgment seat, where it is condemned with frightening severity for its loud-mouthed blasphemy:

"I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit... A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened. I beheld then because of the voice of the great words which the horn spake: I beheld even till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame" (Daniel 7:9-11). The strangeness of this scene is often missed. Here is a political power, the little horn, standing before the judgment seat. We know that God judges nations, but does He usually judge them in this way? The occasion of the judgment of the little horn is the same as that described in Revelation 20:11-15. The expression "the books were opened", common to both passages, establishes this fact. This occasion (according to Revelation 20) is the time when the dead are judged, and it comes as a surprise to read of the judgment of a political power (the little horn) *in these terms and in this context*. It seems out of place until one appreciates that this is the judgment of the militant, rebellious element in latter-day Israel — a people that should have known better. Here is an application of the principle: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2).

6. We have seen that the beast of Revelation is the same as "the man of sin, the son of perdition" of 2 Thessalonians 2. The expression "son of perdition" is only used in one other place — John 17:12 — where it is applied to Judas Iscariot. The beast is therefore a latter-day Judas! This implies treachery and heavy responsibility, and could be appropriately applied to Israel.

7. Think now of the famous 'enmity' passage of Genesis 3:15: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

The obvious order of fulfilment is: first, the bruising of the heel of the seed of the woman by the serpent; then the bruising of the head of the serpent by the seed of the woman. The principles underlying this edict can be worked out in various ways in various contexts. There was a dramatic fulfilment of the first phase of the enmity when a *Jewish* serpent bruised the heel of *the* seed of the woman — when the Lord Jesus was crucified by the Jews, but not destroyed. It is fitting therefore that the seed of the woman should inflict a death wound on a *Jewish* serpent in the next confrontation. The fact that the Scriptures invite us to think of the

beast as a latter-day Judas adds weight to this idea. Remember too that the Jewish nation has never officially repudiated the crime of murdering the man whom they called Jesus of Nazareth. And to this day they reject him. Another confrontation is coming.

The 'enmity' principle also finds expression in another 'little horn' prophecy — that of Daniel 8. In the next chapter reasons are given for believing that the little horn of Daniel 8 is the same as that of Daniel 7. Whether at this stage this proposition carries conviction or not, it is evident that there are two distinct phases to the conflict between the little horn of Daniel 8 and the "Prince of princes". In the first confrontation, the little horn appears to get the advantage; in the second confrontation, however, the little horn is destroyed. The power that made Christ suffer and tried to destroy him is the power that will be destroyed by Christ — militant, antichristian Jewry. Two phases of the hostility between the people of Israel and their divinely appointed king are also implied by the words of the Lord Jesus to his enemies — to his *Jewish* enemies: "Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder" (Matthew 21:44). These words, which could well be based on the prophecy of Nebuchadnezzar's image, were a warning to hostile Jews. Hostile Jews did fall on "the stone" and after a short time they were broken; and it will not be long before "the stone" will fall on another generation of hostile Jews and grind them to powder. The anti-christian, political element in modern Israel will be destroyed with the Gentile kingdoms (for at heart they are Gentiles and not Jews "inwardly") when the stone smites the image on its feet.

8. The emergence of the latter-day State of Israel as an independent political power before the Lord's return, has been a great surprise even to those who had been expecting the restoration of Israel. From their reading of passages like Jeremiah 30:10,11, Jeremiah 31:10, Ezekiel 37:1-14 many had rightly expected the return of the people of Israel to their ancient land, but they had no idea that an independent state would be born. Most of us have to admit frankly that this momentous political development, involving the people of the Bible and the land of the Bible, simply was not taken into account in our interpretation of prophecy. The position is more serious than this. The new State of Israel has been in existence since 1948: yet *still* those who were expecting the return of the people of Israel to their land have not succeeded in relating this highly significant political development concerning the people of the Bible and the land of the Bible to Bible prophecy. Does anyone really suppose that Bible prophecy is silent concerning recent events in Israel? Do not forget that "the Lord will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7); and "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him" (Psalm 25:14).

A serious problem this — unless modern Israel is the beast.

Incidentally, all this helps to explain the immense importance of the beast in latter-day prophecy. Daniel 7, Daniel 8, 2 Thessalonians 2 and all those references in Revelation — it could be thought that this theme was receiving too much attention by those who had not grasped the appalling fact that this is a *Jewish* beast.⁷ The tendency hitherto has been to leave Israel out of the book of Revelation. Here the balance is redressed.

9. There are several other prophecies concerning the ungodliness of the Jews who would live in the Land in the latter days. In Ezekiel 34, for example, before describing the blessing that "David", the divinely appointed shepherd, will bring in, there is a strong condemnation of the wicked shepherds. This is the burden of the chapter. Israel will be impoverished and led

astray by unworthy leaders. Hence the strong words of condemnation against Israel at the time of the latter-day restoration, spoken of in Ezekiel 36:

"Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went" (verse 22). And:

"Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall lothe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations. Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel" (verses 31,32).

According to Zechariah, two thirds of the people of Israel who occupy the Land in the latter days will be destroyed, and the rest will be refined. What a commentary on their wickedness!

"And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the Lord, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The Lord is my God" (Zechariah 13:8,9).

10. Only the emergence of an *Israelitish* beast can adequately explain why the people of God are so repeatedly and insistently warned that they could easily be deceived.

Easy victims

The reader is asked prayerfully to ponder this last point. It is right that our eyes should be constantly on Israel, watching the outworking of God's purpose through this nation. We are positively encouraged to pray for the peace of Jerusalem.⁸ The return of the people of Israel and the birth of the State of Israel out of such adverse circumstances has a truly miraculous element about it, and understandably our imagination is stirred.

Yet for all this, it is possible for our attitude to this unbelieving people to be unhealthy. It is surely unseemly for those who claim to be followers of the Prince of Peace to stand on the touchline, so to speak, and cheer when Israel makes fools of her enemies. Although we can see God at work in Israel, this reflects no credit on the people themselves — "I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went" (Ezekiel 36:22). The weapons of Israel's warfare are carnal, and her motivation is of the flesh.

Remember: as a nation Israel *still* rejects the Lord Jesus Christ. Never has she repudiated the crime of her fathers. And she rarely acknowledges God in her spectacular victories. If the rejection of God's Son was offensive to God in the first century, it is also offensive in the twentieth century. If dependence upon human power was vain and foolish in Old Testament times, it is just as vain and foolish today. Because God has evidently been helping Israel, and because recent events relating to Israel are a notable sign that God's purpose is working out, we should not be blinded to the perversity and wickedness of this nation. There are two classes of people in the world — those in Adam and those in Christ. The people of Israel do not constitute a third class. They are in Adam, and there is less excuse for them than for most of the Gentiles.

Contrasting marks

Here is another matter for reflection. The mark of the beast should be thought of as a sign that contrasts with the seal of the Living God. See how the two marks are set in juxtaposition to advertise the contrast. The mark of the beast is referred to at the end of Revelation 13, and the seal of God at the beginning of Revelation 14.

Later, reasons will be presented for believing that the 144,000 who are sealed in their foreheads are saints of Israelitish stock.⁹ If this is true — and the reader is invited to weigh the evidence — then, to say the least, serious consideration should be given to the thought that the distinguishing mark of those branded for perdition is likewise to be viewed in an Israelitish context.

The Old Testament events relating to Elijah and Ahab can be thought of as a prototype of those relating to the witnesses and the beast. Elijah, who withheld rain and also, on several occasions, called down fire from heaven, corresponds to the latter-day witnesses; and Ahab, the infamous king of Israel who promoted Baal worship, corresponds to the beast. Life was difficult in those days for those who refused to bow the knee to Baal; and life will likewise be difficult for those who refuse to worship the beast and his image, and who do not receive his mark on forehead or hand (14: 9). They, will not be allowed to buy or sell (13:17). They will be denied the means to maintain themselves in life.

But remember how God made provision in the dark days of Ahab. Elijah was supplied with food by ravens¹⁰ (the most unlikely creatures, proverbial for their *raven-ous* appetites), and afterwards by the widow of Sarepta;¹¹ and the sons of the prophets were provided for by Obadiah, Ahab's God-fearing servant.¹² We may be sure that God will also make provision for His servants when the beast oppresses them and tries to make life impossible for them.

A question of credibility

Some might find it hard to accept the proposition that Israel is the beast of Revelation because Israel just doesn't seem big enough to fulfil this role. On the other hand, the growth of communism is such an important factor in the modern world that — it could be argued — it would be more appropriate to regard the beast as a symbol of Soviet Communism. And the additional point could be made that an exposition of latter-day prophecy which does not take into account the growth of communism is hardly worthy of serious consideration.

It is fatally easy to forget that Bible prophecy is Israel-centric. Bible predictions are primarily concerned with the land of Israel, the people of Israel and the Zion-born Christian church; and secondarily with the nations and circumstances that closely affect the fortunes of Israel.

It would doubtless be interesting to find a place for the great United States of America in prophecy, but such attempts as have been made (by British Israelites and Mormons, for example) can be seen by diligent Bible students to be nothing but cunningly-devised fables. China is a mighty power, and those who have no knowledge of the Bible keep telling us about these mysterious prophecies concerning the ultimate dominance of the yellow races — but we are still waiting for the scriptural evidence.

It is tempting to look for a place for the Common Market in Bible prophecy, and those who do so come up with answers that seem attractive to some students. But are these answers solidly based on Scripture, and do they accord with the broad principles of Scripture?

As a community which has had a preponderance of British members, it is understandable that we should have had an inflated impression of the importance of Britain in Bible prophecy. And indeed world events at one time seemed to indicate that it was altogether reasonable to find a prominent place for Britain in prophecy, just as world events now seem to demand a big place for Soviet Communism. Britain was a power to be reckoned with, and the British Empire extended to the uttermost parts of the earth. Indeed, the sun never set on the British Empire. Nor was this all. Britain was very pro-Israel, and had actually been granted the mandate of Palestine by the League of Nations at the end of the first World War, for the express purpose of promoting in it colonisation by the Jews and establishing in Palestine a national home for the Jews.

Accordingly we found a worthy place for Britain in our prophetic programme. Despite the fact that the name "Tarshish" has wider connotations, and that, in Ezekiel 19, young lions represent princes of Israel, we convinced ourselves that these expressions in Ezekiel 38:13 denoted Britain and her colonies. On the basis of this interpretation we proclaimed publicly that Britain would not relinquish Palestine before the Lord's return. It was necessary, we argued, for her to be on the spot in order to say to Gog: "Art thou *come* to take a spoil?"

And we were wrong!

Immediately before the second world war Germany was a mighty military power. Moreover she was extremely hostile to Israel, and she occupied a northerly position. These facts were sufficient to convince some brethren that Germany was "the king of the north". But they were wrong!

Today Russia is powerful — even more powerful than Britain and Germany were in their time. And Russia is known to have designs on Israel. Yes, and she occupies a northerly position. But we must resist the temptation to which we have fallen so disastrously in the past — the temptation to be too much influenced by immediate appearances. Mighty powers can disappear as suddenly as Sennacherib's army.

Of course, in its own way Bible prophecy has taken into account this drift towards what is called communism. The prophecies of Daniel 2, Luke 21 and Matthew 24, for example, describe such processes of disintegration and godlessness as must inevitably take the world in this direction. And in keeping with this is the revelation that the philosophy of the beast is basically humanistic.

It is generally accepted amongst us that Russia is involved in the invasion of Ezekiel 38, and I see no reason to challenge this conclusion. However, reasons have been given for thinking that this will take place after the Lord returns and rules over Israel, whereas the confrontation with the beast occurs earlier.

And in any case, a number of reasons have already been presented for believing that the beast comes from Israel.

To those who think that Israel just isn't big enough to play the part described above, I would say this. Could anyone have guessed forty years ago that Israel would become the power that she is today? Could anyone have foreseen that men whose fathers died in their millions in the extermination camps of Europe would win a major war against much bigger and better equipped armies in just six days, increasing their territory fourfold in the process?

Or could anyone have foreseen even two years before it happened that there would be a peace agreement between Israel and Egypt, with the initiative coming from Egypt? To have suggested it would have been an invitation to ridicule. By the way, the following words, by Isaiah, must have sounded even more absurd in the days of Egypt's greatness:

"And the land of Judah shall be a terror unto Egypt, every one that maketh mention thereof shall be afraid in himself, because of the counsel of the Lord of hosts, which he hath determined against it" (Isaiah 19:17).

Have recent events been the fulfilment of Isaiah's (then) incredible prediction?

Bible prophecy is concerned with things that are humanly unlikely or impossible. Remember that the book of Revelation invites us to expect the unexpected.

Two utterly unexpected features of the beast — two, not one — are highlighted:

1. The emergence of the beast in the latter days.
2. The healing of the beast's deadly wound.

Each of these events causes the world to wonder. It is after the healing of the deadly wound that this extraordinary power of the Middle East becomes a world power. The words of Micah probably refer to this phase:

"Now also many nations are gathered together against thee, that say, Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion. But they know not the thoughts of the Lord, neither understand they his counsel: for he shall gather them as the sheaves into the floor. Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion: for I will make thine horn iron, and I will make thy hoofs brass: and thou shalt beat in pieces many people: and I will consecrate their gain unto the Lord, and their substance unto the Lord of the whole earth" (Micah 4:11-13).

Suggestions concerning forthcoming events

Now let us make a humble attempt to set out a programme of forthcoming events in Israel. These are only suggestions, and they are made tentatively to stimulate thought.

Israel will be threatened by vastly superior forces. Isaiah (29:7), Joel (3:2) and Zechariah (14:1,2) speak of many nations making war on Israel. The very centre of this cataclysmic invasion will be Jerusalem. Because of recent economic and political developments in the Middle East, this invasion is not difficult to envisage. The excuse could be the "occupied territories" that Israel is not willing to give up; the real reason could be that the nations want to ensure a good supply of Arab oil.

From Zechariah 14:2 we learn that the people of Jerusalem will suffer grievously:

"For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city." Then the wrath of God will be turned against the enemies of Israel. First God will fight against those nations "as when he fought in the day of battle". That is to say, He will work through men — on this occasion men of Israel — using them to punish other nations.

Already Israel has performed exploits. After a seemingly devastating setback there will be more and greater wonders. A deadly wound will be healed. The Israeli beast will dominate the political scene and will prevail. Through the power of this Jewish organisation God will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem to battle (Zechariah 12:9). So dramatic will Israel's change of fortune be that unwary saints will suppose that the Lord Jesus is there in person. They will not have learned that the revelation of the man of sin comes before the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Then, like Elijah of old, the witnesses will speak forth, seeking to save a remnant. The hearts of some of the people of Israel will be touched when "the spirit of grace and of supplications" is poured upon them (Zechariah 12:10), and they will accept their Messiah. Others will be impressed by the propaganda of the false prophet, the threats and the promises, and will rally around the beast.

When the prescribed period of witnessing is completed the beast will be permitted to suppress the witnesses.

Not for long! The witnesses will be vindicated and the seventh trumpet will sound.

The Lord will be enthroned in Zion, ruling in the midst of his enemies (Psalm 110:2).

After that the seven vials are poured out — these will be grievous visitations on the Israeli 'beast' organisation: but this power will not yet be destroyed. Next comes the destruction of the harlot organisation by the beast; and then the destruction of the beast by Christ. The Israeli beast movement will be annihilated, but those oppressed people of Israel who looked for the true Messiah will stand upon their feet and live — an exceeding great army (Ezekiel 37:10).

Be warned!

When the air is full of rumours that Christ has come, *do not respond*.TM The man of sin must come first, and he will greatly deceive many people. The saints are repeatedly warned not to listen to men. What is more, they are assured that God's true servants will know when God's Son has come. Just as lightning announces its presence with vivid clarity, so the Lord will announce his presence to his people.¹⁴ Moreover, his people have comforting assurance that God will send His angels to gather the elect (Matthew 24:31).

Those who are wise will bide the coming of the angel.

If it were possible the very elect would be deceived. If it were possible! But the God who sends a strong delusion to the unworthy also makes it impossible for His true servants to be victims of this massive deceit. The Lord's urgent warnings are designed to prevent the very elect from being deceived.

Be warned! Take heed that no man deceive you!

Lest I be misunderstood . . .

Frankly, I find it distasteful to present Israel in such an unfavourable light. Let me therefore explain that I do not consider the people of Israel to be better or worse than other children of Adam. They are ordinary, sinful human beings who have been placed by God in extraordinary circumstances. They have been involved, and will yet be involved, in confrontations of flesh and Spirit. They have reacted, and will react, in an essentially human way. Their behaviour is an object lesson to other people, telling them how they would have acted in similar circumstances. Had God used any other nation in the same way, the result would have been the same. It is as simple as that.

References and Notes

1. Revelation 16:13; 19:20; 20:10
2. See Part 1, chapter 5 — *The false prophet*
3. Matthew 24:4,5,11 and 23,24
4. Mark 13:5,6 and 21-23
5. See Part 1, chapter 5 — *The beast from the bottomless pit*
6. Numbers 16
7. It seems likely that Daniel 11:36-38 provides another picture of the beast, remarkably similar in some details to 2 Thessalonians 2:3,4. If this is true, there is special significance in the statement of Daniel 11:37: "Neither shall he regard the God of his fathers", when applied to Israel.
8. Psalm 122:6
9. See Part 2, chapter 13 — *The Trumpet Judgments*.
10. 1 Kings 17:4
11. 1 Kings 17:9
12. 1 Kings 18:4
13. 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12
14. Matthew 24:23-27

9 Seven Heads and Ten Horns

In this chapter an attempt will be made to work out in more detail a theme that has already been briefly referred to — the sequence of kingdoms symbolised by seven heads and ten horns.

Think first of the four beasts of Daniel 7 — the lion, the bear, the four-headed leopard and the un-named fourth beast with ten horns. These beasts symbolise "kings" or political powers.

The beast of Revelation 13 (which is also the beast of Revelation 17) combines the characteristics of Daniel's four beasts. Thus:

Beast of Revelation 13	Daniel 7
Like a leopard	3rd beast
.....	
Feet like a bear	2nd beast
.....	
Mouth of a lion	1st beast
.....	
10 horns	4th beast

In view of these likenesses it is surely reasonable to conclude that the apocalyptic beast is a composite creature — all four beasts of Daniel 7 rolled into one, so to speak.

This conclusion is strengthened by the fact that the beast of Revelation has seven heads and ten horns, which is the sum of the heads and horns of Daniel's four beasts. Thus:

	Heads	Horns
Lion	1	—
Bear	1	—
Leopard	4	—
4th beast	1	10
Total	7	10

Expressed as an equation:

7 heads + 10 horns = 7 heads + 10 horns.

It hardly needs repeating here that-it is only possible to see all the heads together when the beast is viewed over what, by human reckoning, is a long period of time. This protracted view may be compared to a very long photographic exposure that combines the details of several 'instant' pictures.

"Five are fallen"

Referring to a thought discussed earlier, the eighth head is one of the seven revived.¹ But there are still problems. The one that concerns us now is: what is the meaning of this statement:

"... five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come" (Revelation 17:10)?

Five are fallen! Some have counted off five consecutive world powers in this way:

Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece.

This would mean that the sixth world power, Rome, answers to the expression "one is".

Although at first sight this explanation seems reasonable because, when the woman rode on the beast, the five named powers had come and gone, and the Roman power was indeed there, there is one serious objection. If the equation with Daniel 7 is valid — if the seven heads and ten horns of Revelation are the same as the seven heads and ten horns of Daniel 7 — then one has to start counting heads with Daniel's first beast, which represents Babylon. Another reason for beginning the count with Babylon instead of Egypt is because the times of the Gentiles began when Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon destroyed the kingdom of Judah.

Where then do we get if we start the count of heads with Babylon? The problem may be better appreciated if the beast/heads of Daniel are set out with the corresponding kingdoms:

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------|
| 1. Lion | Babylon |
| 2. Bear | Medo -Persia |
| ³ 1 • 4 leopard | 4 Grecian |
| ⁴ heads | kingdoms |
| 5, | |
| 6.J | |
| 7. 4th beast | Roman empire |

Five are fallen. Taking the kingdoms in order, this would mean the fall of Babylon, Medo-Persia and three of the four Grecian kingdoms; and it would imply the continuing existence of one Grecian kingdom. Yet in John's day all four Grecian kingdoms had disappeared like Babylon and Medo-Persia before them. "Six are fallen" would have seemed more appropriate.

The little horn of Daniel 8

The suggestion offered here is that the secret lies in the little horn of Daniel 8. Please note — Daniel 8/

First a quick reminder of the main features of Daniel 8. The prophet sees a two-horned ram (representing Media and Persia — verse 20) being destroyed by a he-goat with one great horn (representing Grecia — verse 21). When the great horn of the he-goat is broken, four horns come up in its place. Verse 22 explains that the four horns represent the four divisions of the divided Grecian empire.

So to verses 9-12:

"And out of one of them [one of the four horns] came forth a little horn, which waxed exceeding great, toward the south, and toward the east, and toward the pleasant land. And it waxed great, even to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and of the stars to

the ground, and stamped upon them. Yea, he magnified himself even to the prince of the host, and by him the daily sacrifice was taken away, and the place of his sanctuary was cast down. And an host was given him against the daily sacrifice by reason of transgression, and it cast down the truth to the ground; and it practised and prospered."

Before discussing how the 'little horn' prophecy of Daniel 8 can provide the answer to the 'five are fallen' problem, let us try to identify the power. The little horn comes out of one of the Grecian empires. Yet it is distinctive and different: it would not otherwise have been represented by a separate horn.

Some have thought that Antiochus Epiphanes fulfilled this role. He was a king who emanated from the northern Grecian empire in the period between the Testaments and made an important contribution to the history of Israel by his hostility. Yet, as one of the Seleucids, he could be regarded as a representative of one of the divided Grecian empires rather than a separate power, symbolised by a separate horn.

Some have looked for a fulfilment in the Roman power. Because Rome insinuated itself into Grecian politics and, in a sense, developed from Greece, this explanation would seem to have something to commend it. However, the sheer size of the Roman power, and the fact that in Daniel 2 it is represented by a separate metal and in Daniel 7 by a separate beast, makes the little horn an inappropriate and inadequate symbol for this mighty world power. And in any case Rome did not emerge as a power from only one of the divided Grecian empires.

Although Rome is not the little horn, she is very much involved. The reader is asked to consider the proposition that the little horn of Daniel 8 is a symbol of the power of Israel — Israel before and at the beginning of the Christian era, first supported and then dominated by Rome.

Even during the time of Israel's subjection to Rome, when her political strength was drastically reduced, she was a formidable power in the religious world. The crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, the stoning of Stephen, the persecuting campaign sponsored by the high priest and led by Saul of Tarsus, the vicious spoiling activities of the Jews of Thessalonica — these are examples of the implacable hostility of this vassal state to Christianity.

It was during the time of the divided Grecian empires, when Antiochus Epiphanes was trying to suppress the Jewish religion, that an independent state of Israel was born. The Hasmoneans — Judas Maccabaeus and his brothers — were the leaders of the revolt that brought independence to Israel.

Israel between the Testaments

For the benefit of those who may not be well acquainted with the history of Israel in the period between the Testaments, here is the briefest of brief summaries. We shall begin with a well-known historical landmark, and move rapidly into less familiar territory:

In response to the decree of Cyrus, king of Persia, many Jews returned from the Babylonian captivity and settled again in the land of Israel. Here their descendants remained throughout the duration of the Persian empire and the Grecian empire that followed. After the death of Alexander the Great, the Grecian Empire was divided into four parts — a part for each of Alexander's four generals. The two sections that most affected the fortunes of the Jews were

those to the north and south of their land — the Syrian kingdom, ruled by the Seleucids, and the Egyptian kingdom ruled by the Ptolemies.

One of the northern kings, Antiochus Epiphanes, was very hostile to the Jewish people, and tried to destroy their religion. He tortured and killed many Jews, and plundered the temple, profaning it by sacrificing swine. His offensive and idolatrous innovations were courageously resisted, first by a priest named Mattathias, and then by his five sons. These men of the Hasmonean family (also called the Maccabees) led the nation in its fight for independence and freedom to worship God according to Jewish traditions. Brilliant leadership was provided by Judas Maccabaeus, and when he was killed, his brothers carried on the struggle, as a result of which the Jews gained control of Judea, Samaria, Galilee, Idumea and some territory to the east of Jordan.

Jonathan, Judas's brother "commenced the reign of the Priest-kings of the Hasmonean line".² After Jonathan's death, his brother Simon assumed leadership and became high priest. Of him Josephus writes that "he set the people free from their slavery under the Macedonians, and permitted them to pay tribute no longer".³ Simon was followed by his son John Hyrcanus who, after a setback, threw off once again the Syrian yoke and "the Jewish kingdom reassumed its independence, which it maintained until it was compelled to acknowledge the Roman dominion — first under the Hasmonean dynasty, then under the house of Herod".⁴

John Hyrcanus was succeeded by his son Aristobulus who was, in turn, succeeded by his brother Alexander Janeus. The high principles of the first Hasmoneans were abandoned by Aristobulus and Alexander, and the Jewish priest-rulers became monsters of wickedness.

The involvement of Rome

One important feature of the history of the Maccabees was the involvement of the ascending power of Rome. First Judas and then his two brothers who succeeded him, Jonathan and Simon, enlisted the support of Rome in their struggles against the Seleucids. So also did Simon's successor, John Hyrcanus.

To continue our summary: the rivalry between Alexander's two sons (also named Hyrcanus and Aristobulus) weakened the kingdom, and the weakness was exploited by an Idumean named Anti-pater. He and his sons, who were in league with the Romans, involved themselves deeply in Jewish politics. Indeed, one of these sons, Herod ("the Great") married into the Hasmonean family and, by the appointment of Rome, was made king of Judea.

This brings us to New Testament times, and to a more familiar period of Jewish history.

Although there was a certain nobility about the first rulers of this Jewish kingdom (not found in their successors), it was not a divine kingdom. Remember Ezekiel's prophecy: "It shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him" (21: 27). Soon this Jewish state was to become notorious for its fanaticism and wickedness; and its diligent courtship of Rome was always a contemptible feature of this opportunist power. Like Ahaz, these Jews preferred the support of another nation to the help of God: and this was their undoing.⁵

When Israel struck out for independence from the oppression of the Seleucids, Rome promised to be a useful ally; when Rome herself posed as a threat to Jewish independence, the Jews became resentful; and when the Roman grip on Israel tightened, the Jews became

fanatically opposed to Rome. Yet for all this they compromised contemptibly in manipulating the power of Rome in an attempt to destroy Christianity. In the language of Daniel 8, the little horn "cast down some ... of the stars. Yea, he magnified himself even to the prince of the host" (Daniel 8:10,11).

The ultimate irony of this extraordinary story is that the Romans, whose favour the Jews had so diligently sought, were the people who, in the end, destroyed the Jews.

Latter-day fulfilment

Notice that there is a "latter time of their kingdom" (Daniel 8: 23), and that at that time the power of the king shall be mighty (verse 24), and "he shall also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand" (verse 25).

It is not always easy to distinguish between what applies to the first phase of the little horn's existence and what applies to the second; and in any event some of the prophetic details are frankly difficult to understand. However, some things are clear: there are two confrontations with the Prince (reminiscent of the two phases of the "enmity" of Genesis 3:15); and on the second occasion the little horn is destroyed.

From this it can be inferred:

1. That the last phase of the little horn of Daniel 8 is the same as the eighth head phase of the beast of Revelation 17 when the beast is destroyed by the "King of kings" (compare "Prince of princes" of Daniel 8).
2. That because neither Antiochus Epiphanes nor the Roman power has two confrontations with the Lord Jesus, of the kind described in Daniel 8, they do not fulfil the terms of the little horn prophecy and can be ruled out even more decisively.

"Five are fallen"

Back then to the words, "five are fallen". The suggestion is that these five kingdoms would be Babylon, Medo-Persia and three of the four Grecian divisions. The sixth head represents the Jewish kingdom that had its roots in one of the divisions of the Grecian empire and that drew its power from Rome. Whereas the Grecian empires as *such* fell, never to rise again, one of them survived in the sense that it was represented by the little horn of Daniel 8.

The Jewish little horn had certainly been reduced to a vassal state when John wrote the Revelation (before A.D.70?),⁶ but it was not rendered impotent until A.D.70, and even then its destruction was not for ever: it has risen again. Here then, it is suggested, is the sixth head of Revelation 17, and in its latter-day opposition to the Prince of princes it becomes the eighth head.

The seventh head of Revelation 17 — the phase when the beast carries the woman — is of course the Roman phase.

An impressive parallel

There is an impressive parallel between the Jewish State founded by the Maccabees and the present State of Israel:

1. In each case the founders show extraordinary courage, determination and enterprise.
2. The hand of God is evident in both the exploits of the Maccabees and in the marvellous victories of modern Israel. Expositors of Daniel, recognising the help that Judas Maccabaeus and his brothers received from God, have understood the words of Daniel 11:34 ("they shall be holpen with a little help") to refer to this divine help.
3. But: neither State can be regarded as a divinely recognised kingdom because "it shall be no more until he come whose right it is".
4. Indeed, human pride is a feature of both States.
5. Each State has depended upon the support of human powers.
6. The State of Israel founded by the Maccabees rejected and tried to destroy the Prince whom God gave them. Likewise modern Israel rejects Christ, and will try to destroy him again at the next confrontation.

Two "little horn" prophecies

All this points to the conclusion that the little horn prophecies of Daniel 7 and Daniel 8 concern the same power. A tabulation of features common to both "little horn" prophecies may help to demonstrate that they are the same. "The king" of Daniel 11:36-45 is also included in the table of comparison.⁷ The fact that this king has some features in common with Daniel 7 and some in common with Daniel 8 strengthens the evidence that Daniel 7 and 8 describe the same power; and it also provides evidence that "the king" is yet another prophecy concerning the same power.

Daniel 7	Daniel 8	Daniel 11
1. The little horn	The little horn	"The king"
2. At the end of the times of the Gentiles	At the end of the times of the Gentiles	At the end of the times of the Gentiles
3. Very aggressive	Very aggressive	Very aggressive
4. "A look more stout than his fellows"	Magnifies himself	Magnifies himself
5. A mouth speaking great things against the Most High		Speaks marvellous things against the God of gods

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| 6. Makes war
against the
saints and
prevails | Destroys the
holy people |
| 7. Destroyed by
the
Ancient of
days | Destroyed by
the
Prince of
princes |

Although the two "little horn" prophecies concern the same power, the contexts and emphases are different. Daniel 7 is concerned with the little horn's Roman connections, whereas Daniel 8 is concerned with its Greek connections. Daniel 7 is particularly interested in the relationship of this power to the ten kings in the latter days. Despite the fact that the little horn of Daniel 7 appears amongst the ten, it is manifestly not one of them and its intrusion is resented. Daniel 8, while making it clear that there are two phases to the "enmity" between the little horn and the Prince, gives more attention to the first phase than does Daniel 7.

For reflection

The people of Israel play a vital role in God's purpose during the times of the Gentiles. But unless Israel is the little horn of Daniel 7 and 8, this vital role is almost ignored in Daniel's great prophecies concerning the nations. When one considers how much attention is given to detail in these prophecies concerning the other nations who are only playing a supporting role, so to speak, this omission will take some explaining — unless . . .

The dragon

The sixth head of Revelation 17 is therefore to be thought of as an essentially Jewish power that had its beginnings in the days of the Grecian empire; that in its early days enjoyed the political sponsorship of Rome, and in its declining days drew its anti-Christian strength from Rome. Ultimately Rome, the seventh head, took over completely, destroying Israel and exerting its own peculiar influence on the Christian church.

A fuller picture of the sixth-head power is provided in Revelation 12. There it appears as a dragon.

Do not miss one striking point of similarity between the little horn of Daniel 8 and the dragon of Revelation 12 — a similarity that strengthens the conclusion that the same power is being described:

" . . . it cast down some ... of the stars to the ground, and stamped upon them"	"And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven and did cast them to the earth"
(Daniel 8:10)	(Revelation 12:4)

The dragon symbolises a power hostile to God's people — a devouring power like the crocodiles of the Nile. The Jews who, with the Romans, tried to devour the infant church are appropriately symbolised by a dragon.

The dragon, that old serpent called the devil and satan: these very names and the narrative that accompanies them carry overtones of Eden, the Exodus and the massacre of the children at Bethlehem, and recall the deeds of the first serpent, of Pharaoh and of Herod.

At the end of the thousand years, when the dragon, that old serpent which is the devil and satan is released, this elemental hostility to God's purpose will be manifested in another arch-enemy.

References and Notes

1. Part 1, chapter 5,— *The beast from the bottomless pit*.
2. Milman, *History of the Jews*, Vol 2, page 16.
3. *Antiquities* — bk.XIII, chapter VI (7).
4. Milman, *History of the Jews*, Vol. 2, page 33.
5. 2 Chronicles 28:16-21
6. H. A. Whittaker makes a good case for the early date of the Apocalypse in *Revelation —A Biblical Approach*, page 53.
7. See appendix II, page 214.

10 "In the days of these kings"

"And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed ..." (Daniel 2:44). In the days of which kings? These oft-quoted words are of course about the kings represented by the toes of Nebuchadnezzar's image. In the language of the parallel prophecy of Daniel 7, they are the ten horns of the fourth beast; and they are also the ten horns of the beast of Revelation 13 and 17.

Time

The time of the prophecy is plainly stated — "in the days of these kings *shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom*". The 'toe' kingdoms are there when the kingdom of God is established. This means that this part of the 'image' prophecy is fulfilled at the end of the times of the Gentiles. This is in line with Revelation 17 where the ten horns (the same powers described by another symbol) make war with the Lamb. Clearly they are there when the Lord Jesus returns.

Place

Politically and geographically, the centre of God's purpose is the land of Israel. Often forgotten by students of prophecy, this fact is highlighted by Moses:

"When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel" (Deuteronomy 32:8).

Daniel also demonstrates that Israel occupies a central position in prophecies concerning the nations. It is common knowledge that when Alexander the Great died, his empire was divided into four parts — one part for each of his four generals. In the words of Daniel's prophecy:

"The rough goat is the king of Grecia: and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king. Now that being broken, whereas four stood up for it, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not in his power" (8:21,22).

Four kingdoms: yet only two of those four were important from the point of view of Israel — the kingdom of the Seleucids in the north, and the kingdom of the Ptolemies in the south. Israel was the buffer state that separated these two kingdoms: hence the references to the king of the north and the king of the south in Daniel 11. They were north *of Israel* and south *of Israel*. The prophecy almost ignores the other two of the four Grecian kingdoms.

This emphasis on Israel is also a feature of the 'image' prophecy of Daniel 2. That is why only two of the four sections of the divided Greek kingdom have a place in Nebuchadnezzar's image — the two thighs of brass. The other two kingdoms are completely ignored.

There are therefore good reasons for believing that the 'toe' kingdoms *of the same image* are to be viewed in an Israelitish context. Their location is in the Middle East. Indeed, one wonders whether those passages that speak of the downtreading of Jerusalem¹ are to be understood in terms of Nebuchadnezzar's image, whose feet are trampling the holy city.

In any event, it would probably be wise to forget the interpretation that seeks to link the ten kings with the countries of the Common Market. They are too remote from Israel.

Clues from Daniel 7

Before pursuing the question of the identity of the ten kings, a reminder here of a startling conclusion that has already been discussed. Reasons have been given for believing that the final phase of the beast of Revelation is Israelitish. Or, to express it in the language of Daniel 7, the *little horn* is the militant, anti-christ element of Israel.

What then of the ten horns that arise at the end of the times of the Gentiles, and have an important connection with the land of Israel? A useful piece of information is provided in Daniel 7. It is that the relationship between the ten horns and the little horn is, in the first place, one of hostility:

"I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots" (verse 8).

The implication would seem to be that the ten horns resent the intrusion of the little horn and wage war against it. However, the little horn is victorious, winning the battles and annexing the territory of three of the ten 'horn' kings.

Notice also that the little horn comes up among the other horns.

If the little horn is indeed Israelitish, here is another pointer to the conclusion that the ten horns are to be considered in an Israelitish context.

The following passage from the same chapter provides two further clues:

"And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise: and another shall rise after them; and he shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings" (7:24). The clues are:

1. In this latter-day picture, the ten horns are there *before* the little horn — it "shall rise up after them".
2. From the fact that the little horn is "diverse from the others", it can be inferred that there is a common bond relating the ten horns — a bond that does not include the intruding little horn.

Revelation 17

The little horn of Daniel 7 is also called *the eighth head* in Revelation 17. It will be recalled that the ten 'horn' kings make the beast, in its eighth head phase, "king of kings"; they "give their power . . . unto the beast".

By bringing together the information provided by Daniel 7 and Revelation 17 a more complete picture emerges. There is hostility between the ten horns and the little horn who has come into their midst as an unwelcome intruder. The ten declare war on the little horn, but are defeated. Three of the ten — presumably three of the nearest neighbours of the little horn

— lose their independence and become subject to the overruling authority of the little horn. The remaining seven recognise a superior enemy and do not wait to be destroyed. On the principle, "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em", and also because there are other enemies whom they hate and fear, they all give their power to the beast.

Then other remarkable things happen. After submitting to the beast's leadership, the ten horns proceed to destroy the whore: "And the ten horns which thou sawest *and* (RV) the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled" (Revelation 17:16,17).

Kings and kings

It is important to distinguish between kings and kings. The ten horns who hate the whore are *not* the kings of the earth who have committed fornication with her (17:2), and who lament her destruction (18:9). Many kings have had a compromising relationship with the organisation symbolised by the great whore. They have enjoyed her favours and submitted to her direction. Not so the ten kings. For some reason they hate her and are satisfied with nothing less than her complete annihilation. Another clue to the identity of the ten kings!

All these marks of identification seem to point in one direction. The reader is asked to ponder the proposition that the ten horns are Arab kingdoms of the latter days.

The time of their emergence; their location; their relationship to each other; their hostility to Israel whose latter-day emergence as a kingdom occurs even later; their hatred of the whore — the unfaithful 'Christian' community: the marks of identification are impressive. The treaty with Israel that follows the period of hostility and war is yet to be fulfilled. This remarkable story may be unfolding before our eyes soon.

Psalm 83

Psalm 83 is manifestly a psalm of the latter days. It tells of a conspiracy. A number of brother nations (most of them related to, or descended from, Abraham) conspire together against the people of Israel:

"Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance" (verse 4).

The confederate nations mentioned in the prophecy are these: Edom, Ishmael, Moab, Hagarenes, Gebal, Ammon, Amalek, Philistines, Tyrians, Assur. At the time when the psalm was written these nations surrounded Israel. Their territories are occupied today by people who are, for the most part, blood descendants of Abraham, and are called Arabs.

In Old Testament times the people of Israel were surrounded by these alien nations. When they were assailed by these nations, they were protected by God. The prophecy envisages a repetition of these circumstances and makes a plea that God will defend Israel as He did in ancient days.

The stage is set. Israel has again been planted in the midst of hostile nations who are dedicated to her destruction. The prayer of the psalmist has a great relevance today. The

surprise element that this prophetic psalm does not mention (but certain other prophecies do!) is the fact (which we are witnessing today) that

the first phase of the subduing of Arab enemies involves the exploits of aggressive, antichrist elements in Israel. Daniel calls them *the little horn*; Revelation, *the beast*.

Is it just coincidence, do you think, that the names of the enemy nations catalogued in Psalm 83 add up to exactly ten, and that the "nations around" referred to in the prophetic-burden sections both of Isaiah and Jeremiah are approximately ten in number? Also there are approximately ten Arab states surrounding and threatening Israel in the Middle East today.

Sequence

The final phase in the strange relationship between the ten horns and the beast is their united attempt to overthrow Christ (Revelation 17). Working back from this, the next to the last phase would therefore be their destructive campaign against the whore. The alliance between the beast and the ten kings would of course come before this. This implies that the threatening picture of Psalm 83 is still earlier on the divine programme.

The order of events relating to the ten (Arab) kings and the (Jewish) little horn may therefore be as follows (do not miss the implications of the word "may"):

1. The emergence of the Arab states in the latter days.
2. The re-birth of Israel in the midst of territory occupied by Arabs.
3. The hostility of the Arab states (the ten kings) to political Israel (the little horn). Psalm 83 relates to this phase, and it is also implied in Daniel 7:8. We ourselves have been witnessing, and are still witnessing this phase.
4. The conquest of some of the Arab kingdoms by Israel (referred to in Daniel 7:8). This could be thought of as the immediate, but not the ultimate response to the prayer of Asaph and the people of God (Psalm 83) who do not want to see Israel destroyed. Ironically, the Israel who is made strong by God to subdue her enemies is not herself a righteous, Godfearing nation. ("Not for your sakes . . .")
5. The treaty between the ten kings and the beast — between Arabs and Jews — after which the Arabs accept the leadership of Israel (Revelation 17:13).
6. The destruction of the 'whore' organisation — counterfeit Christianity — by Israel and the Arabs (Revelation 17:16,17).
7. The destruction of the rebellious Israel/Arab confederacy by the Lord Jesus Christ (Revelation 17:14).

The beast is the great enemy of the witnesses. Another item must therefore be fitted into the programme -- the witnessing of the two witnesses (who represent a company of saints) to Israel and other nations. This means a period of intense persecution for the saints — even for those who may not be included in the special "witness" category. The evidence for this has

already been discussed. However, the question of where the prophecy of the two witnesses has to be placed in the above programme has yet to be resolved.

It was noted earlier that there is an impressive parallel between Revelation 11 (the chapter concerning the witnesses) and Revelation 13 (where more details are provided concerning the beast). It is evident from Revelation 13 that the beast is exceedingly powerful at the time when the saints are persecuted. This seems to imply that by this time the Arab 'horn' kingdoms have given their power to the beast. Which means that the prophecy of the two witnesses would come after item 5 in the above list. It would have to follow the occasion when the hitherto incompatible children of Abraham, the Jews and the Arabs, join forces.

All nations

It has been seen that an unregenerate Israel is destined to function as a divine battle-axe in the world. How does this happen? Could it not be that the nations come against Israel in support of the Arab States? Events seem to be moving in that direction right now. Powerful nations have already demonstrated their willingness to sell their consciences and discard their alleged principles for the sake of Arab oil.

This means that the uniting of the nations of the world against Israel must be linked with the hostility of the Arabs, and should be placed immediately after it on our list — between items 3 and 4. And what will be the consequences of this world opposition to Israel? Let Zechariah answer:

"Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem. And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it" (12:2,3). This is interesting. First there is a reference to the hostility of "the people round about"; then to "all the people of the earth". The opposition grows dramatically. Yet *all* who try to destroy

Jerusalem are confounded. God works through a nation that has yet to be humbled and purged of its rebels.

Islam

Where does Islam come into all this? Founded by Mahomet, a false prophet who was born nearly six hundred years after Christ, this religion of the Arabs is gaining ground rapidly today. Whereas many Jews treat the religion of their fathers with scant respect, the Arabs are fanatically loyal to Mahomet. One could never imagine the Arabs abandoning their religion when they unite with Israel. Instead, they could, perhaps, find a worthy place for their Jewish brethren of the latter days, within the framework of their religion. After all, they share the same father, Abraham, and the same antipathy to Christianity; and some of the great men of Israel are already given a place of honour in the Koran.

The two-horned beast of the earth — also called the false prophet — is the publicity organisation of the Israeli beast. Two horns: could they represent the interests of Jews and Arabs in this aggressive confederacy of the last days?

The repentance of a remnant

The repentance of Israel is also referred to in Zechariah 12:

"And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn" (verse 10).

It will, presumably, come as a result of the ministry of the witnesses and will concern a remnant. The issue will be of one of allegiance — to Christ or the beast.

Ezekiel 38 — a different prophecy

The confederacy of Ezekiel 38:2-6 (involving Magog, Meshech, Tubal, Persia, Ethiopia, Libya, Gomer, Togarmah) is not to be equated with the ten kings. From Psalm 83, and from the relationship of the ten to Israel, as indicated in Daniel, it can be seen that these nations are descended from Shem, whereas the nations of Ezekiel 38 are descended from Japheth, as Genesis 10:2-4 reveals. The Gogian invasion comes later.

A fuller programme

Here, to conclude this chapter and the first section of this book, is a fuller programme — all submitted very tentatively, of course:

1. The emergence of the Arab states.
2. The re-birth of Israel in the midst of Arab territory.
3. The hostility of the ten (Arab) kings to Israel (the little horn).
4. Many nations support the Arabs and invade Israel.
5. A brief period of intense suffering for Israel — a "deadly wound".
6. Contrary to all human expectations, Israel defeats both the Arabs and the international army and annexes three Arab kingdoms — the deadly wound is healed.
7. The Arabs accept the leadership of Israel.
8. The ministry of the witnesses.
9. The repentance of a remnant in Israel.
10. The suppression of the witnesses by the beast.
11. The vindication of the witnesses.
12. The seventh trumpet — the Lord takes the kingdom and rules in the midst of his enemies.
13. Vial judgments on the beast organisation.

14. The destruction of "Babylon" by Israel and the Arabs.
15. The destruction of the rebellious Israel/Arab confederacy — the beast and the ten horns — by the Lord Jesus Christ.
16. Kingdom blessings in Israel.
17. The Gogian invasion and the annihilation of the Gogian host.
18. The kingdom extends to the rest of the world.
19. God is "all in all".

References

1. Luke 21.-24; Rev. 11:2

11 The Book of Life

In the second section of this book we delve more deeply into the book of Revelation itself, looking for patterns and structural features, and also taking note of the lessons concerning discipleship. Those who have already discovered, by their own research, what a fascinating book the Apocalypse is, would probably have preferred Part Two to have come first. Indeed, this would have been more logical: but as explained in the INTRODUCTION, there were other considerations.

For the most part, the conclusions presented in this section are not dependent on those already discussed. They can be judged on their own supporting evidence.

The author's prayer is that this study will stimulate interest and provide suggestions that will help to open up the Lord's last message to his people.

The spiritual content of Revelation

The Lord Jesus is referred to as a lamb no less than 27 times in the Apocalypse. This is an insistent reminder that the Lord's sacrificial work is relevant all the time, and that exhortation in Revelation is not confined to the seven letters.

Revelation is full of spiritual instruction. Devotional themes, woven into the prophetic messages, are a part of the course of instruction that is designed to prepare us for the great day.

The theme relating to the book of life is a good example of a thought sequence that provides both factual knowledge and exhortation.

There are two great prophetic climaxes in Revelation — in chapters 11 and 20. In the first of these the opening of the book of life is implied; in the second, it is spoken of explicitly. Our purpose now is to survey the sequences that lead to the occasion when this book of destiny is opened:

The seven-sealed book

The story begins in chapter 4. John is invited to go through an open door into heaven. As readers, we are privileged to share his experience and go with him.

We find ourselves in a temple.¹ The central figure is the Almighty Himself, to whom the words are addressed: "Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

God is represented (in chapter 5) as holding in His right hand a seven-sealed book. The proposition submitted here is that this is the book of life. The evidence for this proposition will be discussed shortly; for the moment let us assume that it is true, and see where it takes us.

Only the Lamb is worthy to open the book. The seals, which are all on the outside, have to be removed — all of them — before the book can be opened.

The servants of God have been waiting for their reward. Now that the Lamb has overcome and holds in his hand the book of destiny, their waiting period is over — or so they think. Not so! All seven seals have to be removed from the scroll before it can be opened. Although the Lamb has overcome, certain things have to happen first; various processes — appropriately represented as seals that prevent the immediate opening of the book — have to run their course. Horsemen must go forth and pursue their different purposes; souls under the altar, whose blood cries out for vengeance, must wait until further martyrs have endured; earthquakes and heaven-quakes portend the removal of all human institutions, and human pride must be prostrated; there must be a period of silence in heaven. Thus we are led on to the dramatic climax, when all sequences have been fulfilled and when the Lord Jesus Christ is seated on the great white throne. Then the book of life is opened, and quick and dead are judged.

All the seals are on the outside.

All the seals must be broken before the scroll can be opened.

The evidence

Now to the evidence that the seven-sealed book is the book of life:

1. Here is a book of immense consequence. The Almighty holds it in His hand; it is sealed with seven seals; John weeps greatly because no one is able to respond to the angelic appeal; the Lamb alone is worthy to open the book; three songs of praise are sung — ultimately involving all creation.

2. Prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel were permitted to unfold prophetic programmes. Yet only the Lord Jesus is worthy to open *this* book. It must therefore be more than a book of prophecy.

3. The One who opens the book is described as "a Lamb as it had been slain". Is it mere coincidence that the book is referred to as "*the Lamb's* book of life" (21:27), and also as "the book of life of *the Lamb slain*" (13:8)?

4. Think now of the words: "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood . . ." (5:9). It is the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus and his redemptive work that qualify him to open the book. How appropriate if this book contains the names of the redeemed.

5. The next piece of evidence should be followed carefully. *The reader is earnestly requested to do this.*

For the moment we shall put out of our minds the proposition that this is the book of life. Here is a seven-sealed scroll. Clearly it is a book of extraordinary importance, but (let us say) its contents are a mystery to us.

We note that three songs of praise are connected in some way with this book. The first is sung by the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders, when the Lamb is found worthy, *but before the book is opened*. The second song is sung by a great company of angels ("Ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands" — verse 11); and the occasion

could well be when the book — whatever it contains! — is opened. The third song is sung by all creation ("every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them ..." — verse 13); and the occasion would surely be when God's purpose with all created things — with which, in some way, this book has to do — is completely fulfilled.

The suggestion has been made that the second song of praise was sung by the great company of angels on the occasion of the opening of this great, mysterious book. Now see the significance of the fact, clearly demonstrated by reference to other scriptures, that this great company of angels is assembled *when the book of life is opened*. This provides an excellent reason for believing that the book in question is the book of life.

It remains then to provide the evidence that the second song of praise, referred to in Revelation 5:11,12, is sung on the occasion when the book of life is opened. It is based on links with two other passages: Daniel 7:10 and Revelation 20:11,12. The words of all three passages are set out here for comparison:

"And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb ..." (Revelation 5:11,12).

"I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit ... A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened" (Daniel 7:9,10). "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Revelation 20:11,12). First, notice the similarity of language in Revelation 5:11 and Daniel 7:10. The reference to thousand thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand is common to them both. Evidently these are two accounts of the same occasion.

Now notice the link between Daniel 7:10 and Revelation 20:12. The expression, "the books were opened" is common to them both. So Daniel 7:10 and Revelation 20:11,12 *also* seem to be two accounts of the same occasion.

The rest hardly needs saying. Because the passage from Revelation 5:11,12 refers to the same occasion as Daniel 7:9,10, and because Daniel 7:9,10 refers to the same occasion as Revelation 20: 11,12 — it follows that Revelation 5:11,12 and Revelation 20:11, 12 are two descriptions of the same occasion.

And such an occasion! Revelation 20:12 provides the extra information that *this is the occasion when the book of life is opened* — "••• and another book was opened, which is the book of life . . •" This provides us with almost mathematical proof that Revelation 5:11,12 is the occasion of the opening of the book of life. Already we have seen that the chapter is concerned with a book of immense consequence. This is altogether understandable because it is the book of life.

This means that the seven-sealed book contains the names of the redeemed.

A difficulty?

It may be thought that the information given in Revelation 6 does not support the conclusion that the seven-sealed book is the book of life. According to Revelation 6 (some would contend) the seven-sealed book contains the four horsemen, the souls under the altar, etc., and not the names of the redeemed.

An answer to this objection has already been provided - on page 127. It was explained that although the Lamb has overcome, certain things have to happen first; certain processes, that are fittingly represented as seals that prevent the immediate opening of the book, have first to run their course.

A word here about the mechanics of sealing and unsealing. It will be appreciated that the book is a scroll. We are told that John saw a book, sealed with seven seals. Certainly it reads as if he saw the seven seals, and this would only have been possible if they were all on the outside.² This would, after all, have been the straightforward way of sealing a scroll. I knew a person who once tried to seal a home-made scroll with seven seals, only one of which was on the outside. He confessed that he got into great difficulties, ultimately producing a "very lumpy" scroll.

Now consider. Despite the fact that Scripture and common sense point to the conclusion that all the seals would have been on the outside, those who regard the horsemen of chapter 6 as a part of the contents of the scroll have to reject this view. According to them, there is only one seal on the outside — only one visible seal. When this outer seal is removed, and the scroll is unrolled to a small extent, a horseman on a white horse is seen — presumably it is thought of as a vivid picture within the book. The partial unrolling of the scroll exposes the second seal, which has hitherto been buried beneath the outer convolutions of the scroll. When the second seal is opened, a second horse appears; and access is then provided to the third seal. And so on ...

This will not do. Because all the seven seals are on the outside

of the scroll, *all* have to be removed before the scroll can be unrolled. For this reason the prophetic processes of Revelation 6 are not to be regarded as the contents of the seven-sealed scroll. Instead, they are to be thought of as things that have to happen before the scroll — the book of life — is opened; and they are set in motion by the unsealing operations. These processes bridge the gulf between the time when the Lamb is found worthy to open the book of life and the time when the book is actually opened.

The four horsemen

When the first seal is loosed from the book of life, one of the four living creatures says, "Come".³ The removal of the seal is the signal for the call, and in response a horseman appears, riding on a white horse. (Remember: the scroll itself — the book of life — is still rolled up.)

Then the second seal is removed from the book of life. The second living creature says, "Come". A second horseman appears. And then a third; and a fourth.

The Scriptures themselves explain the symbolism. From Zechariah 1:10 we learn that horsemen are symbols of those "whom the Lord hath sent to walk to and fro through the earth". Consistent with this is the statement in Zechariah 6:5 that the horses of Zechariah's vision, there described, are "the four spirits [or winds] of the heavens, which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth." Here then are instruments or agents of various kinds, subject to God's over-ruling authority, who affect the earth in various ways. The horsemen are responsible for the conditions in the areas over which they march; the colour of the horses and the other details are clues to the ways in which they affect the earth.

The theory that the four horsemen are to be thought of as representing four consecutive periods of history is without scriptural foundation. There is no indication that one horseman completes his mission before the next begins. On the contrary, the fact that we read of two of them much later in the book of Revelation and much later in time indicates that their careers run roughly parallel. Of course one can dominate for a while, and seem to eclipse the activity of another, but they are all there, pursuing their courses.

The fact that similar horsemen are seen in Zechariah implies that the conditions associated with their activities are not restricted to the period extending from the time when the Lamb is found worthy to open the book to the time when the book is opened. They have been before, and there are indications that at least one of the horsemen will continue his work for some time after the book of life has been opened. But the important fact in this context is that, though the saints might have imagined *immediate* and dramatic changes when the Lamb's worthiness is established, there must be a waiting period corresponding to the time when the horsemen fulfil their missions.

Scripture can help us to understand the details. The first horseman is mounted on a white horse. Chapter 19 also speaks of a rider on a white horse, and we should look for connections between the two passages. Because there are differences of detail between the 'white-horse' visions of chapters 6 and 19, some expositors have, unfortunately, missed these connections. It is expressly stated that the first horseman of chapter 6 goes forth conquering and to conquer; and in chapter 19 we see the final phase of the conquering career of this horseman. Because of his conquests he wears many crowns; he is followed by an army on white horses, and together they destroy the beast and the false prophet and their armies.

One important detail concerning the white horse could easily be overlooked: "He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" (19:15). The figure is an Old Testament one — Isaiah and Joel come to mind;⁴ and it is also referred to in Revelation 14. It is an operation associated with the conquering career of the rider of the white horse. This explains the mysterious words of 14:20: "And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, *even unto the horse bridles ...*"

There is a reminder in chapter 19 (in a context concerning the bride, the Lamb's wife) that white stands for righteousness — verse 8. The same chapter also defines the mission of the rider of the white horse: "And I saw ... a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, *and in righteousness he doth judge and make war*" (verse 11). This symbol therefore means judgment and war by a righteous agent.

A word now about the fourth horse. In some respects this is easier to understand than the second and third, to which we shall return. The rider of the fourth horse is called Death, and (it is stated) Hell follows. This grisly team is at large and at work until "death and hell were

cast into the lake of fire" (20:14). Needless to say, death and hell have been at work ever since the transgression in Eden. John has already been reminded of their existence by the Lord's claim that he has the keys of hell and of death. But it is appropriate to be reminded of their continued existence,

despite the fact that the Lamb now holds in his hand the book of life. The "king of terrors" is the last enemy that will be destroyed. The Lord's words to John, recorded in Revelation 1:18, supply valuable information about the fourth horseman and his follower: "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." There are two claims and two keys. Of himself the Lord claims

1) that he has come forth from the grave; and 2) that he will never die again. In other words: 1) he has been raised from the dead, and 2) he has been made immortal. By using the two keys he can do for others what God has done for him — 1) raise them from the dead; 2) make them immortal.

Hell therefore refers to physical death — the key of hell unlocks the grave. *Death* refers to mortality — the dying condition. By using the second key, the Lord is able to release people from the prison of their mortal natures and enable them to live for ever.

Since the same two words, death and hell, are paired together in other parts of Revelation, consistency requires that they should be understood in the same way. So the grim symbolism of the fourth seal portrays Mortality stalking the earth. And the inevitable consequence is that physical death destroys men, putting them into their graves: Hell follows hard behind.

It is interesting to observe that these killers not only work by 'natural' means, but a fourth part of their work is accounted for by the destructive power associated with the other horsemen: "And power was given unto them [death and hell]... to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth"(6:8).

It may be fitting to make the point here that there is bound to be a tentative element about the exposition of some of these details relating to the seals. There is great scope for further research. But it would be unreasonable to reject the main thesis because of differences of opinion concerning some of these details. The main thesis does not stand or fall according to one's interpretation of all the details of the seal prophecies.

What then of the other horsemen? The rider of the second (the red) horse is given power to take peace from the earth. It is also stated that he is given a great sword. The Lord provides a clue to the meaning of this symbol by his words in Matthew 10:34-37: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father . . . And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me ..."

The Lord foresaw that there would be division and bloodshed as a consequence of his preaching. Since people would not expect the preaching of peace by the Prince of Peace to result in fighting, the Lord has to explain that although peace is the *ultimate* result, in the meantime there will be war. This is why he finds it necessary to say: "Think not that I am come to send peace: I came not to send peace but a sword." This is represented by the symbol of the second horseman who is given power to take peace from the earth.

In line with this are the Lord's words in Matthew 24:9,10 (the 'Olivet' prophecy):

"Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another."

The Revelation itself provides an example of the work of the rider of the red horse — in the persecution of the saints by the beast:

"And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them" (11:7).

"And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations" (13:7).

Likewise, the third horseman would seem to be a fitting symbol of famine and the pestilence that so often comes in its train. This is also foreseen in the 'Olivet' prophecy of Matthew 24. But (reverting to the third seal) despite the shortage of natural food, there is to be no limiting of spiritual provision, appropriately symbolised, in accordance with scripture usage, by oil and wine.⁵ The period of hunger comes to an end when the Lamb is enthroned — see Revelation 7:15-17.

"The souls under the altar"

The fifth seal recalls the fact that, under the Law of Moses, the blood of sacrificial animals was poured out at the base of the altar.⁶ It is also a reminder of the shed blood of Abel, that called out for vengeance.⁷ The martyrs of the fifth seal are not themselves calling for vengeance. They have died, and their forfeited lives demand God's judgment on the murderers. Because these people have already been slain, they belong to an era that is passing, or has passed. They would seem, therefore, to be faithful people who have been killed before the closing of the door of opportunity for the Jews.

Notice that they are killed "for the testimony which they held." The word here translated "testimony" is *marturia* — the Greek word associated with witnessing. These men are therefore witnesses, but they will not receive their reward until other witnesses have also been slain. Indeed, the book of life is not to be opened yet!

The sixth seal

"And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake" (6:12).

From Hebrews 12:27 we learn that an earthquake "signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken." Here then is an impressive symbol, a dramatic prophecy of things that will be swept away. Notice that it is more than an earthquake — it is also a heaven-quake. The words that follow in Revelation 6 speak of the removal of all human institutions, all human opposition to the will of God. Thus man is humbled when he is brought to that fearful confrontation with God and the Lamb, "for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"

Silence in heaven

"And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour" (8:1).

The seventh seal is frankly difficult to understand. Because John writes about the seven trumpets immediately after the silence of the seventh seal, it is sometimes asserted that the seventh seal 'con-tains' the seven trumpets. Whereas there is evidence that the seventh trumpet prepares the way for the seven vials, there is no evidence that the seventh seal contains the seven trumpets. (There is, however, considerable evidence that the operations that follow the sounding of the trumpets are those operations summarized in the *sixth* seal.⁸)

The silence in heaven contrasts with the thunderings and voices that proceed from the throne (e.g. Revelation 4:5). The suggestion offered here is that the silence signifies the apparent holding back of God's help when the saints are praying and waiting for the fulfilment of their prayers; and the patient waiting that is the lot of all God's true servants. "How long, O Lord?" was, in a figure, the cry of slain martyrs when the fifth seal was opened. It is also the earnest prayer of those who are still alive — who live in the world, but are not of it. With the Psalmist they plead: "Keep not silence, O Lord."⁹ Of course the Lord is not slack concerning His promise: the very waiting provides an opportunity for God's servants to be sealed and made secure. Is there therefore a connection between the silence in heaven and the holding back of the winds (chapter 7) until the 144,000 are sealed in their foreheads?¹⁰

The climax to a great theme

The theme relating to the book of life is a serialised drama. The beginning of chapter 8 refers to the opening of the seventh seal, but the book of life is not yet opened. This climax is described in chapter 20:11-15:

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

The One who sits on the great white throne is described as him "from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them." This is what happens when the sixth seal is removed. See how the sixth seal brings us straight to this great time of decision. It will be remembered that the horsemen also represent processes that bridge the great gulf of time and bring us up to the time of the end. Likewise the martyrdom referred to in the fifth seal is not restricted to one period. Some martyrs have indeed been killed — that period is over: but others are yet to be killed. The sixth seal predicts the removal of human institutions. Thus man, prostrated before the majesty of the Almighty, is brought to judgment.

The scene is an impressive one. Resurrection. Judgment. The books are opened — would this refer to the Scriptures, the basis of judgment? At all events the dead are judged out of those

things written in the books. Another book is opened — *the* book — the book of life! All whose names are not written in the book of life are cast into the lake of fire — a figure for complete, irrevocable destruction.

Chapter 21 completes the story: "And I saw a new heaven, and a new earth ..."

The relevance of the seal prophecies

There is a great lesson to be learned from the 'book of life' theme. It provides a constant reminder of the fact that the Lord knows those who are His. In the graphic language of the Apocalypse, the names of God's people are written in the book of life from the foundation of the world.

No names are added to this book: those who are called are already inscribed there. But there are several intimations of the sober fact that the names of those who act unworthily may be blotted out of the book of life. Many are called, but few are chosen.

The book of life is sealed up. Although the worthiness of the Lamb is established, the book is not instantly unrolled. There is a lesson in this too. The book is kept rolled up until the faith of the saints has been tested. The overall impression that one gets when witnessing the unsealings is one of trouble, suffering, martyrdom, political upheaval, destruction; though there is consolation in the thought that a righteous judge is also riding forth, and that he must ultimately prevail.

Jew and Greek

All diligent readers of Scripture will agree that the language of the seals is to a great extent the language of the Olivet prophecy. It will also be agreed that the Olivet prophecy is concerned with two sets of "last days" — the last days of *Jewish* opportunity, and the last days of *Gentile* opportunity. It should not be surprising therefore to discover that although there is a continuous element in the seal prophecies, they have a special relevance to these two end-periods. In each case the righteous judge executes decisive judgment on people whose cup of wickedness is full; in each case famine and pestilence prevail; there are Jewish martyrs whose blood calls for vengeance and there are Christian martyrs, drawn from Gentile stock, whose death also demands the vengeance of God.

Students of prophecy have not been able to agree about the application of the prophecy of the sixth seal. It bears convincing resemblance to words that are applied to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, and the language is also very obviously language that is elsewhere applied to the end of the times of the Gentiles. There is no need for any conflict: the sixth seal applies to both times. The theme is removal — *everything* that stands in the way of God's eternal purpose is removed. First comes the destruction of iniquitous Jerusalem, and ultimately the destruction of the kingdoms of this world.

References and Notes

1. The 'temple' theme is discussed briefly in Part 2, chapter 12.
2. Since there were no punctuation marks in the original Greek manuscripts, an alternative reading of Revelation 5:1 is "... a book written within, and on the backside sealed with seven

seals" — in other words, written within and sealed without. This is an additional point of interest, but the interpretation offered does not depend upon it.

3. Most authorities omit the "and *see*" of the AV.

4. Isaiah 63:1-6; Joel 3:13

5. See Matthew 25:3 and Matthew 26:27,28.

6. Leviticus 1:5

7. Genesis 4.-10

8. This theme is developed in the next chapter — Part 2, chapter 12.

9. Psalms 28:1; 35:22; 83:1; 109:1

10. This theme is developed in Part 2, chapter 13.

12 The Patterns of the Apocalypse

We turn our attention now to some of the structural features of the book of Revelation. The serious student should, of course, *begin* his personal study of the book by trying to understand its complex patterns; and then, as the structural framework is taking shape, an attempt should be made to interpret detail and fit it into this framework.

Although this method has been adopted in the study that lies behind this exposition, the order has been reversed in this presentation for reasons explained in the *Introduction*.

The pursuit of sequences and relationships in a book as complex as Revelation calls for persistency and a refusal to be discouraged. The satisfaction of discovering hidden designs and of knowing that they are there to help God's servants to understand things that must shortly come to pass, will more than repay a little perseverance.

Here then are some of the features of the book.

The heavenly temple

Chapter 4 begins with the statement that John beholds a door opened in heaven. He goes through this door, and in spirit we accompany him. We witness an awesome spectacle that includes: *A throne* — reminiscent of the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant;

A jasper and a sardine stone — recalling the high priest's breastplate bearing precious stones, the jasper and the sardine stones are the first and the last stones (Exodus 28:15-20); *Twenty-four elders* — corresponding, perhaps, to the 24 orders of priests (as instituted by David) who served in the temple (1 Chronicles 24:4-18);

Seven lamps of fire — a reminder of the branched candlestick with its seven lamps (Exodus 25:31-37);

A sea of glass — like the molten *sea* of Solomon's temple (2 Chronicles 4:2-5);

Four living creatures — resembling the cherubim of Ezekiel's visions (Ezekiel 10:20) and recalling the fact that cherubic

figures were an important feature of the tabernacle and the temple.

Evidently we are in a heavenly temple, for there are so many things in this scene that bring to our minds the tabernacle and the temple of the Old Testament. A reminder may be appropriate here that, like nearly everything in the book of Revelation, this majestic spectacle is described through symbols. We must try to sense the reality that lies behind the symbolism.

Moses would have seen the same heavenly temple when he ascended Mount Sinai. He made a copy of it in accordance with the insistent injunction: "See that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount" (cf. Hebrews 8:5). The tabernacle in the wilderness was therefore a pattern "of things in the heavens" (Hebrews 9:23) — an inanimate miniature of the living reality that involved the Almighty and the angels in heaven.

John witnessed what Moses had seen many years before. That is why the reality that John witnessed contains so many elements that recall the "copy" made by Moses. Likewise Elijah and Elisha caught glimpses of the cherubim. From Eden onwards the function of the cherubim has been to protect the holy things for the holy people.¹ When Isaiah saw the Lord "high and lifted up" (Isaiah 6), and when Ezekiel saw visions of God, they also glimpsed the glory of God's heavenly host; and their descriptions remind us of features of the temple into which John was called.

It is God's intention to establish His kingdom on earth "as it is in heaven". In Revelation we are privileged to witness the final scenes of this divine operation. Instructions are issued and emissaries are sent forth from the heavenly throne. Man is abased and God is exalted.

The grand climax is expressed by the announcement: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men" (21:3). Henceforward such things as John had witnessed in heaven can be seen on earth.

The four living creatures would seem to be a symbol of the powerful, protective angelic host, and the four and twenty elders symbolise the saints. There is a clear connection between the words of the heavenly vision ("And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold" — 4:4) and three sets of promises made to the saints: "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment" (3:5); "to him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne . . ." (3:21); "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (2:10).

But what are the saints doing in heaven — if indeed the twenty-four elders are saints? It will help if, instead of regarding heaven as a location remote from this earth, we think of it as a term applicable wherever God's blessings are enjoyed by His people. Thus in Ephesians 2 Paul speaks of the believers as having been raised to heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Remember that he is describing their *present* estate.

The heavenly temple scene is the continuing vision of the Apocalypse. It is the backcloth against which most of the action takes place. This is a fascinating theme, and it would be interesting to follow it through in detail. However, -we shall restrict ourselves now to two passages, one from chapter 11 and the other from chapter 15:

"And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ . . . And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail" (11:15,19). "And after that I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened: and the seven angels came out of the temple, having the seven plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles. And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power; and no man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled" (15:5-8).

Sequence

See how these two passages help us to place things in their right order. The temple is opened *after* the sounding of the seventh trumpet — this is stated in the passage from Revelation 11. And the fact that the vial-bearing angels come out of the *open* temple shows that the seven vials follow the sounding of the seventh trumpet.²

There is confirmatory evidence for this conclusion. After the sounding of the seventh trumpet the words are pronounced: "The nations were angry, *and thy wrath is come*". How does God's wrath come? The seven vials are filled up with the wrath of God (15:7). See too how lightnings, voices, thunderings, earthquake and hail are features of the seventh trumpet (11:19) and the seventh vial (16:18,21).

Consistent with this sequence are the facts relating to the beast. The first reference to the beast in Revelation is in chapter 11 in a context relating to the witnesses. The action of this chapter takes place immediately before the sounding of the seventh trumpet. Then the seventh trumpet sounds and the vials of God's wrath are poured out on a beast-worshipping world.

Problems to be resolved

The Lord's return, the resurrection, judgment and glorification of the saints, and the establishment of the kingdom have to be fitted into this sequence. But how?

When discussing the prophecy concerning the two witnesses, the proposition was made that the 'rainbow' angel of chapter 10 represented the Lord Jesus. This means that the Lord appears *to the witnesses* before he reveals himself to the world. His coming is not as yet apparent. Wickedness prevails, and the people of God suffer.

The sounding of the seventh trumpet announces that, as far as the waiting saints are concerned, there will be time no longer. When the seventh angel *begins* to sound, the mystery of God is finished (10:7). From this it can be confidently inferred that from now on the true servants of God are exempt from all persecution and from the painful consequences of the outpouring of the vials.

Are the saints made immortal as soon as the seventh trumpet sounds? This seems unlikely for the following reason: after the vials comes the destruction of Babylon, the great whore — the unfaithful wife; then, *after* the destruction of Babylon comes the marriage of the Lamb and his bride, the true church, which probably implies the glorification of the saints.

Yet the interval of time cannot be long. The impression is conveyed that the vials are a series of swift and devastating judgments, leaving no time or opportunity for repentance.

"Behold, I come as a thief"

Even after the sounding of the seventh trumpet, the unfaithful and unbelieving are in darkness. They do not know what is happening, and the day of the Lord comes to them as a thief in the night: "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief" (1 Thessalonians 5:4).

This helps us to understand Revelation 16:15: "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame." At first sight these words seem out of sequence. The seventh trumpet has sounded; six out of the

seven vials have been poured out; the time of warnings is over; the Lord has come — why then this reference to the thief-like advent?

It is not difficult to see that these words are not a part of the prophetic sequence of the chapter. Whereas the events connected with the vials are written in the past tense ("And the first went. . ."; "And I heard . . ."; "And there came . . ."; "And he gathered . . ."), this passage is in the present tense ("Behold, I *come* . . ."). Clearly the passage is a parenthesis, and in both the RV and the RSV the words are actually put in brackets. This means that the Lord does not return at this point in the outworking of the vial prophecies. Either he is yet to come or he has already returned. The suggestion is that, in terms of this prophecy, the Lord has already returned, and these events are the sequel; but the beast-worshipping community is so ignorant of this great fact that even at this late hour the beast and the false prophet are inducing their worshippers to rally and do battle against the unknown enemy. It is as if the Lord should say quietly to the discerning reader as he is reading this prophecy of post-adventual happenings: "See how these foolish, ignorant people illustrate the truth of my assurance that my coming should be thief-like. Be warned, for when the time comes you could be deceived in the same way."

The programme of the sixth seal

Our object is to follow the sequences and discover the patterns of the Apocalypse. Returning to the seals, it will be recalled that various movements, various processes, are set in motion by the removing of the seals from the book of life. These movements bridge the time gulf between the Lord's ascension and the occasion of the opening of the book, and in some instances go beyond this occasion.

Specially interesting is the sixth seal. The main feature is an earthquake. This is a dramatised prophecy of the removal of human institutions.³ The things to be removed are mentioned summarily in Revelation 6:

"And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" (verses 12-17). The details of these removals are supplied in the trumpet series, where they are set out as a programme. This means that the sixth seal is the composite one that contains the trumpet prophecies — the *sixth* seal and not the seventh.

This will be better appreciated if features common to the sixth seal and the seven trumpets are set out side by side:

Sixth Seal	Seven Trumpets
(Revelation 6: 12-17)	

great earthquake	great earthquake (11:13) another earthquake (11:19)
sun black	third part of sun smitten (8: 12)
moon as blood	third part of moon smitten (8:12)
stars fall from heaven	"there fell a great star from heaven" (8:10) third part of stars smitten (8:12)
the great day of his wrath	"thy wrath is come" (11:18)

This is by no means the whole story. It has already been observed that the sounding of the seventh trumpet introduces the seven vials. If therefore the sixth seal is a summary of the trumpet operations, and if the seventh trumpet introduces the vial operations, it follows that the sixth seal should also 'contain' the seven vials. We should expect to find common features in the sixth seal and the seven vials. And we do!

Sixth Seal	Seven Vials
great earthquake	great earthquake (16:18)
sun black	darkness in kingdom of beast
islands moved	every island fled away (16:20)
mountains moved	mountains were not found (16:20)
the great day of his wrath	the vials of the wrath of God (16:1)

Putting all this together, the sixth of the seals that binds up the book of life is concerned with various demolition and removal operations that are set out in detail in the trumpet and vial series. The trumpet series, as we have seen, brings us to the beginning of the kingdom. The initiative is now in the Lord's hands. This finds fulfilment in the pouring out of the vials of God's wrath. This prepares the way for the destruction of the great whore, and then the destruction of the beast. Between these two operations, as we discover from Revelation 19, comes the marriage of the Lamb and his true bride (which probably implies resurrection and immortality for the people of God).

The great division

We turn now to another notable feature of the book of Revelation that has been mentioned only briefly and incidentally hitherto: the great division that comes in the middle of the book.

It is not difficult to see that after the climax marked by the sounding of the seventh trumpet, a new start is made in chapter 12. The chapter begins with the words:

"And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars ..." This is followed by:

"And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns ..." (12:3).

Here then is the section of Revelation that is concerned with signs or wonders. (The same Greek word is sometimes translated "sign" and sometimes "wonder".) The signs include the beasts of Revelation 13 and, presumably, the dramatic scenes of chapter 14. Certainly it includes chapters 15 and 16 — the 'vial' chapters — because the vial series is spoken of as a sign:

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

It seems reasonable to infer that the destruction of the whore and of the beast (the subject matter of chapters 17 to 19) also comes in the 'signs' section of Revelation, not only because of the way that the prophecies follow on, but also because an angel associated with the vials speaks to John about the judgment of the *yhere: "*And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will show unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters*" (17:1).

Indeed, there are reasons for thinking that the 'signs' section may extend to the end of the book of Revelation. But this is not a subject for dogmatism.

Complementary prophecies

Careful reading reveals that the contents of the 'signs' section run parallel with the 'trumpet' section. Both sections cover the same prophetic ground, but with different emphasis. Thus they complement each other, and together give us a more comprehensive picture of things that must be hereafter.

To see the intriguing possibilities, let us first take note of some of the more obvious parallels between the trumpets and the signs.

Trumpets (Chapters 8 -11)	Signs (Chapters 12 onwards)
A great star falls from heaven (8:10)	The dragon is cast out of heaven (12:9)
A third part of the stars is smitten (8:12)	The dragon's tail casts down a third of the stars (12:4)
"Woe, woe, woe to the inhab-itors of the earth" (8:13)	"Woe to the inhabiters of the earth" (12:12)
The beast that comes out of the bottomless pit . . .	The beast that comes out of the sea . . .

... makes war	... makes war
against the witnesses	against the saints
and overcomes them	and overcomes them

...	...
... they of the	... power over
people and kindreds	kindreds and
and tongues ...	tongues and nations

...	...
... they that dwell	... all that dwell
upon the earth...	upon the earth ...
(11:7-10)	(13:1-8)
Resurrection and	Resurrection and
judgment (11:18)	judgment (20:4 and
	11-13)

"Thy wrath is come"	The vials of God's
(11:18)	wrath

Temple of God	(chapters 15,16)
opened (11:19)	

Lightnings, voices,	Temple of God
thunder-ings,	opened (15:5)
earthquake and hail	Voices, thunders,
(11:19)	earthquake and hail
	(16:18,21)

This feature has already been taken into account in the chapter concerning the witnesses; also earlier in this chapter, when looking at the evidence that the seventh trumpet contains the seven vials.

And there are other intriguing possibilities ...

References and Notes

1. Genesis 3:24

2. It is important to distinguish between words spoken by those who are actors in the Apocalyptic drama and words that describe events. After the announcement, "And the seventh angel sounded", two sets of spoken words are recorded — the first by "great voices in heaven", and the second by the 24 elders. However, the *narrative* goes straight on to verse 19 and reveals that the temple of God is now open. *This* is the immediate consequence of the sounding of the seventh trumpet, and prepares the way for the outpouring of the seven vials.

3. See Part 2, chapter 11, *The sixth seal*.

13 The Trumpet Judgments

Recapitulation

A quick summary, first, of the conclusions that have already been stated regarding the trumpets.

1. The sixth seal is a summary of the trumpet programme.
2. The seventh trumpet introduces the vial series.
3. A new section of Revelation, the 'signs' section, begins with chapter 12. The signs run parallel with the trumpets.

Another impressive parallel

Careful readers of Revelation will already have noted a parallel between the trumpets and the vials. Here is a table of comparison. In each case, only a key word or phrase is set down. Readers might like to do their own checking: Revelation 8—11 concerns the trumpets, and chapter 16 the vials.

Trumpets	Vials
1st. earth	earth
2nd. sea (salt water)	sea (salt water)
3rd. rivers and fountains (fresh water)	rivers and fountains (fresh water)
4th. sun, moon, stars	sun, moon, stars
5th. sun and air darkened	kingdom of beast full of darkness
6th. River Euphrates	River Euphrates
7th. "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord"	"It is done"

Significant differences

Despite the impressive parallel, there are significant differences:

1. Repeatedly the word "third" occurs in the trumpet series (" . . . and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars . . ." etc.) This fractional feature does not apply to the vials. The devastating effect of these bowls of divine wrath affects the whole.

2. The consequences of the seven trumpet blasts cover a long period. Warnings and encouragements are interspersed. In contrast, the vials come in rapid succession. Their finality is implied by the words, "the seven *last* plagues".

3. Though providentially directed, the trumpet judgments are effected through a variety of agents, some of them evidently human. The sound of the trumpet is the signal for a destructive operation to begin. The vials, however, are all poured out by angels. (It has been suggested, however, by some expositors, that these angels represent saints because they are clothed in white linen.)

4. Because the seventh trumpet marks the end of the waiting period of the saints, the people of God do not share in any way in the suffering that follows the pouring out of the vials. Indeed, they are vindicated by these judgments. (See Revelation 16:5, 6, 7.)

5. This leads to the conclusion that the trumpets are sounded before the advent (the seventh announcing the Lord's presence). The vials, which follow, are post-adventual.

The sealing of the 144,000

Now let us try to fit the trumpet series into a larger 'Revelation' context.

A useful clue is provided in chapter 7:

"And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads" (verses 1,2, 3).

Immediately after this, details are given about the sealing of the 144,000.

Turning now to chapter 8, which concerns the first four trumpets, it is interesting to observe that the first two trumpets "hurt" those things which were protected until the sealing had been completed. The first trumpet hurts the earth and the trees, and the second, the sea:

"The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the

third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up. And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood; and the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died . . ." (8:7-9). The fact that the destructive operations introduced by the first two trumpets are held back until the sealing of the 144,000 means that the sealing of the 144,000 comes before the trumpets. The servants of God are marked before the judgments begin.

A sealing operation is described in Ezekiel 9. This chapter speaks of six men, each with a "destroying weapon" in his hand, being sent to slay the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Before them goes a man "clothed with white linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side". His instructions are: "Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon

the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof." The other six are told: "Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: slay utterly old and young, both maids and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary" (Ezekiel 9:4-6).

Sealing first, then destruction: the parallel between Ezekiel and Revelation is impressive.

Who then are the 144,000 who are sealed? Repeatedly, emphatically, they are declared to be Israelites. The twelve tribes are mentioned, one by one: from each of the tribes 12,000 are sealed. It is not suggested that the numbers are to be taken literally; that there are exactly 12,000 from Manasseh, and not a single one from Dan — though there must be significance in the omissions and the inclusions, and lessons to be learned.

Verse 9 of Revelation 7 presents a marked contrast: "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands . . ." Having *heard* the number of those who were sealed from the tribes of Israel, John now *sees* a great multitude "which no man could number, of all nations . . ." The scope of the gospel preaching has been extended. Paul's words come to mind: "It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46).

Note the three points of contrast between the 144,000 and the "great multitude":

144,000	"great multitude"
1. John "heard"	John "beheld"
2. A specified number (in the symbolic language of the chapter)	"a great multitude, which no man could number"
3. Of the tribes of Israel.	"of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues"

These three points of contrast are sufficient to demonstrate that whereas the 144,000 represent the redeemed of Israel before the door of opportunity was finally closed to them, the "great multitude" represents, as the words imply, the redeemed from all nations.

Isaiah 49 concerns the destiny of both Jews and Gentiles. It is interesting to observe that in the section of Revelation 7 concerning the great multitude there is a quotation (in verses 16,17) from the 'Gentile' section of Isaiah 49: "They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them" (verse 10).

Further reference is made to the 144,000 in Revelation 14. Here they stand with the Lamb upon Mount Zion. Many seem to take it for granted that these are the redeemed of all nations, and would want to argue that the 144,000 of chapter 7 should be understood in the same way.

But is it so obvious? There is evidence that the 144,000 of chapter 14 are also of Israelitish stock. Observe first that they are called "firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb" (14:4) — an expression particularly appropriate for the redeemed of Israel; and then take note of the fact that the harvest (the agricultural imagery is carried through) is spoken of in verse 15 of the same chapter — and no one would question the application of *this* passage to the saints generally.

Judgments on Israel and on her destroyer

Sealing first, then destruction. The proposition therefore is this, the 144,000 should be thought of as the redeemed of Israel who were reconciled to God before the nation was rejected. When the number of God's elect from Israel was completed, judgment descended on the people and the land.

It has been noted that whereas earth, trees and sea were protected before the sealing of the 144,000, they suffer damage after this operation. These acts of devastation are consequences of the sounding of the first two trumpets.

Immediately before the details of the first trumpet are recorded, the following words occur:

"And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thundrings, and lightnings, and an earthquake" (8:5). These words should be compared with those of Ezekiel 10:2 — the chapter that follows the one concerning the marking on the forehead of the righteous in Jerusalem:

"And he spake unto the man clothed with linen, and said, Go in between the wheels, even under the cherub, and fill thine hand with coals of fire from between the cherubims, and scatter them over the city."

Ezekiel and Revelation are still running parallel. In Ezekiel, the Babylonians were the instruments of God's judgments on Israel. In the corresponding judgments of the first trumpet of Revelation, God's instruments of punishment are the Romans. The hail and fire of the first trumpet recall visitations on Sodom and Egypt. Now, however, Jerusalem, the city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, and the land associated with it, are laid waste. What then of the casting of this great mountain burning with fire into the sea? Although Sinai is called "the mount. . . that burned with fire" in Hebrews 12:18, and Sinai is a symbol of the Israel of the Old Covenant, it seems unlikely that the second trumpet is also concerned with the destruction of the Jewish kingdom. This kingdom had virtually lost its independence before the great preaching campaign of the Lord and his apostles, and the fiery judgments of the first trumpet would surely be sufficient to account for the ultimate ruin of this kingdom.

The mountain of the second trumpet is a *great* mountain, and its effect on the sea is immense, turning a third of it into blood and destroying many sea creatures and ships. Here is the antithesis of the creative work of Genesis 1, when land came forth from the sea. It represents the ultimate in divine wrath on a kingdom — "though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea" (Psalm 46:2).

Concerning Babylon, the first destroyer of Israel, the prophet Jeremiah says: "Behold, I am against thee, O destroying mountain, saith the Lord . . . and will make thee a burnt mountain" (51:25).

The suggestion offered here is that now the Roman power, having fulfilled God's purpose in destroying Israel, is itself destroyed. She is the burning mountain that causes such havoc when cast into the sea.

The third and fourth trumpets

The third trumpet concerns a star that falls from heaven. Burning like a lamp, it falls on rivers and fountains of water, making them bitter. Those who drink of these bitter waters die. Lying behind this remarkable piece of symbolism is a bewildering array of related scriptures. Genesis provides the key. The rivers of Eden were life-giving streams for irrigating thirsty land: they were not channels of transport.¹ The rivers and fountains of water that gave life to the world of the apostles and their contemporaries were the words of the gospel message. The call of the gospel is described in Isaiah 55 as an invitation to drink freely, and those who respond are led to living fountains of water, in the language of Revelation 7:17. These life-giving streams were poisoned by something — a falling star!

One gets the impression from Jude (13) that wandering or shooting stars represent false teachers. Here is a star that *falls* from heaven and then poisons the life-giving gospel streams. Following up the recommendation that we should look for parallels between the trumpet and the sign sections of Revelation,² could not this star, cast from heaven to earth, be regarded as the equivalent of the dragon, that old serpent, of Revelation 12, which was cast from heaven to earth? The validity of this parallel is confirmed by the juxtaposition in each setting of the cry of "woe to the in-habitors of the earth". In chapter 8, people drink the water; in chapter 12, the earth swallows a flood (of propaganda?) from the mouth of the dragon/serpent. Of course there is a difference of emphasis. Whereas the dragon similitude invites us to witness the ejection of a political power, the star burning like a lamp suggests religious activity.

What then does this light-bearing star that kills people by poisoning fresh water mean? (Incidentally, it may already have occurred to some readers that this is the opposite of the miracle of Marah.³) Surely this is a brilliant description of the meteoric fall of the religion of the Jews, whose bitter teaching subsequently defiled and destroyed so many potential Christians.

The Jews of New Testament times regarded themselves as God's special people. Unto them had been committed the oracles of God,⁴ though ironically they rejected the man whose coming their prophets had foretold. The words of the Lord Jesus come to mind: "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven" (Luke 10:18). Because these people rejected the Lord Jesus and his apostles, God rejected them and permitted the Romans to destroy the land and many of the people. Yet their religion did not die; and in the immediate sense the graceless Judaism of this discredited people prevailed. The life-giving streams of Christianity were poisoned by Judaism. To use the words of Hebrews 12 (verse 15), a root of bitterness had sprung up and many had been defiled. Two features of this corrupt Christianity were: a host of priestly rituals, and the doctrine of justification by works. Both of these were derived from the Law of Moses — not the law as God had intended it, a system of works designed to lead the people to Christ, and having done so to disappear,⁵ but the law as misunderstood by the Jews who rejected Christ. By making it into a permanent institution they built a barrier between man and God.

In the fourth trumpet there is a reminder that we are now approaching the time of the end. The striking similarity between the Lord's prophecy concerning the last days in Luke 21

(signs in sun, moon and stars, and upon earth distress of nations with perplexity) and the details of the fourth trumpet followed by the cry of woe to the inhabitants of the earth, have been noted.⁶

God is the great, original source of light. Put there by the power of God, the sun was appointed to "rule the day" (Genesis 1:16). According to God's will, the sun was darkened, or commanded to stand still, or caused to go back, or made to look feeble in the presence of a greater glory. It is a fitting symbol of Gentile rulers who are set up or deposed according to the will of the Almighty.⁷ The smiting of the third part of the sun, moon and stars is then an appropriate way of describing disturbances amongst political and ecclesiastical rulers — a characteristic of the last days. To most readers this will not be a new thought.

The first woe

So to the latter-day judgments on scattered Israel that seem to be referred to in the fifth trumpet, or the first woe of Revelation 9. The locusts of the fifth trumpet act in a very un-locust-like way. Unlike real locusts, they have a king.⁸ And, astonishing to relate, they are forbidden to touch grass or any vegetation! Once again the instruction seems to be: "Hurt not the earth, nor the trees" — only on this occasion it is given to locusts.

The land has no immediate relevance. At the time of this prophecy the land of Israel has been laid waste. As a consequence of the first trumpet the third part of trees was burnt up and all green grass (8:7).

The people of Israel have been scattered into other lands, but the locusts pursue them relentlessly. As in Joel, these locusts are a symbol of the enemies of Israel. The thoroughness of locusts is proverbial. The people who have cut themselves off from God — "which have not the seal of God in their foreheads" (9:4) — are persecuted so severely that they seek death. As *a nation*, they want to die. They want to lose their national identity and be assimilated by other nations and thus escape persecution: but this is denied them. It will be recalled that all this happened to the Jews in Europe before and during the second world war. The process of assimilation had gone a very long way in Germany where Jewish persecution was so severe.

The second woe

"One woe is past, and behold, there come two woes more hereafter" (9:12). Events move on.

The sixth trumpet describes the next phase, when Israel is restored to its land. In ancient days the Euphrates was important because of its strategic position relative to Israel. Invading armies came from the other side of this river of Babylon. Here then, it is suggested, is a great, invading army. Two hundred million. Literal or not, it conveys the impression of a vast company.

The associations of the Euphrates with ancient Babylon may provide a clue. The name *Babylon* conies from Babel, the place where the nations were united in wicked endeavour until God frustrated their purposes by confounding their tongues (Genesis 11). The modern counterpart of Babel is the United Nations. Does the vast army of the sixth trumpet, poised for action, represent the nations brought together by a common desire to destroy Israel? This

is a situation that could develop soon. Many nations are already in a mood to wipe Israel off the map of the world.

Of course this is a subject of prophecy outside of Revelation. Joel 3 and Zechariah 14 come immediately to mind, and Psalm 83 is probably relevant. Arab oil is an important factor in modern politics. Many nations have already shown their willingness to sell their consciences for oil.

Thus the stage is set for the events of Revelation 11. Early in the chapter comes the reminder that Jerusalem is still not a Jewish city: "The holy city shall they tread underfoot forty and two months" (verse 2).

The third woe

Things happen quickly. The two witnesses; the beast from the bottomless pit — a Jewish beast; the vindication of the witnesses. The seventh trumpet or third woe.

The seven last plagues; the destruction of Babylon, the destruction of the beast . . .

References and Notes

1. Genesis 2:10
2. See Part 2, chapter 12 — *The great division; complementary prophecies.*
3. Exodus 15:23-26
4. Romans 3 :2
5. Galatians 3:24,25
6. Part 1, chapter 3. See section concerning Revelation 8 and 9.
7. Sun: darkened — Exodus 10:21; stood still — Joshua 10:12,13; turned back — 2 Kings 20:10,11; made to look feeble by greater glory — Acts 9:3 (compare Acts 26:13). In Ezekiel 32:7 the abasement of Pharaoh is described in terms of an eclipse of the sun: "And when I shall extinguish thee ... I will cover the sun with a cloud" (R V).
8. Proverbs 30:27

14 The Woman, the Dragon and the Man Child

The 'signs' section of Revelation begins with chapter 12. The opening scene is about a woman and a dragon.

Echoes of Eden are loud and clear. The woman in travail; the hostile serpent; the casting out of the serpent; the enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent; the victory of the seed of the woman — both the events and edicts of Eden are recalled in this drama.

To digress for a moment: it may be remembered that the language of the last two chapters of Revelation is also reminiscent of Eden. A glance at these chapters will be sufficient to convince those who may not have noticed this feature before. It is appropriate that the concluding chapters of Scripture should provide a picture of paradise restored. The fact that Eden is a theme common to chapter 12 and the end of Revelation may be an indication that the section of the book that begins with Revelation 12 extends to the end of the book.

Recurring themes

The events of the Exodus are also echoed in Revelation 12. One is reminded of Israel's travail in Egypt; of Pharaoh's cruel, draconic role; the man child destined for rulership, snatched from destruction — Moses comes to mind here, as does the 'firstborn' nation in Egypt; Israel's flight into the wilderness is surely the prototype of the flight of the woman of the Apocalypse, and each in its turn is borne on eagle's wings;¹ the provision made for the woman's sustenance in the wilderness — this is also a feature of the Exodus that recurs in Revelation 12.

This apocalyptic drama also takes our minds back to the circumstances of the Lord's birth, with Herod waiting to devour. Indeed there are those who think that the beginning of Revelation 12 is a dramatised representation of this very occasion.

Here then is a typical picture and a recurring Bible theme — the mutual hostility between carnally-minded and spiritually-minded people. The enemy is ruthless and has a great facility for adapting himself to changing circumstances.

Not only does the church suffer persecution, but she also travails as flesh and spirit do battle within each member. The struggling community is helped by the angels and prevails. But even before the ultimate victory there is joy in the midst of suffering. Impressions like these come over clearly, and they are full of exhortation. Yet frankly, the interpretation of detail is difficult, and one dare not be too dogmatic.

The woman

Because Israel was the mother of the man child born in Egypt, and also the mother of *the* man child of Herod's day, it could seem reasonable to conclude that the woman of Revelation 12 also represents Israel. But is this altogether adequate?

The woman is clothed with the sun, the moon is under her feet, and she wears a crown of twelve stars. Many students have been impressed by the fact that these symbols are features

of Joseph's dream concerning the children of Israel,² and have taken this as proof positive that the woman is a symbol of the people of Israel. Moreover the twelve stars are taken to be a reminder of the special importance of the number twelve in Israelitish contexts — the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles come instantly to mind.

Israel is undoubtedly very much involved — but can we be more precise? In New Testament times the name Israel stood for mutually hostile elements. Both the people of God and the enemies were of Israelitish stock.

Observe that this woman is not clothed with inadequate, improvised garments, like Eve, nor with the gaudy attire of a harlot. The Almighty Himself is described as being clothed with light, as with a garment,³ and this woman is likewise enveloped in the light of the sun. She has been clothed by God Himself. The imagery could well be drawn from Isaiah 60:1,2:

"Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee."

The woman is with child. This is a dignified picture, and the omission of specific mention of her husband does not entitle us to leap, as some have done, to the repugnant conclusion that she is a harlot. The link with Isaiah 60, the elevated status of the woman, and the destiny of her son direct us, rather, to the conclusion that God is her husband, and that her child is conceived of the Spirit. The words of Isaiah 54:5,6 have relevance here:

"For thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; the God of the whole earth shall he be called." Another helpful quotation is Isaiah 9:6:

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful. . ."

Note the use of the word *us*. The child is born to a company of people. The fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy is likewise expressed in plural terms in Luke 2:11: "For unto *you* is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." It is not unreasonable, therefore, to regard the woman of Revelation 12 as symbolical of a group or a multitude of people with Israelitish associations; but can we be more exact in our identification?

The woman travails in sorrow. This is a recurring prophetic theme which the Lord makes use of *and applies to the apostles and their fellow disciples*:

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you" (John 16:20-22). The apostles and their contemporaries certainly played a maternal role in God's purpose. By the operation of the Holy Spirit upon them they gave birth to the Christian community.

But were they not members of the Christian community themselves? Indeed they were. The Christian church may be thought of both as a mother and a child. See how this dual role is expressed in the following passage:

"My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you, I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you. Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? for it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband" (Galatians 4:19-27). Several points from this passage are worth noting:

1. Paul speaks of himself travailing in birth. He performs -the duty of a mother.
2. "... until Christ be formed in *you*" — the Galatians also fulfil a maternal role. They and Paul (who is labouring on their behalf) are in process of giving birth to Christ.
3. Obviously the title *Christ* must be understood in the larger sense here, and not confused with the personal name, Jesus. Christ is born in every true believer.
4. In the same context, Paul refers to Abraham's two wives and their respective sons. The interests of Hagar and Ishmael are diametrically opposed to those of Sarah and Isaac. The first mother and son, though in bondage, despise and persecute the second, free-born mother and son. Yet, by God's grace the second son ultimately triumphs.⁴ The rival parties both have an important relationship to Abraham. With regard to the first, the emphasis is on the Law of Moses and Israelitish nationalism (how ironical that Ishmael, the father of the Arabs, should symbolise aggressive Jew-ishness!). With regard to the second, the emphasis is on spiritual descent from Abraham and identification with Christ, the true seed — blood descent from Abraham is not important.
5. In a figure, Sarah is the spiritual mother of Abraham's spiritual seed. This mother is also called "Jerusalem which is above", and she is described as "the mother of us all". This is particularly interesting. Although Paul and other believers perform the duty of a spiritual mother, here, in the very same context, Paul speaks of himself and other believers as *children of a spiritual mother*. "Jerusalem which is above", he says, "is the mother of us all." This brings us back to the earlier thought that the members of the Christian church play the dual role of mother and child. It is an idea that is solidly based on Scripture.
6. Now see the effective use that Paul makes of Isaiah 54 — "Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not . . ." This is the first verse of the chapter where that statement occurs: "Thy Maker is thine husband". In Paul's interpretation of Abraham's domestic circumstances, Abraham is represented as a spiritual husband and a spiritual father. But in a higher sense, that Paul allows for by quoting from Isaiah 54, God is the spiritual husband and father. He is the husband of "Jerusalem that is above", and the father of the Christ-community.

All this is too deep and wonderful for us. Such profound thoughts should keep us humble, as well as help us to understand the imagery of Revelation 12, which is drawn from Old and New Testament scriptures.

Let us now return to the idea that the Christian community is to be thought of as both a mother and a son. When the emphasis is on receiving God's Spirit and travailing to produce a Christ-like character, and when there is temptation and persecution, the appropriate figure is that of a mother. When the emphasis is on the Christ-like character that is produced, and on a mature Christ-community destined to rule, the appropriate figure is that of the man child. The figure of the mother applies more to the present — the time of preparation; and that of the son applies more to the future — the time of fulfilment.

Both figures are used in Revelation 12. The Christian community travails to produce Christ in itself. This travail is an inevitable feature of discipleship, but the immediate application, in Revelation 12, is to the intense labour pains of the early church. In the beginning the members of the church are of Israelitish stock, and the crown of twelve stars may well be a reference to the leadership provided by the apostles. However, the woman is not exclusively Jewish. It has been noted that the Galatian churches, where there would have been both Jewish and Gentile Christians were, with Paul, labouring to produce Christ in themselves. Indeed, this applies to all true believers.

The tribulation of the woman is two-fold. There are the birth pangs within her, and the hostility of the dragon without. To change the metaphor, all true Christians encounter hostile flesh on two fronts — in their own beings and in the world.

A word here about sequence. Notice that a statement which occurs in verse 6 concerning the woman is repeated in verse 14. There it is fitted into a programme of events, repeated and amplified:

Verse 6	Verses 14-17
"And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand and two hundred and threescore days."	"And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent. And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood. And the earth helped the

woman, and the
earth opened her
mouth, and
swallowed up the
flood which the
dragon cast out of
his mouth. And the
dragon was wroth
with the woman, and
went to make war
with the remnant of
her seed, which keep
the commandments
of God, and have the
testimony of Jesus
Christ."

Obviously verse 6 is a summary statement concerning events which do not happen immediately. This could also be true of verse 5. Here the simple statement is made that the man child, destined to rule all nations with a rod of iron, is caught up to God and to His throne. The ultimate fulfilment of this could come much later — after many of the events delineated in the chapter.

"The dragon, that old serpent..."

The woman's enemy has four names: dragon, serpent, devil and satan. Clearly this is a power motivated completely by sin. Its beast-like appearance and deportment, recalling the beasts of Daniel's prophecies, indicates that this is an organisation, a political power — or, more strictly, a series of political powers — motivated by sin.

Seven heads and ten horns! The heads represent phases of government. Generally, though not invariably, the heads appear in sequence. It is not usual to see a number of heads together at the same time (though four heads do appear together on the leopard of Daniel 7 — a symbol of the divided Grecian kingdom). Certainly the seven heads of the dragon would not all be there at the same time. The picture is a 'panoramic' one.

The seven *heads* are crowned. Do not miss the difference in chapter 13 where the ten *horns* are crowned. Digressing for a moment, the crowns on the horns indicate that the kings thus represented have, *at the time of the dramatic action of the vision*, received their kingdom. Compare this passage in Revelation 13 with Revelation 17 where reference is made first to a time when the powers represented by the ten horns have not yet received their kingdom, and later to the time when they receive power as kings.

Applying this logic to Revelation 12, the fact that the heads are crowned, and not the horns, points to the conclusion that the time of the horns, and of the beast whom they acknowledge as leader, has not yet come. It will be remembered that the head which is associated with the ten horns is the eighth head, and that it is the sixth head revived.

Revelation 12 is therefore concerned with the time of the seven heads, but not of the eighth head and the ten horns. Can we be more precise? The travail of the woman covers a long

period, and during this time successive human governments are ready to devour the Christ-community when it is born. So the first, general picture describes a long-standing hostility against the people of God even before the Christ-community is born — the period of the first five heads.

But the 'action' of the prophecy — the war in heaven, the casting out of the dragon, the persecution of the woman — concerns the latter part of the 'head' series. The fact that all the heads are crowned means that the sixth and seventh heads are also crowned, and are probably involved in the action of the chapter. The dragon is rampant during the sixth (Jewish-Roman) head and the seventh (Roman) head phases. It was first the Jews, helped by the Romans, and later the Romans without the Jews who tried to destroy the infant church.

Concerning dragons and wild beasts

There is a remarkable elasticity about the way that the Spirit likens nations to wild beasts. Unless we ourselves have a measure of mental elasticity in interpreting these symbols, we shall find ourselves in difficulties.

Here are examples of the elasticity of Scripture in this field:

1. That which is represented by a monstrous human image in Daniel 2 is represented by four beasts in Daniel 7.
2. That which is symbolised by a bear in Daniel 7 is symbolised by a ram in Daniel 8.
3. A leopard in Daniel 7 becomes a he-goat in Daniel 8.
4. The four *heads* of the leopard of Daniel 7 become the four *horns* of the he-goat of Daniel 8.
5. The four beasts of Daniel 7, with heads totalling seven and horns totalling ten, invite comparison with a *composite* beast in Revelation 13 and 17, with seven heads and ten horns.

This easy transition from one symbol to another is remarkable. Thus Medo-Persia is symbolised by the breast and arms of a human image in Daniel 2; by a bear in Daniel 7; by a ram in Daniel 8; and presumably by one of the heads of a multi-headed composite creature in Revelation.

From these observations the following conclusion can be drawn: *the beast forms of Daniel and Revelation are likenesses that must be taken in context*. In a certain context a certain political power can be likened to a leopard; in another context it can more effectively be compared to a he-goat. If we have a leopard fixation in our minds, the he-goat similitude, though just as scriptural, will not be acceptable to us and will not give us the intended enlightenment.

Sin is remarkable for its many manifestations, and also for its great facility for disguise. Its diverse appearances usually belie the hideous, hidden reality. This may be another reason why, in Scripture, the symbols for the same sin-power are changed as occasion requires.

Pursuing this thought a little further, in Revelation the devil — the New Testament personification of sin — is represented by a dragon and a serpent; yet Peter likens the devil to a roaring lion.⁵ Each similitude is appropriate *in context*.

Another example of sin's facility for appearing in different guises (not to say disguises), and of the Spirit's facility for recognising this fact, is provided in Isaiah 14:29:

"Rejoice not thou, whole Palestina, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken: for out of the serpent's root shall come forth a cockatrice, and his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent."

Returning to Revelation, if we work too inflexibly on a one beast/one power principle, we shall find ourselves in difficulties. See how easily the symbols are changed in Revelation 12. When in heaven, the power is called a dragon. When cast to the earth, it is a serpent — recalling the belly-sliding propulsion of the disgraced serpent of Eden. Yet when the serpent phase is under consideration the dragon aspect is not forgotten, for the name is picked up again later in the chapter and carried forward in the book.

The dragon/serpent of Revelation 12 has seven heads and ten horns. However, in Revelation 13 another creature appears — a composite beast, having elements of Daniel's four beasts. Yet, remarkably, this hybrid monster also has seven heads and ten horns!

Does the beast of Revelation 13 represent a different series of political powers from the dragon of Revelation 12? Surely not! Remember that these beast bodies are likenesses that must be understood and interpreted within the limited contexts. They are not to be thought of as invariable clues to identity. The fact that seven heads and ten horns are common to dragon and beast should be sufficient to assure us that the same series of powers is under consideration. It would be strange indeed if there were two separate series of powers, each represented by seven heads and ten horns, in the political arena at the same time. One could perhaps imagine a single, sin-motivated power running parallel with the series of powers represented by the successive beast heads; but hardly two parallel series, each with phases represented by seven heads and ten horns.

There is just *one* series, represented by the seven heads and ten horns. Not only do heads change as the sequence of kingdoms proceeds, but when appropriate, body likenesses change as well. According to scripture usage, dragons devour and serpents deceive. Thus in certain contexts the power hostile to the people of God can best be represented as a dragon; and in other contexts it can be more fittingly be likened to a serpent. In its final phase before the kingdom, the God-defying power is likened to a wild beast, more like a leopard than anything else, but having lion and bear characteristics as well.

A careful reading reveals that the change in body likenesses does not necessarily take place at the same time as the change of heads. The dragon likeness has some relevance during the earlier 'head' phases, but it is specially appropriate when there is an infant Christian church to devour. The dragon is rampant during the sixth-head phase and during the first part of the seventh-head phase. During the second part of the seventh-head phase, when this God-defying power carries the woman that represents apostate Christianity, a scarlet-coloured beast is a more appropriate symbol.

The man child

It has been intimated that the man child represents the Christ element in the Christian community. Revelation itself confirms this conclusion.

The child is destined to rule all nations with a rod of iron; he is caught up to the throne of God. It needs no proving that these words could be applied to the Lord Jesus himself.⁶ But it is important to note that, in Revelation, they are also applied to those of the Lord's followers who overcome. The promise to Thyatira is: "He that overcometh ... to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron" (2:26,27), and to Laodicea: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (3:21).

Because the destiny of the man child is expressed in terms that can be applied both to the Lord Jesus and to the Christian community, there has been a tendency to argue for the one or the other. Yet the two thoughts are one. It is altogether fitting that principles which first apply to the man, Christ Jesus, should have an extended application to the people who bear his name. And because, at the time when the Revelation was communicated to John, the birth of the Lord Jesus was history, the emphasis in Revelation 12 is on the plural Christ — the community.

Consistent with this are the comments concerning the victory of the saints:

"And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death" (12:11). Here is an extension of the principle expressed in Hebrews 2:14:

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil."

As far as he personally was concerned, the Lord destroyed the devil by his death. Here, in Revelation 12, the principle is given a larger application to those who are Christ's. The members of the Christ-community overcome the devil of their day 1) by the blood of the Lamb (they have identified themselves with the Lord's death); and 2) by being willing to accept death themselves.

See how the battle against evil is fought on two fronts. The angels wage war, on behalf of the believers against the dragon; and at the same time the believers destroy sin in themselves. If there were no personal battle there would be no reason for a political battle.

Heaven

There is an urgent need to establish the meaning of heaven in this context, because, at various times, woman, dragon and man child are seen there.

The word *heaven* is often used in the New Testament to describe a relationship, rather than a location. Those who are "in heaven" enjoy a privileged relationship with God.⁷

Incidentally, in Revelation the word *earth*, like the word *heaven*, expresses a relationship. It is the human environment of the people of God, and it can vary according to context. Earth

dwellers are usually hostile to God's servants and witnesses. Often they are people who are responsible to God, but act unworthily.

The woman is in heaven when the action begins. At first the Christ-bearing community is Jewish, though later, as we have seen, Gentiles are also involved. During the ministry of the Lord and of the apostles, the Jews enjoyed a privileged relationship with God: they were "in heaven". Living in their own land, they enjoyed His protection. In their midst was the temple where the priests offered sacrifices to God on behalf of the people. In common with the rest of the nation, the Christ-bearing minority, the apostles and their fellow believers, had this special relationship.

In common with the rest of the nation! The enemies of the Christ-bearing community received the same privileges and enjoyed the same elevated status. The dragon was in heaven!

Yes, one of the phases of the organised opposition to the people of God was the Jewish phase. Indeed, the hostility of the Jews was more wicked than that of any other nation. For this reason one of the seven heads of the sin-power that appears in so many guises is a Jewish head.

The dragon is cast out of heaven. In other words, Israel is driven from the presence of God. The implacable enemies of God, who not only crucified His Son but afterwards tried to destroy the apostles and their fellow Christians, were thrust out. The Lord's prophetic words come to mind: "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven" (Luke 10:18).

The pilgrim church

Persecution drives the woman into the wilderness. This means that the Christ-bearing community, struggling within and oppressed without, enters into a pilgrim phase. She is no longer Israel-based. Providentially this has great advantages. No longer is Christianity exclusively Jewish —the call to salvation goes forth to the Gentiles. And the scattering of God's people spreads the Word.⁸

The woman no longer depends upon the ministrations of Levitical priests. Her relationship to God is through the Great High Priest. In the wilderness she is sustained and protected by God.

The man child in heaven

But what about the man child? Of him it is written that he was caught up to God and to His throne. It has already been intimated that the ultimate fulfilment of this prophecy comes after the other events described in the chapter. The elevation of the Christ-community is to rulership over the nations, and many things must happen before this.

However, there is an important immediate fulfilment as well. Remembering that "heaven" can describe a relationship, we note that the man child is brought into a higher relationship with God than the woman and the dragon. He ascends not just to heaven, but to the throne of God; and he does so *now*, as Paul explains in Ephesians 2:6:

"And [God] hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

In one sense — in a spiritual sense — the people of God are in heaven with Christ now. The *new creature in Christ* is in heaven with Christ. In another sense — a literal, physical sense — the people of God are on the earth. These two complementary ideas are implicit in Paul's exhortation to the Colossians:

"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth . . ." (3:1-5).

In terms of Revelation 12, the appropriate figure for the heavenly status of Christians is the man child; and the appropriate figure for their earthly tribulation is the woman.

When the dragon is cast out of heaven, the announcement is made: "Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God ..." It could be thought from these words that the coming kingdom of God is established at this point, if one did not take note of the words that follow: ". . . Therefore rejoice, ye heavens . . . Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time" (12:10-12).

The kingdom is come; and yet the devil is rampant on the earth, and there is great trouble. How are the two ideas reconciled? The inescapable conclusion is that the kingdom has come *to those who enjoy this heavenly status*. They recognise Christ as king already, and enjoy a foretaste of ultimate kingdom blessings. But the awaited establishment of God's kingdom on the earth does not take place yet: indeed, the woman is in the wilderness. The establishment of God's kingdom on the earth is referred to in Revelation 11 — the climax of the first section of Revelation — when "the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ"; and again in Revelation 20 where the dragon, that old serpent, is bound and cast into the bottomless pit.

The woman in the wilderness

The woman is protected and sustained by God in the wilderness. It must be remembered that the community represented by the woman is no longer exclusively Jewish. In fact, the Jewish element dwindles and disappears, and an international fellowship takes its place.

The frustrated serpent casts from its mouth a flood of water after the woman. According to scripture symbolism, that which comes from the mouth of a serpent is poisonous, lying words.⁹ A whole flood of propaganda is directed against the church in the wilderness. However, she is saved by the timely intervention of "the earth", who opens her mouth and swallows the flood.

How does the swallowing of ungodly propaganda by the earth help the church of God? Here is a suggestion. Think of the earth as the human environment of the exiled church. During the early centuries of the Christian era, the church was subjected to cruel persecution. But when the earth — in this context the Roman Empire — became nominally Christian, it just

"swallowed up" the anti-christian propaganda with one contemptuous gulp. To change the metaphor, when the Roman Empire accepted nominal Christianity, the pressure was now lifted from true Christians. As Christians in a society that also claimed to be Christian, they were protected and not persecuted.

Alas, the woman herself is ultimately corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ, and becomes the whore of Revelation 17. The God-defying political power of the time now supports the compromising community, and its movements are directed by her. The political power that supports the woman and is directed by her is the seventh-head (Roman) phase of the beast.

Persecution of the remnant of the woman's seed

"And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 12:17).

More echoes of Eden! How does the dragon persecute the remnant of the woman's seed? But first, who is this remnant?

By this time there is an important distinction between real Christianity and counterfeit Christianity. Existing at the same time are the harlot daughters of the apostate church (Revelation 17) and the faithful remnant of the seed of the woman.

The faithful remnant have often been persecuted, but it may be that Revelation 13 provides the extra information concerning the persecution in question. Here, however, the symbolism changes. Not now a dragon but a beast that comes forth from the sea, whose deadly wound is healed. He is the latter-day persecutor of the people of God. But it is the dragon who gives him "his power, and his seat, and great authority" (13:2).

Do the dragon and the beast exist at the same time?

How are we to understand this relationship between the dragon and the beast? Do the words just quoted imply that the dragon and the beast exist at the same time? Not necessarily. The dragon symbolises a power that tried to destroy Christianity at its birth, and tried again to destroy it in its infancy. Had it not been for the protection of God, it would have succeeded. The dragon was cast out by Michael and his angels.

But this is not the end of this God-defying, anti-Christian power. It emerges again, and in a later phase it is more appropriately symbolised by a scarlet coloured beast.

The beast is the latter-day representative of the dragon power. Its hostility is directed against Christianity; and the power that at one time belonged to the dragon is now transferred to the beast. The fact that the dragon also gives his seat to the beast implies that the centre of the beast's operations is the same as that of the dragon. We must look to the same region.

What then of the statement: "And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet" (Revelation 16:13)? Does not this indicate that the dragon and the beast are there at the same time? Not necessarily. It could mean

that the wicked philosophy that emanated from the dragon when it held sway *still* influences people at the time that the beast and the false prophet are making their God-defying utterances. They all stand for the same anti-Christian thinking.

References and Notes

1. Exodus 19:4
2. Genesis 37:9,10
3. Psalm 104:2
4. See Genesis 16 and Genesis 21:1-14
5. 1 Peter 5:8
6. See Psalm 2:9.
7. Part 2, chapter 12 — page 142
8. Acts 8:1-4; 11:19-21
9. Romans 3:13 etc.

15 Heralds and Harvests - The great climax

The sounding of the seventh trumpet announces the climax of a great prophetic programme. The era of preparation is over and the time of fulfilment has come. As the Hebrew bondservant awaited the jubilee trumpet, so the servants of God wait for the seventh trumpet of the Apocalypse. The mighty 'rainbow' angel has sworn that there should be time no longer, but in the days of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished (10:5-7).

The period immediately before the seventh trumpet is one of suffering for the people of God. The two witnesses are persecuted (though their vindication comes just before the seventh trumpet), and the other saints are also afflicted.

There is another great climax in Revelation. It is the occasion of the opening of the book of life, described in chapter 20 (remember how the theme is developed from Revelation chapter 5?).

It is not difficult to see that the two climaxes are one. The sounding of the seventh trumpet proclaims that the time to open the book of life has come. To set two passages side by side is to establish this fact:

Revelation 11: 15-18	Revelation 20: 11-15
"And the seventh angel sounded ; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come ; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned. And the nations were	"And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in

angry, and thy wrath them: and they were
 is come, and the judged every man
 time of the dead, according to their
 that they should be works. And death
 judged, and that and hell were cast
 thou shouldest give into the lake of fire.
 reward unto thy This is the second
 servants the death. And
 prophets, and to the whosoever was not
 saints, and them that found written in the
 fear thy name, small book of life was cast
 and great; and into the lake of fire."
 shouldest destroy
 them which destroy
 the earth."

Chapter 14

The events of chapter 14 come after the sounding of the seventh trumpet. Not only do these events appear later in the prophetic record, but they concern the time when the Lord takes the initiative, so to speak; when the saints are rewarded and the enemies are punished and destroyed.

A quick reminder here that Revelation 14 contains the following features:

1. The Lamb on Mount Zion with the 144,000
2. An angel preaching the everlasting gospel, and warning of impending judgments
3. A second messenger announcing the imminent destruction of Babylon
4. A third messenger announcing the forthcoming destruction of the beast, and warning against worshipping the beast
5. Words of encouragement to God's suffering servants
6. The reaping of the "harvest of the earth"
7. The reaping of the "vine of the earth".

Sealed for salvation or marked for perdition

Let us now look at the opening scene. The Lord Jesus stands on Mount Zion with 144,000 redeemed people, who have the seal of the living God in their foreheads. This is a striking contrast to the picture that immediately precedes it in the last section of chapter 13. One of the features of the beast-worshipping community of the last days is that each member carries on his body the mark of the beast.

What will this mark of registration and identification be? An incision? an earmark? an invisible tattoo? We shall probably have to wait and see: but the waiting will not be long.

"No man" is one of the key phrases of Revelation. Whereas in the kingdom of the beast *no man* is permitted to buy or sell if he does not bear the mark of the beast, the 144,000 are distinguished by the song they sing. *No man* is able to sing the song but the 144,000 (14:3).

Firstfruits

One important word is often overlooked. The 144,000 are *first-fruits* unto God and to the Lamb (verse 4). A harvesting expression this. Firstfruits imply a great ingathering to follow. This ingathering is spoken of in the same chapter:

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

Immediately after the account of the reaping of the harvest of the earth, another reaping operation is described. The vine of the earth is reaped, and cast into the winepress of the wrath of God: "And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe. And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs" (verses 17-20).

The reaping of the vine of the earth comes after the reaping of the harvest of the earth. This is the order presented in chapter 14. and it is also the order implied in chapter 19. Here the Lord Jesus is represented as the rider of a white horse and he is followed by an army of people riding on white horses, "clothed in fine linen, clean and white" — "the righteousness of saints" (verse 8). It is after being united with the saints that "he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" (verse 15). In the language of chapter 14, the blood comes to the horse bridles (verse 20).

The question of the identity of the 144,000 has been discussed.¹ It has been argued that the Scripture's own statement concerning their identity should be accepted. They are "of all the tribes of the children of Israel". It may be recalled that John *heard* the number of those who had been sealed — the redeemed of the tribes of Israel — before he *saw* another multitude, a different one, which no man could number "of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues" (7:9).

Of course there is an important difference between the reference to the 144,000 in chapter 7 and that in chapter 14. The earlier picture of the seventh chapter concerns the *sealing* of the faithful Israelites. They are marked as God's people — marked for protection — as were the Israelites whose houses were covered by the blood of the passover lamb, and as righteous people were marked on the forehead in Ezekiel 9. In Revelation 14 there is a progression. Here these redeemed Israelites are *harvested*. They are united to each other and to the Lord Jesus Christ after the resurrection.

We have observed that the 144,000 are called firstfruits, and that there is a description of a great ingathering later in the same chapter. The implication seems therefore to be that these Israelitish saints are restored to life before the great multitude from all nations. This would be another application of the principle, "to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile" (Romans 2:10).

Those who might feel inclined to reject this thesis are asked to ponder the use of the word "firstfruits" in Revelation 14:4. Clearly this word implies a harvest to follow: when does this harvest occur? It cannot be denied that a great harvest is spoken of later in the same chapter: is it not reasonable to relate this to the "first-fruits" of verse 4? Does it seem likely that although the words "firstfruits" and "harvest" occur in the same chapter they have no relationship to each other?

There may be another example of the 'perspective' principle here. From a distance the resurrection of all righteous people could be thought of as a single event. But as one gets nearer to the occasion, it can be discerned by carefully scrutinising the message provided for the instruction of those who live in the last days that the resurrection is phased, and that the Israelitish saints are raised first.

Two other New Testament scriptures may have a bearing on this subject. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul says: "Every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they are Christ's at his coming" (verse 23). Now, in Revelation, this principle of every man in his own order is extended: first the Jew, then the Gentile. The other scripture is 1 Thessalonians 4, where Paul is at pains to assure his readers that when the Lord Jesus comes, living saints will get no advantage over dead saints. They will not receive priority treatment. On the contrary, the dead saints will rise first, and then the living saints will be united to the Lord Jesus:

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (verses 13-17). Putting all this together, the order would seem to be: first, the resurrection of the Israelitish saints; then the resurrection of the Gentile saints; and finally the calling of those who are "alive and remain" to the presence of the Lord.

The order of events that we have been trying to work out relates to resurrection and meeting the Lord, and *not* to receiving immortality. Although the evidence appears to point to the conclusion that the Jewish saints are restored to life first, it seems likely that immortality will be bestowed on all the saints at the same time.

A comparison of Revelation 14:1,2 and 19:5-7 helps to establish this conclusion. The passage from the 14th chapter refers first to the 144,000 on Mount Zion, and then to "a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder"; and in chapter 19 there is an invitation for *all* God's servants, both "small and great", to praise Him, followed by words which could well be a quotation from chapter 14 (concerning "the voice of many

waters" and "mighty thunderings"), and leading to an announcement that the time has come for the marriage of the Lamb, "and his wife hath made herself ready".

The suggestion therefore is that the uniting of all the saints to Christ and the bestowing of immortality on them is the development of the Mount Zion scene that begins with the 144,000 — the Jewish elect. Events follow each other quickly.

The complete and ultimate unity of all the members of the body of Christ will be realised when they receive the blessing of "life for evermore". In Psalm 133 this joyful occasion is compared to the occasion when Aaron (the high priest who represented a multitude) was anointed with precious ointment which ran from his head, over his beard and down to the very skirts of his garments. The theme and the lesson of this symbolic act is unity — *a unity that will be brought to its ultimate perfection on one grand occasion*,

The destruction of Babylon — before the marriage of the Lamb

Because this is largely a study of sequences, we turn now to Revelation 19 and note that the uniting of the saints with Christ takes place *after* the destruction of Babylon. A reading of the first seven verses of Revelation 19 will make this clear:

"And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: for true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia. And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready."

Although reversed sequences are sometimes found in Revelation, this does not read like one. First the wanton woman who pretends to be the bride of Christ is removed, and then the marriage of the true bride takes place.

Moving forward in chapter 19, we note that after the destruction of the whore and after the marriage of the Lamb, the Lamb marches forth with a great company to destroy the beast.² Those who follow the Lamb are clothed in white linen, and, like their Leader, they ride on white horses. In this very chapter it is stated that white linen represents the righteousness of the saints (19:8). This is just one of several features that establish the identity of these people. There are fascinating verbal links between this passage in Revelation 19 and the letters to the churches — links with Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea — that make it quite clear that the saints are involved in the destruction of the ultimate arch-enemy. Because the language of Revelation is symbolical, it would, however, be wrong to conjure up a mental picture of a military engagement involving a cavalry charge.

Three doom messages

Back now to the three doom messages of chapter 14. The first is accompanied by a universal appeal because God's judgments are imminent:

"And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters" (verses 6,7).

The second message pronounces the doom of Babylon:

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

The third message concerns the doom of the beast, and carries the sternest of warnings:

"And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascend-eth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name" (14:9-11).

From the way that the word "followed" is used in the passages quoted above, it seems reasonable to regard these announcements as being in chronological sequence.

The great appeal

How appropriate that, in the first message, God is called the Creator of heaven, earth, sea and rivers, when He is about to demonstrate His control over these elements by a reversal of His creative activity. The warning is evidently intended to prepare responsive people for the judgments of heaven, earth, sea and rivers, described in chapter 16 — in the vial series. A glance at the sixteenth chapter will assure the reader that these regions suffer catastrophically when the vials are poured out; and the words of verses 5-7 make it clear that these are divine judgments:

"And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy. And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments."

The doom of Babylon

The second message of doom is surely an abridged version of chapter 18, which likewise begins with the words: "Babylon ... is fallen.. ." (18:2).

Incidentally, it is not always appreciated that Revelation 18 comes earlier, chronologically, than that part of Revelation 17 concerning the destruction of Babylon. The warning of

chapter 18, urging people to come out of Babylon, would only have relevance if it came before Babylon's annihilation.

Warning against beast worship

So abhorrent is the beast to God that any compromising relationship with him is condemned:

— "If any man worship the beast

— "and his image,

— "and receive his mark in his forehead,

— "or in his hand . . ."

The punishment of beast worshippers is effected, first, in the vial judgments, and finally, by destruction in the lake of fire, (chapter 20).

Appended to the warning against beast worship are words of encouragement for the people of God. These words should be thought of as a parenthesis — an exhortation to those who, by reading this programme of judgments, know beforehand about the

fate of the ungodly. These words are not a part of the programme. "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (14:12,13).

The seven last plagues

The effect of the pouring out of the seven vials, or bowls, of God's wrath, is a devastating series of divine judgments. These visitations are remarkably similar in detail to the trumpet judgments, but are more drastic, and events seem to follow each other in rapid succession. There is a certain finality about the seven last plagues. In terms of judgment and destruction the vials are followed only by the destruction of Babylon, the judgment seat of Christ and the annihilation of the beast and the false prophet.

Revelation 15 is a short chapter that introduces the vials, and chapter 16 provides the details. Included in chapter 15 (verses 2, 3 and 4) is a picture of a victorious, rejoicing multitude standing on a sea of glass, having gotten the victory over the beast. This is a good example of a reversed sequence: the details of the victory are related later.

The vial-bearing angels

The vials are poured out by angels "clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles" (15:6). This description is similar to that of the One like the Son of man of chapter 1 — the Lord Jesus Christ. It could therefore be appropriately applied to those who have identified themselves with the Lord, that is to say, the saints. Furthermore it is expressly stated in Revelation 19:8 that fine linen is "the righteousness of the saints".

If, however, the vial bearers are saints, there is a sequence problem. According to Revelation 19, the saints are united to the Lord Jesus (which would, presumably, mean their glorification) *after* the destruction of Babylon; and Babylon is destroyed after the outpouring of the vials. Are we then to suppose that the saints pour out the vials before they are immortal? Or what?

Here is a suggestion. The identity of the two witnesses of Revelation 11 has been discussed. Massive evidence has been produced to demonstrate that the witnesses represent a company of believers who preach powerfully when the beast holds sway. Their powerful words are matched by powerful deeds. Of them it is written that "if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies"; and "these have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will" (11:5,6). Hitherto our interest has been concentrated on the witnesses' power to destroy their enemies with fire, to withhold rain and to turn water into blood — like Moses and Aaron and like Elijah. Now let us think particularly of their power "to smite the earth with all plagues". Do they use this power to pour out the vials of the wrath of God — the seven last plagues?

And could this throw any light on the mysterious statement that after the resurrection of the witnesses they ascended up to heaven in a cloud? Instantly our minds go to Elijah and to the Lord. Each of these ascensions is followed, sooner or later, in one sense or another, by a coming again. Is this also true of the witnesses? The suggestion is that the story of the witnesses is carried forward to chapter 15 and continued in chapter 16. Under another name, this special group of saints is active again, and the enemy is still the beast. Now they smite the earth with plagues — the vials of God's wrath.

So the vial bearers are not the saints generally, but a special group of saints — those described in Revelation 11 as the two witnesses. The fact that most of us would view this sort of assignment with revulsion has no relevance. Our immediate purpose is to ascertain, as far as we are able, the facts, however our conditioned human minds might want to reject them. There have been circumstances when mortals have been told to set aside that normally admirable virtue of pity — "thine eye shall not pity ..."

A beast-worshipping community

One fact emerges clearly from chapter 16. The vial judgments are poured out on to a beast-worshipping community. Thus the first vial brings "a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast"; and the fifth angel pours out his vial upon "the seat of the beast", as a result of which the kingdom of the beast is full of darkness. Moreover, after the outpouring of the sixth vial, three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouths of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet.

There are, in fact, two human 'poles' that claim the allegiance of men — the beast and Babylon. In Revelation 14 there are warnings against each of these.

The beast — a latter-day Pharaoh

The word "plagues" recalls the plagues of Egypt, and the details of the seven last plagues provide a further reminder. A grievous sore, water into blood (twice), darkness, frogs, lightnings, hail — these visitations come straight from Exodus. Notice too that, as in ancient

Egypt, the plagues are selective in their effect: they distinguish between beast worshippers and others. Pursuing the parallel further, see how those who suffer are beyond repentance — their hearts are hardened. Twice it is stated that they repented not; and thrice, that their response to the plagues is to blaspheme God. Indeed, after six of the seven plagues have wrought tremendous devastation, powerful propaganda is still pouring from the mouths of the three arch-enemies, urging the people to prepare for a massive assault on the forces of righteousness.

The parallel is followed right through. Just as Pharaoh and his army were engulfed and destroyed in the Red Sea, so the beast and the false prophet meet their fate in the lake of fire.

Incidentally, the fact that both the prophecy concerning the two witnesses, and that of the seven last plagues are so obviously based on the Exodus, indicates that they are consecutive scenes in the same great drama. This is a further pointer to the conclusion that the same actors are involved in both scenes. Just as Moses and Aaron who witnessed for God against Pharaoh were also God's agents to bring the plagues on Egypt, so (it is suggested) those who witness against the tyrant of the last days are also in control of the seven last plagues.

Order of events

On the basis of conclusions presented in this chapter, the following sequence of events is suggested:

1. The sounding of the seventh trumpet
2. The seven vials
3. The destruction of Babylon
4. The Mount Zion scene — Israelitish saints raised
5. The great company of saints raised
6. The destruction of the beast
7. The millennium (The three doom messages have to be fitted in somewhere. It has been suggested that they should be placed before the seventh trumpet.)

The Jerusalem drama

All this must be fitted into a larger context.

To return to an earlier thought, it has been suggested that the sixth trumpet (the second woe) announces a massive invasion of Israel. In the symbolic language of Revelation, the army comes from the Euphrates, the river of Babylon. Here then is the army of the apocalyptic Babylon; here are the combined powers of the Western world — a nominally Christian segment of the world — united in a mission of destruction against Israel.

It looks as if the invasion will be in support of the Arabs. The motives: to control an area of immense strategic importance before Russia gets a foothold; and to ensure a good supply of

Arab oil. Other objectives could well be: to free Jerusalem (a city important to the Arabs, and the holy city of three world religions) from Jewish control, and to release the occupied territories.

The invasion of Israel sets the scene for the beginning of Revelation 11, and explains verse 2: "... the holy city they shall tread under foot forty and two months". Here then is the last phase of the downtreading of Jerusalem by Gentile invaders, and it lasts 42 months or three and a half years.

Three and a half is a familiar number in prophecy. It is appropriate that half of the perfect number, seven, should be associated with suffering. Two other periods of three and a half years are also mentioned in the same context:

"And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth" (11:3).

"And there was given unto him [the beast] a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months" (13:5).

The three and a half year period of the beast's power clearly follows that of the Gentile downtreading. It probably begins when the deadly wound is healed.

And the witnessing period? it seems likely that this begins before the downtreading period is completed, and runs on to include a part of the period of the beast's power. Hence the hostility of all except God's faithful servants to the work of the witnesses.

When the witnesses have finished their testimony, the beast suppresses them, but they are vindicated very soon (three and a half days later); and then events move rapidly to the sounding of the seventh trumpet. Although, as we have seen, the beast is far from finished when the witnesses are vindicated, his decline and fall are imminent.

When the seventh trumpet sounds, the Jewish elect, the 144,000, are united with Christ. Then a series of warnings, after which the seven vials of God's wrath are poured out. Like Pharaoh of old, the beast becomes furious and desperate. After the sixth vial there goes out of his mouth an ugly incitement to the people of the world to follow him to battle; but before this "battle of the great day of God Almighty" is joined, the beast annihilates the harlot organisation. Ultimately the beast is destroyed by the Lord Jesus.

Revelation 17 supplies the information that the ten kings give their power to the beast; and from Daniel 7 the extra piece of information can be gleaned that this is the consequence of the annexation of the territory of three of these ten kings. Translated into more literal language, it seems likely that the following events can be envisaged:

After the invasion of Israel by the army of the Western world ("Babylon"), Israel gains yet another amazing victory, even more dramatic than those we have witnessed within recent years. This involves a crushing defeat for the Arabs, in whose support the "Babylonian" army has tried to destroy Israel. The Arabs (the ten kings) quickly decide that survival depends upon a pact with the Israeli beast. A truly spectacular victory by the beast is implied by the acclamation: "Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" (13:4).

It may be recalled that certain suggestions were offered concerning the *second* beast of Revelation 13—the publicity organisation which is also referred to as the false prophet.³ Its emergence seemed to come after the healing of the deadly wound of the first beast; and its two horns suggested the union of two groups of people. Jews and Arabs?

After this last amazing victory the Israeli beast is right in the centre of the world stage — "... and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations. And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life. . ."

All except the "very elect" are deceived. Many may regard this rapid succession of fantastic events as proof positive that the Lord is in the land of Israel. No wonder the work of the witnesses, who are loud in their condemnation of the beast, is offensive to all except God's true servants. Those who dwell on the earth (as distinct from those who dwell in heaven, and are blasphemed by the beast — see Revelation 13:6,7) rejoice when the witnesses are suppressed (11:10).

So to the seventh trumpet and the seven last plagues, when the beast-worshipping world is punished; then the destruction of Babylon by that bizarre Jew-Arab combination, the beast and the ten kings; then the resurrection, first of the Israelitish saints and then of a great multitude; and finally the destruction of the beast and the false prophet by Christ and his immortal army.

References and Notes

1. See Part 2, chapter 13 - *The Trumpet Judgments*
2. See Part 1, chapter 7 - *Babylon the Great*.
3. See Part 1, chapter 5 — *The Revelation of the Beast*.

16 Resurrection and Judgment

The subject matter of Revelation 20 is well known, though the interpretation of detail has occasioned a deal of controversy.

In the opening scene, the dragon (also called "that old serpent, which is the devil, and satan") is bound and imprisoned in the abyss for a thousand years. The consequence of this is worth noting: the nations are no longer deceived. At the end of the thousand years, however, satan is released, and inevitably the nations *are* deceived. They are incited to rebellion against God's people, and then destroyed.

A period of 1000 years is also referred to in another connection in the first part of Revelation 20. It is the duration of the reign of the resurrected saints — "and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years" (verse 4). The commonly held view, that these two periods of 1000 years are the same, is surely reasonable. As we should expect, sin is restrained when Christ and the saints rule the earth, and militant opposition to God's purpose is not possible.

A relaxation of authority and a consequent revolt at the end of the millennium would not imply failure, as some have suggested. Just as Solomon, in his wisdom, gave Shimei an opportunity to reveal his latent wickedness and be punished for it, so God gives irresponsible, frustrated worldlings the opportunity to fulfil their heart's desire and rebel. By their wickedness they call forth the wrath of God; they virtually invite God to destroy them.

It seems reasonable to regard the thousand-year period as literal. Even so, those who insist that all other time periods in Revelation are figurative ought not to be dogmatic about the literalness of the duration of the millennium.

After the final elimination of all sinners, the ultimate of God's purpose is reached. The last enemy, death, is destroyed; all who continue living are partakers of the divine nature, and God is "all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

Two resurrections?

"Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (Revelation 20:6).

Although the expression "second resurrection" does not appear in this chapter, nor indeed elsewhere in Scripture, it seems to be implied by the phrase "first resurrection".

Many imagine that the second resurrection is that referred to in the concluding section of Revelation 20. Certainly this passage refers to an occasion of resurrection and judgment:

"And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man

according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20: 11-15).

The idea that this resurrection and judgment is post-millennial is based on the fact that the scene that comes immediately before this passage concerns the (rebellion that erupts "when the thousand years are expired".¹

Careful students of the Apocalypse know that the scenes depicted in the book are not necessarily presented in chronological sequence — sometimes the order is reversed.² Indeed, all who consider the judgment scene of Revelation 20 to be post-millennial are compelled to regard the scene that follows (described in the beginning of Revelation 21) — when John beholds a new heaven and a new earth — as an earlier one, because it is clear from Isaiah 65 and 2 Peter 3 that the millennium itself is the new heaven and earth. So a backward step must be taken either at the beginning of verse 11 (quoted above) or at the beginning of the next chapter.

The proposition submitted here is that the backward step in time is at the beginning of verse 11, and that the judgment scene associated with the great white throne is, in fact, the judgment seat of Christ. The resurrection that is connected with this judgment is therefore the resurrection that takes place when the Lord returns to the earth. Here is a summary of the evidence:

1. The fact that sequences are sometimes reversed in the Apocalypse has already been established. A big step back in time would thus be introduced by the words, "And I saw ..." in Revelation 20:11.³
2. The words of Revelation 20:10 concerning the dead being tormented day and night for ever and ever do not seem to lead on to the great white throne scene of verse 11. There is a break in the subject matter.
3. The words of verse 11, "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them" invite comparison with those of Revelation 6:14 concerning the opening of the sixth seal: "And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places." The verbal link between the two passages — obviously designed — would be pointless if this were a post-millennial scene.⁴
4. A verbal connection with Daniel 7:10 has already been noted.⁵ An occasion of judgement, in which "the books were opened", is common to both. The occasion is manifestly the same; and a quick reading of the relevant part of Daniel 7 should be sufficient to assure the reader that it cannot be post-millennial. The judgment scene of Daniel 7 is referred to in the context of the little horn. This God-defying power is condemned and destroyed for its blasphemy. In terms of Revelation, this is the judgment of the beast, and he is certainly destroyed before the end of the millennium. Observe that the rebels at the end of the millennium are cast into the lake of fire "*where the beast and the false prophet are*" (Revelation 20:10). The beast and the false prophet have been cast into the lake of fire earlier.
5. In the judgment scene described in Revelation 20 the book of life is opened. From the references to the book of life scattered over the Scriptures, and especially from the references

in Revelation, it can be seen that the book is concerned with the destiny of those whose probation will end with the Lord's return. It is unthinkable therefore that the only reference to the opening of this book of destiny concerns the end of the millennium. Can it be seriously supposed that the book of life will not be opened until the end of the kingdom; or that it is opened, closed up and opened again at the end of the millennium, and that this post-millennial opening alone is sufficiently important to mention?

No, this is the judgment seat of Christ. It is a white throne — a symbol of righteous judgment.

The prophetic narrative follows right through into chapter 21. Having been told that the heaven and earth have fled away from the face of him who sits on the throne (20:11), we are prepared for the words: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth ..." (21: 1). Remember that there were no chapter divisions in the original.

Incidentally, it may be worth pondering the fact that little seems to be revealed in Scripture concerning "the great beyond" — the post-millennial era. There could be two reasons for this: it is too far distant to have much immediate relevance; and in any case, in our mortal state we should not be able to understand. Another example of the 'perspective' principle, perhaps.

The second resurrection

Back then to the question of the second resurrection. Since the great white throne scene is not post-millennial, the references that are made to resurrection on this occasion are not concerned with a post-millennial resurrection.

If the phrase "first resurrection" does indeed imply a second resurrection (and it seems to), then we must look to other scriptures to discover what this is and when it occurs.

A reminder may be appropriate here that there is no want of Bible evidence that the judgment of righteous and unrighteous will take place at about the same time.⁶ This is implied by the Lord's declaration to the Pharisees, "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out" (Luke 13:28); as it is by his parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-46). It is also the obvious sense of Paul's words to Timothy, "... the Lord Jesus Christ ... shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom" (2 Timothy 4:1); and to the Thessalonians, "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe" (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10). See the force of that word "when". The wicked will be punished *when* the righteous are rewarded. There is no great time gulf between the two occasions. The words of the angel to Daniel almost amount to an explicit statement that the resurrection of good and bad will take place at the same time. He is dealing with a 'time' question when he says: "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2).

The suggestion that is now offered is not original. It is that the word "first" in the phrase "first resurrection" relates to importance and not to time. (Peter is described as the first of the apostles, although Andrew was called before him. The Greek word *protos*, here translated "first", is actually translated "chief" in about half a dozen places in the AV.) The idea then is that the first resurrection is that of the just — "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power." The other, inferior resurrection, the second, is that of the unjust. The implication is that the second death *does* have power on the unjust ones who are raised from the dead.

The Lord himself speaks about two resurrections in John 5. He calls them "the resurrection of life" and the "resurrection of damnation":

"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (verses 28, 29).

The rest of the dead

"But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished" (Revelation 20:5).

These words concerning the rest of the dead read like a parenthesis. The main thought moves on from the end of verse 4 to the last sentence in verse 5, thus: "... they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. [*Parenthesis concerning the rest of the dead.*] This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection . . ." (verses 4, 5, 6).

Who are the rest of the dead? One view is that they are those who die during the millennium. Yet any reference, *at this point*, to those who die during the millennium, some of whom would not even have begun to exist at the time under consideration, would be irrelevant and distracting. More likely the words refer to the wicked dead who are raised when the Lord returns, as distinct from the righteous dead who are raised at the same time. We have seen that there is considerable scriptural evidence that wicked and righteous will be raised at about the same time. Moreover it has been noted that the 'great white throne' scene does not speak of a post-millennial resurrection.

What this passage does seem to teach is that the wicked, who are raised to life and judged and condemned, die again. Whereas the second death has no power over those who have part in the first resurrection, it does have power over these others. Whereas the righteous are permitted to live and reign a thousand years (and more!) there is to be no life for these others during this thousand-year period — no, not until the thousand years are finished. In other words: never! The idiom employed here can be compared with that used in connection with Michal, Saul's daughter: "Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no child unto the day of her death" (2 Samuel 6:23). No one would argue that these words imply that she had a child on the day of her death.⁷

Ezekiel 38 again

The Gogian invasion of Ezekiel's prophecy was discussed in chapter 4 (Part 1). There it was argued that the hostile confederacy comes down on the land *after* the Lord's return and the establishment of the kingdom.

The question was raised as to whether the Gogian invasion of Ezekiel 38 was the same as that of Revelation 20. The arguments against this view have been heard many times, so here, for a change, are some arguments for equating them. Please bear in mind that here I am proceeding tentatively — just presenting ideas for consideration.

1. Both occasions are after the Lord's return and the establishment of the kingdom.
2. Whereas the restoration of Israel is said to be "at hand" in Ezekiel 36:8, the Gogian invasion is "after many days" (Ezekiel 38:8). So a long period seems to separate the restoration from the invasion. This would be in line with Revelation 20.
3. Consider the words of Ezekiel 38:8 concerning the Gogian host: "After many days thou shalt be visited". These words are a quotation from Isaiah 24:22, and the context of Isaiah's words (concerning a long imprisonment before the visitation) is very similar to the picture presented in Revelation 20. The reader is invited to read both passages and note the similarities. The suggestion therefore is that because Isaiah 24:22 has features similar both to Ezekiel 38 and Revelation 20, it is a passage that links the two together and shows that they relate to the same occasion.

Whether these arguments for equating Ezekiel 38 and Revelation 20 carry conviction or not, the earlier proposition, that the invasion of Ezekiel 38 is after the Lord's advent, is surely beyond dispute.⁸

References and Notes

1. Some of those who believe in a post-millennial resurrection and judgment think that the ones who are raised and judged are those whose probation takes place during the millennium. Others regard Revelation 20:12 as the resurrection and judgment of the wicked — a thousand years after the resurrection and judgment of the righteous.
2. See Part 2, chapter 15, page 180 — *The doom ofBubylon*.
3. Those who have regarded, "And f saw . . ." at the beginning of chapter 21 as an expression that introduces an earlier scene should not automatically reject the proposition that "And I saw ..." introduces an earlier scene at verse 11 of chapter 20.
4. If my "Book of Life" thesis (Part 2, chapter 11) is valid, this link is specially significant.
5. See Part 2, chapter 11, page 130.
6. The word "about" is used advisedly here. Whereas the judgment of righteous and unrighteous will take place *about* the same time — the millennium will not separate the two occasions — they may not happen at *precisely* the same time. See Part 2, chapter 15, pages 175—178.
7. Another good example of the same idiom: Deuteronomy 23:3 (compare with Nehemiah 13:1).
8. See Appendix 1 — *The Gogian Invasion*.

17 A Preview of the Judgment

The Lord Jesus will judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom. Do we want to know the sort of things that the Great Judge will look for? The letters to the churches supply vital information concerning judgment to come.

To the angel of the church at Oldcastle

Imagine that there are not seven letters to seven churches, but eight letters to eight churches; and that the eighth letter begins like this:

"Unto the angel of the church in Oldcastle [or whatever the name of your ecclesia] write: These things saith the Son of God, I know thy works ..."

Would you be interested in this message from the Lord Jesus to your own ecclesia? Indeed you would!

"*7 know thy works.*" Your mind would probably be leaping ahead of the written words, examining yourself and your ecclesia far more critically than you normally do, anticipating the Lord's verdict.

The fact is that you and your ecclesia have received not just one letter, but seven. Indeed each of the seven letters to the churches of Asia is also addressed to every one of us. Each is a personal communication from the Lord Jesus Christ to those who will receive it — "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

The letters to the churches are essentially judgments, interim judgments that help us to understand what the ultimate judgment will be like. There are important lessons to be learned, and they must be learned quickly because the time is short.

1. Complete discipleship

The first lesson is the most important of all. Nothing less than complete discipleship will do. The Lord abhors part-time disciples. There must be unconditional surrender to His authority. A quick check here: does this describe you — or are you a part-time disciple?

The church at Ephesus is a truly remarkable one. Works, labour, patience, doctrinal purity, endurance in adversity — this community functions like a well-oiled piece of machinery. Surely it has great reason to feel satisfied?

It has not! It has left its first love, and because of this it is in imminent danger. Repent or your lightstand will suddenly be removed — this is the urgent message of the Judge; it almost eclipses that splendid catalogue of virtues.

How does this stern verdict impress us? If we think that it is rather hard, we are, in our hearts, challenging the standards of the Lord Jesus and showing that we do not understand the nature of our calling. If we still think it is hard, let us not forget that *love* is the virtue that the Lord is insisting on. Those who forsake love cannot expect love.

So love is the one thing that matters! Are we here and now resolving to concentrate on love while perhaps relaxing a little with regard to the sterner virtues, like doctrinal purity?

Careful now! Pergamos is rebuked just as sternly as Ephesus, but the reason for the rebuke is different. Because the wicked teaching of Balaam has pervaded the church in Pergamos, they are told: "Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth" (2:16).

So a high standard of purity in teaching and practice is also vitally important. In fact, *everything* that God commands is important. For this reason each disciple should make a special point of discovering his deficiencies and making them good.

It is human and natural for people to congratulate themselves on their "strong points" and to console themselves with the thought that these will compensate for their shortcomings. This is a pernicious and dangerous way of thinking. The commandment that really tests the quality of a man's discipleship is the one that he finds difficult. There is no credit in concentrating on that which is easy to obey. This is the way of the world. The fact that all professing Christians tend to do this is a commentary on the deceitfulness of the human mind. And self is the biggest victim of human deceit.

Nothing less than unconditional surrender to the Lord's authority is acceptable; and we cannot surrender unconditionally unless we really believe in Him, and know in our heart that He is altogether adequate, and will provide for all our needs.

2. The danger of self-deceit

Back to the theme of self-deceit! In six out of the seven letters there is condemnation for trusting in a lie. Thus there are, in Ephesus, those "which say they are apostles"; in Smyrna, "them which say they are Jews"; in Thyatira, "that woman Jezebel, which *calleth herself* a prophetess"; Sardis has "a *name* that thou livest, and art dead"; in Philadelphia again there are those "which *say* they are Jews"; and Laodicea is condemned "because thou *sayest*, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and *knowest not* that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

Here, surely, is evidence enough that self-deceit is dangerously easy. Which reminds us of earlier thoughts concerning prejudice.

As the wise man says: "Every man's ways are pure in his own eyes". In these messages to the churches, the Lord is warning his servants that the reason why people will be rejected at the judgment is because they have not examined themselves in the light of instruction from the Word of God. It is the Lord's standards that matter, and not ours.

3. The need for repentance

The demands of discipleship reveal the shortcomings of God's servants. Inevitably there are sins, both of commission and neglect, to be repented of.

The frequent occurrence of this word "repent" in the letters to the churches is the measure of its importance. Today is the day of opportunity — the day of repentance. And generally speaking the proof of sincere repentance is the forsaking of that which is repented of. To

repent is to acknowledge that God is right after all. "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee" (3:3).

4. Beware of covetousness

Again and again reference is made, in these seven letters, to one particular chapter from the Gospels. Have you noticed the frequency of these references? Do you recognise the chapter?

The chapter is Luke 12. If you do not recall what this chapter is about, you may unwittingly have been neglecting one of the most important messages of all. The key verse is verse 31:

"But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things [food, clothing, material possessions] shall be added unto you."

It would be an interesting exercise to mark every place where Luke 12 is quoted in the seven letters. "There is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known"; "Be not afraid of them that kill the body . . ."; "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God"; "Sell that ye have, and give alms . . ."; "And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come . . ."; "He will make him ruler over all that he hath" — these are only some of the passages from Luke 12 that can be matched by words from the seven letters.

The importance of all this is immense. Ponder the fact that the standards laid down in Luke 12 are the basis of the Lord's judgment. How do we measure up to them?

Covetousness is the fashionable, sophisticated idolatry of our day that threatens to steal our hearts and beguile us into thinking that other things are more important than the kingdom of God. Hence the Lord's warning:

"Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15). And again:

"The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment" (Luke 12:23).

The fact must be faced that most people simply do not accept these propositions. Of course the Lord recognises that because we are mortal we need certain basic things to maintain us in life — "Your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things." The things in question contribute towards our life, but seeking them must not be the great purpose of life. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God."

Wonderfully reassuring are the words: "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (verse 32). The emphasis is on *the kingdom*. Because it is God's good pleasure to give us the kingdom — if we seek it — He can surely take care of us and supply our creature needs in the meantime.

What it amounts to is this: if our highest priority is seeking God's kingdom, we can be sure that God will give us that kingdom, and that He will supply us with sufficient to maintain us in this present life which is a preparation for the kingdom; if, however, these other things take

precedence, we will not get the kingdom, and we have no guarantee that our material needs will be satisfied either.

Only those who apply this principle in their lives can withstand the Lord's scrutiny as he moves amongst the churches. Only they will be able to stand in the great day of God's wrath. They alone are God's true servants for whom the enlightenment of the Revelation is intended.

Smyrna had learned this lesson. How comforting are the Lord's words to this church: "I know thy . . . poverty, (but thou art rich)" (2:9). And what a contrast the words to Laodicea: "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (3:17). These people were obsessed with material things: no wonder they were lukewarm. They tried to worship both God and Mammon.

5. Ecclesial independence

Important lessons concerning the status of ecclesias can be learned from the letters to the churches. Each church is a separate light-stand. The Mosaic candlestick was all of one piece, consisting of a central stem and six branches.¹ The candlestick of Zechariah's prophecy was also of one piece, though here there was one great bowl and seven burners.² However, in Revelation the pattern changes more significantly. Appropriate to the ecclesial organisation of the Christian community there are seven separate light-stands. Some can be removed and others left — hence the warning to Ephesus: "I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent" (2:5).

The fact that each church is represented by a separate candlestick means that each church functions independently and is re-responsible for its own affairs. Ephesus is blamed because she has lost her first love, but she is not held responsible for the false doctrine of Pergamos nor the lukewarmness of Laodicea.

Ecclesial autonomy is an important principle, and the Lord's words to the churches of Asia show how wrong it is for some ecclesias to pressurise other ecclesias into conforming to their pattern, often to the point of boycotting and virtually disfellowshipping those that do not conform.

Of course this ecclesial independence cannot be absolute. Apostles and prophets were concerned with the spiritual health of many churches; brethren were appointed as bishops of ecclesias

that they had not been members of; some ecclesias provided welfare for others whose material needs were great; and messages were exchanged and sometimes circulated — for example there was to be an exchange of Paul's letters between the neighbouring ecclesias of Colosse and Laodicea.³

Another lesson is provided by the Lord's words to the faithful remnant in Thyatira. They are not encouraged to break away from that compromising community and start a better one. Like the few in Sardis, they prove their worth by holding fast.

The relevance of the seven messages

The seven letters are often treated as if they hardly belong to the book of Revelation. Some expositors have almost, if not altogether, ignored them. Others have tried to give these letters an artificial relevance by postulating the theory that, taken together, they provide us with a dramatised prophecy of the declension of the church — the spiritual graph sloping downwards from Ephesus to Laodicea. However, there is no scriptural support for this theory, and it is contradicted by the high spiritual quality of the next to the last church, Philadelphia.

The relevance of the seven letters is more *real* than this. The book of Revelation has been provided to show God's servants things which must shortly come to pass; and the letters enable people to examine themselves and see whether they are indeed God's servants.

We have seen that, above all else, they teach clearly that the Judge accepts nothing less than complete discipleship; and by repeated references to Luke 12 they provide a warning against that form of idolatry called covetousness.

This warning against covetousness is important for two reasons: first, because obsession with material things is such a feature of these last days; second, because the destruction of civilisation will reveal the absurdity of this misplaced trust. Let us not forget Ba-ruch the son of Neriah!⁴

Blessings are promised to those who overcome. Seven times the assurance of blessing to come is given by the Lord Jesus. Those who overcome are permitted to eat of the tree of life; are given a crown of life; a new name, power over the nations; white garments; they are made pillars in the temple of God; are granted the privilege of sitting with the Lord around God's throne.

That word, *overcome*, is important. It is profitable to trace the usage of this key word right through the book of Revelation.⁵

The circumstances in which the promised blessings are given to those who overcome are detailed in the ensuing chapters of the book of Revelation. Particularly impressive is chapter 19 where there are references to five of the seven churches.⁶

Tie-ups

The important connections between the letters to the churches and the beginning of the next section of Revelation are often overlooked. Brief reference was made to some of these earlier,⁷ but here they are set out more fully.

"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (2:10). Connect this with the 24 elders with crowns of gold (4:4).

"He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment" (3:5). Connect this with the 24 elders clothed in white raiment (4:4).

"Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (3:11).

Those who have held their crowns, resisting all human attempts to take them away, are able to cast them before the throne, saying, "*Thou art worthy ...*" (4:10,11).

"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my ^ throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (3:21).

This is related 1) to the picture of the 24 elders' thrones around a central throne (4:4); and 2) the prevailing [same word as "overcome" in Greek] of the Lamb referred to in Revelation 5.5.

Incidentally —

Those interested in a deeper study of the letters to the churches! might like to follow up this suggestion. Each of the letters is based on a character and/or an o-casion from the Old Testament. [Three of the more obvious examples are:

Ephesus — Eden

Sardis — Moses coming down from Mount Sinai

Philadelphia — Jacob

Pursuing themes of this kind can be interesting and exciting. It can also be profitable, provided one does not lose sight of the fact that what ultimately matters is that we learn the lessons that the stimulating themes of Scripture are there to teach us.

References and Notes

1. Exodus 25:31-37

2. Zechariah 4:2

3. Colossians 4:16

5 Unfortunately the importance of this word has been obscured by translation The Greek word, *nikao*, is translated "overcome" in the following passages: Revelation 2:7, 11, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 11:7; 12:11; 13:7; 17:14; 21:7; it is translated "prevail" in 5:5; "conquer" in 6:2; "get the victory" in 15:2.

6 See Revelation 19 verses 8, 9, 11, 12

18 From Genesis to Revelation

The new creation

The language of Genesis is used in the concluding chapters of Revelation to teach important spiritual truths.

John witnesses a new creation. He sees a new heaven and a new earth (21:1). From 2 Peter 3 we learn that this is the third heaven and earth. The first was destroyed by water; the second will be destroyed by fire. "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Peter 3:13).

The expression "new heavens and a new earth" must not be taken too literally. In 2 Peter 3 there is an interesting blend of literal and figurative language. The water to which Peter refers was literal enough. It destroyed civilisation and nearly every human being, but the planet remained. So too with the fiery destruction to come: the fire is probably literal. The earth which held vast reservoirs of water for the destruction of the antediluvian world has also great reserves of volcanic fire; and man may also make his own contribution to his fiery destruction by using the bombs he is now producing. The destruction will be immense and civilisation as we know it will be destroyed, but the planet — the earth — will remain.

The Scriptures contain resounding assurances that this planet will not be destroyed. Numbers 14:21 is one of several passages where God declares that the whole earth will be filled with His glory; and the prophet Isaiah declares:

"For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the Lord; and there is none else" (Isaiah 45:18).

No more sea

In the new creation that John witnesses, there is no sea. Although it would probably be unreasonable to expect a literal fulfilment of this prediction, the prophecy is based on literal, cosmological, creative activity. When the earth was without form and void, the

whole surface was covered with water. In the Genesis creation, dry land emerged from the water, and thereafter the surface of the earth had a variegated pattern of sea and land. The ultimate, expressed in Revelation 21:1, is that all the sea disappears and the surface of the earth consists entirely of dry land.

The Scriptures themselves provide us with a key to the interpretation of this symbolical prophecy. Sea represents unregenerate nations — "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt" (Isaiah 57:20). At one time all nations were unregenerate and, in the strict sense, irresponsible. The emergence of dry land means that some of the people of the world are brought into a special relationship with God. The complete disappearance of the sea is an appropriate symbol for a world in which all nations are brought under divine law and are answerable to God — in other words, the coming kingdom of God.

No need of the sun

Another great development is expressed in the elemental language of creation. Speaking of the great city, the new Jerusalem, John says:

"And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it . . ." (Revelation 21:23,24). These words are an echo of Isaiah 60 where the Lord is spoken of in language normally applied to the sun:

"Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee" (verses 1, 2). "Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended" (verse 20). There is a fine balance between Genesis and Revelation. Ingenious explanations have been offered for the fact that the first fiat of Genesis 1, "Let there be light", came on the first day of creation, whereas the sun, moon and stars came on the fourth day — light before the sun! Surely the explanation must be that the first light to make an impact on the earth was the light of the glory of God. Essential though the light of the sun is *to our mortal life*, it has been put there by God to fulfil, for as long as God sees fit, the

purpose that the Almighty Himself can fulfil to perfection. For this reason the sun is sometimes used in Scripture to symbolise those rulers who are there by divine appointment to rule as long as God permits. An eclipse of the sun is a fitting metaphor for the extinction of a political power that has had 'absolute' authority under God.

See then how the splendour of the great, primeval act of creation is fulfilled when the unsullied glory of God shines forth, giving light and life to those whom He has created for Himself.

The perfect marriage

The full potential of marriage was not realised when Adam married Eve. Nor has it been ever since. The secret of the success of the ultimate marriage is preparation — "his wife hath made herself ready" (Revelation 19:7); "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (21:2).

The community that is called the bride of Christ is also called a city — "the holy city, new Jerusalem". It will be remembered that the harlot of Revelation is also a city — called Babylon. The contrast between the two communities confirms the conclusion that the harlot, Babylon, represents a counterfeit-Christian community. The contrast can be expressed more clearly by tabulation:

The bride	The harlot
1 . A city — New Jerusalem	A city — Babylon
2. Long and careful preparation	A wanton career of fornication
3. Comes down from heaven	Sits on a hybrid beast

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 4. Clothed in white
linen | Clothed in purple
and scarlet |
| 5. "Glorious within"
(Psalm 45:13) —
symbolised by a city
with precious stones
as foundations | Embellished with
gaudy trappings |
| 6. Sits on an earth in
which there is no
more sea | Sits on many waters |
| 7. Invites people to
drink of the water of
life (Revelation
22:17) | Invites people to
drink of wine of
fornication
(Revelation 18: 3);
and is a destroyer of
life, drunken with
the blood of saints
and martyrs (17:6) |
| 8. Made immortal | Destroyed by the
beast and the ten
kings |

Eden restored

The last point invites further thought. Not only is there a contrast between Babylon and the holy city: there is also a contrast between the first and last Eden. Especially important is the fact that the lying 'serpent' element is excluded from the future Eden: "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (21:8). "And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life" (21:27). "For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie" (22:15).

The inference is that one reason for the failure of our first parents was because the serpent was not excluded from the garden. Abundant confirmation is provided in Romans 16:17-20:

"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple. For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf: but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil. And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly."

In comparisons and contrasts there are about half a dozen allusions in this passage to the events of Eden. An exhortation to reject false teachers is full of references to Eden. The implications are clear: the serpent should have been excluded; the bride should have been prepared by careful instruction. Both these failures are carefully avoided in Eden restored, as it is described in the last two chapters of Revelation.

"No place for repentance"

The words, "I come quickly", occur no less than three times in Revelation 22. The chapter is charged with a sense of urgency.

9. Excludes	A hold of foul
anything that	spirits and a cage of
defiles, works	unclean and hateful
abomination or	birds (18: 2).
makes a lie.	

With the abruptness of the fall of a guillotine, our period of probation will end, and there will be no further opportunity to repent: "And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (22:10-12).

"The Spirit and the bride say, Come"

Such time as is left to us is a gift from God. As Peter says, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). All the time, the Spirit is saying: "Come!" (22:17).

Those who hear the call of the Spirit, and who respond, will feel moved to extend the invitation to others. Thus "the Spirit *and the bride* say, Come".

A fair test of our discipleship this. Are we preachers of the Word of Life? Do we echo the invitation of the Spirit and call people to repentance while the Lord remains away?

The ultimate test

There is another test — the ultimate test.

To the Lord's final assurance, "Surely I come quickly", John responds: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

Is this our response? *Do we love his appearing?* If we do, then the Lord, the Righteous Judge, will give us a crown of righteousness on that glad day.

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

19 Conclusion — Your Responsibility

I have made some challenging statements and offered some startling suggestions. Now it rests with you. It is for you to decide whether you are profiting by the book of Revelation; whether you are making the best use of the divine message that has been provided to prepare you for the Lord's return.

You must also decide whether the method of interpreting latter-day prophecy adopted in this book is scriptural and reasonable. The conclusions presented, the tentative ones and those that are expressed more confidently, will need checking carefully. If any of the conclusions presented are true, then they are also important.

A warning has been sounded about the dangers of prejudice. Please take this warning seriously.

Lest a mass of detail should have obscured the main points which you are invited to ponder, they are briefly re-stated here:

1. The whole world will soon be engulfed in trouble on an unprecedented scale.
2. Israel will be invaded and overwhelmed by a vast international force. For a short time the nation will suffer greatly. (This is *not* the Gogian invasion of Ezekiel 38.)
3. That power called *the beast* will dominate the political scene. The reader must himself decide whether the beast could be a revived, antichristian Israel. Whatever the identity of the beast, it is time to make mental and spiritual preparation for its tyrannical rule.
4. Some of the saints will be called upon to witness powerfully for Christ to Israel and the world, and they will be specially equipped to do this work. When their witness is completed, they will be suppressed by the beast.
5. The beast and the ten kings will destroy that massive organisation called Babylon before they are themselves destroyed by Christ. The reader must decide whether the ten kings are Arab powers, and whether Babylon is Rome.
6. The Gogian invasion of Ezekiel 38 must not be thought of as a sign of the Lord's return. It will occur after the Kingdom is established in Israel.
7. The day of reckoning is coming soon. Nothing less than complete discipleship is acceptable to the Lord. Especially do the saints need to fortify themselves against the materialistic idolatry of this age. The Lord's recommendation, "Seek first the kingdom of God", has a special relevance to this generation of believers.

The Bible — our guide

Now is the time for preparation. It will be too late to start preparing when the crisis is upon us. This is one of the lessons of Revelation.

We may suddenly discover that the extra time we were reckoning on is not there:

"Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Revelation 22: 10-12).

It is the duty of all responsible Christians to stress the importance of regular Bible reading. A warning also needs to be sounded against the dangers of reading mechanically, as a ritual rather than a means of enlightenment. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, *and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness . . .*" (2 Timothy 3:16).

Those who have tasted the blessings of studying prophecy should encourage others to turn to the Scriptures for light in these difficult days. The book of Revelation has been provided to show God's servants things that must shortly come to pass. God's intention is that we should read it diligently *for the purpose of understanding the future*. It has been neglected too long.

Co-operating with God

This is not all. We must also develop a responsive attitude to God's guidance in life. First there must be an awareness that God is working things out; then a spiritual sensitivity — a reluctance to move without God, but an instant recognition of, and response to divine prompting.

The Lord Jesus had an amazing sensitivity to the will of his Father. From the Scriptures he learned what he was required to do and, at the precisely correct time and in exactly the right way, he did what was required. With a keen awareness of God's consummate planning, by prayer, patience and spiritual alertness, he played his part to perfection.

We can also learn from the example of lesser men — Joseph the patriarch, for instance.¹ Through dreams God had revealed to him the purpose he was destined to fulfil. Then, by bearing the yoke in his youth, Joseph was prepared for his ultimate responsibilities. At an appropriate time, God gently intimated to him that he had not been forgotten.

Joseph played his part by humbly accepting the quota of affliction measured out for him by a wise and understanding Heavenly Father. And he co-operated with God by keeping in step, so to speak. He neither dragged his feet nor dashed ahead; he required neither spurring nor restraining. When he was offered the rulership of Egypt, he accepted it. But when he was made ruler he resisted a temptation that nearly everyone else would have yielded to. He did not pre-empt Providence by sending a message to tell his father that he was alive and had been blessed. God had given convincing evidence that He was working out a plan, and Joseph was prepared to wait. There were nine extra years to wait, but when reunion with his father and brothers took place, it was an authentic divine operation, and Joseph was prepared for it.

At the time of the Lord's first coming, a handful of dedicated people were ready to do what God required of them. Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth, Zacharias, Anna, Simeon and just a few others had patiently prepared for this great occasion, and when it came they were in the right place doing the right thing.² There was nothing chancy about it. God took their attitude into

account and worked through them accordingly. Even these worthy characters were surprised by some of the things that happened, but they were prepared.

Those who had not prepared themselves lost their sense of direction, and most of them never found it again.

It is so easy to get sidetracked by events and attitudes. Remember Lot's wife.³ Remember the two hundred who followed Absalom "in their simplicity and they knew not anything".⁴ Remember how Joab and Abiathar followed Adonijah instead of Solomon and found themselves in an irretrievable position.⁵ Remember the multitude who were fatally trapped in Jerusalem because they had not heeded the Lord's warning.⁶ Remember his urgent admonition concerning false Christs and false prophets . . .⁷

Can we expect God to rescue us from the consequences of our ignorance when we have refused to receive instruction?

Preparation for persecution

It is a pity that so many appear unwilling to take prophecies concerning future persecution more seriously. One gets the impression that they regard religious persecution as a phenomenon that belongs to the deep past.

They hardly seem aware of the fact that at this very time many Bible-loving people are suffering grievously in countries behind the Iron Curtain. And why do they close their eyes to the evidence provided in Scripture (referred to in this book) that more persecution can be expected? Is the prospect so unpleasant that they would prefer not to think about it?

That could well be the reason! Persecution is frightening to contemplate. Most of us are cowards at heart.

How can we prepare for persecution? By measuring our powers of endurance against the ugly possibilities that loom before us, and then proceeding to nerve ourselves to take more and more pressure? By massive resolutions and monumental self-discipline?

There is a better way! Of course resolution and self-discipline are important, but there is something infinitely more important. *We must learn to put our trust in God.*

It is for God's sake that His people will be called upon to suffer. He will not abandon those whose deep desire is to honour Him.

God understands us through and through. He knows the weaknesses of each of us; our breaking points. We can rely upon God to provide those who trust Him with the strength to endure. More, He will enable them to endure *joyfully*. Remember how Paul and Silas sang praises to God in that dark Philippian dungeon?

Now is the time to get to know God. Those who are not learning to trust God now will not feel able to trust Him then. But those who have cast all idols out of their hearts and learnt to rely on God now will be able to turn to Him as a Friend when the crisis comes. They will have a deep conviction that He will never leave them.

"Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Hebrews 13:5,6).

References

1. Genesis 3 7—50
2. Luke 2:25-38
3. Luke 17:32
4. 2 Samuel 15:11
5. 1 Kings 1
6. Luke 21:20,21
7. Matthew 24:4,5,11,23,24

Appendix 1 — The Gogian Invasion and the Beast

The subject of the Gogian invasion of Ezekiel 38 is discussed in part 1, chapter 4. The proposition presented there is that the Gogian invasion (or, more strictly, the attempted invasion) occurs after the Lord's coming and the establishment of the kingdom in Israel.

It was argued that the sequence of events in Ezekiel 37—39 is as follows:

1. The people of Israel are restored to the land of Israel.
2. They are cleansed and made spiritually alive by the breath of God.
3. The divinely appointed king is enthroned.
4. Kingdom blessings are enjoyed in Israel.
5. The Gogian confederacy attempts an invasion and is destroyed on the mountains of Israel.

From other scriptures we have seen that after the return of the people to their land and before the establishment of the kingdom in Israel the beast reigns — an Israelitish beast. Are we to suppose that Ezekiel is silent on this important matter?

Ezekiel is not silent concerning the beast. A passage from the second half of Ezekiel 39 can be easily overlooked:

"And, thou son of man, thus saith the Lord God; Speak unto every feathered fowl, and to every beast of the field, Assemble yourselves, and come; gather yourselves on every side to my sacrifice that I do sacrifice for you, even a great sacrifice upon the mountains of Israel, that ye may eat flesh, and drink blood. Ye shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth, of rams, of lambs, and of goats, of bullocks, all of them fatlings of Bashan. And ye shall eat fat till ye be full, and drink blood till ye be drunken, of my sacrifice which I have sacrificed for you. Thus ye shall be filled at my table with horses and chariots, with mighty men, and with all men of war, saith the Lord God. And I will set my glory among the heathen, and all the heathen shall see my judgment that I have executed, and my hand that I have laid upon them. So the house of Israel shall know that I am the Lord their God from that day and forward" (39:17-22).

These words do not describe the destruction of Gog and his company. By the time Gog tries to invade Israel, the people of Israel have turned to God and are enjoying His blessings. It is stated expressly that the destruction of Gog magnifies God in the eyes of many nations "and they shall know that I am the Lord" (38:23). The destruction referred to in the passage from Ezekiel 39 quoted above, however, is a destruction by which "the house of Israel shall know that I am the Lord their God from that day and forward". Here then is a parenthesis concerning judgment on Israel itself that comes before the Gogian invasion. By this judgment the rebellious element is purged out and the remnant learns to serve and trust God. After this He is gracious to them and pours out His spirit on them — an event referred to earlier in Ezekiel, as we have seen, but appropriately repeated in verse 29 of this chapter.

It is more than interesting to see that the same language (concerning a feast of men of war and horses, to which birds and wild beasts are bidden) is used in Revelation 19:17-20. And the occasion? Why, none other than the occasion of the destruction of the army of the beast, when he goes forth to fight against Christ!

And it hardly needs saying that the evidence has been presented for believing that this beast represents a power that emerges from Israel.

So Ezekiel 39:17-20 concerns a judgment upon Israel itself— a judgment that takes place before the Gogian invasion. And this is in line with other latter-day prophecies.

Appendix 2 — Daniel 11:36— 45

The last section of Daniel 11 is often referred to by those who expound latter-day prophecy, and some remarks concerning this difficult portion of Scripture may be called for.

The first section of the great prophecy of Daniel 11 tells of the division of the Grecian empire into four parts, and after that there is a concentration of interest on events relating to two of these four. The expressions "king of the north" and "king of the south" are of course relative to Israel, and the history of these kings is of interest insofar as it affects the history of Israel. Prophecy concerning these two kingdoms and their effect upon the buffer state of Israel occupies the remainder of the eleventh chapter.

A problem confronts us in verse 36. We are introduced to a powerful and wicked king who is neither called king of the north nor king of the south — simply "the king". Most commentators, having first assumed that this king must be either the king of the north or the king of the south, have then decided in favour of the king of the north.

But why begin with the assumption that this king must be either the king of the north or the king of the south? The fact that the section beginning with verse 36 reads like a new paragraph of prophecy, where it is neither stated nor implied that the central character belongs to the north or the south, is more likely to be an indication that this important power occupies a middle position. Confirmation of this conclusion is provided in verse 40 which speaks about the aggressive attitudes of both the kings of the north and south to this king. Thus: the king of the south pushes at him (the king who occupies the middle position), and the king of the north comes up against this same king like a whirlwind.

Those who regard "the king" of verses 36-39 as the king of the north are compelled to interpret the aggressive acts of verse 40 as the description of a battle between the kings of the north and south. This involves an unsatisfactory juggling with the pronoun "him" — "the king of the south shall push at *him* [i.e. the king of the north]: and the king of the north shall come against *him* [i.e. the king of the south] like a whirlwind".

Let us then think of *the king* as a power occupying a middle position between the north and the south — in other words, occupying the land of Israel. Let us, in fact, think of him as the power of an ungodly Israel. This also makes good sense for another reason. The description of *the king* of Daniel 11 is remarkably similar to that of the little horn of Daniel 7, the little horn of Daniel 8 and the man of sin of 2 Thessalonians 2; and reasons have already been given for believing that the power described in these other scriptures is that of Israel.

The aggressive thrust of the king of the south against *the king* (Israel) is not particularly effective. It is just a push. The king of the north, on the other hand, invades successfully. He enters the land of Israel, but does not take possession of the territories of Edom, Moab and Ammon that lie to the east of Jordan. Israel is submerged, and the king of the north then inundates Egypt. He is therefore a power hostile both to Israel and Egypt. He seems, however, to be in league with Libya and Ethiopia, who are "at his steps". This power from the north makes a proud gesture of annexation by planting "the tabernacles of his palace between the seas in the glorious holy mountain" (verse 45). Yet he comes to his end in a way that is not explained in Daniel 11.

The king of the north of the concluding section of Daniel 11 cannot be Gog of Ezekiel 38 for two reasons:

1. Because Gog's attempted invasion takes place after the Lord has established the kingdom in Israel, whereas the king of the north invades when a wicked king holds sway; and —
2. The Gogian host makes an attempted invasion and does not succeed, whereas the king of the north makes a successful invasion.

All the facts seem to point to the following conclusions:

1. That *the king* is aggressive, godless, latter-day Israel.
 2. That the pushing by the king of the south represents the ineffective Egypt-directed attempts to destroy Israel that we have witnessed.
 3. That the invader from the north represents the Arabs, estranged from Egypt, and under the leadership, perhaps, of Syria. The fact that territories on the east of Jordan are not invaded suggests that this is, basically, an Arab attack. This idea is supported by the fact that Libya is "at his steps". By this time Egypt has changed sides (this we have witnessed recently) and therefore she is invaded at the same time as Israel by the Arabs.
 4. The invasion by the king of the north is probably backed by superior forces. Various scriptures (for example, Joel 3 and Zechariah 14) speak of "all nations" making war against Jerusalem in the latter days, and it seems likely (as has been suggested in other expositional contexts in this book) that they do this in support of the Arabs.
 5. Tidings out of the east and out of the north trouble the northern invader. These tidings must come from a more remote country occupying a more northerly (and easterly) position. Russia? It is interesting to note that so far from acting as a deterrent, these troublesome tidings provide incentive for a more furious and destructive mission.
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