

IS THAT IN THE BIBLE?



**THE MYSTERIES OF THE
BOOK OF REVELATION!**

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Contents

Preface	1
Introduction	3
Chapter 1 Christ's Message to the Seven Churches.....	5
Chapter 2 The "Synagogue of Satan"	15
Meaning of the Word, "Synagogue"	15
The Synagogue of Satan.....	16
Evolution of a False Religious System	17
Chapter 3 The Nicolaitans	19
Speculation About the Nicolaitans.....	19
Origin and Nature of the Nicolaitans	21
Chapter 4 The "Key of David"	23
Meaning of the Word, "Key"	23
Meaning of the "Key of David"	24
God's Covenant With David	25
Shebna and Eliakim	26
Chapter 5 The "Open Door"	29
Ability to Preach the Gospel.....	29
Ability to Enter the Kingdom of God	30
Christ—the Open Door	31
Protection from Physical Persecution	32
Chapter 6 Christ—The Beginning of the Creation of God ...	33
God the Father Without Beginning.....	33
Christ Without Beginning.....	33
Christ Was Melchizedek	34
Meaning of, "Christ the Beginning"	35
Chapter 7 The Heavenly Throne Without a Human Soul ...	37
No Human Souls in Heaven.....	37
What Is Death?	38
Christians Won't Go to Heaven When They Die.....	39
1 Thessalonians 4:16–17	39
John 14:2–3 — "Many Mansions in My Father's House" ..	39
King David Not in Heaven	40
Only Jesus Went Back to Heaven	40
Jesus Will Return to This Earth	41
Enoch Is Not in Heaven.....	41
Enoch "Translated"	42
Elijah Not in God's Heaven	43
Three Heavens	43

Elijah Died	45
Death Is A Sleep	46
Chapter 8 The Scroll With the Seven Seals	49
The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.....	49
The Great Tribulation	50
The Souls Under the Altar	50
The Heavenly Signs.....	52
God’s Servants Sealed.....	52
No Secret Rapture.....	52
Origin of the Secret Rapture Theory	53
Protection Here on Earth	54
The Day of the Lord.....	55
Armageddon	57
The Return of Jesus Christ	58
After Christ Has Returned	59
Millennium on Earth.....	59
<i>The Seven Seals of the Book of Revelation</i>	60
Chapter 9 The 144,000 and the Great Multitude	61
The 144,000.....	61
The Great Multitude	62
What We Can Know From Scripture	62
Repentance in the Last Days.....	63
Chapter 10 The Little Book	65
Chapter 11 The Temple of God	67
A Physical Temple in Jerusalem Before Christ’s Return.....	67
The Abomination of Desolation.....	67
The Temple Will Be Measured.....	68
The Man of Sin in the Temple of God.....	69
More Biblical Evidence for a Physical Temple	70
Chapter 12 The “Two Witnesses”	73
Moses? Elijah? Enoch?	74
What We DO Know From Scripture	74
The Death and Resurrection of the Two Witnesses.....	75
Chapter 13 The Dragon and the Woman	77
The Dragon.....	77
The Woman	77
The Dragon’s Future Fight Against the Woman	78
Chapter 14 The Two Beasts.....	81
The First Beast (Revelation 13:1–10).....	81
The Ten Revivals of the Roman Empire	82
The Second Beast (Revelation 13:11–18).....	83
The Image of the First Beast (Revelation 13:14).....	84
Chapter 15 The Mark of the Beast	87

Chapter 16 666 — The Number of the Beast	89
Chapter 17 The 144,000	91
Chapter 18 The Torment of the Wicked	93
No Everlasting Torment of the Wicked	93
What IS the Meaning of Revelation 14:11?	94
What "Forever" Means	95
The Smoke of Their Torment	96
An Ever-Burning Hell?	97
Origin of the Idea of an Ever-Burning Hell	97
Origin of the Concept of Limbo and Purgatory	98
The Gehenna Fire	98
Fate of the Wicked	99
Fire Won't Be Quenched	100
"Their Worms Won't Die"	101
Chapter 19 The Woman Riding the Beast	103
The Fallen Woman or Harlot	103
The Great City on Seven Hills	104
Identity of the Great City	105
The Scarlet-Colored Beast with Seven Heads and Ten Horns	108
Seven Heads and Ten Horns	109
Seven Last Revivals of the Ancient (Holy) Roman Empire	109
Chapter 20 The Fall of Babylon the Great	113
Don't Be a Part of the Babylonian System	113
Chapter 21 The Marriage Supper Between Christ and His Church	115
Location	115
Parable of the Wedding Feast	115
Five Wise and Five Foolish Virgins	116
Christ Returns Only Once	117
God's Transportable Throne	117
The Sea of Glass	118
The Great Multitude Before the Throne	118
The Bride of God	119
Christ the Bridegroom	119
Christians Betrothed to Christ	120
Christ Will Marry His Bride	121
Bride Includes ALL Christians	121
The Heavenly Jerusalem Called the Bride	122
Chapter 22 The Resurrections	125
The First Resurrection	125
The Second Resurrection	127

Resurrection of Israel	127
Resurrection of Non-Israelite Peoples.....	128
The Third Resurrection	129
The Nature of the First Resurrection	131
The Nature of the Second Resurrection.....	133
The Nature of the Third Resurrection	135
Chapter 23 Eternal Torment of the Beast and the False Prophet?	137
Torture of the Beast and the False Prophet.....	137
Lake of Fire Prepared For Satan and His Angels.....	139
Chapter 24 The "New Jerusalem"	141
The Tabernacle of God With Men.....	142
Description of the New Jerusalem.....	143
Symbolic Significance	143
For the Healing of the Nations	145
Chapter 25 Nations and Kings in the New World	147
Jesus Still Called "The Man"	148
Kings Rule Over Others	148
Chapter 26 Outside Are Dogs and Sorcerers . . .	151
Those Who Are "Outside"	151
Conclusion	155

Preface

In this booklet, we are going to discuss seemingly mysterious passages in the book of Revelation—passages that invoke much curiosity, but, in fact, are commonly misunderstood.

While many have heard about the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, the Great Tribulation, the Day of the Lord, the beast, the false prophet, the mark of the beast, the number 666, the beast with seven heads and ten horns, the dragon, the woman riding the beast, Armageddon, Babylon the Great, the two witnesses, the Marriage Supper with the Lamb, the 144,000, the Millennium, the Great White Throne Judgment, the New Jerusalem, etc., very few have correctly understood what God is conveying through these symbols and detailed descriptions.

In addition, the book of Revelation gives us answers to other important age-old questions—questions such as: What happens to us when we die? Will the souls of true Christians go to heaven? Do wicked souls burn in hell fire forever and ever? What is the truth about the resurrection?

What, then, do these so-called mysterious symbols and events actually *mean*? And what is their relevance in our lives?

Once you understand the structure of the book and comprehend the meaning of its main symbols and descriptions, you can—and *will*—understand the message of the book of Revelation.

Introduction

Early tradition unanimously declared the apostle John as the writer of the book of Revelation. It was probably written during the latter part of Roman Emperor Domitian's reign (A.D. 81–96). John was banned, as a *political* prisoner, to the Greek island of Patmos (compare Revelation 1:9).

The real author of the book is God the Father. He gave the message to Jesus Christ who delivered it to an angel to pass on to John (Revelation 1:1). John simply bore witness of everything that he saw (verse 2).

The book is a *prophecy* (Revelation 1:3; 22:18). It relates to things that must shortly take place (Revelation 1:1), as the time is near, or at hand (Revelation 1:3). Although written nearly 2,000 years ago, the book of Revelation pertains to the end time—to our days.

John was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day (Revelation 1:10). This means that he saw visions (Revelation 4:2; Ezekiel 8:3; 2 Corinthians 12:1–4). The Lord's Day is not a reference to a particular day of the week, but it refers to the prophetic time when God will begin to intervene in world affairs (compare Malachi 4:5; Joel 2:31).

The events depicted throughout the book of Revelation deal mainly with the time span of perhaps one year prior to Christ's return (including many flashbacks to show the historic perspective, culminating in the Day of the Lord).

First, John saw the glorified Jesus Christ—"like the Son of Man" (Revelation 1:12–18). Christ possesses the keys of Hades and of Death, as He died for us and paid the penalty of sin—which is death—on our behalf. His Sacrifice made it possible that mankind could become "kings and priests to His God and Father" (verse 6).

Jesus' appearance in His glorified state was so magnificent that John fell at His feet as dead (Revelation 1:17). Jesus comforted him, reminding him that He is the Head of His Church, and instructed him to pass on a message to the "the seven churches" (Revelation 1:11).

Chapter 1

Christ's Message to the Seven Churches

Revelation 2 and 3

In the second and third chapters of the book of Revelation, John received a message for the “angels of the seven churches” (Revelation 1:20). These messages were to be meant for seven existing local church congregations in seven distinct cities at John’s time, but they were also directed to all Christians at all times (compare Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, and 22), and they included messages for seven consecutive Church eras, beginning at the time of John, and ending at the time of Christ’s Second Coming (compare Revelation 1:19–20).

Note, for example, the following comments from the *Ryrie Study Bible*: “The 7 churches addressed in chapters 2 and 3 were actual churches of John’s day. But they also represent types of churches in all generations. This idea is supported... by the statement at the close of each letter that the Spirit was speaking to the churches.”

This means, that all seven letters are warnings to the Church in every age.

In addition, the *Nelson Study Bible* states: “The seven churches were congregations in Asia Minor in John’s day. Sometimes they are interpreted as representing seven stages of church history.”

Regarding the understanding that Christ’s message ALSO included seven church ERAS, please note the following interesting comments by Baptist minister, Dr. Lehman Strauss, “*The Book of the Revelation*,” copyright 1964, 1972 (hereafter sometimes referred to as “Strauss”), pages 33, 34, 45:

“... each church individually, and the seven churches combined, set forth prophetic anticipation. I see in them seven ages or stages in the life of the Church on earth, commencing with Pentecost... There

is a prophetic picture of seven periods of the Church's history on earth... The Laodicean letter, being the last of the seven, anticipates prophetically the end of the Church Age, that period immediately preceding the return of Christ... Our materialistic, inflationary times might well mark the end of the present age..."

The seven Church eras can be briefly described as the eras of Ephesus (Revelation 2:1–7); Smyrna (Revelation 2:8–11); Pergamos (Revelation 2:12–17); Thyatira (Revelation 2:18–29); Sardis (Revelation 3:1–6); Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7–13); and Laodicea (Revelation 3:14–22).

The following sets forth our understanding of the identities of the seven Church eras:

(1) **Message to Ephesus** (compare Revelation 2:1–7)

The city of Ephesus was the commercial center of Asia. Its temple of Diana was one of the “seven wonders” of the ancient world. At first, the Church brethren did not follow “false apostles” (compare Revelation 2:2: “... you cannot bear those who are evil.”).

Strauss comments on page 36: “They were intolerant of sin. Today it makes little difference what people are like morally or spiritually, just so we get them into our church and on the membership roll to swell the number. The church at Ephesus was not concerned with the quantity of persons that were added, but rather with the quality.”

Nevertheless, they subsequently did tolerate false teachers such as the “Nicolaitans” (Revelation 2:6). The identity of these people will be discussed later in this booklet. The Church members in Ephesus had become weary and had lost their first love for Christ and His truth and were no longer as zealous to resist error. That this could happen was partially due, in the opinion of some commentators, to constant persecution from the Romans under Emperor Domitian (whose statue was found in Ephesus and who called himself “god”) and the fact that they were meeting in their homes or anywhere else they could—scattered congregations with their own pastoral leadership, but without central leadership (compare *Hailey's Bible Handbook*, p. 701).

Historically, the New Testament Church was founded in Jerusalem but was later transferred to the city of Pella, around 69 A.D. When Paul traveled to Europe, Ephesus became a second Headquarters.

Paul spent much time in the city of Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:8). According to tradition, John and Philip died in Ephesus.

The first era of Ephesus describes *the Nazarenes*. The Bible itself identifies the early Christians as the “sect of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5). Worldly records tell us that the Nazarenes kept the Sabbath and the annual Holy Days, abstained from eating unclean meats, and practiced the “ceremonies of Moses.” In other words, they adhered to both the Old and the New Testaments. Historians tell us that the Nazarenes and the Ebonites escaped the Roman destruction of Jerusalem by fleeing to the city of Pella in 69 A.D. The Ebonites were not part of the Church of God, but they did cling to converted brethren.

The Nazarenes are still mentioned in records as late as the 5th century. They are the ones who preserved the book of Matthew. According to Revelation 2:2, the Church of that era was originally zealous, but by the time of the second or third generation, it began to lose “its first love” (verse 4).

(2) **Message to Smyrna** (compare Revelation 2:8–11)

Smyrna means “bitter.” And so, Christ addressed the Smyrna Church as one finding itself in the midst of bitter sorrow and suffering.

Christ encouraged the Church to “be faithful until death” (Revelation 2:10). The Greek word for faithful in this case signifies conviction—a conviction inclusive of the persuasion that with Christ, everything is possible, and that there is never a compelling reason to give up.

Although Smyrna was a splendid city, the members themselves were poor (compare Revelation 2:9).

The second era of the Church began with *Polycarp*. He was a disciple of John who later became the leader of the Church in Smyrna. He refused, in 155 A.D., to renounce Christ and was martyred as a consequence. The persecution mentioned in Revelation 2:10 could refer to ten separate attempts to wipe out Christianity prompted by the edicts of ten different Roman rulers (Strauss, page 43). Or, it might refer to the persecution under Trajan, which hit Smyrna extra hard. Historically, a ten-year persecution against the Church (“ten” signifies in the Bible a period of testing and judgment) occurred under

Diocletian and Galerius from 303 to 313 A.D.

Subsequently, in 325 A.D., the observance of Passover was prohibited by Emperor Constantine, and in 365 A.D., Sabbath observance was outlawed as well. God's true Church was forced to flee "into the wilderness" of little recognition in this world for about 1,260 years, in order to continue observing God's laws (Revelation 12:6).

Strauss makes the following comments regarding Constantine and the Catholic Church, on pages 55 and 56:

"Constantine... declared himself a Christian and Christianity to be the religion of the state. Christian leaders were invited to witness the wholesale baptism of whole regiments of soldiers in Constantine's army. When later almost four hundred bishops met, Constantine was carried on a golden throne and he presided over the council as the recognized head of the church... Today the world is ready to accept the Roman Pope and be subject to him. The Roman Catholic Church claims to be of divine origin, but its 'deeds' and 'doctrines' are hated by Christ."

(3) *Message to Pergamos* (Revelation 2:12–17)

A great altar of Zeus or Jupiter overlooked Pergamos. This town was also the seat of emperor worship. Christians refusing to worship pagan gods or the emperor would oftentimes be killed (compare Revelation 2:13). In addition, Pergamos was a center of healing associated with the temple of Asclepius (or Esculapius or Aesculapius) who was worshipped in the form of a serpent (one of the designations of Satan, compare Revelation 12:9).

Christ chided the Church at Pergamos for holding the doctrine of Balaam (Revelation 2:14; compare Jude 10–14; 2 Peter 2:15).

Notice these interesting comments by Strauss, pages 53–54:

"Balaam conceived an evil scheme that was to produce the downfall of God's people. When he concluded that he could not curse them, he proposed to corrupt them. He suggested that the Moabite girls should seduce the men of Israel by inviting them to participate in their idolatrous and immoral feasts. In this evil perpetration he succeeded (Numbers 25:1–3; cf. 31:16), and through this unholy alliance, this unequal yoke, this mixed marriage, Israel fell. Balaam had followed Satan's old line. When the devil failed to wipe out the godly line through murder (Genesis 4), he resorted to mixture

(Genesis 6). This was Balaamism, and it was this evil principle that came into the assembly at Pergamos.”

The third era of Pergamos began about 650 A.D. True Christians became known at that time as “*Paulicians*.” One important leader was Constantine of Mananali. Originally, the Paulicians believed what the Nazarenes and Polycarp had believed. Worldly records tell us that they kept the Sabbath, the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread; that they preached the Kingdom of God; and that they baptized by immersion. Apparently, more than 100,000 Paulicians died as martyrs, as one author put it, “by hanging, fire and sword.” Later, and perhaps because of persecution, many turned away from the true faith and resorted to violence. They became known as a *warrior sect*; their ministers were also *generals*.

(4) *Message to Thyatira* (compare Revelation 2:18–29)

The city of Thyatira was a commercial center and famous for its temple of Artemis or Diana. A mysterious figure, Jezebel, is mentioned. Whether a literal woman, a symbolic reference to a great false church (compare Revelation 17) or a reference to the wife of ancient king Ahab, the thought conveyed here is that some in the Church of God had begun to engage in pagan worship of the sun god Baal and his “mother-wife”—the moon goddess Astarte or Istar (compare 2 Kings 9:22)—including the observance of Sunday, Christmas and Easter, a doctrine or teaching referred to as the “depths of Satan” (Revelation 2: 24). (For more information, please read our free booklets, “*Don’t Keep Christmas*” and “*Man’s Holidays and God’s Holy Days*.”)

Strauss offers this interesting interpretation, on pages 66–67: “Even though the Bible is clear that a woman is in subjection to the man and that a woman is never to usurp authority over the man (1 Timothy 2:1–12), Romanism has reversed this order and millions of Roman Catholic men worship an image of Mary and offer prayers to her... The Jezebel of the last 1,500 years has not changed. Rome never does change. But this Babylon of prophecy will meet with divine judgment when the sovereign Head of the Church comes back to earth again...”

The fourth era of Thyatira began at the time of the Reformation, around 1100 A.D., with Peter of Bruys in France. He would

later become known as Peter Valdez or *Peter Waldo*, leader of the *Waldensians*. In the 12th century, Waldensians were known in about 22 European countries. In 1309, they appeared in the Netherlands, and a few years later, Waldensian leaders Walter the Lollard and his brother Raymond preached the gospel in Great Britain. In 1315, records report 80,000 Waldensians in Bohemia. By 1539, their number had reached 800,000 in Europe.

The Waldensians kept the Sabbath and the annual Holy Days, and they rejected pagan customs, which had been embraced by orthodox Christianity, such as Easter. Remnants will still exist when Christ returns (Revelation 2:25). However, when persecution began, many resorted to violence—as the Paulicians had done—and they began to forsake the truth and adopted wrong teachings to save their lives (Revelation 2:20–23).

(5) **Message to Sardis** (compare Revelation 3:1–6)

The city of Sardis had once been extremely wealthy under the legendary king Croesus. It was still famous in Roman times. Apparently many in Sardis converted to Christianity, but only few remained faithful. Most were, and would be, asleep (compare 1 Thessalonians 5:2).

Christ says in Revelation 3:4 that Sardis had “a few” which had not defiled their garments.

Strauss writes, on page 74: “The sad contrast between the ‘many’ and the ‘few’ marks the twofold division of the human race. All men travel on one or the other of these two roads. Those who travel with the crowd and stand for nothing might find a certain feeling of security in doing what the majority do. But it is a false security. The fact that so many persons are doing the same thing does not make it right.”

The fifth era of Sardis began about 1585 in England. The practice of Sabbath-keeping became known again during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603). One important leader was *Stephen Mumford* who founded the Church of God in the United States in Newport, Rhode Island, in 1664. In the middle of the 19th century, true Christians became part of an Adventist movement, but separated in 1860 and began to publish numerous magazines and pamphlets, including, “*The Remnant of Israel*,” “*The Sabbath Advocate*,” and the “*Bible Advocate*.” Ministers were sent from Missouri, Oklahoma and Oregon to Mexico, Chile, Argentina, and the Philippines, and

congregations in those countries began to keep the Sabbath and the Holy Days. Remnants of the Sardis era will exist when Christ returns (Revelation 3:3).

(6) *Message to Philadelphia* (compare Revelation 3:7–13)

Philadelphia was a small town. The brethren had “little strength” (Revelation 3:8); they were humble and content in the midst of a corrupt society. This is the only Church with which Jesus does not find any fault. Christ, who has the key of David (Revelation 3:7; compare Isaiah 22: 20–22), promised to keep them from persecution (Revelation 3:10), and to give them an open door (Revelation 3:8; compare 1 Corinthians 16:9). More about the key of David and the open door in chapters 4 and 5 of this booklet.

Christ said to the Church at Philadelphia (Revelation 3:8) that He knew their works and He approved of them. Strauss explains correctly on page 91 that we “are saved by faith and not by works, but we are saved to work, and for our works we shall be rewarded (Ephesians 2:8–10).”

The sixth era of Philadelphia began under *Herbert W. Armstrong*, who had come into contact with the Sardis era in 1927, and was ordained as a minister in 1931. The Philadelphia era began in 1933. In 1934, the truth was preached from a radio station in Oregon, and in 1953, radio programs began to be broadcast in Europe. The Church of God became known as the *Radio Church of God* and later as the *Worldwide Church of God*, with its educational institutions of *Ambassador College* and *Ambassador Foundation*, headquartered in Pasadena, California.

At the time of his death in 1986, Mr. Armstrong wondered in a prayer, in the presence of the Advisory Counsel of Elders, whether he was passing the baton to the Laodicea era. Subsequent events have answered this question in the affirmative.

Since Christ promises the Philadelphians protection from the still future event of the Great Tribulation (Revelation 3:10), remnants of the Philadelphia era must still exist and be active (compare Revelation 3:8; Matthew 24:45–47) at the time of Christ’s return. As will be explained in chapters 8 and 13, this protection will be granted here on earth—not in heaven. The concept of a secret rapture is nowhere taught in Scripture

(7) *Message to Laodicea* (compare Revelation 3:14–22)

Laodicea was a very prosperous city near Colossae. Christ alluded to this prosperity (compare Revelation 3:17), also by referring to fine wool and eye salve, two of the town's commercial products (Revelation 3:18). The city was a banking center as well, and its water supply was channeled from hot springs some distance away, essentially reaching the town in a "lukewarm" state (Revelation 3:16).

Christ said in Revelation 3:15–16 that He wished the Laodiceans were either cold or hot, but that He will spew them out of His mouth because they were lukewarm.

Strauss explains, on pages 97 and 98: "This the Lord is saying to those at Laodicea that if, instead of being lukewarm, they were so cold as to feel the bitterness and severity of that coldness, they would flee to the true warmth of refuge. If we are really cold, and admit to the fact, our confession will lead to the removal of our sin... The Greek word for 'hot' ... means 'boiling hot'... the members in the church at Laodicea were not boiling hot; they were not ardent Christians. They had no enthusiasm, no emotion, no zeal, no urgency. It is possible to have a large measure of doctrinal correctness without the fire of spiritual fervor and affection..."

It should be noted here that while all of the other messages were directed to the angel [either a spirit being or a human church leader] of a particular city, this message is directed to the angel of the church of the "Laodiceans," [not Laodicea!], showing perhaps the "individuality" of the people.

Hailey's Bible Handbook remarks on pages 707–708: "Strange picture. A Church of Christ, with Christ Himself on the outside, asking to be let in to one of His own churches."

Eerdman's Handbook to the Bible concurs, stating on page 650, "The worst case of all seven is a church so self-satisfied as to be totally blind to its true condition. It is so far from what it should be that Jesus stands outside, knocking for admittance to the lives of individuals who call themselves Christians."

As mentioned, we believe that *we are living today in the last era of the Church—the Laodicea era*. Therefore, the message to the Laodiceans should serve as a **STRONG WARNING** for us today! Rather than keeping the doors of our hearts *closed*, we are to **obey**

His command and zealously embrace His promise to His true followers, as recorded in John 14:23: “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.” Anyone who does NOT do so, is essentially refusing to follow Christ by *refusing to DO* what He says, thus denying entrance to Him who stands outside knocking.

The last era, that of the Laodiceans (compare Revelation 3:14), will be predominantly in existence at the time of Christ’s return. But this does not mean that those who are called today could not become a part of the remnant of the Philadelphia era. Laodiceans are not limited to any one particular Church organization; they actually can be found in every true organization of the Body of Christ.

Regardless of their “corporate” affiliation, and regardless of what Church era one may actually belong to individually, all in God’s Church must remain, or must become zealous, and they must repent (compare Revelation 3:19)! They must maintain or acquire the Philadelphia spirit (compare Revelation 3:11) in order to be accounted worthy of escaping the terrible times ahead, and to stand before the Son of God when He returns (Luke 21:36).

History reveals, as does God’s infallible Word, that Jesus did, indeed, build His Church (compare Matthew 16:18); that commencing with the Day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2, God separated individuals whom He called and to whom He gave His Holy Spirit; that throughout some 2000 years of subsequent history, the Church of God has existed, even though its identity has been often overshadowed by false churches; and, that even now, in a time when Satan has caused a scattering of God’s people, Jesus Christ still works and rules as the living Head of the Church of God.

Chapter 2

The “Synagogue of Satan”

Revelation 2:9; 3:9

We read in Revelation 2:9 and Revelation 3:9 about people who belong to the “synagogue of Satan.” Before analyzing these two passages in detail, let us first get some background:

Meaning of the Word, “Synagogue”

The word “synagogue” is used in several places in the New Testament. The word is derived from the Greek word “*sunagoge*” and means, literally, a “bringing together.” The Greek word “*sun*” means “together,” and the Greek word “*ago*” means “to bring.” (Compare “*Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*,” by W. E. Vine). *Young’s Analytical Concordance to the Bible* defines it as a “place where people are led together.” Although originally used for religious or other gatherings of Jews, the word was later also applied to religious or other gatherings of Christians.

The *New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* confirms this understanding. They write, under number 4864, that the word means “an assemblage of persons; [specifically] a Jewish ‘synagogue’ (the meaning or the place); by [analogy] a Christian church—assembly, congregation, synagogue.”

In his letter to the “twelve tribes which are scattered abroad,” James addressed “brethren” from those twelve tribes (James 1:1, 2). He wrote primarily to brethren from the house of Israel—who were NOT Jews (For more information on the identity of the modern house of Israel, please read our free booklet, “*The Fall and Rise of Britain and America*.”).

In James 2:2–4, he states: “For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also

come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, ‘You sit here in a good place,’ and say to the poor man, ‘You stand there,’ or, ‘Sit here at my footstool,’ have you not shown partiality among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?”

In the Greek, the word for “assembly” in James 2:2 is “*sunagoge*.” The *New Jerusalem Bible* translates “synagogue,” rather than assembly. The point is, James uses this word for a religious assembly of *Christians*. In addition, the Greek verb, “*sunago*,” normally rendered as “to assemble,” describes a religious meeting of *Christians* in Acts 4:31.

Christ also warned that His disciples—true Christians—would be “put out of the synagogue” (compare John 16:2). In the Greek, the words are “*aposunagogos poieo*,” and they literally mean, “expelled from the congregation” or “excommunicated” (Compare “*Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*,” by W. E. Vine).

The Synagogue of Satan

With this background, let us now review the two passages where the “synagogue of Satan” is mentioned:

Revelation 2:9 addresses the Church of God in Smyrna. It says: “I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a *synagogue of Satan*.”

Revelation 3:9 addresses the Church of God in Philadelphia. It says: “Indeed I will make those of *the synagogue of Satan*, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you.”

As we have seen, the reference to “synagogue of Satan” does not *have to* describe a literal Jewish synagogue. Nor does the word “Jew” have to refer to literal Jews. Note that the Bible says that those from the synagogue of Satan claim that they are Jews, but that they are not. Romans 2:28–29 states: “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.” The Bible refers to true Christians as spiritual Jews, since salvation is of the Jews (John 4:22).

Those who claim that they are Jews, but are not, are those who actually claim that they are *spiritual* Jews or true Christians. But Christ says that they are not true Christians, as they do not teach and DO what He commands (compare Matthew 7:21–23).

As we have seen in the preceding chapter, Christ addresses in chapters two and three of the book of Revelation seven literal churches at the time of John, as well as seven successive church eras of the Church of God which culminate in Christ's return. And, He is speaking to all Christians, at all times. In addition, Christ is *describing a false religious power*, calling it the “synagogue of Satan,” which is masquerading as His true Church. This false religion was already evolving at the time of the local Church congregations in Smyrna and Philadelphia. (This same false religious system would become more and more influential and powerful throughout the successive eras of God's true Church.)

Evolution of a False Religious System

The evolution of that false religious system, which was directed by none other than Satan the devil, is described in several verses in the second and third chapters of the book of Revelation:

In Revelation 2:6, the true Church of God in Ephesus is warned not to tolerate the “deeds of the Nicolaitans.”

In Revelation 2:9, the “synagogue of Satan” is mentioned, and Christ says in verse 10 that the devil will persecute the true Church of God in Smyrna.

In Revelation 2:13, Christ tells the Church of God in Pergamos that they live where Satan has his throne. He also warns them, in verses 14 and 15, not to commit idolatry, nor to accept the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. We see, then, that the deeds of the “Nicolaitans” had become canonized. More about the Nicolaitans in chapter 3 of this booklet.

In Revelation 2:20, Christ warned the Church of God in Thyatira of idol worship and of a fallen woman (Jezebel) who was claiming to be a prophetess, which would include a claim that she had the gift or “right” to speak on behalf of God. It is possible that that same fallen woman is mentioned in Revelation 17. This woman or religious system would exist at least until the time of the Great Tribulation (Revelation 2:22).

In Revelation 2:24, Christ warns the Church of God in Thyatira to be aware of the doctrine and depth of Satan; and in Revelation 3:9, Christ states that those of the synagogue of Satan will worship before the feet of true Christians in Philadelphia.

It is important to note that some in the true Church of God began to tolerate and then adopt false doctrines and practices, until they ultimately left the Church, spiritually, and became a part of that false religious system—the synagogue of Satan. These heretics might not even have departed from the assembly of true Christians, but they might have forced true Christians to leave, or they might have even excommunicated true Christians (as prophesied by Christ). Christ said that these historical events would happen again at the time just prior to His return.

Jamieson, Fausset and Brown write in, “*Commentary on the Whole Bible*,” on page 1533: “The ‘Jews’ who might have been ‘the church of God,’ had now, by their opposition and unbelief, become the synagogue of Satan.”

Turning once again to Revelation 3:9, we find that those of the synagogue of Satan will worship before the feet of true Christians (especially those of the Church in Philadelphia). This implies that true Christians will be God beings—as none other than God is worthy of worship (Revelation 19:10; 22:8–9). The Bible confirms, indeed, that it is the potential of true Christians to become God beings. (For more information, please read our free booklet, “*The Gospel of the Kingdom of God*.”)

In addition, those of the synagogue of Satan will ultimately recognize that they were deceived, and they will come to realize who and where the true Christians had been. What a joyful time this will be! May God speed that day!

Chapter 3

The Nicolaitans

Revelation 2:6, 15

We find two references in the Bible about the Nicolaitans, both contained in the second chapter of the book of Revelation. In His message to the Church of Ephesus, Jesus Christ says in Revelation 2:6: “But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.” Again, in His message to the Church of Pergamos, He says in Revelation 2:15: “Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.”

Speculation About the Nicolaitans

Much has been speculated about the origin and exact nature of the Nicolaitans and their teaching.

The commentary of *Albert Barnes’ Notes on the Bible* points out:

“From the two passages, compared with each other, it would seem that they were alike corrupt in doctrine and in practice, for... their deeds are mentioned, and... their doctrine... In regard to the origin of the name, there [has been the opinion...] that the name was derived from Nicolas, one of the deacons ordained at Antioch [compare Acts 6:5]. Of those who have held this opinion, some have supposed that it was given to them because he became apostate and was the founder of the sect, and others because they assumed his name, in order to give the greater credit to their doctrine.

“But neither of these suppositions rests on any certain evidence, and both are destitute of probability. There is no proof whatever that Nicolas the deacon ever apostatized from the faith, and became the founder of a sect; and if a name had been assumed, in order to give credit to a sect and extend its influence, it is much more probable that the name of an apostle would have been chosen, or of some other

prominent man, than the name of an obscure deacon of Antioch...

“[Others] have supposed that the name Nicolaitans was intended to be symbolical, and was not designed to designate any sect of people, but to denote those who resembled Balaam, and that this word is used in the same manner as the word ‘Jezebel’ [in Revelation 2:20], which is supposed to be symbolical there.

“... it has been supposed that some person now unknown, probably of the name Nicolas, or Nicolaus, was their leader, and laid the foundation of the sect. This is by far the most probable opinion, and to this there can be no objection...”

The *New Bible Commentary: Revised* adds the following:

“We gather... that they held the same error as the Balaamites, viz. teaching to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit fornication. These were the chief matters condemned by the decree of the apostolic council (Acts 15:29). It is noteworthy that Balaam and Nicolaus have more or less the same etymology (Balaam—‘he has consumed the people’; Nicolaus—‘he overcomes the people’). If this is the teaching so strenuously resisted by the Ephesians... then it must have been widespread indeed.”

The commentary of *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown* gives this interpretation: “Literal eating of idol meats and fornication ... were accompanied by SPIRITUAL IDOLATRY AND FORNICATION.”

Unger’s Bible Handbook states: “Some take this symbolism, however, as indicating the origin of clericalism (*‘nikeo’*, ‘conquer,’ and *‘laos,’* ‘people’), making them a group that early favored a clerical system which later developed into the papal hierarchy.”

Similarly, we note from the *Ryrie Study Bible*: “... some understand from the meaning of the name (‘conquering of the people’) that they were a group which promoted a clerical hierarchy...”

James Hastings makes the following interesting remarks about the “Nicolaitans” in his *“Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics”*:

“According to pseudo-Dorotheus, there was a Nicolas, bishop of Samaria, who fell into heresy and evil ways under the influence of Simon Magus, and he may have given his name to the sect... the name... has been attached to several later groups... There is evidence at the beginning of the 3rd century of the existence of a Gnostic sect of immoral habits, called therefore Nicolaitans... they shared the

worship of the great Mother-goddess, the goddess of heaven...”

Origin and Nature of the Nicolaitans

In light of what IS known about the Nicolaitans, one does not need to be uncertain about their origin and nature when considering the most obvious usage of the word—which has been preserved even in our days. We explain the following in our free booklet, ***“Don’t Keep Christmas,”*** under the section, “Santa Claus”:

“Closely associated with the giving of presents at Christmas time is the figure of Santa Claus, also called St. Nicholas... According to legend, there was a Catholic priest who allegedly gave gifts to children in December. This priest was supposedly the Bishop of Myra, and he was called ‘Nicholas.’ He reportedly died on December 6, 326 AD. This is the ‘official’ explanation, as to why the ‘day of St. Nicholas’ is celebrated today on December 6. Many historians doubt, however, that there is any legitimacy to this legend. They even question whether such a priest ever existed...”

“On the other hand, it is a historical fact that pagans did worship a pagan god that shows great similarities with the modern Santa Claus. This pagan deity was the old Germanic god ‘Wodan.’ He was called ‘Odin’ in Scandinavia. Wodan or Odin was a sun god. According to pagan belief, he gave his life for the world by ‘hanging on a tree’ or a cross for nine nights, after which he was ‘pierced by a spear.’... In Germanic legends, Wodan [or Odin] had a holy tree, and when someone came close to that tree on December 25, he found presents under it. In addition, Wodan’s day on which he was worshipped was December 6.

“Earl W. Count, B.D., Ph.D., Professor of Anthropology, states in *‘4000 Years of Christmas,’* on pp. 11 and 54: ‘We do not really know when the Christ Child... was born; or the time and place when Christmas was first celebrated; or exactly how it was that, over the centuries, a bishop-saint of Asia Minor and a pagan god of the Germans merged to become Santa Claus... Of most interest to us, however, is the fact that Wodan [or Odin] has become—Santa Claus, or, as he is better called, St. Nicholas.’...”

“Where did the name ‘Santa Claus,’ or ‘Nicholas,’ come from? In Revelation 2:6, we are introduced to the sect of Nicolaitans which

taught and practiced wrong concepts and doctrines... Nicolaus, the founder of the sect of the Nicolaitans... is none other than ‘Nicholas’ or ‘Santa Claus.’ In German, for instance, the similarities of these two names are even more striking. ‘Nicolaus,’ the founder of the ‘Nicolaitans,’ is rendered in German as ‘Nikolaus’—and ‘Santa Claus’ in German is ‘Nikolaus’ as well.”

Far from being an obscure short-lived ancient sect, the Nicolaitans are well and alive today in the “Christian” world. After all, Christ’s message to the seven churches was not just meant for the seven ancient church congregations at the time of John, but it was also prophetic and addressed to the Church of God throughout its existence until the time of Christ’s return. And the message is a warning to all true Christians not to repeat the mistakes which some of the ancient church congregations committed.

The deeds of the Nicolaitans became doctrine, and orthodox Christianity adopted the pagan festivals of Christmas and St. Nicholas Day—in honor of the “founder” of the Nicolaitans—and teaches it today as some of the most important festivals of Christianity. In addition, the unbiblical concept of the worship of the Virgin Mary and her “ascension” to heaven, where she is believed to reside as the queen or “Mother goddess” of heaven—as the early Gnostics worshipped the “great Mother goddess of heaven”—gradually became an established dogma in the Catholic Church. But Jesus said twice in Revelation 2 that He hates the deeds and teachings of the Nicolaitans. As you continue reading in this booklet, you will clearly see why this is.

Chapter 4

The “Key of David”

Revelation 3:7

Jesus Christ tells us in Revelation 3:7 that He has the “key of David.”

The term “key of David” is only mentioned once in the New Testament—in Revelation 3:7—and a variant of the term; i.e., “key of the house of David,” is only mentioned once in the Old Testament, in Isaiah 22:22

Meaning of the Word, “Key”

Before analyzing the meaning of the phrase, “key of David,” or, “key of the house of David,” let us review Scriptures first which use the term, “key.”

In the *Old Testament*, the Hebrew word for “key” (in the phrase, “key of the house of David”), is “*maphteach*.” It is defined by *Young’s Analytical Concordance of the Bible*, as, “key, opener” or “opening.” In addition to Isaiah 22:22, the word is only used two more times, in Judges 3:25 and in 1 Chronicles 9:27. In both cases, the word describes a literal key that opens a literal door to a literal building or room.

In the *New Testament*, the Greek word for “key,” as used in Revelation 3:7, is “*kleis*.” It is a female word and defined by *Young’s Analytical Concordance of the Bible* as, “a key.” It is used six times in the New Testament. In addition to Revelation 3:7, we find it three more times in the book of Revelation; i.e., in Revelation 1:18; 9:1; and 20:1. We also find it used in Matthew 16:19 and in Luke 11:52.

Revelation 9:1 and Revelation 20:1 speak about “the key of the bottomless pit.” The “bottomless pit” is the location where Satan and his demons will be bound for a thousand years, after Christ’s return (compare, too, Luke 8:31, where the word is translated as,

“abyss.”). The bottomless pit or abyss describes a (spiritual) future prison for fallen angels, and the “key” to the bottomless pit describes a (spiritual) key to open and shut this prison. The concept of “key” is used in a similar fashion here, as it is used in Judges 3:25 and 1 Chronicles 9:27.

In addition, we read in Matthew 16:19 that Christ gave Peter “the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” The context shows that He was revealing to Peter and the other disciples the KNOWLEDGE as to how to enter the Kingdom of God. (For more information, please study our free booklet, *“The Gospel of the Kingdom of God.”*) In Luke 11:52, Christ clarifies this, by saying: “Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of KNOWLEDGE. You did not enter in, and those who were entering in you hindered.” (The parallel scripture in Matthew 23:13 shows that Christ was talking about the knowledge of how to enter the Kingdom of God).

Turning to the book of Revelation, Christ said in Revelation 1:18 that He has the “keys of Hades and Death.” In other words, He has the KNOWLEDGE to bestow on us, of how to escape death. Psalm 68:20 tells us: “Our God is the God of salvation; and to God the LORD belong escapes from death.” Further, Christ decides, of course, who will be found worthy to enter into eternal life.

We have seen so far that a key opens and shuts a literal building or room; and that it unlocks or opens to our understanding the knowledge of how to escape death and how to enter the Kingdom of God.

Meaning of the “Key of David”

Turning to Revelation 3:7–8, we find that the word “key” is used in exactly the same way when it talks about the “key of David.” The passage reads, “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, ‘These things says He who is holy, He who is true, He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens: “I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.”’”

Christ reveals that it is He who has the key of David, and that it is He who opens and shuts. We also read that Christ gave “the church in Philadelphia” (Revelation 3:7) “an open door.”

The next chapter of this booklet discusses in detail the concept of the “open door.” As will be shown in [chapter 5](#) of this booklet, one of the meanings is the ongoing obligation and ability of God’s Church to preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God. In the process of preaching the gospel message, some will be called and will obtain the knowledge of how to enter the Kingdom. The key of David, then, has to have some kind of nexus or connection with the preaching of the gospel message and the response by some to the message.

God’s Covenant With David

As we explain on pages 39–42 of our booklet, “***And Lawlessness Will Abound,***” God made a covenant with David and his descendants. According to that covenant, there would always be a descendant of David sitting on the throne of David, a throne that still exists to this day on the earth. Jesus Christ will return to an existing throne, and He, as a descendant of David, will then sit on that throne and rule from it. Therefore, the “key of David” is associated with the knowledge of where the throne of David is today, and who are today the modern nations of the houses of Israel and Judah (as the throne of David would always rule over “Israel.”). The booklet also explains that God made His covenant with David because David kept God’s Law. In Isaiah 55:3, the new or “everlasting” covenant is described as “the sure mercies of David.”

We are told in Scripture that God’s true disciples will rule on this earth, with and under Christ, sitting on thrones (compare Matthew 19:28). The rule of the saints on this earth is clearly part of the gospel message. In fact, only when we have entered the Kingdom of God as Spirit beings, will we be able to rule with Christ on this earth. We will then be part of the Kingdom or Family of God, ruling—as God beings—over man. King David will be in the Kingdom of God. He, too, will be a member of the God Family at that time. Jeremiah 30:9 prophesies: “But they shall serve the LORD their God, And David their king, Whom I will RAISE UP for them.” (Compare, too, Hosea 3:5.)

God's covenant with David makes it possible that true Christians who believe and obey God—when they are born again as Spirit beings—can rule, with and under Christ, in the Kingdom of God. Christ came as a human being to qualify so that God the Father would “give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32–33). We will share in Christ's rule in Jerusalem (Daniel 7:27; Isaiah 2:1–4), which will be established first over the modern houses of Israel and Judah. We understand, of course, that God's government and rule “upon the throne of David and over His kingdom” (Isaiah 9:7) will increase and finally include all nations (compare Isaiah 66:18–20).

Shebna and Eliakim

Turning to Isaiah 22, we find a description of the judgment on Shebna, a scribe and steward over the king's house. Although Shebna was a historical figure (Isaiah 36:3; 2 Kings 18:37), this judgment is also directed at an end-time personality, as the context of the prophecy is still the future Day of the Lord (verses 8, 12 and 20 speak of “that day,” a prophetic reference to the Day of the Lord). This end-time “Shebna” could be an unworthy political leader over the modern house of Israel or Judah, or it could perhaps refer to a religious figure in the spiritual house of God—the Church. Isaiah 22 prophesies that “the LORD will throw you [Shebna] away violently, O mighty man, And will surely seize you. He will surely turn violently and toss you like a ball Into a large country; there you shall die, and there your glorious chariots Shall be the shame of your master's house. So I will drive you out of your office And from your position he will pull you down” (verses 17–19).

This remarkable prophecy continues in verses 20–25: “Then it shall be IN THAT DAY That I will call My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah; I will clothe him with your robe And strengthen him with your belt; I will commit your responsibility into his hand. He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem And to the house of Judah. ***The key of the house of David*** I will lay on his shoulder; So he shall open, and no one shall shut, And he shall shut, and no one shall open. I will fasten him as a peg in a secure place, And he will become

a glorious throne to his father's house. They will hang on him all the glory of his father's house, the offspring and the posterity, all vessels of small quantity, from the cups to all the pitchers. IN THAT DAY, says the LORD of hosts, the peg that is fastened in the secure place will be removed and be cut down and fall, and the burden that was on it will be cut off; for the LORD has spoken."

Eliakim, the son of Hilkiyah, was a historical figure who became the steward or prefect over the palace, as had been foretold by Isaiah (compare 2 Kings 18:18; Isaiah 36:3, 22; 37:2). Since the prophecy in Isaiah 22:20 talks about the still future Day of the Lord, it refers to an additional "Eliakim" who is yet to appear. The context of the passage deals with the rulership of the house of David over Israel. Originally, Shebna had been in a trustworthy position in the king's rule. The *Nelson Study Bible* explains that "the steward had the key that gave him an audience with the king." Scripture foretold that Shebna would be replaced by Eliakim, and that Eliakim was to become "a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah." Eliakim would receive the key of the house of David, so "he shall open, and no one shall shut, And he shall shut, and no one shall open." We know from Revelation 3:7 that Jesus Christ is in possession of that very key. It is therefore obvious that the "end-time" Eliakim is none other than Jesus Christ Himself.

Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, Commentary on the Whole Bible, point out: "Eliakim, as his name implies, is here plainly a type of... Christ, the Son of 'David'..."

The *New Bible Commentary: Revised*, adds the following:

"Jesus is true in the sense of 'true to His word', i.e. faithful. This is spoken in connection with His possessing the key of David, a phrase that recalls [Revelation] 1:18 but actually quotes Is. 22:22; it claims for Christ the power of admitting individuals or shutting them out from the city of David, the new Jerusalem, the Messianic kingdom."

The *Nelson Study Bible* agrees: "The key of David represents authority as the One who opens and shuts the door in the Davidic kingdom (see Is. 22:22), a prerogative that is Christ's as the rightful 'Son of David' (see Matt. 1:1)."

The *Broadman Bible Commentary* concurs: "To say that Christ is

the one who has the key of David is to affirm his messianic authority to admit or exclude from the messianic kingdom.”

In conclusion, Isaiah 22 and Revelation 3 confirm, in light of all of the Scriptures quoted herein, that the “key of David” refers to the knowledge that Christ, the “Son of David,” will rule over the nations of Israel and Judah, as well as over the entire earth. It also includes the understanding as to who the modern houses of Israel and Judah are; where they are located today; and where the throne of David can be found. It includes the knowledge that only Christ has the power to give us access to, or reject us from entering God’s Kingdom (compare Acts 4:12). It reveals to us how we can avoid paying the death penalty for our sins (compare Romans 6:23; John 8:24); how we can inherit eternal life by entering and becoming members of the Kingdom of God; and how we can qualify to rule, with and under Christ, over the houses of Israel and Judah, and the entire earth.

Chapter 5

The “Open Door”

Revelation 3:8

In Revelation 3:7–8, Christ tells the angel of the Church in Philadelphia: “These things says He who is holy, He who is true, ‘He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens’: ... ‘See I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it.’”

That door is still open for those who belong to the “Church in Philadelphia.” “The Church in Philadelphia” is mainly a reference here to faithful Christians who have developed in their lives a “Philadelphian *spirit*” or attitude—which is described in Revelation 3:7–13.

But what is this open door?

Ability to Preach the Gospel

At least four Scriptures explain that the term “open door” refers to the ability of the Church to preach the gospel—and all that it entails—in all the world as a witness to all nations, prior to Christ’s return. Acts 14:27 states, “He had opened the DOOR OF FAITH to the Gentiles.” 1 Corinthians 16:9 points out, “...a great and effective DOOR has opened to me” in Ephesus. 2 Corinthians 2:12 says, “... when I came to Troas to preach Christ’s gospel, and a DOOR was opened to me by the Lord...” Finally, Colossians 4:3 states, “...that God would open to us a DOOR for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ.”

However, the term “open door” is not limited to preaching the gospel message to the world. There are other Scriptures that identify additional aspects of the “open door.”

Ability to Enter the Kingdom of God

In the parable of the ten virgins, the five wise virgins, who were ready, went with Christ to the wedding, and, as Matthew 25:10 tells us, the open door was shut. When the foolish virgins, who were not ready, came and said, “Lord, Lord, open to us!”, Christ answered them, “I do not know you” (verses 11–12). Likewise, in Luke 13:25, we read that the time will come when the Master of the house (that is, of the Church of God) will shut the door and won’t let those in who are standing outside, knocking.

The open door, then, is also associated with the ability of the five wise virgins to enter God’s Kingdom. The foolish virgins were unable to do so—for them, the door was shut. Christ told us to “enter” by the narrow gate, which leads to life, and that only few will find it (Matthew 7:13–14). Only for the few, then—the *spiritual* Philadelphians—the door to the gate of eternal life is open, and remains so. However, for the overwhelming majority of mankind, it is closed at this point in time, and it has been closed since God placed cherubim at the east of the Garden of Eden to guard or protect the way to the tree of life. (This door to eternal life WILL be opened later to mankind, after Christ’s return, during the Millennium and the Great White Throne Judgment. For more information, please read our free booklets, “***Do We Have an Immortal Soul?***” and “***God’s Commanded Holy Days.***”)

We read in Revelation 3:20 that the Church of the Laodiceans—those with a Laodicean *attitude* of spiritual blindness and self-righteousness (Revelation 3:16–18)—has shut the door. Christ is outside, standing in front of the door, knocking. Christ says, “IF anyone... opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me [at the Wedding Supper—more fully discussed in chapter 21 of this booklet].” Christ, then, must give us an open door to let Him into our lives—to let Him live His life within us (Galatians 2:20). As long as we are *spiritual* Philadelphians, and remain so, Christ gives us that open door. Christ WILL live His life in us, and NO ONE can shut Him out. No one—except we ourselves—can do it. If we shut Him out, Christ is not going to force us to keep the door open. He does not force us to live God’s Way of Life.

When we continue to shut Christ out of our lives, more and more,

we cease to be *spiritual* Philadelphians and become, instead, lukewarm and self-righteous Laodiceans. It is the *spiritual* Laodiceans who have shut the door—the door of their hearts—while Christ is outside, knocking, but only for a while, to be received back into their lives. We are living at the very time when God IS knocking at the doors of many Laodiceans. If they don't repent, but instead, refuse to let Christ become the center of their lives again, it will be they who will be knocking at HIS door at the time of HIS return, in an effort to enter the Wedding Supper. By then, the door will be shut for them. Unless the spiritual Laodiceans repent and open the door of their hearts to let Christ in, thereby becoming spiritual Philadelphians, the door to eternal life remains shut for them.

Christ—the Open Door

Christ identifies Himself many times as the “open door.” In John 10:1–9, Christ talks about Himself as the door to the sheep. He says that He who enters the sheepfold by the door (verse 2) is the true shepherd, and that everyone will be saved who enters through Christ. That is what the five wise virgins did when they entered the wedding room through Jesus Christ—the open door—going in and finding pasture (compare John 10:7, 9).

We of ourselves have only a little strength (Revelation 3:8). Our strength of overcoming and living a Christian life must come through Jesus Christ, the open door to God the Father. Paul was confident that God would complete the good work in those in whom He had begun it (Philippians 1:6). Christ said that those who endure to the end WILL be saved. They are the VERY elect. They follow the Lamb wherever He goes, because they are the called, and the chosen, and the faithful ones (Revelation 14:4; 17:14).

The “open door” is associated with Christ who has given Himself to the spiritual Philadelphians. Christ said that He gave the Morning Star to those in Thyatira. Those Christians—although physically living in Thyatira or during the Thyatira era—can be described as *spiritual* Philadelphians, because they will rule in the world to come (Revelation 2:26–28). Christ later identified Himself as that very Morning Star (Revelation 22:16; 2 Peter 1:19). He—the Morning Star—gives Himself to His people. The same symbolism is used

regarding the open door—Christ gives Himself, as an open door, to the spiritual Philadelphians.

Revelation 3:12 says that the true Philadelphians will be “pillars” in the temple of God, and that they will go out no more. It is given to them to go through the open door, Christ, into the temple of God, in order to be pillars there.

Protection from Physical Persecution

God closed the door of the ark after Noah and his family, as well as the selected animals, had entered the ship. Genesis 7:16 reads, in the *Revised English Bible*: “The Lord closed the door on him.” God did so, after righteous Noah and his family had entered the ark through the open door, which no one could shut for them. They entered the ark to be saved from destruction. This is interesting, as Revelation 3:10 points out that the Church in Philadelphia—those who have a Philadelphian *spirit*—will be protected from the hour of trial or tribulation which shall come upon the whole world. The flood destroyed the whole world at the time of Noah, and Christ said that the Great Tribulation to come would destroy all of mankind if Christ would not intervene at the very end (Matthew 24:21–22). The open door that has been given to the Philadelphians is also associated with *physical protection* from the Great Tribulation.

In conclusion, God has given to the *spiritual* Philadelphians the open door of preaching His Word, and NO ONE can shut this door. At the same time, we must strive to enter the narrow gate or door that leads to eternal life, by letting Christ—the door to God the Father and to God’s Kingdom—live in our hearts. If we do this, God promises us physical protection from the Great Tribulation (Revelation 12:14), as well as entrance into His Kingdom as born-again members of His Family (2 Peter 1:10–11).

Chapter 6

Christ—The Beginning of the Creation of God

Revelation 3:14

Did Christ have a beginning? Is this what Revelation 3:14 teaches, when it states that Christ is the “beginning of the creation of God”?

God the Father Without Beginning

The Bible proclaims dogmatically that God had no beginning, but that He has always existed. We read that God created all things; that is, human beings, animals and all physical things, as well as angelic beings and all spiritual “things.” However, God is not just one Person, but a Family, presently consisting of God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son. Jesus Christ was God since all eternity—as was the Father. We read that God created everything through Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:15–17)—proving that God the Father *and* Jesus Christ existed before there was anything else. Hebrews 1:1–2 tells us that God the Father created “the worlds” through His Son, Jesus Christ. John 1:1 says that the “Word”—Jesus Christ (compare Revelation 19:13)—was “in the beginning” with God and that the Word *WAS* God. John 1:3 tells us that “all things” were made through Him, and “without Him nothing was made that was made.”

Some claim that God the Father first created His Son, Jesus Christ, and proceeded afterwards to create everything else through Christ. They say that Christ—the Word—was created, and when that happened, there were no days or time created, so Christ had no beginning of days as such. This is not, however, what the Bible teaches.

Christ Without Beginning

Micah 5:2 talks about the coming Messiah when it states: “But

you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, WHOSE GOINGS FORTH ARE FROM OF OLD, FROM EVERLASTING.”

Isaiah 9:6 states: “For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” According to *Young’s Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, the Hebrew for “Father” in the context of Isaiah 9:6 can also convey the meaning of “ancestor, source, inventor.”

Christ Was Melchizedek

In Hebrews 7:1–10, we are introduced to the Son, Jesus Christ, who was known as the High Priest Melchizedek at the time of Abraham (When Christ was here on earth as a human being, born as a man, He confirmed that He actually met Abraham in His prior life as an immortal God being, compare John 8:56–58).

Note how the Son of God or Melchizedek is described:

- Hebrews 7:1: He was the Priest of the Most High God—God the Father, who is higher than Christ (1 Corinthians 11:3).
- Hebrews 7:3: He was “without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life.” Christ said later that He is the One who “was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Revelation 1:8).
- Hebrews 7:3: When He appeared as Melchizedek, He was made like, or better, He was “resembling” (compare the *Revised Standard Version*) or “bearing the likeness of” (compare the *Revised English Bible*) the “Son of God”—that is, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, manifested Himself as a human being, as He did on other occasions in the Old Testament (for instance, He and two angels appeared to Abraham before Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, compare Genesis 18:1–2, 13, 16–17; 19:1).
- Hebrews 7:3: The One known as Melchizedek and as the Son of God, Jesus Christ, “remains a priest continually.” He is still alive, confirming what Christ said in Revelation 1:18: “I am He who lives, and was dead (and in the grave for 72 hours), and behold, I am alive forevermore.”

- Hebrews 7:8: He was not a “mortal man” but someone who still “lives” today.

Accepting the clear Biblical testimony, we must conclude that Jesus Christ, as a Spirit being and as the second member of the God Family, has always lived together with God the Father. He had no beginning.

Meaning of, “Christ the Beginning”

How then are we to understand Revelation 3:14 which says that Christ is “the Beginning of the creation of God”? Since the Bible does not contradict itself, we can rule out the idea that God the Father created Christ so that Christ became the very first act—the “beginning”—of God’s creation. What, then, is the meaning of the verse?

Let us note how other translations render this verse:

- *New International Version*: “the ruler of God’s creation”
- *Living Bible*: “the primeval source of God’s creation”
- *New Revised Standard Version*: “the origin of God’s creation”
- *Revised English Bible*: “the source of God’s creation”
- *New Jerusalem Bible*: “the Principle of God’s creation”

Please also note the following statements from a few commentaries:

- *The Broadman Bible Commentary* gives the following explanation:

“‘The beginning of God’s creation’ is not easy to interpret. If taken to mean that Christ was the first creature, then one has ignored the Christology of Revelation... Beckwith translated this phrase ‘the one from whom creation took its beginning.’ Another good translation is ‘who is the origin of all that God has created.’... God is the primary source (4:11; 10:6), and Christ is the agent of creation as in John 1:3 (see Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2).”

- *The Nelson Study Bible* states:

“... the Beginning, meaning the ‘First Place’ or ‘The Ruler.’... The phrase about creation has been interpreted by some to teach that Jesus is the first being that God created. This is certainly not required by Greek grammar, and is contrary to other biblical passages. Christ is described in other passages of the New Testament as eternal (see John 1:1–1) and as being

God Himself (see John 8:58; Phil. 2:6; Titus 2:13). Revelation speaks of Him as the First and the Last, the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End. In fact, the Greek phrase in this verse can be translated in a more active sense, so as to read, ‘the One who begins the creation of God.’”

- The “*New Bible Commentary: Revised*” adds the following: “... the title ‘the beginning of God’s creation’ (better translated ‘the principle’ or ‘source’ of creation) exalts Christ as Creator above the proud but puny creatures that boast in their self-sufficiency.”
- The Commentary of *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown* agrees, pointing out: “‘beginning of the creation of God’—not he whom God created first, but as in Colossians 1:15–18... the Beginner of all creation, its originating instrument.”

Some have suggested that Christ is the “beginning” of God’s spiritual Family, and that this is the meaning of Revelation 3:14. Even though Christ IS the “firstborn” among many brethren, Revelation 3:14 does not limit itself to *that* aspect of God’s creation. Rather, God created EVERYTHING through Jesus Christ, including the spiritual world—long BEFORE He began to create man.

In Revelation 22:13, Christ refers to Himself as the “beginning [arche] and the end [telos].” If “beginning” suggests that there was a time when Christ did not exist, but that He came into existence as the first being of God’s creation, does “end” indicate that there will be a point at which He will no longer exist? That would be a ridiculous suggestion!

Based on all the biblical evidence, we can dogmatically state that Jesus Christ had NO beginning. Rather, He is the BEGINNER of God’s creation: God the Father created everything through Jesus Christ, who existed since all eternity. For more information, please read our free booklets, “*God is a Family*” and “*Jesus Christ—A Great Mystery*.”

Chapter 7

The Heavenly Throne Without a Human Soul

Revelation 4

We read in Revelation 4:1–2 that John was transferred “in the Spirit” or in a vision to the throne of God in heaven. He sees God the Father on His brilliant throne, surrounded by angelic beings.

No Human Souls in Heaven

It is important to realize that none of the beings described in Revelation 4 are human beings made immortal—they are strictly created holy and righteous angelic beings. This includes the twenty-four elders (Revelation 4:4), the seven Spirits of God (Revelation 4:5), and the four living creatures (Revelation 4:6–8). All of these angelic beings, and their functions and responsibilities, are fully explained in our free booklet, “***Angels, Demons and the Spirit World.***”

The fact that no immortal human beings or “souls” are mentioned to reside in heaven may shock and disturb those who believe and teach that we (or our souls) go to heaven when we die. But the belief that Christians go to heaven when they die is by no means universally accepted in orthodox Christianity.

In a recent article of *WorldNetDaily*, dated February 10, 2008, the following was pointed out:

“A bishop described as ‘one of the most formidable figures in the world of Christian thought’ is now challenging the widely held belief that Christians go to heaven when they die. N.T. ‘Tom’ Wright, the fourth most senior cleric in the Church of England who has been praised for his staunch defense of the literal resurrection of Jesus Christ, has published a new book in which he says people do not ascend to God’s dwelling place. Instead, God will be coming back to Earth. ‘Never at any point do the Gospels or Paul say Jesus has been

raised, therefore we are... all going to heaven,' Wright told Time Magazine...Wright says much of 'traditional Christianity' has been influenced by pagan philosophies...

"While Wright's view may seem stunning to many of today's Christians, it is the same view held by some famous names in the Protestant Reformation. In 1520, Martin Luther blasted Catholic ideas 'that the soul is immortal; and all these endless monstrosities in the Roman dunghill of decretals.' A decade later, English Bible translator and martyr William Tyndale echoed the idea Christians are completely dead until Jesus returns, as he voiced opposition to 'heathen' ideas of people having immortal souls at birth: 'The true faith putteth [setteth forth] the resurrection, which we be warned to look for every hour. The heathen philosophers, denying that, did put [set forth] that the souls did ever live. And the pope joineth the spiritual doctrine of Christ and the fleshly doctrine of philosophers together; things so contrary that they cannot agree...'"

In fact, the Bible does not teach that a Christian goes to heaven when he dies.

What Is Death?

Let us first consider some fundamental biblical teaching about death, as it now relates to mankind.

Hebrews 9:27 states: "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment..." Ecclesiastes 3:20 confirms that everyone dies: "All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust." Psalm 89:48 concurs: "What man can live and not see death? Can he deliver his life from the power of the grave?" Paul also shows that all men die: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22).

The Bible is very clear what happens to a person at the time of his or her death.

In Ecclesiastes 9:4–5, we find the following:

"But for him who is joined to all the living there is hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they shall die; But *the dead know nothing*, And they have no more reward, For the memory of them is forgotten." As people will not remember them after some time, so their own memory (the faculty of remembering) also

ceases to exist (See the marginal notes in the *Companion Bible*).

Verse 6 continues: “Also *their love*, their hatred; and their envy have *now perished*...”

Psalm 146:3–4 illustrates that the day one dies, his *thoughts perish*.

(For a further discussion on this topic, see our booklet, “*Do We Have an Immortal Soul?*”)

Christians Won't Go to Heaven When They Die

1 Thessalonians 4:17 and John 14:2–3 are often used in an attempt to prove that when a Christian dies, he immediately is taken off to heaven to spend eternity with God. It is claimed that such is his reward for having lived his life according to the way taught in his faith. But what do these passages really say?

1 Thessalonians 4:16–17

1 Thessalonians 4:16–17 reads: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

Paul was not referring to the day of a person's death, but to the time of the *resurrection* of the just, which occurs at the time of Christ's Second Coming; and to what is to happen then to those who have a part in that resurrection (verse 16). The resurrection from the dead will be discussed in much detail later in this booklet, especially in [chapter 22](#).

John 14:2–3—“Many Mansions in My Father's House”

Christ said in John 14:2–3: “In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”

The Greek word for “mansions” refers to dwelling places. It literally means, “dwellings” (compare the margin of the *New King James Bible*). The same word is used in John 14:23, where it is translated as “home.” According to the *Nelson Study Bible*, “Everybody has a longing for a permanent, secure place. Such places have already been

set aside for all of God's children."

As our booklet, "*The Gospel of the Kingdom of God*," points out, Christ is preparing the places, or positions of rulership, of true Christians, depending on their conduct in this life.

Christ continued to say, in John 14:3, that "if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that *where I am*, there you may be also." When Christ spoke these words, He was *here on earth*. He said He would *return to this earth*, and the disciples, who would at that time be *resurrected from the dead*, would then be with Him, where He was at the time of His statement—that is, *here on earth*!

The passages in 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17 and John 14:2–3 don't mean that Christians go to heaven, when they die.

King David Not in Heaven

Not even righteous King David went to heaven when he died. Peter gave this testimony concerning David: "Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day" (Acts 2:29). And so, that there be no confusion, Peter very precisely showed that David was not in heaven: "For *David did not ascend into the heavens*, but he says himself: 'The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool"' (Acts 2:34–35). This is a prophecy that God the Father would place *Jesus Christ* at His own right hand in heaven for a period of time.

Only Jesus Went Back to Heaven

Jesus Christ died, and He was without sin (compare 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 1 John 3:5). But *only Jesus* has entered heaven, having been resurrected by the Father (compare Ephesians 1:20; Hebrews 8:1). This is further explained by Paul in Ephesians 4:8–10. It is also verified by Christ's own words. Christ told Nicodemus that "*No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man...*" (John 3:13). Martin Luther, correctly understanding the biblical teaching on this matter, even translated John 3:13 as follows: "No one ascends into heaven, but He who descended from heaven, that is, the Son of Man" (copyright 1938).

Jesus Will Return to This Earth

When Christ returns to this earth, He will bring the reward for true Christians with Him (compare Revelation 22:12). They will be resurrected or changed at that time and meet the returning Christ in the clouds, in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Then, they will descend with Him to the Mount of Olives. When Jesus ascended to heaven, from the Mount of Olives, the angels told the apostles: “This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

Zechariah 14:4 shows that in that day, Christ’s feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives, which is located on the earth! His disciples will be ruling with Christ when He rules here on earth (compare Revelation 20:4–6). “...thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). They will be where Christ will be (compare John 14:3)—here on earth. After all, Christ’s disciples are to “inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5).

Christ is coming in all His glory, with His holy angels, to begin a Millennial rule upon the earth (Matthew 25:31–32). The saints of God, who will have been resurrected from the dead at that time, along with those saints still living, who will be changed to spirit at that time, will be given power to rule with Christ (Revelation 2:26–27).

The saints will have positions as Kings and Priests, and will reign with Christ during the 1,000 year period on the earth. The rest of the dead, who had no part in this resurrection, will await in their graves for a future resurrection (Revelation 20:5).

No biblical passage tells us that we go to heaven when we die. Rather, Christians will rule with Christ here on earth, when He resurrects those who died, or when He changes those, who are still alive at His Coming, from mortal to immortal.

Enoch Is Not in Heaven

Many refer to Enoch as proof that we go to heaven to be with God when we die. Since we don’t, what happened to Enoch?

Genesis 5:24 is one of the misunderstood Scriptures concerning Enoch: “And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.” This verse is quoted in Hebrew 11, verse 5.

When we read the context of Genesis 5, we find the line of Adam

through Seth and the particular children who were faithful to God. In this lineage we find the mention of faithful Enoch (verse 22, compare Jude 14): “After he begot Methuselah, Enoch walked with God three hundred years, and had sons and daughters.” However, Enoch had already been alive for sixty-five years so that his total lifespan was 365 years—shorter by far than either his ancestors or his offspring.

We have only been given a few indications in the Bible as to what exactly the world was like before the flood came. When Noah, the great grandson of Enoch, was born, Noah’s father, Lamech, said of him: “This one will comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD has cursed” (Genesis 5:29). Also, in Genesis 6:5, we read this statement about the tragic circumstances of mankind: “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

However, Noah “walked with God,” being called “... a preacher of righteousness,” while God brought “in the flood on the world of the ungodly” (2 Peter 2:5).

Understanding that Enoch’s generation was in rebellion to God and His laws, shows the challenge that Enoch faced. Hebrews 11:5 lists Enoch among those who were truly faithful to God: “By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, ‘and was not found, because God had taken him’; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God.”

Now consider verse 13 of Hebrews 11: “These ALL [including Enoch, compare Hebrew 11:5] DIED in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” This verse conclusively proves that Enoch, one of these faithful, died along with the others.

Genesis 5:23 also conclusively states: “ALL THE DAYS of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years.” This same phrase, “all the days,” is used throughout this chapter about generations of people who died.

Enoch “Translated”

In speaking of Enoch, the Bible records that he “walked with God” (Genesis 5:24), and “he pleased God” (Hebrews 11:5). Because

of this, and because of the rebellious society in which Enoch lived, God “took” him away, so that he “should not see death” (Hebrews 11:5, *Authorized Version*). God “translated” or transported him to another place on earth, in order to spare him from the second or eternal death. We don’t know when exactly God transported Enoch to another place on this earth—whether this happened at the end of his life or before—but we do know that Enoch DIED the first death at the age of 365. John 8:51 confirms that if we keep God’s Word, we shall “never see death”—the *second* death, that is. Remember, it is appointed to *all* men once to die the *first* death (Hebrews 9:27). We do know for certain, based on the biblical teaching and evidence, that Enoch did die the first death at a relatively young age for his day and that he did not ascend to heaven!

Paul also said in Hebrews 11:5 that Enoch was “not found.” This does not mean that he lived on forever. Moses died, and God buried him at a secret place, and he was not found, and “no one knows his grave to this day” (Deuteronomy 34:6).

We need to both consider and believe the clear statements of Scripture. Like David and many other people who have faithfully served God, Enoch awaits the hope of the resurrection to righteousness (compare Hebrews 11:39–40), and a time in which he will indeed not see death—the second death of eternal destruction.

Elijah Not in God’s Heaven

Some teach that Elijah went to heaven where God’s throne is, and that he—or his soul—is presently with God in His heavenly realm.

But as noted earlier, Christ stated unequivocally that “no one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man” (John 3:13, *NASB Version*). This includes Elijah, as well as Enoch.

Three Heavens

However, we must realize that the Bible speaks of more than just one heaven. The Bible does, indeed, reveal the existence of “three” heavens. While the first two heavens are “physical” in nature, the third heaven is composed of spirit—referred to in Scripture as God’s dwelling place.

The fact that there is more than one physical heaven can be seen in Genesis 1:1, where we read, “In the beginning God created the HEAVENS and the earth” (compare also the *Revised Standard Version*.)” Also, in Genesis 2:1, “Thus the HEAVENS and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished” (compare also the *Revised Standard Version*). These verses imply that the whole material universe was created simultaneously with the earth.

The first two heavens—the physical heavens—can be divided into the earth’s atmosphere and the space beyond our atmosphere—commonly called the universe.

The atmosphere or the “first heaven”—the air that surrounds the earth—refers to the space where birds fly, where clouds and winds roam, and from which the dew comes. We read in Genesis 1:20: “...let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens.” We also read, in Genesis 27:28, that God promises to give “the dew of heaven.” Finally, we are told in Deuteronomy 33:28, that Jacob’s “Heavens shall also drop dew.”

The physical universe that is beyond this earth’s atmosphere, can be described as the “second heaven.” It represents the space where we find the sun, the moon, the stars, and all of the other planets that God has created. We read, in Genesis 1:14–17, that God referred to the sun and the moon as “lights in the firmament of the heavens” (verses 14, 15), and that He “set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth” (verse 17). David pondered, in Psalm 8:3, over God’s “heavens, the work of Your fingers,” and he especially continued to talk about “the moon and the stars, which You have ordained.”

In addition to these two physical “heavens,” we find that the Bible speaks about another heaven—a heaven composed of spirit—the third heaven, where God lives. No human being or soul has ever ascended to this heaven (compare John 3:13)—the only one who went to this heaven, after His resurrection, was Jesus Christ. Elijah did not go to the third heaven, where God’s throne is, but only to the first heaven.

We read, in 2 Kings 2:1, 11, that Elijah was taken up “into heaven by a whirlwind.” We also read that the disciples understood that Elijah did not go to the third heaven, as they were concerned that

“the Spirit of the LORD has taken him up and cast him upon some mountain or into some valley” (verse 16). In fact, God transported Elijah to another place here on this earth, where Elijah continued to live until his death. He wrote a letter and had it delivered to King Jehoram, AFTER he “went to (the first) heaven,” as Jehoram became king right at the time of Elijah’s disappearance (2 Kings 1:17; 3:1). 2 Chronicles 21:12–15 gives us the contents of the letter, referring to the evil deeds of King Jehoram that he had committed *after* Elijah had been taken away, having been transported through the air to another place here on earth.

We know, then, from Scripture, that Elijah did not go to the third heaven where God’s throne is. We also know that he was transferred, supernaturally, to another place here on earth. There are several biblically recorded incidents where human beings were supernaturally transferred by God to another place here on earth (compare, for example, Philip’s transfer to another place here on earth, in Acts 8:39–40).

Elijah Died

However, we also know from Scripture that Elijah *died* after this incident, as it is appointed to man once to die (Hebrews 9:27).

Some say that Elijah will return as the one who prepares the way for Christ’s Second Coming, or that he is one of the two witnesses still to appear. However, there is no biblical evidence supporting any such claim. We will discuss the true identity of the two witnesses in chapter 12 of this booklet.

Some believe that Elijah was alive at the time of Christ, as he appeared, in a glorified state, to three of the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration, together with the glorified Moses and Jesus (Matthew 17:1–9; Mark 9:2–10; Luke 9:28–36). We explain this account in detail on pages 14 and 15 of our booklet, “***The Gospel of the Kingdom of God.***” In that booklet, we show that the whole experience was a VISION—the disciples were given a foretaste of the Kingdom of God in power. They saw, in a VISION, the time—still in the future—when Christ, Moses and Elijah would be powerful God beings in the Kingdom of God. Elijah and Moses are not glorified yet, as Hebrews 11:39–40 explains. They *will* receive the promise of

eternal life and glory in the Kingdom of God *at the time of Christ's return*—not before then.

Some believe that Elijah was alive at the time of Christ, in the person of John the Baptist. Although Christ said that John the Baptist was the Elijah to come (Matthew 17:12–13), other Scriptures explain that John had come in the spirit and the power of Elijah (Luke 1:17)—not that he was the reincarnated Elijah, or that Elijah had never died and that he appeared now as John the Baptist.

Elijah is dead in the dust of the earth, awaiting the resurrection of the just. Elijah—some years after being removed in the whirlwind—died and went to the grave, but he will rise again to live forevermore!

Death Is A Sleep

The biblical truth is very clear: No human being goes to heaven after death, and—as we will discuss in [chapter 18](#) of this booklet—no human being goes to a state of limbo, purgatory or hell, either. These are all pagan concepts, which are NOT taught in Scripture! When a person dies, he SLEEPS the sleep of death. God will wake him out of that sleep in a resurrection. IF it were true that a person—or his or her “soul”—were to keep on living after he or she died, WHY THEN would there have to be a resurrection?

We read in Isaiah 57:1–2: “The righteous perishes, and no man takes it to heart; merciful men are taken away, while no one considers that the righteous is taken away from evil. He shall enter into peace; they shall rest...”

Job asked the age-old question, in Job 14:14, “If a man dies, shall he live again?” Job himself gives us the answer to his question, “All the days of my hard service I will wait, till my change comes. *You shall call*, and I will answer you; you shall desire the work of your hands” (Job 14:14–15).

Jesus Christ confirmed that the dead will be made alive again—actually, that it is *Christ* who will CALL, and that they will respond. He said in John 5:28–29: “...The hour is coming in which **all** who are in their graves [that is, all who have died] will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the *resurrection* of life, and those who have done evil, to the *resurrection* of condemnation [or judgment].”

The fact that death is a sleep and that the dead will be resurrected out of that sleep is also confirmed in Daniel 12:2: “And many of those who *sleep* in the dust of the earth shall *awake*, Some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt.” The angel who spoke to Daniel told him: “But you, go your way till the end; for you shall *rest*, and *will arise* to your inheritance at the end of the days” (verse 13).

God will resurrect everybody in his due time—but not necessarily all at the same time. This fact will be discussed in chapter 22 of this booklet.

Chapter 8

The Scroll With the Seven Seals

Revelation 5:1; 6:2–14; 8:1–13; 9:1–21; 16:1–21

John saw in vision that God the Father had in His right hand a scroll, sealed with seven seals, which contained prophecies for the future.

Many have been confused about the scroll with seven seals (compare Revelation 5:1), and they have tried to attach human interpretations to them. But John saw, in a vision, that no one was able to break nor explain the seven seals, except for the Lamb, Jesus Christ (compare Revelation 5:3, 5–7, 9; 6:1). We, therefore, need to turn to *Jesus Christ's Words* in order to understand the seven seals. And IF we accept the explanations of Jesus, as written, then the meaning becomes very clear.

The first six of the seven seals are all recorded in Revelation 6.

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

When Christ opens the first four seals, described in Revelation 6:2–8, John sees in the vision the famous four horsemen of the Apocalypse which kill “a fourth of the earth” with “sword, hunger, death and by the beasts of the earth” (Revelation 6:8). When comparing Revelation 6:2–8 with Christ’s sayings in Matthew 24:4–7 and Luke 21:8–11, then the meaning of the four horsemen or the first four seals becomes clear:

(1) The FIRST SEAL (Revelation 6:2)—RELIGIOUS DECEPTION (compare Matthew 24:3–5; Luke 21:8).

(2) The SECOND SEAL (Revelation 6:3–4)—WAR (compare Matthew 24:6–7; Luke 21:9).

(3) The THIRD SEAL (Revelation 6:5–6)—FAMINE (compare Matthew 24:7; Luke 21:11)

(4) The FOURTH SEAL (Revelation 6:7–8)—PESTILENCE (compare Matthew 24:7; Luke 21:11).

Oftentimes religious deception leads to wars, directly or indirectly. Wars, in turn, lead to famine and diseases. Historically, the Black Death alone killed upwards of one-third of the people living in Europe in the 14th century. The Spanish flu pandemic lasted from March, 1918, to June, 1920, spreading even to the Arctic and remote Pacific islands. While older estimates put the number of those who were killed at 40 to 50 million people, current estimates are that 50 to 100 million people worldwide died, possibly more than what succumbed to the Black Death.

The Great Tribulation

(5) The FIFTH SEAL (Revelation 6:9–11)—THE GREAT TRIBULATION

After the four horsemen have begun their terrible ride, organized and worldwide martyrdom of true Christians will occur next, depicted by the fifth seal (compare Matthew 24:9–12; Mark 13:11–13; Luke 21:12–19).

The Souls Under the Altar

How are we to understand that there are souls under the altar who speak—and that they are then told to “rest” a little while longer (Revelation 6:9–11)? Doesn’t this show that our souls go to heaven when we die, while they are resting at the same time?

Now, that would be a pretty confusing teaching, don’t you think?

First of all, it does not say that the altar is in heaven. Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Bible maintains that “The altar is upon earth, not in heaven.” The “souls” are under the altar because, as the *Nelson Study Bible* explains, “sacrificial blood was poured beside the base of the altar in the temple (see Ex. 29:12).”

We must realize that the fifth seal with the souls under the altar describes a *vision*, as do the other seals. The four horsemen do not REALLY ride—they REPRESENT certain events, which will take place on this earth. In the same way, the “souls under the altar” are not really alive and do not really cry to God with a loud voice. Neither

did the “dry bones” in Ezekiel’s vision in Ezekiel 37:11 really speak, nor did Abel’s shed blood (Genesis 4:10). This is symbolic language, as we also read in Hebrews 12:24 that the blood of Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant, “speaks better things than that of Abel.”

Notice also what is said in Revelation 20:4, 6 about the “souls” of those who were killed for Christ:

“... I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads and on their hands. *And they lived* and reigned with Christ for a thousand years... Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection...”

These souls were brought back to life in a resurrection. Before that, they were dead. (Please note [chapter 7](#) of this booklet, discussing in detail the false concept of the “immortal soul.”)

Just imagine what it would mean if we were to take this symbolic vision in Revelation 6:9–11 literally: Souls of killed *saints* would need to “rest” under the altar for several more years—and that in a conscious state, being able to speak and to have emotional pain—until other servants of God were killed as well (Revelation 6:11). This does not sound like a very blissful and happy state of affairs for the souls of righteous people!

To use the vision of the souls under the altar as evidence for the teaching that our souls don’t simply sleep but do go to heaven when we die, is without any biblical basis whatsoever.

At the same time of this *religious* persecution of God’s servants, the modern nations and peoples of Judah and of the house of Israel (the English-speaking nations of the USA, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and others) will be attacked and destroyed in war, mainly by a European power bloc, during the “Great Tribulation” (Matthew 24:15–28; Mark 13:14–20; Luke 21:20–24; Daniel 12:1; Jeremiah 30:10; Hosea 9:3; 13: 16; Amos 6:7; 7:17).

The Great Tribulation is Satan’s wrath directed against true Christians—*spiritual* Israelites—and the modern houses of Israel and Judah.

The Heavenly Signs

(6) The SIXTH SEAL (Revelation 6:12–14)—COSMIC DISTURBANCES or HEAVENLY SIGNS

After the Great Tribulation has begun, the sixth seal is opened—picturing “heavenly signs” or cosmic disturbances, which are introduced by a great earthquake (Revelation 6:12–14; Luke 21:25–26; Matthew 24:29).

These cosmic disturbances PRECEDE the “Day of the Lord,” the seventh seal. Revelation 6:17 refers to the Day of the Lord as the “great day of His wrath.” Compare Joel 2:30–31; 3: 14–15. This time span, which will begin prior to Christ’s return, is described as a time of Godly retribution (Isaiah 2:10–21; 13:6–16; Zephaniah 1:14–18).

God’s Servants Sealed

Before God pours out His wrath on unrepentant mankind during the Day of the Lord, God’s servants will be sealed to be protected from that time to come (Revelation 7:1–3; compare Ezekiel 9:4; see also Revelation 9:4). First 144,000 will be sealed—12,000 out of each tribe of Israel (Revelation 7:4–8; compare Revelation 14:1–5), excluding Dan (compare Judges 18:30; Deuteronomy 29:17–20; Genesis 49:18).

After that, John sees a great multitude which “no one could number,” from “all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues,” standing before the Lamb with white garments (Revelation 7:9). They “came out of the great tribulation... and washed their robes and made them white” (Revelation 7:14). So, if they CAME OUT of the Great Tribulation, then they must have been in it.

While some Christians will be protected here on earth—not in heaven—from the Great Tribulation (compare Revelation 3:10; Revelation 12:14; see also Luke 21:36; Proverbs 14:26), others will have to go through it, in order to be purified (Revelation 12:17; compare 1 Corinthians 11:32).

No Secret Rapture

Let us clarify here that the Bible nowhere teaches the concept of a secret rapture, neither before, nor during nor after the Great Tribulation. Some true Christians will be protected *here on earth* at a

place of safety (to be discussed later in this chapter and in chapter 13 of the booklet)—they will NOT be taken up into God’s third heaven to be protected there. Remember, NO ONE ascends to heaven!

Some claim, however, that a secret rapture is taught in 1 Thesalonians 4:13–18. It is not. Note what this Scripture says:

“But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

Some Bible commentaries conclude from the words “shall be caught up... in the clouds,” that those in Christ will be secretly transported to heaven, and then later return visibly—together with Christ—to rule the world. Others challenge that idea.

Note the following statements by the *New Bible Commentary: Revised*:

“To meet the Lord’ (Gk. ‘*eis apantesin tou kyriou*’): When a dignitary paid an official visit ... to a city in Hellenistic times, the action of the leading citizens in going out to meet him and escorting him on the final stage of his journey was called the ‘*apantesis*’; it is similarly used in [Matthew] 25:6; Acts 28:15. So the Lord is pictured as escorted to the earth by His people—those newly raised from death and those who have remained alive.”

F.F. Bruce’s *International Bible Commentary* agrees: “To meet is used in the papyri of the official reception given to a visiting governor, whom his citizens escort into the city from which they have come to meet him.”

Origin of the Secret Rapture Theory

Early Christians did not believe in the concept of a secret rapture. It was not taught prior to the sixteenth century. Joseph Ribera,

Cardinal Bellarmine and Alcasar, Jesuit Priests of the sixteenth century, were the first Christian authorities to promulgate this idea. Even in their day, the idea was unclear. It wasn't until 1830 that men who claimed divine inspiration said the Holy Spirit revealed to them that the last days had come, that the Lord was about to return, and that first He would "rapture" the believers who were ready, at a secret coming.

The Bible does not teach a secret rapture. Rather, God's Word reveals that Christ will return ONCE, NOT TWICE (Hebrews 9:28). He will come openly, not in secret (Matthew 24:21–31; Revelation 1:7; Acts 1:10–11), and He will END the Great Tribulation at the time of His Coming by establishing the **Kingdom of God here on earth** (Revelation 11:15–18). Mark 13:24–27 specifically states: "But in those days, AFTER that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. THEN they will SEE the Son of Man COMING in the clouds with great power and glory. And THEN [not before then] He will send His angels, and GATHER TOGETHER HIS ELECT..."

Christ will come at the time of the LAST TRUMPET when His elect will be resurrected from the dead or changed to immortality (1 Thessalonians 4:15–17; 1 Corinthians 15:50–52). There can only be ONE last trumpet, which means that there can only be ONE return of Christ!

Protection Here on Earth

The Bible does reveal, though, that there can be protection from the terrible times to come prior to Christ's return. However, that protection will be provided here on earth, not in heaven. As we explain in our free booklet, "***The Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord***," beginning on page 58, Christ promises His people—who are worthy—a way to "escape all these things that will come to pass" (Luke 21:34–36; compare Revelation 3:10; Zephaniah 2:3; Psalm 31:19–20). That "place of refuge" (Proverbs 14:26) will be on this earth—not in heaven (Revelation 12:14; Isaiah 33:16; Isaiah 26:20–21).

Even though God CAN protect us anywhere He wants, He has

decreed that His people will be protected at a certain place here on earth—the place of safety and “shelter” (Joel 3:14–16). Christ compares the time preceding His coming with the time of Noah (Matthew 24:37–39), and as God protected Noah and his family in the ark—here on earth—so He will protect His people on this earth in the way that HE has chosen. He will definitely NOT protect them by “rapturing” them to heaven!

But whether protected during the Great Tribulation or not, *all* true Christians—including the 144,000 and the great multitude—who survive that time of trouble will be protected from God’s wrath to come.

The Day of the Lord

(7) The SEVENTH SEAL:

The SEVENTH seal consists of SEVEN TRUMPETS, which are blown by seven angels (Revelation 8:2, 6). The first FOUR trumpets are described in Revelation 8:7–12.

(7.1) The FIRST TRUMPET

It describes, what appears to be, a firestorm that is destroying one-third of the trees and all the grass (compare Revelation 8:7).

(7.2) The SECOND TRUMPET

It depicts, what appears to be, a huge burning meteorite falling into the sea, destroying one-third of all sea creatures and one-third of all ocean ships (Revelation 8:8–9).

(7.3) The THIRD TRUMPET

It describes, what appears to be, another huge fiery comet or asteroid, destroying or poisoning one-third of all the sweet drinking water (Revelation 8:10–11).

(7.4) The FOURTH TRUMPET

It brings further cosmic disturbances, blocking one-third of the light of the sun, moon and stars (Revelation 8:12–13).

Revelation 8:13 speaks of the last three remaining trumpets as the last “three woes”—because of their great and extreme severity.

(7.5) The FIFTH TRUMPET (the “first woe”)

The first of the last three woes—or the fifth trumpet—is described in Revelation 9:1–12. It identifies the final resurrection of the Roman Empire, coming out of a “bottomless pit” (Revelation 9:1–3,

compare Revelation 11:7; 17:8)—an end-time European power bloc, referred to as the “beast” elsewhere. It is depicted to be at war with other nations. Its instruments of war are symbolically portrayed as “locusts” (Revelation 9:3) or possibly helicopters, causing pain and harm on humans for five months, without killing them (Revelation 9:4–5, 10).

The real ruler of this power bloc is “the angel of the bottomless pit” (Revelation 9:11)—Satan the devil. This war occurs *after* the Great Tribulation—*after* the time of war between Europe and the modern nations of the houses of Israel and Judah. By that time, the modern nations of the houses of Israel and Judah will already have been defeated, and their surviving people will have become captives of this European power. The war depicted in Revelation 9 is alluded to more fully in Daniel 11, commencing with verse 41. For more information, please read our free booklet, “*Europe in Prophecy.*”

(7.6) The SIXTH TRUMPET (the “second woe”)

Revelation 9:13–21 describes the second woe or the sixth trumpet—the appearance of an invading army of 200 million soldiers (Revelation 9:16) from the east (Revelation 9:14)—shortly after Europe’s invasion of the Middle East (Daniel 11:41–43, 45)—to kill “a third of mankind” (Revelation 9:15). Apparently, this is the second stage of a total world war between, at that time, mainly the European power bloc and a power bloc of eastern nations (compare Revelation 9:17 with Joel 2: 4). This second stage is also alluded to in Daniel 11:44.

(7.7) The SEVENTH TRUMPET (the “third woe”)

The third woe or the seventh trumpet is not described until Revelation 16. Previous chapters are interludes—flashbacks—setting the stage for the climax of the last or seventh trumpet, as identified in Revelation 16 (compare Revelation 10:7).

The seventh trumpet of the seventh seal consists of SEVEN LAST PLAGUES, which are described in Revelation 16:1–21. Seven angels pour out these seven last plagues, also referred to as the seven bowls of the wrath of God (Revelation 15:7; 16:1).

(7.7.1) The FIRST OF THE SEVEN LAST PLAGUES or bowls:

It causes “a foul and loathsome sore” on those who worship the

beast and its image, and who have accepted the mark of the beast (Revelation 16:2). All of these terms and their meaning will be explained in chapters 14 and 15 of this booklet.

(7.7.2) The SECOND OF THE SEVEN LAST PLAGUES or bowls:

It causes every living creature in the sea to die (Revelation 16:3).

(7.7.3) The THIRD OF THE SEVEN LAST PLAGUES or bowls:

It causes the sweet water supply to become “blood”—that is, undrinkable (Revelation 16:4–7).

(7.7.4) The FOURTH OF THE SEVEN LAST PLAGUES or bowls:

It brings about increased solar radiation, which horribly scorches mankind. Despite this punishment from God for their sins, man will not repent, but rather will blaspheme God (Revelation 16:8–9).

(7.7.5) The FIFTH OF THE SEVEN LAST PLAGUES or bowls:

It causes total darkness to cover the Headquarters of the beast—again, people will blaspheme God and will refuse to repent even then (Revelation 16:10–11).

Armageddon

(7.7.6) The SIXTH OF THE SEVEN LAST PLAGUES or bowls:

It will dry up the waters of the “great river Euphrates” (Revelation 16:12) to enable the “kings from the east” to advance to the place of “Armageddon” (Revelation 16:16) to “gather” there in preparation for “the battle of that great day of God Almighty” (Revelation 16:14, 16).

These kings from the east, as well as all of the other kings of the earth, will be influenced by Satan and the demonically possessed beast and the false prophet (Revelation 16:13–14). All of them will gather at “Armageddon” or the “hill of Megiddo” (“har” meaning “hill” in Hebrew), about 55 miles or 90 kilometers north of Jerusalem, and about 15 miles or 25 kilometers inland from the Mediterranean Sea.

Megiddo is a huge mound with a commanding view of the long

and fertile valley of Jezreel—an ideal place for armies gathering there. Then, they will converge from there on Jerusalem to fight the returning Christ. We *don't read* that there will be a *battle* at Armageddon—the battle will be fought farther south in the valley of Jehoshaphat, which is called today the “Kidron Valley,” bordering Jerusalem on the east.

(7.7.7) The SEVENTH OF THE SEVEN LAST PLAGUES or bowls:

It describes a tremendous earthquake to shake the earth “as had not occurred since men were on the earth” (Revelation 16:17–18; compare Isaiah 2:12–19; 13:6–13; 24:1–20), causing the “great city” of Jerusalem to be “divided into three parts” and “all the cities of the nations” to fall (Revelation 16:19). Further, every island will disappear and mountains will be leveled (Revelation 16:20). A great hail of tremendous size will destroy everything in its path. Again, man will not repent, but will continue to blaspheme God because of the hail (Revelation 16:21).

To envision the entire scenario of events at the time of Christ's return, we need to consider some additional passages.

The battle in the valley of Jehoshaphat and the mighty earthquake are more fully described in the nineteenth chapter of the book of Revelation, which pictures the return of Jesus Christ. Chapters 17 and 18 of the book of Revelation are again interludes—flashbacks—setting the stage for the climax of the destruction of this world's civilization—called “Babylon”—which is dominated or influenced by a military, economic and religious power. (More about this later in chapters 19 and 20 of this booklet.)

The Return of Jesus Christ

Chapter 19 of the book of Revelation describes the returning Jesus Christ, riding on a white horse, to establish the government of God here on earth (Revelation 19:6, 11, 14–15).

When the seventh angel sounds and when Christ returns, the saints—converted Christians—will be resurrected to immortality, if they have already died, or they will be changed to immortality, if they are still alive (1 Corinthians 15:50–56; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18). They will, at that time, be born again and inherit salvation, by

entering the Kingdom or very Family of God. They will meet Christ in the air and descend with Him, on that same day, on the Mount of Olives. Zechariah 14:3–5 indicates that, apparently due to the great earthquake of the seventh bowl, mentioned in Revelation 16:17–18, the Mount of Olives shall split in two, making a very large valley, where the final battle of God Almighty will take place.

Christ will overcome the armies that will be trying to fight Him, as well as the modern leaders of modern “Babylon”—the military ruler (“the beast”) and the religious leader (“the false prophet”) (compare Revelation 19:19–21). The destruction of the armies is more fully described in Zechariah 14:12, 15. The beast and the false prophet will be cast into “the lake of fire burning with brimstone” (Revelation 19:20).

Revelation 19:7–9 also states that Christ will come to “marry” His “wife”—His Church—and that those are blessed “who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” Other passages shed more light on this marriage and the marriage supper. Compare Matthew 22:1–14; 25:1–13; Luke 12:35–38; 13: 25–30. The marriage supper will be discussed in detail in [chapter 21](#) of this booklet.

After Christ Has Returned

Beginning with Revelation 20, we read a description of further events yet to occur after Christ has returned to this earth. An angel will bind and imprison Satan and his demons for 1000 years or a “Millennium,” so that Satan cannot deceive mankind during that period (Revelation 20:1–4; compare also Revelation 12:9). The then immortal saints will rule during that millennial period with, and under Christ, on, and over all this earth, (Revelation 20: 5–6; Daniel 7: 22, 27). The result of this rulership will be peace, prosperity and a correct understanding of God and His ways (Isaiah 2:2–4; 9: 6–7; 11:1–10; 35:1–10; Amos 9:13–15; Micah 4:1–5). Ultimately, the saints will reign under God “forever and ever” (Revelation 22:5).

Millennium on Earth

Some claim that the saints will rule this earth from heaven. According to that theory, Jesus Christ will return to meet His saints in the clouds to take them back to heaven, before the Millennium begins.

This concept is without any biblical merit. We read in Revelation 5:9–10, how the angels praise Jesus Christ for having redeemed His people through His blood: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seal, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign *on the earth*” (*New International Version*). The Bible is clear that the saints will rule not just over the earth, but also ON the earth during the Millennium and the Great White Throne Judgment.

The Seven Seals of the Book of Revelation

(1) The FIRST SEAL (Revelation 6:2)—RELIGIOUS DECEPTION

(2) The SECOND SEAL (Revelation 6:3–4)—WAR

(3) The THIRD SEAL (Revelation 6:5–6)—FAMINE

(4) The FOURTH SEAL (Revelation 6:7–8)—PESTILENCE

(5) The FIFTH SEAL (Revelation 6:9–11)—THE GREAT TRIBULATION of spiritual and physical Israel

(6) The SIXTH SEAL (Revelation 6:12–14)—COSMIC DISTURBANCES or HEAVENLY SIGNS

(7) The SEVENTH SEAL consists of SEVEN TRUMPETS (Revelation 8:2, 6)

(7.1) The FIRST TRUMPET destroys one third of all trees and of the grass (compare Revelation 8:7)

(7.2) The SECOND TRUMPET destroys one third of all sea creatures and of all the ocean ships (Revelation 8:8–9)

(7.3) The THIRD TRUMPET poisons one third of all the sweet drinking water (Revelation 8:10–11)

(7.4) The FOURTH TRUMPET blocks one third of the light of the sun, moon

and stars (Revelation 8:12–13)

(7.5) The FIFTH TRUMPET (the “first woe”) depicts a war caused by Europe (Revelation 9:1–12)

(7.6) The SIXTH TRUMPET (the “second woe”) depicts retaliating Asian powers (Revelation 9:16)

(7.7) The SEVENTH TRUMPET (the “third woe”) consists of SEVEN LAST PLAGUES (Revelation 16:1)

(7.7.1) The FIRST PLAGUE causes “a foul and loathsome sore” (Revelation 16:2)

(7.7.2) The SECOND PLAGUE causes every living creature in the sea to die (Revelation 16:3)

(7.7.3) The THIRD PLAGUE causes the sweet water supply to become “blood” (Revelation 16:4–7)

(7.7.4) The FOURTH PLAGUE scorches mankind (Revelation 16:8–9)

(7.7.5) The FIFTH PLAGUE causes total darkness (Revelation 16:10–11)

(7.7.6) The SIXTH PLAGUE prepares for “Armageddon” (Revelation 16:16)

(7.7.7) The SEVENTH PLAGUE causes the greatest earthquake of all time (Revelation 16:17–18)

Chapter 9

The 144,000 and the Great Multitude

Revelation 7

As alluded to in this booklet previously, the time will come when God will seal 144,000 people for protection. In that context, another group is mentioned—the great multitude.

Much has been speculated as to the identity of the 144,000 and the great multitude. However, if we let the Bible speak for itself, the answer becomes rather obvious.

The 144,000

In verse 1 of Revelation 7 we find that the Day of the Lord—the time of terrible plagues—is to be delayed temporarily *UNTIL* 144,000 servants of God have been sealed. According to the sequence of prophesied events, this sealing is yet *IN THE FUTURE*. It will occur *AFTER THE COMING GREAT TRIBULATION AND THE APPEARANCE OF THE HEAVENLY SIGNS*, but just *BEFORE THE PLAGUES* of God’s judgments are poured out.

Next, notice Jesus’ own explanation of the 144,000. They are 144,000 of the *TRIBES OF ISRAEL*, 12,000 of each tribe. The tribe of Dan is not mentioned—perhaps because they went to idolatry anciently, and will thus have to *WAIT* for God’s salvation (Genesis 49:1, 18). The 144,000 are to be given *SPECIAL PROTECTION DURING THE DAY OF THE LORD*.

Lehman Strauss, *The Book of Revelation*, makes the following comments on pages 171–173 regarding the 144,000:

“Judgment is suspended till 144,000 Jews are sealed [Strauss says, “Jews,” but he should have said, “Israelites.” Strauss makes the common mistake of equating the Israelites with the Jews. All Jews are Israelites, but not all Israelites are Jews. Only three of the twelve

tribes of Israel are referred to as “Jews” in the Bible—namely, those from the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Levi]. If language means anything, these sealed ones are literal Israelites... not one Gentile is among them... Dan... is omitted because he was guilty of idolatry. God has warned His people that idolaters would be separated from the rest of the tribes... The 144,000 are sealed with ‘the seal of the living God.’ The seal is the mark of divine possession, protection, and preservation.”

The Great Multitude

After that event, John sees a great multitude which “no one could number,” from “all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues,” standing before the Lamb with white garments (Revelation 7:9). They “came out of the great tribulation...and washed their robes and made them white” (Revelation 7:14). As we mentioned in a previous chapter of this booklet, the great multitude had to go through the Great Tribulation, but they will be protected—together with the 144,000—from the plagues of the Day of the Lord.

Strauss comments on pages 175–178:

“The number ... is beyond all counting, as far as man is concerned. The exact number is known to God (2 Timothy 2:19)... John saw ‘palms in their hands’ ([Revelation 7,] verse 9)... the palms may be in celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles... palm branches express the joy of complete deliverance (John 12:12–13). They are celebrating the triumph of having been brought through the awful period of tribulation...”

What We Can Know From Scripture

In considering the Biblical revelation regarding the 144,000 and the great multitude, we can see the following:

- 1) None of the 144,000 have already been sealed.
- 2) The 144,000 will be sealed in the future, AFTER the Great Tribulation.
- 3) The 144,000 will be sealed in order to be protected from the plagues of the Day of the Lord.
- 4) The 144,000 are physical Israelites that will be alive at the time of their sealing.

5) 12,000 of each tribe of Israel will be sealed. Since the tribe of Dan is omitted (compare [chapter 8](#) of this booklet), the tribe of Joseph is represented through Joseph and through his son Manasseh (Revelation 7:6, 8).

6) Since the 144,000 will be sealed AFTER the Great Tribulation, they will have to go THROUGH the Great Tribulation. There is no indication in the Bible that they will be protected from the Great Tribulation at a place of safety.

7) As the 144,000 will be protected from the plagues of the Day of the Lord, so the “great multitude” (Revelation 7:9) will turn to God for protection as well.

8) The “great multitude” is not a part of the 144,000, but it is a separate group of peoples.

9) The “great multitude,” which “no one can number,” consists “of ALL [other, that is, non-Israelite] nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues.”

10) The “great multitude” had to go through the Great Tribulation as well. They will not be at a place of safety, to be protected from the Great Tribulation. Revelation 7:14 reads: “These are the ones who COME OUT OF the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

Today, neither the 144,000 nor the great multitude have turned to God. But they will—when they remember the message of the gospel of the Kingdom of God, which is being preached today, and which will continue to be preached by God’s Church (compare Matthew 24:14; 28:18–20), combined with the activities of the two witnesses (Revelation 11:1–6), the martyrdom of some of the saints (Revelation 6:9–11; 12:13–17) and the sufferings of national Israelites and Jews during the Great Tribulation, and the heavenly signs.

Repentance in the Last Days

When the 144,000 find themselves in the midst of the Great Tribulation, they will reflect on their lives and the situation they are in, and will come to their senses. THEN they will repent—not before then! Speaking of the modern houses of Israel and Judah, we read a remarkable prophecy in Deuteronomy 30:1–3, 6, and 8. This prophecy refers to “the latter days” (Deuteronomy 31:29) and might

also include a description of the conversion of the 144,000:

“Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God drives you, and you RETURN to the Lord your God (i.e., REPENT) and OBEY His voice, according to ALL that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul (describing CONVERSION), that the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity (which will be experienced by the modern houses of Israel and Judah during the time of the Great Tribulation)... And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, THAT YOU MAY LIVE (that is, that you might be PROTECTED from the PLAGUES of the Day of the Lord)... And you will again obey the voice of the LORD and do all His commandments which I command you today.”

When the 144,000 and the great multitude turn to God, become converted and receive the Holy Spirit, they will be protected from the plagues of the Day of the Lord. Their conversion is still in the future. It will take place after they have experienced the fiery trial of the Great Tribulation.

Chapter 10

The Little Book

Revelation 10

In Revelation 10, John hears a message from seven angelic beings, called the “seven thunders.” John is to seal up the things, which the angels pronounced, without writing them down. A mighty angel gives John a little book to read. When he does, it is sweet in his mouth, but bitter in his stomach (Revelation 10:9–10). Something similar happened to the prophet Ezekiel in Old Testament times (Ezekiel 3:1–3).

After eating the little book, John is to prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues and kings. Undoubtedly, these prophecies would include certain events that would befall them.

Knowledge—including prophetic knowledge—can be sweet at first, but it may become bitter when announced and rejected. This is the reason why many today are reluctant to cry out and spare not, and to proclaim powerfully the true gospel of the Kingdom of God, as a witness. But it **MUST**, and **WILL BE DONE**, by God’s true Church, so that the end can come (Matthew 24:14).

Some claim today that they are in possession of the little book, or that they themselves have written it. This is utter nonsense! The little book was symbolic, containing knowledge about events that will come to pass. John was instructed not to reveal them—they had to be kept secret until the time of the end and the “days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound,” and “when the mystery of God would be finished” (Revelation 10:7; compare Daniel 12:9). But the little book itself was eaten by John—so how can anyone claim that he possesses it today?

Chapter 11

The Temple of God

Revelation 11:1–2

In Revelation 11:1–2, John is asked to measure the temple of God, the altar and those who worship there, but to leave out the court, which is outside the temple, for it has been given to the Gentiles.

Does this mean that the Jews will build a temple in Jerusalem, prior to Christ's return?

When we consider all of the Scriptures related to this topic, it appears very likely that a temple will be built in the near future, prior to Christ's return.

A Physical Temple in Jerusalem Before Christ's Return

When Christ was asked by His disciples what would be the sign of His coming and of the end of the age [of this present civilization] (Matthew 24:3), He referred to the “great tribulation” (verse 21) and, at that same time, “the abomination of desolation,” spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place” (verse 15; compare, too, Mark 13:14, adding, “where it ought not”). In Luke 21:20, in the parallel account, Christ is quoted as saying, “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near.”

The Abomination of Desolation

From these passages, we see that the abomination of desolation refers to foreign armies that will make Jerusalem a desolate place. But is this ALL that the term, “abomination of desolation” refers to? Christ pointed out that the *prophet Daniel* spoke about the “abomination of desolation.” He did so on three occasions—in Daniel 9:27; 11:31 and 12:11. (An additional similar reference can be found

in Daniel 8:13). The way those passages are worded, they seem to refer to more than just armies. Daniel 11:31 states that a king of the North shall muster forces, “and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and PLACE THERE the abomination of desolation.” Daniel 12:11 states: “And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is SET UP...”

These end-time prophecies predict that a future “king of the North” will invade Jerusalem and take away daily sacrifices—indicating that the Jews will, in the future, begin to bring again daily sacrifices in Jerusalem. It is true that the Jews do not need to have a temple to bring daily sacrifices (compare Ezra 3:6)—but this does not mean that the Jews will NOT build a temple, in order to bring daily sacrifices there.

Returning to the prophecy in Daniel 11:31, most commentaries agree that that particular passage refers to Antiochus Epiphanes, at least as a forerunner for another end-time fulfillment. As the *Nelson Study Bible* points out, “Antiochus polluted the altar by offering a sow upon it. He declared the daily sacrifices and other Mosaic ceremonies illegal and committed an abomination of desolation by erecting an image of Zeus in the holy place (9:27; 12:11). Jesus said a similar thing would happen just prior to His return (see Matt. 24:15).”

We should take note of the fact that at the time when the first “abomination of desolation” was set up, Antiochus overran Jerusalem with armies; did away with the daily sacrifices, which were brought AT THE TEMPLE; and erected an image of Zeus (or Jupiter) in the “holy place”—the TEMPLE.

Since the original abomination, spoken of by the prophet Daniel, involved the existence of a temple, it is reasonable to conclude that the final abomination of desolation will likewise involve an existing temple. Other biblical passages confirm this conclusion:

The Temple Will Be Measured

We read in Revelation 11:1–2 that an angel of God tells John: “Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And

they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months [or 3-1/2 years].”

Some rightly point out that the term “temple” or “temple of God” in the New Testament can refer to God’s Church [compare Ephesians 2:19–22; 1 Corinthians 3:16–17]. They claim that the reference in Revelation 11:1–2 speaks exclusively to the Church. Although the Church might be included here, the more obvious and intended meaning is a reference to a literal temple in Jerusalem. After all, the Gentiles will tread the holy city (!) underfoot for 3-1/2 years, and the court, which is outside the temple, will be given to those Gentiles. It is difficult to see how all of these references could just exclusively refer to the Church.

Also, a distinction is made in Revelation 11:1–2 between the temple and those who worship there. If the temple were meant to exclusively describe the Church, it would be difficult to determine who those would be who worship there.

The *Nelson Study Bible* comments: “John is given a reed like a measuring rod, much like that used by Ezekiel (see Ezek. 40: 3, 5) in his vision of the measuring of the temple (see Ezek. 40–48)... This is the temple of the tribulation period that will eventually be desecrated (see 13:14, 15; Dan. 9:27; Luke 21:24; 2 Thess. 2:4)... Luke 21:24 prophesies that the Gentiles will tread the holy city underfoot until ‘the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.’ Apparently the period of forty-two months is the conclusion of ‘the times of the Gentiles.’ ‘Gentile’ here may also be translated ‘nations’ (v. 9; 10:11).”

The Man of Sin in the Temple of God

Another Scripture that indicates the existence of a future temple in Jerusalem, just prior to Christ’s return, can be found in 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4. Paul writes:

“Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day [of Christ’s return] will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”

This “man of sin,” who is also called “the lawless one” in verses 8 and 9, is identified in the book of Revelation as “the false prophet”

(compare, for example, Revelation 16:13; 19:20; also see Revelation 13:13–14). This religious figure will deceive people through “great signs” (Revelation 13:13; 19:20). We read in 2 Thessalonians 2:9 that the coming of the lawless one is “according to the working of Satan, with all power, SIGNS and lying wonders.” This false prophet will receive the power to do these things from none other than Satan and his demons (compare Revelation 16:13–14).

The *Ryrie Study Bible* comments:

“... the Antichrist [this is an incorrect designation—rather, the passage speaks about the false prophet] will desecrate the rebuilt Jewish temple in Jerusalem by placing himself there to be worshipped... This will be the climax of man’s great sin of self-deification, in open defiance of God.”

The *Nelson Study Bible* adds:

“The man of sin will proclaim himself to be divine and will sit in the temple of God, acting as if he were a god... The man of sin will probably stand in a physical temple in Jerusalem, and declare himself to be a god, the ultimate fulfillment of the ‘abomination of desolation’ spoken of by Daniel (Dan. 7:23; 9:26, 27; 11:31, 36, 37; 12:11) and Jesus (Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14)...”

The returning Christ will consume the man of sin “with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming” (2 Thessalonians 2:8).

More Biblical Evidence for a Physical Temple

An additional passage, which suggests that the Jews will build an end-time temple in Jerusalem just prior to Christ’s return, is Psalm 79:1–7. This is an end-time psalm, as verse 6 shows. God is asked to pour out His wrath on the nations—a reference to God’s pouring out of the end-time plagues of His wrath, as described in Revelation 15:1, 7; 16:1, 19. In this context, Psalm 79:1 says: “O God, the nations have come into your inheritance; Your holy temple they have defiled. They have laid Jerusalem in heaps.”

Other prophetic references to a future temple in Jerusalem could perhaps be found in Ezekiel 8:5, 16, as well as in Ezekiel 9:1–7. All of these Scriptures are prophecies for the end-time, and they seem to refer to a physical temple and the abominations that will be practiced in it.

Finally, we find detailed descriptions of a future physical temple in Jerusalem in the book of Ezekiel, beginning in chapter 40. We know from those Scriptures that a literal temple will be in Jerusalem after Christ's return. Ezekiel 40–46 does not tell us, however, when this future temple will be built. Is it possible that Ezekiel 40–46 describes the very same temple that the Jews will begin to build just prior to Christ's return?

In conclusion, considering all of the Scriptures on the topic, it appears very likely that a temple will be built in Jerusalem just prior to Christ's return.

Chapter 12

The “Two Witnesses”

Revelation 11:3–12

We read in the 11th chapter of the book of Revelation that Jerusalem will be occupied by Gentiles for 42 months or 3-1/2 years or 1260 days (Revelation 11:1–3; compare Luke 21:23–24; Daniel 2:44). This Gentile rule will occur under two future political and religious leaders of the final resurrection of the ancient Holy Roman Empire. These political and religious leaders are also referred to in Scripture as the “beast” and the “false prophet” (Daniel 11:45; 2 Thessalonians 2:4).

We are told in Scripture that during that future time of Jerusalem’s occupation, “two witnesses” will prophesy for 1260 days or 3-1/2 years (compare Revelation 11:3). This will apparently happen at the same time when certain Church members will be at a “place of safety” here on earth to be protected from the beast and the false prophet (compare Revelation 12:14). The time frame for the testimony of the two witnesses of 1260 days or 3-1/2 years corresponds with “a time and times and half a time” or 3-1/2 years in Revelation 12:14, describing the duration of stay of Church members at the place of safety. (Please realize that one year has 360 days according to the Hebrew calendar, and that the term “time” means “year”, compare Daniel 4:16.)

These two witnesses are called in Revelation 11:4 “the two olive trees and the two lampstands.” This is an obvious reference to a passage in Zechariah 4:3, 11–14.

Over the years, there has been much speculation about the identity of the “two witnesses.” Some fanciful and some down-right ridiculous concepts have been advanced, and there have been people throughout history—it seems—who claim that they are one of the

“two witnesses” or that they know who they are.

The truth is that it has not yet been revealed who the two witnesses are, or will be—and we strongly hold that those who may believe that THEY ARE the two witnesses are misled, and are misleading others!

Moses? Elijah? Enoch?

Some claim today (thereby inadvertently adopting the opinion of some confused Catholic “church fathers”) that the two witnesses are or will be ancient Moses and ancient Elijah or ancient Enoch, who will either be resurrected from the dead, or who have been kept alive for thousands of years in a state of “limbo”—not really being alive and not really being dead. Apparently, this latter concept is alluded to in the uninspired Book of Enoch—a Jewish legend and fairy tale, which has correctly been rejected as part of the inspired Word of God. Others feel that the two witnesses are two angels. However, there is absolutely NO indication in the Bible that any of these foregoing human ideas are accurate!

In this regard, note in Scripture that Moses died, that God buried him, and that his grave is unknown (Deuteronomy 34:5–6). Hebrews 11:23–29, 39–40 teaches that Moses will be resurrected from the dead at the time of Christ’s Second Coming—and not before then. This means that he cannot be one of the two witnesses. The same is obviously true, then, for Elijah and Enoch. As we discussed earlier in this booklet, Elijah and Enoch also died, and they await the resurrection from the dead. They are not one of the two witnesses.

What We DO Know From Scripture

Let us carefully review what CAN be safely said about the two witnesses, by reviewing God’s revealed Scriptures. Everything beyond that belongs in the realm of speculation, which is not revealed Godly knowledge at all, but is, instead, nothing more than human ideas and fabrications.

The commentary of *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown* points out:

“They are described by symbol as ‘the two olive trees’ and ‘the two candlesticks,’ or lamp-stands, ‘standing before the God of the earth.’ The reference is to [Zechariah] 4:3, [Zechariah] 4:12, where two

individuals are meant, Joshua and Zerubbabel, who ministered to the Jewish Church, just as the two olive trees emptied the oil out of themselves into the bowl of the candlestick. So in the final apostasy God will raise up two inspired witnesses to minister encouragement...”

Even though it is true that the book of Zechariah might refer, in one sense, to Joshua and Zerubbabel who were alive at the time of Zechariah’s writing, both the books of Zechariah and of Revelation are primarily prophetic in nature.

Since the books of Zechariah and Revelation contain prophecies for our time, they cannot be used to prove that the two witnesses of the end time were alive at the time of Zechariah and John. They cannot be used, either, to prove that the two witnesses are Moses and Enoch or Elijah, whom God kept alive supernaturally in some unexplained way, because, as mentioned, we are clearly told that Moses and Enoch DIED (compare Hebrews 11:5, 13, 23–29, 39–40; Deuteronomy 34:7). To postulate that God will resurrect Moses and Enoch or Elijah to physical life again in these end-times, prior to Christ’s return, is without any biblical basis whatever.

For the same reason, the statements in the books of both Zechariah and Revelation about the two witnesses “standing” before God, cannot be used to prove that they are angels. We read in the 11th chapter of the book of Revelation that the beast or military ruler will kill the two witnesses, and that their dead bodies will lie in Jerusalem for 3-½ days (Revelation 11:7–10). Since they will be killed, they cannot be angels, as angels cannot die (Luke 20:35–36).

Unger’s Bible Handbook points out:

“Although the two witnesses are commonly identified as Moses and Enoch or Moses and Elijah, such identifications are scarcely tenable... These witnesses are evidently two members of the latter-day remnant. They are Christ’s witnesses... Their message is Christ’s lordship over the earth... proclaiming the soon coming of the King of kings to take possession of the earth... they are killed by the beast (head of the revived Roman Empire, Rev. 13:1–10; 17:8)... but not until they have completed their testimony...”

The Death and Resurrection of the Two Witnesses

Following their death, they will be resurrected and ascend

to heaven in a cloud, at the end of the “second woe,” and at the beginning of the “third” and final “woe,” when the seventh angel sounds (Revelation 11:11–15, 19—compare Revelation 16:17–18; both passages speak about lightnings, noises, thunderings and an earthquake, showing that both passages describe the same event and the same time setting).

The resurrection of the two witnesses will take place, then, *at the same time as the first resurrection of the just* to immortality, when the seventh or last angel sounds (compare 1 Corinthians 15:51–52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; Matthew 24:30–31). At that time, those who died in Christ will be resurrected to immortality, together with those in Christ who will still be alive and changed to immortality at that moment, and all of them will ascend “in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). This will include the two witnesses who were killed, but who will be resurrected 3-1/2 days later to immortality, and who will ascend “to heaven in a cloud” (Revelation 11:11–12) to meet the Lord in the air, together with all the other resurrected and changed saints.

What the Bible tells us is that at the very end, just prior to the return of Jesus Christ to this earth, two extraordinary human beings will prophesy and warn this world for 3-1/2 years. During the time of their testimony, no one can harm them, as they will have supernatural protection and powers from God. Although the powers described remind us of acts performed by Moses and Elijah, “it is not necessary to assume that John expected them to return literally” (*Broadman Bible Commentary*, vol. 12, page 303). Rather, they will be human beings, sent by God to give this world a last warning, going before the returning Christ “in the spirit and power of Elijah” and Moses (compare Luke 1:17).

Chapter 13

The Dragon and the Woman

Revelation 12

The Dragon

Before Christ returns, some very important events will first have to take place; events that will affect the true Church of God. Revelation 12 begins to describe these events by referring first to a very ancient event—the rebellion of Lucifer, the “dragon,” and his angels against God. This rebellion occurred prior to Genesis 1:2 and prior to the creation of man. Note that an entire one-third of God’s holy angels followed Satan in this coup d’etat to dethrone God. Satan, who was originally called Lucifer, and his angels failed in that attempt, and the angels subsequently became known as demons (compare Isaiah 14; Ezekiel 28; Luke 10:18; Jude 6; 2 Peter 2:4). (For more information, please read our free booklets, “*The Theory of Evolution—a Fairy Tale for Adults*,” and “*Angels, Demons and the Spirit World*”).

Lehman Strauss, *The Book of Revelation*, comments on Satan’s rebellion, as follows, on page 230:

“There is a mass of evidence... which demonstrates beyond doubt that there was a long interval between the first creation, described in the first sublime sentence of the Bible and the chaos of the second verse. It was during this interval that the war in Heaven was begun by Lucifer’s rebellion. God’s next revealed move was the creation of man...”

The Woman

The account in Revelation 12 continues to describe the “woman” giving birth to a Child, and the dragon’s unsuccessful attempt to kill the Child.

The woman is pictured as being clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and with a garland of 12 stars on her head (Revelation 12:1). In Genesis 37:9–11, Jacob and his wife Rachel, Joseph’s mother, are symbolized as the sun and the moon, and Joseph’s brothers are symbolized as eleven stars, bowing down to Joseph. It appears, therefore, to be very plausible that the TWELVE stars in Revelation 12:1 refer to the TWELVE tribes of Israel (including Joseph).

Revelation 12:2–5 refers to the fact that Mary gave birth to Jesus Christ and that Satan attempted unsuccessfully to kill Christ through King Herod (Revelation 12:4; Matthew 2:13, 16).

We understand that the woman is, first of all, symbolic for Eve (Genesis 3:15); then for the Old Testament Church which would evolve from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and Jacob’s TWELVE sons, and which would become known as the Church of Israel in the wilderness; then for Mary, the mother of Christ; and—subsequent to Christ’s ascension—for the New Testament Church of God (compare Matthew 25:1; Ephesians 5:22–32; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Galatians 4: 26).

Revelation 12:6 tells us that the woman—the New Testament Church—fled into the wilderness for 1,260 days. As mentioned earlier, when discussing Christ’s message to the seven churches, this has been understood as referring to prophetic days or YEARS. The Bible makes it clear that sometimes, “days” can refer to a corresponding number of “years.” The “day-for-a-year principle” is expressed, for example, in Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6. The true Church of God continued to exist, but it was not greatly noticed by the world during that period of about 1,260 years.

The Dragon’s Future Fight Against the Woman

Commencing with Revelation 12:7, events that will take place at the time of the end—still future—are being described. A new war is depicted between Satan and God—another demonic attempt to dethrone God. But Satan will fail again and will be cast back down to the earth, to subsequently persecute the woman with “great wrath” (Revelation 12:7–13).

While the woman has flown to her place of safety, *here on earth*,

with two wings of a great eagle (compare Exodus 19:4; Deuteronomy 1:31; 32:11; Isaiah 63:9), to be nourished there for 3-½ years (Revelation 12:14), Satan will spew water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman. This might perhaps allude to an army or to a military force (compare Daniel 11:10; Jeremiah 47:2–3). *The earth* will open its mouth to help the woman (compare Numbers 16:31–32). All of this will happen on earth—not in heaven, as some who believe in the false concept of a secret rapture erroneously teach.

Satan will proceed to persecute others within the Church who will not be at the place of safety here on earth (those belonging to the prophetic “church of the Laodiceans,” compare Revelation 3:14–19, including 144,000 Israelites and the great multitude of Gentiles, mentioned earlier).

Chapter 14

The Two Beasts

Revelation 13

In the thirteenth chapter of the book of Revelation, John sees two “beasts.” These are symbolic descriptions of powerful world empires.

The First Beast (Revelation 13:1–10)

Beginning with Revelation 13:1, John sees—in a vision—a fantastic beast rising up out of the sea, which has seven heads and ten horns, and on his head ten crowns. This reminds us of Satan’s description in Revelation 12:3 as “a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns...” Revelation 12:9 identifies the dragon as Satan the devil. This shows that Satan is giving his power to the beast (compare Revelation 13:2, 4).

The beast with the seven heads and ten horns was like a leopard, with feet of a bear and a mouth of a lion (Revelation 13:2). In the book of Daniel, chapters 2, 5, 7 and 8, we are told that, beginning with the ancient Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, there would arise four world-ruling empires on this earth—the Babylonian Empire (Daniel 2:36), the Medo-Persian Empire under Cyrus, Xerxes and others (Daniel 5:28), the Greco-Macedonian Empire under Alexander the Great and his generals (Daniel 8:20–21), and finally, a fourth Empire (Daniel 2:33; 7:7). In Daniel 7:3–24, these four empires or kingdoms are compared with a lion, a bear, a leopard with four heads, and a terrible beast with ten horns (Daniel 7:7).

Comparing these four beasts in the book of Daniel with the one beast in Revelation 13, we can see that the beast in Revelation is a conglomeration of those four beasts in Daniel. It has seven heads, because it combines the head of the lion, the head of the bear, the

four heads of the leopard, and the head of the fourth beast with ten horns. Virtually all Bible scholars confirm the historical fact that this fourth beast was the Roman Empire. It was to be divided (Daniel 2:41). This division happened in 286 A.D. under Diocletian. By the fourth century, the Roman Empire had two capitals—one in Rome and one in Constantinople.

According to Daniel 7:24, ten kings were to arise out of the Roman Empire. This could either describe a simultaneous or co-existing one-time revival under the leadership of ten kings, or it could refer to ten successive revivals—one revival following the next over time. Comparing the passage in Daniel 7 with the beast in Revelation 13, and based on what actually occurred historically, we conclude that successive revivals are intended here—the beast or the Roman Empire would have ten successive resurrections or revivals. Revelation 17:8 confirms this—the beast described there, which is similar to the beast of Revelation 13, is described as one that “was, and is not, and will ascend...,” showing the *successive* nature of the revivals.

Revelation 13:3 explains that one of the seven heads of the beast would be mortally wounded and then be healed. This is a reference to the head of the fourth beast in the book of Daniel—the Roman Empire—which was all but destroyed, but which was subsequently healed or revived. None of the previous three empires or kingdoms in the book of Daniel were restored after they had been destroyed. They just ceased to exist. It was different, however, with the fourth beast—the Roman Empire. It would receive a deadly or mortal wound, but it would be healed.

The deadly wound refers to the fall of Rome in 476 A.D. But as we saw, that mortal wound would be healed. The ancient Roman Empire “died”—but it re-appeared again on the world scene in successive revivals.

The Ten Revivals of the Roman Empire

The *first three resurrections* or revivals of the Roman Empire after its fall occurred under Geiseric of the Vandals; Odoacer of the Heruli; and Theodoric of the Ostrogoths. But they did not yet “heal” the deadly wound. Rather, historians refer to these three initial revivals as the “transition age” of the Roman Empire. They temporarily

“revived” the Roman Empire to an extent, but they did not bring it back to its earlier power and influence. All three leaders of these first three resurrections were followers of Arianism—a religion, which taught some truth, mixed with error. It held, correctly, that God is not a Trinity, but it denied, incorrectly, that Jesus Christ is God. (For more information, please read our free booklets, “*Is God a Trinity?*” and “*God Is a Family.*”)

Arianism was later condemned by the Roman Church. Daniel 7:24 explains that a “little horn” would “subdue” three resurrections of the fourth beast—the Roman Empire. This is a reference to the Roman Church, which subdued Rome’s FIRST three resurrections under “barbarian” or “Arian” powers.

The actual “healing” of the deadly wound signifies the *fourth resurrection* of the ancient Roman Empire, which occurred in 554 A.D., when Justinian, who was heavily influenced by his Roman Catholic wife, defeated the Ostrogoths and marched into Rome. He united the Eastern and Western parts of the ancient Roman Empire and restored the entire Empire. Historians refer to this event as the “Imperial Restoration.”

The *fifth resurrection* occurred under Charlemagne in 800 A.D.; the *sixth* under Otto the Great in 962 A.D.; the *seventh* under Charles V of Hapsburg in 1530 A.D.; and the *eighth* under Napoleon (which lasted from 1804 A.D. until 1814 A.D., when Napoleon abdicated at the battle of Leipzig).

Following Napoleon, two more resurrections were to occur, as the fourth beast in Daniel 7 and the beast in Revelation 13 had TEN horns. The *ninth resurrection* happened under Mussolini and Hitler. We are observing right now the *beginning of the tenth and final resurrection* of the ancient Roman Empire in continental Europe (For more information of the ten successive revivals of the ancient Roman Empire, please read our free booklet, “*Europe in Prophecy.*”)

The Second Beast (Revelation 13:11–18)

Beginning with Revelation 13:11, John sees in vision a second beast coming up out of the earth. This second beast had two horns. It looked like a lamb (Jesus Christ is referred to as the Lamb of God throughout the New Testament, compare John 1:29), but it spoke

like a dragon (Remember that Satan is identified as a dragon in Revelation 12:3, 9). This second beast is obviously a religious power, which is influenced by Satan, while pretending to speak on behalf of Christ. We read in 2 Corinthians 11:15 that Satan's "ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness." Jesus warned that many would come in His name, admitting that He was the Christ or Savior, and deceive many through their wrong teachings (compare Matthew 24:4–5).

This deception will be magnified by the fact that the second beast will be able to perform "great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do..." (Revelation 13:13–14).

As discussed before, we read in 2 Thessalonians 2:9–11 about the end-time representative or leader of this second beast power, as follows: "The coming of the lawless one [the man of sin or son of perdition, who will claim to be God, verses 3 and 4] is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs and lying wonders and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them [that is, He will allow it] strong delusion, that they should believe the lie..."

The Image of the First Beast (Revelation 13:14)

We read in Revelation 13:14 that the second beast will make an "image" to the first beast, which we identified as the Roman Empire. This passage found its fulfillment, historically, when the religious power of the second beast patterned itself after—made an image of—the governmental and political structure of the worldly power—the first beast—when it became a state in Rome, called the Vatican State, which would make contracts or treaties with other worldly governments; which also would send out their ambassadors and emissaries; and which would even have an army, including the Swiss guards, which fought against "heretics" under the leadership of the Pope. It ultimately influenced and "inspired" the first beast to put to death those who would not worship and follow the dictates of the Catholic Church.

Albert Barnes' Notes on the Bible agrees, stating the following regarding the nature of the “image”:

“All that is stated here would be fulfilled if the old Roman civil power should become to a large extent dead, or cease to exert its influence over people, and if then the papal spiritual power should cause a form of domination to exist *strongly resembling* the former in its general character and extent, and if it should secure this result—that the world would acknowledge its sway or render it homage as it did to the old Roman government. This would receive its fulfillment if it be supposed that the first ‘beast’ represented the ancient Roman civil power as such; that this died away—as if the head had received a fatal wound; that it was again revived under the influence of the papacy; and that, under that influence, a civil government, *strongly resembling* the old Roman dominion, was caused to exist, depending for its vital energy on the papacy, and, in its turn, lending its aid to support the papacy.

“All this in fact occurred in the decline of the Roman power... In the empire which then sprung up, and which owed much of its influence to the sustaining aid of the papacy, we discern *the ‘image’ of the former Roman power*; the prolongation of the Roman ascendancy over the world.”

Similarly, *John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible*:

“... the Roman empire... had received a deadly wound... but now revived in... the pope of Rome... *the image* made to this beast some understand of the translation of the empire to Charles the great, and his successors the emperors, by the pope of Rome, he ordaining so many electors to [choose] a king of the Romans, and elect an emperor when one was wanting; and this was an *image* to the first beast... for the power of inaugurating and crowning these emperors, and of setting up and deposing them when the pope pleased, lie reserved to himself...”

However, this passage is not just of historical application, but it also contains a prophecy for the immediate future. Many commentators suggest, therefore, that the “image” might very well point at an ultimate literal fulfillment—and this even more so, as there have been isolated incidents in the past, which might serve as forerunners to a final all-encompassing deception.

We read in Revelation 13:15 that the image *will speak and cause those to be killed* who will not worship the image of the beast. In applying this statement figuratively *and* quite literally, *John Gill* writes:

“[This] may be understood either of the images of the virgin Mary, and other saints, which it is pretended, and the people are made to believe, that they do at times actually speak, and really weep and laugh, as it may serve their different purposes; or this image may be said to speak by the decrees, canons, anathemas, curses, threatenings, persuasions, doctrines, and blasphemies of the pope and his clergy... these are the known orders and decrees of the Papacy, which have been executed by the Inquisition, and other hands, in innumerable instances...”

The commentary of *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown* adds the following:

“Charlemagne’s image was set up for homage; and the Pope adored the new emperor...’ Rome’s speaking images and winking pictures of the Virgin Mary and the saints are an earnest of the future demoniacal miracles of the false prophet in making the beast’s... image to speak.”

Lehman Strauss writes in *“The Book of the Revelation”*:

“The false prophet [the second beast] will attempt to lead the people to finance the erection of a great image in Jerusalem, thereby making Jerusalem the center of a world-wide religious system... How the image is made to speak, or what it says, is not revealed... When the image speaks, Jews and Gentiles, Roman Catholics and Protestants, wherever they are, will worship the image or be killed if they refuse.”

Whatever the exact meaning of the speaking image, it is clear that it describes a future worldwide demonic deception, causing all who won’t worship and obey the beast (Revelation 13:4, 8, 12) and its image (Revelation 13:15), to be killed.

Chapter 15

The Mark of the Beast

Revelation 13:16–17

Revelation 13:16–17 explains that “the image” of the *second* (religious) beast will cause people to accept “a mark” of the *first* beast “on their right hand” or “on their foreheads.” Without it, they cannot buy or sell (compare Revelation 14:9).

This mark of the first beast is clearly associated in Scripture with the violation of God’s Sabbath commandment (compare Exodus 31:13; Ezekiel 20:20; Isaiah 56:2; Isaiah 58:13; Amos 8: 5; Exodus 16:23, 26; Exodus 31:15). In the Bible, the “right hand” is associated with work (Psalm 90:17; 137:5). The “forehead” is the seat of thoughts (Ezekiel 3:8; 9:4; Revelation 7:3).

We are told that the “little horn”—a reference to the Roman Catholic Church, as we have seen—would try to “change times and law” (Daniel 7: 25)—that is, God’s law regarding holy time. The Roman Church has changed the calendar in Europe, which identifies Sunday as the last day of the week, rather than the 7th-Day Saturday-Sabbath. It commands that Christians are to rest on Sunday, and it did command in the past that they were to work on Saturday. We will experience something similar very soon.

The “image” will influence the first beast—the final European revival of the ancient Roman Empire—to enjoin people to work on the Sabbath, while prohibiting to work on Sunday. As in the past, it will thereby “cause” the death of true Christians (compare Revelation 13:15).

It might be difficult to imagine that in this sophisticated time of reason and enlightenment, Sabbath-keeping Christians will actually be persecuted by European governments—at the instigation of a religious power—for keeping the Sabbath and refusing to work

on that day. But we should not forget what happened less than 60 years ago in Europe to Jews and other “unpopular” religious groups. At that time, the government succeeded in persecuting many innocent victims, while powerful religious organizations stood idly by. In the future though, religion will actually play an active part in the persecution. As Satan will be behind this terrible persecution yet to come, we can rest assured that it WILL happen. More importantly, God has clearly prophesied in His Word that it will happen (compare Revelation 6:9–11; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2; see also Matthew 24:9–13).

God warns us not to worship the beast and his image, and not to receive his mark on our forehead and on our hand (Revelation 14:9). If we do, we will “drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation” (Revelation 14:10). On the other hand, true Christians, who are not protected at the place of safety, WILL be killed for their refusal to worship the beast and its image, and to receive the mark. But notice how Revelation 20:4, 6 describes their glorious future:

“... I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads and on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years... Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection... they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.”

Chapter 16

666—The Number of the Beast

Revelation 13:18

Revelation 13:17 tells us that no one will be able to buy or sell if he does not have the mark or the name of the *first* (political and military) beast, or the number of *his* name. Verse 18 reveals that the famous “number of the beast” is the “number of a man.” We are told to “calculate” the number, which is 666. King Lateinos was the founder of Rome. In the Greek, every letter has a numerical value. The numerical value for “Lateinos” is 666. Therefore, the first beast is again clearly identified as the Roman Empire—the number 666 identifying the founder of the Roman Empire—Lateinos.

Although the designation “beast” in Revelation 13 describes the Roman Empire, it can also refer to the *representative or ruler* of the final revival or resurrection of that Empire (compare Revelation 16:13; 19:20). It is likely that the numerical value of the name of that final human leader of the revived Roman Empire—referred to as a MAN (compare again Revelation 13:18)—will also be 666.

Chapter 17

The 144,000

Revelation 14

144,000 servants of God are mentioned in Revelation 14:1–5. They are depicted standing with Christ on Mount Zion, here on earth. The time setting is *after* Christ’s return. They sing a new song, a song that reaches God’s throne in heaven (verse 3), as do our prayers today (compare Revelation 5:8; 8:2–5). God has found no fault in them (Revelation 14:5). This description reminds us of Christ’s message to the angel of Philadelphia (compare Revelation 3:7–12). Both have the Father’s name written on their foreheads (Revelation 14:1; Revelation 3:12). Note, however, that Revelation 14 does not say that these 144,000 are the only ones who will be in the first resurrection. Revelation 14:4 points out that the 144,000 are “firstfruits,” but it does not say that they are “the” firstfruits or the “only” firstfruits.

The 144,000 in Revelation 14 might perhaps be the same group of 144,000 mentioned in Revelation 7. Most commentaries suggest this, but we cannot be totally certain.

For instance, *Albert Barnes’ Notes on the Bible* states in regard to the 144,000 in Revelation 14: “These are evidently the same persons that were seen in the vision recorded in Rev. 7:3–8...”

John Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible points out: “and with him an hundred forty and four thousand; the same with those in Rev. 7:3...”

The *New Bible Commentary: Revised*, states: “The identity of the 144,000 seems determined by 7:1–8... John would hardly represent two different groups by such an extraordinary.... number, especially when he adds that both companies bear the mark of God in their foreheads...”

The *Broadman Bible Commentary* writes: “This group bears the mark as the 144,000 of 7:4–8 and is probably the same.”

Although it appears possible or even probable that the two groups of 144,000 in Revelation 7 and 14 are identical, we need to wait for God’s clear revelation to us as to who, exactly, the 144,000 in Revelation 14 will be.

Chapter 18

The Torment of the Wicked

Revelation 14:9–11

Does the Bible, particularly a passage in Revelation 14:9–11, teach that the wicked will be tormented forever in hell fire?

Revelation 14:9–11 reads:

“Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, ‘If anyone worships the beast [an end-time political leader, as well as the political system that he represents] and his image [made by an end-time religious system, as well as by a religious leader representing that system] and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand [permitting or preventing him to buy and sell, Revelation 13:16–17], he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb [Jesus Christ]. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.’”

Most commentaries teach that this passage describes the never-ending torment of wicked souls in an eternal hell fire. The *Nelson Study Bible*, in altering the literal wording of the passage, states:

“A third angel announces with a loud voice the tragic eternal destiny of the one who rejects the offer of the gospel (vv. 6,7) and worships the beast (ch. 13)... In the just outworking of God’s wrath, unbelievers who worship the beast will be tormented... forever and ever, with no rest day or night.”

No Everlasting Torment of the Wicked

However, reading the passage carefully, it does not say that the

wicked will be “tormented... forever and ever.”

The *Broadman Bible Commentary* discusses the problems with such an interpretation. It states, in volume 12, on page 320:

“The greatest problem of interpretation in this passage is the apparent vindictiveness. Christian interpreters have regarded it as sub-Christian reflecting the stress of the time but impossible to reconcile with the teaching of Jesus. Some reject its obvious implications since such endless and horrible suffering could serve no good purpose and offer no prospect of release... Others see the language as dealing with ultimate realities and prefer a literal interpretation. Their case merely points out that man has brought this judgment on himself. Others believe that if there are those who resist God’s love finally, they, with Hades and Death, will be thrown into the lake of fire (20:14ff), which is ‘extinction and total oblivion.’”

The last interpretation comes closer to the truth than the others. But even it misunderstands, apparently, that the passage in Revelation 14:11 does NOT talk about the final fate of the wicked.

As we point out in our booklets, “*Do You Have an Immortal Soul,*” and “*God’s Commanded Holy Days,*” and as will be discussed in detail in [this chapter](#) of the booklet, there is NO ever-burning hell fire, NOR will the wicked be tormented for all eternity. Rather, they will be BURNED UP in the THIRD resurrection—that is, after the Millennium and the Great White Throne Judgment period (compare Revelation 20:4–15).

The passage in Revelation 14:11 does not talk about that specific time period. It refers to the coming of Jesus Christ and the time when people will worship the beast and receive its mark. All of this will occur BEFORE the Millennium.

What IS the Meaning of Revelation 14:11?

One key point is to realize what it says and what it does not say. It DOES say that the torment of their SMOKE will ascend forever and ever. It DOES NOT say that THE WICKED will be tormented forever and ever. Rather, the wicked will be burned up in fiery plagues, and it is their smoke—evidence that the fire has done its work—which ascends forever and ever. Smoke results from something burned. This indicates that they were consumed and that all that remains is smoke. We also read in Malachi 4:3 that the

ASHES of the wicked will be under the feet of the righteous. Psalm 37:20 tells us that the wicked shall “perish”—“into smoke they shall vanish away.” It is not the punishment of the fire, but the result of that punishment, which is being addressed in Revelation 14:11.

What “Forever” Means...

We also need to understand that the biblical expression “forever” does not have to mean “for all eternity.” The words are often a translation from the Hebrew “*olam*” and the Greek “*aion*” or “*aionios*,” meaning “age,” or “age-lasting” (compare *Young’s Analytical Concordance to the Bible*). In Revelation 14:11, the Greek words translated as “for ever and ever” mean, according to *Young’s*, “to ages of ages.” The *Englishman’s Greek New Testament* translates this verse as follows: “And the smoke of their torment goes up to ages of ages...”

We read in Exodus 21:6 that the servant would belong to his master “forever.” Here, the word describes a relationship that would last until the death of either the master or the servant. In 1 Samuel 1:22, Hannah, the mother of Samuel, took him up to the temple to remain there forever. Verse 28 explains that this meant, “as long as he lives.”

In Jonah 2:6, the term “forever” describes the time span of “three days and three nights,” as made clear in Jonah 1:17. Jonah, when in the belly of the sea monster, prayed about the earth with her bars being about him forever. What he was actually saying here is that as long as he was in that particular situation, the earth was about him.

Jude 7 speaks of the vengeance of eternal fire that burned Sodom and Gomorrah, though these cities are not still burning nor are the people still suffering that vengeance. The fire only burned for a while. An “*aeonian* fire” does not refer to a fire that never goes out. After it completely destroyed and obliterated those ancient cities, it burned itself out when there was nothing else left to consume. The smoke from that fire ascended for a while. It is not still ascending today. Jesus shows that the people in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah will be resurrected in a period of judgment yet future (compare Matthew 10:15).

The people worshipping the political and religious leaders of the end-time Babylonian system will be tormented “forever”—that is, until they die. They “have no rest day or night,” as long as they are

alive and remain part of that system falling under God's wrath; that is, before they are destroyed by the fiery plagues of God's last seven bowls judgment (Revelation 16:1–21).

The Smoke of Their Torment

The smoke of their torment will ascend for a while—as long as the necessary conditions exist to allow smoke from burned bodies to ascend. This does not mean that burned wicked souls will be tormented for all eternity. We read that the smoke from the Babylonian system—and from the city of modern Babylon, which is built on seven hills (Revelation 17:18, 9)—will rise up “forever and ever” (Revelation 19:3—based on the Greek, it should say, according to *Young's* and the *Englishman's Greek New Testament*, “to the ages of the ages”). Babylon “will be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judges her” (Revelation 18:8). The kings of the earth “will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance for fear of her torment” (verses 9–10). This is a reference to the smoke from buildings, but the fire won't burn for all eternity. In fact, we read that the great city of Babylon (verse 10) “shall not be found anymore” (verse 21).

Likewise, we read in Isaiah 34:9–10, that the smoke from the land of Edom will “ascend forever”—that is, until the fire has burned up all consumable material. As in the case of the burned cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, that fire of Edom will not burn for all eternity.

The unrepentant wicked will ultimately be burned up. That will happen AFTER the Millennium and the Great White Throne Judgment. However, the passage in Revelation 14:11 does not address that time period. It merely serves as a forerunner and a warning. Most people who will worship the false political and religious system of Babylon, as well as its human representatives, won't fully comprehend what they will be doing—they will not commit the unpardonable sin leading to the second death, from which there will be no resurrection (Revelation 20:14–15; 21:8). Rather, God will bring them back to life in a Second Resurrection, when the gravity of their wrong conduct will be revealed to them, and when they will be given an opportunity to repent and accept God's Way of Life.

An Ever-Burning Hell?

This prompts the question, however: Does the rest of the Bible teach the existence of an ever-burning hell fire in which wicked souls are tormented for all eternity? Do the wicked go to hell?

The concept that the wicked go to an ever-burning hell after their death is nowhere taught in Scripture. The Bible does not teach the existence of an ever-burning hell where the wicked souls of departed ones are tortured continually for their evil deeds.

Origin of the Idea of an Ever-Burning Hell

The concept of an ever-burning hellfire is derived from paganism. Richard Craze explains in his book, *Hell, An Illustrated History of the Netherworld*, copyrighted 1996:

“... the old horned gods of the Stone Age people became the new rulers of hell. There was a sort of logic in locating the place of the dead below ground—the underworld—because that was exactly where the dead were buried... The early [nominal] Christians borrowed Hel’s name [the goddess Hel ruled over the place of the “lost souls” in Viking mythology] for their own place of punishment... The early [nominal] Christians borrowed heavily from earlier mythologies, and the generally accepted appearance of Satan is an amalgamation of such things as the horns and shaggy hindquarters of the Greek god Pan, the wings of the Mesopotamian devil Pazuzu, and the scales and dragon skin of the Persian Azhidaahaka...

“The Greeks borrowed freely from the Babylonians... Pluto, Zeus’ brother, governed [hell] with a merciless severity and subjected his poor guests to the most ingenious tortures... [Others] were consigned to the deep bottomless pit... ruled by Kronos. Here they would suffer eternal torment... sinners were tortured for eternity... The Romans knew exactly where hell was located—underneath Italy. Everything else they borrowed from the Greeks.”

The author also points out: “... it was the Synod of Bishops in Constantinople in 543 that... set the seal on hell, when they decreed that ‘if anyone shall say or even think that there is an end to the torment of... ungodly persons, or that there ever will be an end to it, then let them be excommunicated.’ And they promptly excommunicated Origen, an early Church father, for saying that he thought hell was finite.”

Origin of the Concept of Limbo and Purgatory

In addition, the Bible does not teach the concepts of “limbo” or “purgatory,” either. These concepts have their origin in pagan mythologies, as well.

Craze points out these most incredible facts:

“The early [nominal] Christians... introduce[d] the concept of a sort of waiting-room, where souls would stay for [a while]. They found a ready-made idea—limbo—that they freely borrowed from the Romans, who had borrowed it from the Greeks. Limbo became a place where anyone who did not quite fit could be put... Purgatory... was a cross between limbo and hell... Jesus’ mother, the Virgin Mary, was called back from heaven, where she had been asleep (the Dormition). She was given the keys of hell to look after, and the running of the purgatory. She does not administer any punishments—in fact, her main job seems to be protecting the souls of the sinners from the wrath of her son [Jesus Christ!!!]. Purgatory became a sort of temporary hell—but one from which sinners could be rescued.”

However, the Bible does not teach the concepts of limbo, purgatory or of an ever-burning hell.

The Gehenna Fire

It is true that the New Testament speaks about a fiery place, which is translated in some English Bibles as, “hell.” The Greek word for this place is “*gehenna*.” It does not, however, describe an ever-burning hell, as commonly understood by many. Craze explains:

“Gehenna—the place of fire. It is probable that it was named after the place just outside Jerusalem where the household rubbish, including the bodies of criminals and animals, was burnt.”

Gehenna, which designates the valley of Hinnom, is located outside Jerusalem. Trash, animal carcasses and even the dead bodies of criminals were thrown into that fire to be burned up. The Bible applies the concept of that *Gehenna* fire to the fire awaiting the wicked to destroy them. That fire is referred to in many places as the “lake of fire” or the second or final death (compare Revelation 20:14). The wicked will be thrown into that “hell fire” to be burned up and destroyed—they will not be tortured for ever and ever. The act of their extinction will occur with sudden finality, and the wicked will

quickly perish with only a brief comprehension of their empty fate!

The Nelson Study Bible states: “The imagery of hell (frequently called *gehenna*) comes from a garbage dump outside the walls of Jerusalem. Jesus’ hearers were familiar with the smoldering fires that always burned there.”

Fate of the Wicked

Please note the following excerpts from our free booklet, “***Do We Have an Immortal Soul?***,” addressing the concept of a fiery hell:

“The word ‘*gehenna*’ and the very concept of it are derived from the Valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem in which the corpses of dead people, mainly criminals, would be burned up. It is another expression for the ‘lake of fire’ in Revelation 20:15, in which all who have acted wickedly, and who have refused to repent, will be thrown into, to be burned up or ‘devoured.’ (Remember that Hebrews 10:27... tells us that the wicked wait for God’s fiery indignation that will ‘devour’ them.). That is the ‘hell’ or the ‘*gehenna*’ fire that Christ is talking about... —‘the second death’ from which there will be no resurrection.

“Those who sin deliberately, willfully and maliciously, God will resurrect to physical life [please note that they were dead—not in heaven, hell, limbo or purgatory—and that they had to be brought back from death to physical life] to throw them—their physical body and their soul or their ‘life’—into ‘*gehenna*’ or the lake of fire (Revelation 20:13–15; 21:8). They won’t burn there forever—rather, they will be burned up. They are the ‘chaff,’ that will be ‘burned up’ with unquenchable fire (Matthew 3:12)—that is, no human can quench it. Notice that this fire will ultimately even burn up or bring to dissolution ‘heaven and earth,’ so that a ‘new heaven and a new earth’ can be created by God (2 Peter 3:10–13).

“The wicked, such as the rich man in Christ’s parable in Luke 16, will not burn forever and ever, for all eternity, in an everlasting hell fire, but they will be ‘burned up’ (cp. again Matthew 3:12). The Greek word for ‘burned up’ is ‘*katakaio*’—conveying the meaning that nothing of what is burned up will remain. We read in Revelation 18:8 that modern Babylon ‘shall be utterly burned with fire.’ The word for ‘utterly burned’ is, again, ‘*katakaio*’ in the Greek. And we are told that ‘that great city Babylon [will] be thrown down, and

shall be found no more at all.’ (Revelation 18:21). In the same way, the wicked, such as the rich man in Luke 16, that are [brought back to life from the dead and then] thrown into ‘*gehenna*’ or the lake of fire [called the SECOND death!], will be ‘burnt up’—they ‘shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up... that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.’ (Malachi 4:1). They will become ashes under the feet of the righteous (Malachi 4:3); it will be as if they had never existed (Obadiah 16).”

Fire Won't Be Quenched

But what did Christ mean when He warned us in Mark 9:43–48 that the wicked would go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched, where “Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched”?

Note that Jesus does not say that the fire will burn forever, and that it will never go out. He said that it would not and could not be “quenched”—that is, nobody would (be able to) put it out as long as there was fuel to keep it burning. Once there is no more fuel, it will cease to burn.

The same terminology is used throughout the Bible for fire—or God’s wrath burning like a fire—but this does not mean that that fire or the wrath of God will burn forever. It burns as long as there is reason or “fuel” to burn. Note Jeremiah 4:4: “Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, And take away the foreskins of your hearts, You men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, Lest My fury come forth like fire, And burn so that no one can quench it, Because of the evil of your doings.” Compare, too, Jeremiah 21:12 and Amos 5:6.

We also read that God’s wrath, even though no one can quench it, will not “burn” forever. Psalm 30:5 says: “For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for life.” And Micah 7:18 adds: “He does NOT retain His anger forever, Because He delights in mercy.”

God uses the same terminology of “unquenchable fire” for the ancient destruction of Jerusalem at the time of Jeremiah. We read God’s words in Jeremiah 17:27: “But if you will not heed Me to hallow the Sabbath day, such as not carrying a burden when entering the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched.”

We read that this prophecy came to pass in the days of King Zedekiah of Judah, when King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, destroyed Jerusalem under his captain Nebuzaradan. We read in 2 Kings 25:9 that he “burned the house of the LORD and the king’s house; all the houses of Jerusalem, that is, all the houses of the great, he burned with fire.”

But that fire is not burning any more today. Jerusalem was rebuilt. It existed at the time of Jesus. The fire was never quenched, that is, deliberately put out, but it went out on its own when there was no longer any fuel to keep it burning.

The same is true for the future *Gehenna* fire—the lake of fire. We read that it will ultimately engulf and burn up the surface of the entire earth—we are told that “both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up” (2 Peter 3:10). In fact, even the “heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat” (verse 12). But after that, God will create “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (verse 13). At that time, there will be no more burning lake of fire, because nothing will exist anymore which needs to be burned. Revelation 21:4 tells us that at that time, there will be “no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain.”

The *Gehenna* fire will apparently be burning throughout the time of the Millennium, the Great White Throne Judgment and the Third and Final Resurrection to “damnation” or “the final destruction” of the wicked.

“Their Worms Won’t Die”

Why does Jesus say that during that time, the worms of the wicked will not die?

Again, Christ uses language pertaining to the fire of Hinnom, which was burning outside Jerusalem, to illustrate a point. When some animal or body of dead criminals caught on the ledges below the rim, it would be devoured by “worms” or maggots. However, the maggots would not live forever—they would develop into flies. Those flies would deposit new eggs, and maggots would hatch from these eggs, eat the flesh, continue in the larval form for a few days, go through a metamorphosis and emerge as flies.

Nothing would exterminate the maggots—as nothing or no one

would extinguish or quench the fire. But without fuel to burn or without flies to deposit new eggs, the fire would go out and maggots would cease to develop. Technically, Christ's point is well taken, as maggots, in fact, did not die—they developed into flies—which would ultimately die. But His spiritual application is much more telling: The fate of the unrepentant wicked is inescapable. As no one quenched the fire or prevented maggots from developing into flies, so no one can change the fate of the unrepentant sinner.

Jesus quoted from a future prophecy in Isaiah 66:24, which says: "And they shall go forth and look Upon the CORPSES of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, And their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh." Please note that the "worms" or maggots are those developing on the corpses of dead people—they are NOT the dead people themselves.

The *Broadman Bible Commentary* agrees, stating as follows: "Hell with its unquenchable fire is 'Gehenna'... *Gehenna* historically was a valley at the western edge of Jerusalem. Used at one time by worshippers of Molech as a place where their sons or daughters were offered in sacrifice, the valley was defiled during King Josiah's religious reformation... Since that time it had been used as a dump for all kinds of refuse. Therefore it was correctly described as a place where maggots continually fed and multiplied ('their worm does not die') and where fire was always smoldering ('the fire is not quenched')."

The wicked will be burned up in a temporary *gehenna* fire, to die the SECOND death, from which there will be no further resurrection to life (Revelation 20:14–15; 21:8). They will not be tortured forever and ever in an eternal hell fire, without ever being destroyed. We need to understand, too, that those who will be burned up will have committed the unpardonable sin. As it is true in regard to the concept of "hell," very few have a proper understanding of what the "unpardonable sin" really is.

To learn more about the future of those who will be burned up in *gehenna* fire, because they have committed the unpardonable sin, as well as the fate of all of those who have died, please read our free booklet, "***Do We Have an Immortal Soul?***"

Chapter 19

The Woman Riding the Beast

Revelation 17:1–18

In Revelation 17, John sees a fallen woman who sits on a scarlet-colored beast with seven heads and ten horns. There can be little doubt what Revelation 17 describes. As we explain in our free booklet, “*Europe in Prophecy*,” and as we will discuss more fully in this chapter, the scarlet-colored beast on which the woman sits depicts *the last seven revivals* of the ancient Roman Empire.

The Fallen Woman or Harlot

In biblical terminology, a religious entity is many times depicted as a woman. The true Church of God is identified as a woman (Revelation 12:6, 13–17); a virgin (2 Corinthians 11:2); and the wife of Jesus Christ (Revelation 19:7). Likewise, Christ’s true followers are identified as “virgins” (Matthew 25:1; Revelation 14:4). This will be discussed in more detail later in this booklet.

However, the woman who sits on the scarlet-colored beast is a FALLEN rich woman who has committed “fornication” with the inhabitants of the earth (Revelation 17:2; compare also verse 4, and Revelation 18:3, 9). She is identified as “the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication” (Revelation 19:2). In biblical terminology, she is a fallen church, pretending to be the true Church of God, but, instead, persecuting Christ’s true disciples.

The woman is called, in verse 5, “Mystery, Babylon the Great, The Mother of Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth.” This fallen church is called the “Mother Church,” which has “daughter churches.” We are told in verse 6 that the woman is drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.

Verse 18 explains: “And the woman whom you saw is that GREAT CITY which reigns over the kings of the earth.”

The Great City on Seven Hills

Again, in Revelation 18:10, 16, 18, 19, 21, Babylon is identified as a prosperous and wealthy “great city” and a “mighty city” (compare, too, Revelation 14:8). Revelation 18:23 adds that by “your sorcery all the nations were deceived,” and Revelation 19:2 speaks of the judgment of the woman “who corrupted the earth with her fornication.”

With this background, let us read Revelation 17:9, which says: “Here is the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits.”

According to *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, the Greek word for “mountain,” “oros,” means “mountain” or “hill” (see *Strong’s No. 3733*).

Young’s Analytical Concordance to the Bible agrees, defining the Greek word used in Revelation 17:9 as “mountain, mount, hill.”

This same word is used in Matthew 5:14, where Christ says: “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a HILL cannot be hidden.” It is also translated as “hill” in Luke 4:29.

The *New English Bible* translates Revelation 17:9, as follows: “The seven heads are seven HILLS...” So do the *Revised English Bible*; the *New International Version*; the *New American Bible*; the *Moffat Translation of the Bible*; the *Jewish New Testament*, by David Stern; and a German Bible translation, “*Die Gute Nachricht*.”

The *New Jerusalem Bible* states: “The seven heads are THE seven hills...”

The *Living Bible* gives the following interpretation of the verse: “And now think hard: his seven heads represent a certain city built on seven hills where the woman has her residence.”

Verse 10 explains that the seven mountains or hills symbolize *seven kings*—seven military and political rulers. They describe the seven last resurrections of the ancient Roman Empire—with the last king or revival of the Roman Empire still to appear in the near future.

But remember that the woman is *also* identified as a CITY, which sits on seven mountains or hills.

Some Catholic and Protestant commentaries grasp for an explanation of this passage, which is different from the most obvious one (discussed below), because they realize that the passage is speaking about them. If they were to give the intended meaning of the passage, they would indict themselves as deserving of Godly judgment. Others accept the obvious explanation (discussed below), but claim that it has only historical relevance, without any meaning for us today or our immediate future. However, Revelation 17 is a prophecy, culminating, in Revelation 19, in the return of Christ—something, which has not yet happened.

So, then, what is the OBVIOUS explanation of Revelation 17:9? Which RELIGIOUS city is built on seven mountains or hills?

Identity of the Great City

Some few commentaries claim that the city described is Jerusalem. But this explanation makes no sense, neither historically, nor prophetically. As Stan Lindsay accurately explains in “*The Human Drama*,” on page 91:

“The most problematic passage in identifying Babylon as Jerusalem is Revelation 17:9, which says that the seven heads of the beast are seven mountains upon which the woman sits. This has been taken almost universally as a reference to Rome’s origin on seven hills. While topographically Jerusalem might be divided into seven hills, utilizing important ‘mounts’ that are inside and outside of the city walls, it would sound contrived. The seven hills almost certainly signify Rome.”

As mentioned by Lindsay, this is the overwhelming consensus of most biblical commentaries, and for valid and correct reasons, as we will see.

John Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible explains:

“As the woman is a city... these seven mountains, on which she sits, must be so many mountains on which the city is built; and what city can this be but Rome, which is so famous for being built on seven hills? This is taken notice of by Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Claudian, Starius, Martial, and others; and indeed there is scarce a poet that speaks of Rome but observes it: hence it has been sometimes called, by writers, the seven hilled city, and sometimes Septiceps, the seven

headed city, which comes near to the language here: the names of the seven mountains were these, Capitolinus, Palatinus, Aventinus, Esquilinus, Coelius, Viminalis, and Quirinalis; the four first of these were taken in by Romulus, the first founder of it, and the three last by Servius Tullius, when he enlarged it; and upon the addition of the seventh mountain there was a feast kept, called Septimontium; and which was kept in seven places in the city; and was annually observed; and in this situation it was in John's time; for Pliny, who was contemporary with him, expressly says, that in his time it took in seven mountains; and that this refers to a city in John's time, then reigning over the kings of the earth, is certain...

“Now there was no imperial city, so built in his time, but Rome... and this confirms that the beast before spoken of, on whom the woman sat, is the Roman empire, since she is here said to sit on the seven mountains, on which Rome, the metropolis of that empire, was built...”

Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible states: “Seven mountains—the seven hills on which Rome stands...”

Albert Barnes' Notes on the Bible agrees: “The seven heads are seven mountains—Referring, undoubtedly, to Rome—the seven-hilled city—Septicollis Roma.”

He adds, in his comments to Revelation 12:3: “Rome was built, as is well known, on seven hills... and was called the seven-hilled city (Septicollis)... Tertullian: ‘I appeal to the citizens of Rome, the populace that dwell on the seven hills’ (Apol. 35). And again, Jerome to Marcella, when urging her to quit Rome for Bethlehem: ‘Read what is said in the Apocalypse of the seven hills.’...”

Halley's Bible Handbook points out:

“This description of Babylon the Great Harlot, Seated on the Seven-Headed Ten-Horned Beast, while it may have ultimate reference to a situation yet to appear, Exactly fits Papal Rome. Nothing else in World History does fit.”

Unger's Bible Handbook states:

“The revived Roman Empire with its end-time emperor (the beast) appears as the agent of the harlot's destruction... The revival of the Roman power under the beast will occasion great wonder and deception... The woman (ecclesiastical Babylon) has her headquarters

in the beast's capitol... which is the seven-hilled city of Rome... He rules over a ten-kingdom federation... and makes war against the Lamb... The harlot who has dominated and exploited the peoples of the earth... and who has ridden into last-day power on the beast, shall find the beast turning against her at the end to utterly destroy her... Destruction is her judgment... because of her evil desire to dominate earthly rulers for her own selfish and deceptive interests."

Dave Hunt, "A Woman Rides the Beast," quotes the "Catholic Encyclopedia" on page 67, as follows: "It is within the city of Rome, called the city of seven hills, that the entire area of the Vatican State proper is now confined."

The *Ryrie Study Bible* adds: "...the name [Babylon] here seems to be a symbolic reference to Rome... In chapter 17 Babylon represents the false religious system that will center in Rome during the tribulation period. In chapter 18 it represents more the political and commercial aspect of the revived Roman Empire... Thus the term stands both for a city and for a system (religious and commercial) related to the city (much like 'Wall Street,' which is both a place and a system)."

The *Nelson Study Bible* states: "The seven heads of the beast... symbolize both seven mountains and seven kings. Since the word mountains also means 'hills'... most interpreters understand this as referring to the seven hills along the Tiber River, a well-known designation of the city of Rome. However, seven mountains may also refer to successive world empires..."

The *New Scofield Reference* edition points out: "There are two forms which Babylon is to have in the end-time: political Babylon... and ecclesiastical Babylon... Political Babylon is the beast's confederated empire, the last form of Gentile world dominion. Ecclesiastical Babylon is all apostate Christendom, in which the Papacy will undoubtedly be prominent; it may very well be that this union will embrace ALL RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD."

Lehman Strauss writes in "The Book of the Revelation," pages 295–301: "The Babylon of the Revelation is an apostate religious system clearly identifiable with all of Christendom, with papal Rome taking the lead in its formation... the world might applaud such a union, but we may be certain God is not in it... We are not surprised, then, when we see men and women of various religious faiths making

pilgrimages to Rome to see a man who has been exalted as ‘the holy father,’ ‘the voice of God,’ and then bowing down to him as though he were a god.

“The Roman Catholic Church is playing her most strategic role in world affairs. Never before has she wooed and won so many devotees of other religions... Rome is known as the seven-hilled city... Here then is a prophecy referring to papal Rome, not history referring to pagan Rome... The wealth of the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant denominations combined adds up to many billions of dollars... Students of ancient coins remind us that the coin of Vespasian represents Rome seated on seven hills. The Roman Catholic Church itself, in the Confraternity Edition of the New Testament (new edition, New York, 1963, page 337), claims that Rome is Babylon.”

Strauss also states the following about the woman riding the beast, on pages 292, 295: “Since the late Pope John ascended the papal throne, there has been a growing movement toward the *merging of all religions into a world church...*”

Remember that the woman which rides the beast, and which is called “Babylon the Great,” is depicted as a “harlot” (Revelation 17:16). She is also the “mother of harlots” (Revelation 17:5), implying that she, as the “mother church,” has “daughter churches.” She has made the inhabitants of the earth spiritually “drunk” with the “wine” or teachings of “her fornication” or doctrines which are not pure and true (Revelation 17:2). Rather, she is teaching the ancient Babylonian Mystery Religion (Revelation 17:5). The woman is responsible for the martyrdom of the saints of God (Revelation 17:6).

In conclusion, any honest evaluation of Revelation 17:9, in its context, must admit to the fact that John is describing, in prophetic terms, an end-time religious system, which is centered in the seven-hilled city of papal Rome, influencing and dominating the peoples of this world.

The Scarlet-Colored Beast with Seven Heads and Ten Horns

Chapters 17 and 18 of the book of Revelation need to be read together with Revelation 13. We have already discussed the events depicted in Revelation 13. We pointed out that the first beast, which is described in Revelation 13 as having seven heads and ten horns, identified past military and economic resurrections, as well as one future

resurrection of the ancient Roman Empire in continental Europe.

We explained that the second beast, which is also described in Revelation 13 and which made an “image” to the first beast, is identified as a religious power. It is depicted as working hand in hand with some of the political and military resurrections or revivals of the first beast. We showed that the first “beast” can describe the revived Roman system, as well as the respective leader of that system, including the last leader of the final revival of the Roman Empire—which is yet future.

Seven Heads and Ten Horns

In chapter 17, a woman is described, riding a scarlet beast with seven heads and ten horns (verse 3). We discussed the passage in Revelation 17:9, 18, which states that the woman is a city that is built on seven mountains or hills.

The seven heads of the beast in Revelation 17 are identified as seven kings or kingdoms (Revelation 17:10). The ten horns are ten kings or kingdoms, but they are obviously different from the seven heads or kings. While the seven heads depict seven successive resurrections, the ten horns depict simultaneous rulership. The ten kings will, at the very end, receive power, together with the beast—the final military leader—“for one hour” (Revelation 17:12). The beast and the ten kings will make war with the Lamb, Jesus Christ (Revelation 17:14). These ten kings are identical with the ten toes in Daniel 2:34, 41–45, which toes will be destroyed by Jesus Christ, the stone in Daniel’s vision (Daniel 2:34, 45). The ten kings, then, are ten still future national rulers or nations, which will place themselves under the leadership of a mighty political personage, the beast. This will be the final “resurrection” of the Roman Empire.

Seven Last Revivals of the Ancient (Holy) Roman Empire

The seven heads of the beast, which are also identified as kings or kingdoms, are the seven LAST resurrections of the Roman Empire. We know this, because the woman only sat on the last seven resurrections, not on the first three ones (Remember, as we discussed, the little horn in Daniel 7:24, which is identical with the woman in Revelation 17, subdued the first three of the ten resurrections).

Six of those seven last resurrections, under the influence of the woman, have already happened. Recall from our previous discussion of the first beast in Revelation 13 that six of the last seven resurrections have already occurred, historically.

They were:

(1) The Imperial Restoration in 554 A.D. under Justinian. This occurred at the behest of the Roman pontiff or pope, especially Pope Pelagius and, to a lesser extent, previous Pope Vigilius;

(2) The Carolingian Empire under Charlemagne. He was crowned in 800 A.D. by Pope Leo III. His empire was called the “Holy Roman Empire”;

(3) The German Empire under Otto the Great. He was crowned in 962 A.D. by Pope John X. His empire was called the “Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation”;

(4) The German-Austrian Empire under Charles V. of Hapsburg. He was crowned in 1530 by Pope Clemens VII;

(5) The French Empire under Napoleon the Great. He was crowned in 1804 by Pope Pius VII; and

(6) The comparatively insignificant Italian-German resurrection under Mussolini and Hitler (compare Revelation 17:10–11. Although this resurrection existed when God’s Church understood the meaning of this prophecy at the time of the late Herbert W. Armstrong [Revelation 17:10: “one IS”], it was very insignificant, so that it is also characterized as not existing [Revelation 17:11: “is NOT”].)

Neither Mussolini nor Hitler were crowned by a Pope (as Justinian had not been, either); nevertheless, a close partnership existed between the Catholic Church under Pope Pius XII and Italy and Germany. This partnership can be seen by Mussolini’s signing the Lateran Treaty with the papacy in 1929, establishing papal sovereignty of the Vatican City, affirming Roman Catholicism as the only religion of Italy and, in turn, having the papacy officially recognize Mussolini as the rightful Italian governor. Further, the Vatican signed a concordat with Hitler in 1933, protecting the rights of the Church under Nazi regime and giving Hitler’s government an outward semblance of legitimacy.

(7) The last or tenth resurrection of the Roman Empire, or the seventh resurrection of the “Holy” Roman Empire under religious

control, is still ahead of us. It will consist of ten European nations—ten core nations of a United States of Europe. It will be short-lived, and, in the end, the political European rulers will “hate” the woman, which is quite wealthy (compare Revelation 17: 4), “eat her flesh and burn her with fire” (Revelation 17:16).

Lehman Strauss writes in *“The Book of Revelation,”* on pages 297, 301, 302: “The ‘ten horns’ represent the ten confederated kingdoms, the revived Roman Empire... Here, then, is the revived Roman Empire, the ten toes of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream image, to arise just prior to the establishment of Christ’s kingdom on earth (Daniel 2:41–44)... The ten horns, the federated states of Europe, that great political power, turn against the harlot with hatred.”

As we have seen, all of the resurrections of the Holy Roman Empire are pictured in the 17th chapter of the book of Revelation as a woman riding a beast with seven heads and ten horns. The seven heads of the beast signify seven resurrections of the “Holy Roman Empire”—six of which have already occurred—and the ten horns point at a still future event: the rule of ten end-time European nations or groups of nations. These united ten European nations or groups of nations will give their authority to “the beast”—a powerful end-time political leader (Revelation 17:13). The woman who is sitting on the beast is also called Babylon the Great. It is identified in the 17th chapter of the book of Revelation as a religious entity—“that great city which REIGNS OVER the kings of the earth” (Revelation 17:18). It is sitting on seven mountains or hills (verse 9).

Therefore, the Bible does reveal that the final revival of the ancient Holy Roman Empire in Europe will again be guided by the Church of Rome. In addition, the Bible speaks in several places of a “heavenly queen,” which is being worshipped (Jeremiah 7:18; 44:17–19, 25). However, Scripture condemns such practice. In fact, modern Babylon identifies herself as a “queen” (Revelation 18:7; compare Isaiah 47:1, 5, 7, referring to the “daughter of Babylon” as the “Lady of Kingdoms,” verse 5). It is therefore no coincidence that the design of the European flag was allegedly “inspired” by an image associated with the “Virgin Mary,” who is described by Catholics, directly or indirectly, as “our Mother,” the “queen of heaven,” our Lady” and “the queen of Europe.” We are also told that when the

final configuration of this last European revival has manifested itself on the world scene, the time of Christ's return will be "very near." The Bible speaks of "one hour" (Revelation 17:12)—that is, a VERY short time!

Chapter 20

The Fall of Babylon the Great

Revelation 18

While in Revelation 17 the *religious* nature of the last resurrection of the Roman Empire is vividly depicted, Revelation 18 focuses more, but not exclusively, on the *economic* nature of that last resurrection.

Let us quote again these interesting comments by the *Ryrie Study Bible*, in their annotation to Revelation 17:5: “In chapter 17 Babylon represents the false religious system that will center in Rome... In chapter 18 it represents more the political and commercial aspect of the revived Roman Empire... Thus the term stands both for a city and for a system (religious and commercial) related to the city (much like ‘Wall Street,’ which is both a place and a system).”

Don’t Be a Part of the Babylonian System

God warns His people not to participate in this Babylonian system, by accepting the mark of the beast and becoming RICH thereby (compare Revelation 18:3–4; see the discussion of the “mark of the beast” in [chapter 15](#) of this booklet). Its merchandise even included “the bodies and souls of men” (Revelation 18:13). Also in it, the blood of the saints was found (Revelation 18:24), and through its false teachings and sorcery all the nations were deceived (Revelation 18:3, 23).

Lehman Strauss comments on modern Babylon’s wealth and religious persecution, as follows: “The wealth of the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant denominations combined adds up to many billions of dollars (p. 298)... The unscriptural doctrines of purgatory, the last rites, and masses for the dead have brought untold wealth into the treasury (p. 310)... Sir Robert Anderson, of

Scotland Yard fame, estimated that Rome was guilty of the death of 50,000,000 Christians (p. 299)... She will be judged because of the untold number of victims whom she slaughtered in the inquisition and in St. Bartholomew's Massacre. She must pay for those shocking murders and for the many bloody persecutions which followed (p. 314)" [and which still will occur in the near future].

God will destroy the modern city of Babylon (Revelation 18:10, 16, 18, 19, 21) "in one day" and "in one hour" (Revelation 18: 8, 10, 17). God will totally wipe out that city, as well as the religious, economic, political and military system it represents, to become a habitation and prison for demons (Revelation 18:2).

The warning and the lesson for God's people is very clear: "Come out of her, My people," God says. Have nothing to do with her. Be and stay separate, and don't touch what is unclean. Don't participate in other men's sins. There are always some who think that they need to remain within an apostate religious system and perhaps try to "reform" it. It never works—and it is against God's specific instructions!

We will observe, very shortly, the final revival of the ancient Roman Empire in Europe. A most powerful world-ruling Empire will emerge, attempting to impose its religious and military "values" on everybody. As we know these things, we ought to take very seriously Christ's warning in Luke 21:34–36: "But TAKE HEED to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to ESCAPE all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man [at His return]."

Chapter 21

The Marriage Supper Between Christ and His Church

Revelation 19:7–9

Revelation 19:7–9 states the following about the marriage between Christ and His Church: “Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb [Jesus Christ, compare Revelation 5:1–14] has come, and His wife [the Church, compare Ephesians 5:31–32] has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, ‘Write: “Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!” ...”

As we can see from Ephesians 5:31–32, Paul is addressing here the mystery of the relationship between Christ and His Church. He emphasizes that those who are called must come out of the ways of this world in order to be joined with Christ. Christ must be continuously living within them (1 John 2:15–17; Romans 12:2; Galatians 2:20).

Paul also shows that the physical institution of marriage is pointing at a spiritual union between God and man. It is pointing at a spiritual marriage between Christ and His Church.

Location

Please note that the Scripture in Revelation 19:7–9 does not say *where* the marriage supper will take place. Other Scriptures strongly imply that it will take place here on earth, after Christ’s return.

Parable of the Wedding Feast

Christ gave a parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22,

presupposing that the wedding feast or marriage supper will take place here on earth. We read in verse 11: “But when the king [who had arranged the marriage for his son, verse 2] came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment.”

In the parable, “the king” represents God the Father, and “the son” represents Jesus Christ. If the marriage supper were to take place in heaven, the guest without a wedding garment could not have been there—neither as a physical being nor as a fallen spirit being. He could not have been a disqualified saint, as there are no physical beings in heaven and the disqualified saint would not have been changed to spirit. Nor could he have been a “fallen” spirit being; i.e., Satan or a demon, as by that time, Satan and his angels will have no more access to God’s throne in heaven. Revelation 12:8 speaks of a time, before the marriage supper, stating, “...nor was a place found for them [Satan and his demons, verse 7] in heaven any longer.”

Five Wise and Five Foolish Virgins

Christ tells another parable in Matthew 25, comparing the Church with five wise and five foolish virgins, “who went out to meet their bridegroom” (verse 1). While the five foolish virgins tried to buy oil for their lamps, the bridegroom (Jesus Christ) came, “and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut” (verse 10). We then read that “afterwards the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us!’” Christ, though, refused them entrance to the wedding supper. Where did the five foolish virgins go? Obviously, as physical humans, they could not go to heaven to try to get entrance there. Christ’s parable of the five wise and the five foolish virgins clearly presupposes and implies that the events take place here on earth.

Additional passages which show that the marriage supper will take place here on earth are Luke 12:35–37 and Luke 22:27–30.

Nevertheless, some have suggested that the wedding supper will take place in heaven before Christ returns to the earth to establish the Kingdom of God. It has been suggested that Christ will come back to take His saints to heaven, have the marriage supper in heaven with them, and then return with His saints to establish the Kingdom of God.

Christ Returns Only Once

However, as we have already explained, the Bible does not teach that Christ will return “twice.” The Bible is consistent that Christ comes back a second time to reward His saints and, at the same time, to punish the wicked that are still alive (Matthew 24:27–39; 2 Thessalonians 1:3–10). God’s saints will be resurrected and changed to immortality at the time of Christ’s return and at the sound of the seventh and last trumpet (1 Corinthians 15:50–54; 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17). However, at the same time—that is, at the sound of the last trumpet—Christ will also begin His reign over the world (Revelation 11:15–18). *There can only be ONE seventh and last trumpet!* There cannot be a sound of the seventh trumpet to signal the resurrection of the saints and their “going to heaven with Christ” for the marriage supper, and ANOTHER seventh or last trumpet to signal the subsequent return of Christ with His saints from heaven to set up the Kingdom of God.

Rather, we read that: 1) Christ will return; 2) at the time of His return, the saints will be resurrected and changed and will meet Him in the air; and 3) Christ and His saints will descend immediately together to the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4). That particular day is a 24-hour day, as Zechariah 14:6–7, 9 reveals.

God’s Transportable Throne

Some have suggested that Revelation 14 speaks of a marriage supper in heaven. However, Revelation 14 does not mention a marriage supper at all. It states that the Lamb and 144,000 of those “who were redeemed from the earth” stand on Mount Zion (verse 1), and that they are “without fault before the throne of God” (verse 5). Although “Mount Zion” can refer to a spiritual mountain in heaven (compare Hebrews 12:22), it can also certainly refer to the physical mountain here on earth. The saints might be standing, on Mount Zion, before God’s transportable throne, which was on earth before (compare Ezekiel 1). Or, verse 5 might just express the thought that they are without fault “in the sight of” God. The Greek word for “before;” i.e., “*enopion*,” literally means, “in the sight of” or “in the face of” (compare Luke 1:15; 16:15; Acts 4:19). Even today, we appear daily “before” God’s throne in heaven, through prayer.

The Sea of Glass

Another Scripture that has been used to suggest that the marriage supper will be in heaven is Revelation 15:2. Again, this passage does not even remotely suggest a marriage supper. The passage states that saints are “standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God.” This is another vision (verse 1), which, simply judging by its wording alone and without consideration of other Scriptures, does not necessarily take place in heaven. The sea of glass could very well be a reference to a sea of glass before Christ’s throne, which will be here on this earth. In addition, we find in Ezekiel 1:22, 26, that Christ’s transportable throne has a firmament with the color of a crystal, in other words, a sea of glass.

Note, for instance, in Exodus 24:9–10: “Then Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel. And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity.” In addition, the saints in Revelation 15:2 are portrayed as standing on a sea of glass, singing the victory song of Moses. This reminds us, of course, of God’s victory over the Egyptians when they drowned in the Red Sea. Therefore, this vision might very well picture the saints’ symbolic victory over the beast power (compare verse 2), as ancient Israel was victorious over Egypt. This is especially true in light of the fact that Exodus 15:18 conveys a future victory of God and His people over God’s enemies: “The LORD SHALL reign forever and ever.” One must be careful not to deduce an entire teaching from a symbolic phrase.

The Great Multitude Before the Throne

A third Scripture that has been quoted to support the speculation that the marriage supper takes place in heaven is Revelation 7:9–17. Again, nothing is mentioned in this Scripture referring to a marriage supper. We are told that a great multitude of all nations stands before the throne and before the Lamb. This is clearly another vision—such as the vision of dead souls under God’s altar that cry out with a loud voice (Revelation 6:9–11). Still, even when analyzing carefully the text of the vision in Revelation 7, we find that the described event does not occur in heaven. Revelation 7:14 says that

the saints “washed their robes and made them white.” Verse 15 says, “Therefore they ARE before the throne of God, and SERVE Him day and night in His temple.” This cannot be happening in heaven, as the last part of the verse says that God “WILL dwell among them.” If this passage described a situation in heaven, God would ALREADY dwell among them.

The passage conveys, however, that those of the great multitude who had to go through the Great Tribulation to become spiritually clean, will, from that time on, serve God daily in His temple—the Church, a spiritual organism, the bride of Christ. We are today the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:17; Ephesians 2:21). But we are not in heaven.

The idea that the marriage supper will be held in heaven is nowhere taught in the Bible. All biblical passages strongly imply that it will occur here on earth, after Christ’s return to this earth.

The Bride of God

Jesus Christ is the bridegroom who will marry the bride upon His return. As we have seen, He will have a marriage supper with His bride at that time.

Christ the Bridegroom

Jesus spoke of Himself as the “bridegroom” (Luke 5:34–35). When Jesus was on this earth, He taught that He would be taken away and that no “marriage” would be consummated at that time.

Note, as well, that Jesus gave a parable indicating that He, as the bridegroom, would return (compare Matthew 25:1–13). In this story, Jesus began His teaching with these very important words: “The kingdom of heaven shall be LIKENED to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom” (Matthew 25:1).

Jesus presented this example of bridegroom and virgins (that is, the bride) as a means of instructing His Church to be ready for His return. Most importantly, the Church was to remain vigilant and not let God’s Holy Spirit (the “oil” for their lamps) fade out of their lives! He would only marry those who were ready.

John the Baptist also referred to Jesus as the bridegroom (compare John 3:29). In his statement, John attested to the fact that Jesus was

the Christ, and that he (John) was in a position of service, as if he were the friend in a marriage ceremony. This is, of course, just an analogy, because John will be in the first resurrection and therefore part of the bride.

In a deeply symbolic series of statements, Paul instructs married members of the Church to love their mates (compare Ephesians 5:22–33). He draws on the selfless example of Christ’s love for His Church to make his point. Then, he mentions a profound truth about marriage, calling it “a great mystery” (verse 32).

Why is it a mystery? Because it is a truth hidden in the plan of God—hidden to those not called by God! Yet, God’s Church understands this mystery: Jesus Christ will marry His Church (compare, especially, verses 25–27)! Note what Paul also stated in this regard: “For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:2).

Christians Betrothed to Christ

It is important here to understand the meaning of “betrothal,” a word not commonly used today. Betrothal describes a binding agreement or covenant of engagement, which could only be annulled or dissolved through divorce, but it does not describe the consummation of the marriage. (The subject of betrothal is fully explained in our booklet, “***And Lawlessness Will Abound...***,” on pages 47 and 56–59.) As will be shown, God’s “betrothal” is not limited to those who will be in the first resurrection. The aforementioned booklet also explains that the New Covenant IS a marriage agreement between Christ and His disciples—but it is not limited, either, to those who will be in the first resurrection. Rather, it will also apply to those who will live in the Millennium and during the Great White Throne Judgment, and who will become converted at that time (For more information on that aspect of God’s great Master Plan, please read, “***God’s Commanded Holy Days.***”)

In the many examples where the Church is referred to as a “virgin,” the intent is that of our spiritual condition. Again, it is important that we not deduce an entire teaching from a symbolic phrase! A vital key for understanding the Bible is to look at other Scriptures for the

meaning behind difficult verses, parables and symbolic analogies.

Christ Will Marry His Bride

The fact remains that Jesus Christ will marry His Church! We find this specifically promised in Revelation 19. Verse 7 states: “Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.” Understand that the wife spoken of here is comprised of ALL of the saints—ALL of those counted WORTHY for the first resurrection. Christians who live just before Christ’s return, also must be prepared—just as the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25 so clearly teaches.

Carefully consider what is stated in Revelation 19:8: “And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is THE RIGHTEOUS ACTS of the saints.” The focus for who will be in this wedding ceremony centers on those who are righteous—that is, those who obey God! Here we gain insight to the fact that Christ will marry those who live righteous lives—something only possible through having the help of God’s Holy Spirit!

Bride Includes ALL Christians

In the Old Testament, God says that He is the Husband of Israel: “For your Maker is your husband, The LORD of hosts is His name; And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of the whole earth” (Isaiah 54:5). Even as Israel rejected God, He reminded them of Who He was: “Return, O backsliding children,’ says the LORD; ‘for I am married to you...” (Jeremiah 3:14).

In a moving outpouring of God’s love for Jerusalem—here, a type of all Israel—He speaks of how He chose and tenderly loved her and made her His: “...Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine,’ says the Lord God” (Ezekiel 16:8). In verses 32 and 38 of this chapter, God charges Jerusalem of being “...an adulterous wife” and compares it with “...women who break wedlock.”

Speaking to Israel of a future time—a time when God will establish His Kingdom on the earth: “And it shall be, IN THAT DAY,’ Says the LORD, ‘That you will call Me “My Husband...”” (Hosea 2:16). Then, in verses 19–20, we find that God promises to join Israel to

Himself in an unending marriage: “I WILL BETROTH YOU TO ME FOREVER; Yes, I will betroth you to Me In righteousness and justice, In lovingkindness and mercy; I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, And you shall know the LORD.” It is important to realize that God will “betroth” Israel in the future—AFTER Christ’s return and the FIRST resurrection. This shows that the “bride” cannot only include those in the first resurrection.

The qualities the bride brings to this marriage are: righteousness, justice, lovingkindness, mercy and faithfulness. These are fruits of God’s Holy Spirit, fruits that Christians—the saints, the bride of Christ—are to possess (compare Galatians 5:22–23).

We have seen that the Church of God is called a “bride.” Also, God’s Word reveals that He addresses Himself as a Husband to Israel and that He will be married to her forever in the future—after Israel’s conversion! Furthermore, the Bible also speaks of a “bride” in an even greater context.

The Heavenly Jerusalem Called the Bride

“Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, ‘Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife.’ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God” (Revelation 21:9–10).

Earlier, in Revelation 21, verse 2, we find this overview: “Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”

Please note that the holy city, spoken of as the “bride,” will descend to this earth after the first resurrection, the Millennium and the Great White Throne Judgment. At that time, the heavenly Jerusalem, placed on earth, is compared with the bride; that is, it will be comprised of ALL of God’s saints.

Most commentaries understand this analogy. For example, *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown* say that the bride in Revelation 21:2 is “made up of the blessed citizens of the ‘holy city,’” and the *Ryrie Study Bible* states that “the heavenly city [when here on earth] will be the abode of all the saints, the bride of Christ...” Again, we see that the “bride”

includes more than just the saints of the first resurrection.

The spiritual consummation of the marriage between Christ and His Church, as well as the spiritual “marriage supper” celebration, will be ongoing—as physical marriage supper celebrations in biblical times lasted for several days (compare *Rienecker, Lexikon zur Bibel*, “under “Marriage”).

In this most remarkable look into the future, God has revealed that ALL of mankind who become truly converted and become Christ-like will be joined to Him and His Family: “HE WHO OVERCOMES shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son” (Revelation 21:7).

Mankind was created to become members of God’s Family! As children of God—described as sons of God and brethren of Christ (compare Hebrews 2)—mankind also is offered a role with Christ described as being His “bride.” We are to become helpers “comparable to [H]im,” as the first woman was created to be a helper, comparable to the husband (compare Genesis 2:18). We are to become united in a permanent relationship within the Family of God!

Jesus prayed a remarkable prayer to His Father, which is recorded in John 17. Jesus asked for something that is—when correctly understood—a most extraordinary relationship! Note, in particular, verses 11 and 20–26. Jesus specifically asked that His followers might become ONE as both He and the Father are ONE. Genesis 2:24 states of the married relationship between man and woman: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become ONE FLESH.”

In this context, we must understand the significance of what Peter stated in Acts 10:34–35: “Then Peter opened his mouth and said: ‘In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him’” (Compare also Romans 2:11; Galatians 2:6; Colossians 3:23–25; 1 Peter 1:17).

Our understanding about who the bride is must be supported by all of the relevant Scriptures. Remember, God desires that ALL men should be saved (compare 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). Also, consider what Jesus Christ taught about those who would be saved—about those who would, indeed, become His spiritual bride: “And indeed

there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last” (Luke 13:30).

Finally, in some of the very last words of the Bible, this heartening plea is made—it is as if those who now rest among the spiritual virgins awaiting the marriage of the Lamb speak to us: “And the Spirit and the BRIDE say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17).

Chapter 22

The Resurrections

Revelation 20:4–15

In Revelation 20, we are introduced to the concept of THREE resurrections. To fully comprehend this virtually unknown fact, we need to review the topic of the resurrections in much detail.

As we will see, the Bible clearly teaches THREE resurrections—not just one.

Paul was inspired by God to write in 1 Corinthians 15:20–26:

“But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have *fallen asleep* [that is, who have died. Remember, the Bible likens death with a sleep]. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam ALL die, even so in Christ ALL shall be made alive. But each one IN HIS OWN ORDER: Christ the firstfruits, AFTERWARD those who are Christ’s [true converted Christians] at His coming. THEN COMES THE END, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an END to all [rebellious human and demonic] rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till he has put all ENEMIES under His feet. The LAST ENEMY that will be destroyed is death.”

Paul reveals that there is an ORDER of resurrections.

The First Resurrection

When Christ returns, only those who died IN CHRIST will be resurrected. They will be resurrected to immortality. However, not all of the dead will be resurrected at that time.

Romans 8:11 reads: “But IF the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in YOU, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give [eternal] life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit [which] dwells in YOU.”

This resurrection to eternal life at the time of Christ's return is described in 1 Corinthians 15:50–54.

It is also referred to in 1 Corinthians 6:14: “And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise US up by His power.”

The *New King James Bible*, as quoted above, does not accurately convey the Greek meaning of this passage—and neither do most other English translations. Paul is actually saying here that God will raise us up from among the dead.

The German *Elberfelder Bible* points out in a footnote that the literal meaning is that God will raise us out of the dead; that is, He will bring us back to life from among and out of the dead. The passage shows that not all of the dead will be resurrected at the time of Christ's return.

The same concept is conveyed in Philippians 3:11, where Paul speaks about his desire to “attain to the resurrection from the dead.” The choice of the word “from” is not the best. The German *Menge Bible* translates, “resurrection out of the dead.” Again, the *Elberfelder Bible* points out that Paul is talking about a resurrection from among the dead. In German, the word is “*Heraus-Auferstehung*”; that is, a resurrection out of the dead. This passage does not talk about a resurrection of all of the dead. V.E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, gives the literal meaning of the word as “the out-resurrection from among the dead.”

Jesus Himself also clearly revealed that there will be more than one resurrection. He tells us in John 5:28–29: “... for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection OF LIFE, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of CONDEMNATION.”

Those in the first resurrection will become immortal Spirit beings—they will be part of the resurrection of ETERNAL LIFE. They will rule with Christ ON THIS EARTH for a thousand years (Revelation 20: 4, 6; 5:9–10).

In speaking to the Church of God in Smyrna, Jesus said that those who overcome “...shall not be hurt by the second death” (Revelation 2:11). The nature of the “second death” will be explained below. Jesus' promise not to be hurt by the second death is made to all who are called NOW to be a part of the first resurrection—as the

firstfruits of God’s plan of salvation (compare Revelation 20:6). But, the resurrection of condemnation will come later.

The first resurrection will be attained by those whom God has specifically called and who have repented and overcome in this lifetime—those who have endured to the end—those who have not given up on their calling and returned to the ways of the world! Christians are being judged NOW. Peter states: “For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now ‘If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?’” (1 Peter 4:17–18).

In his second letter to the Church, Peter very specifically addresses the issue of accountability that those who are called NOW will face if they turn away from God. Verses 18 through 22 of 2 Peter chapter 2, contain somber warnings for anyone so foolish as to reject God’s calling and allow themselves to be overcome by the world, Satan or their own desires, to the point that they permanently cut themselves off from God.

The Second Resurrection

Following the first resurrection of those who died “in Christ” will be the second resurrection of those who had not accepted Christ when they died. They will come back to live as humans, and will then have their first opportunity to learn the truth and accept Christ. But their resurrection will come LATER—it will NOT occur at the time of Christ’s return.

Revelation 20:5, 11–12 describes the SECOND resurrection: “But the REST OF THE DEAD [who were not in the FIRST resurrection] did not live again UNTIL the thousand years [the Millennium] were finished... Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it... And I saw the dead, small and great, STANDING before God... And the dead were JUDGED...”

This second resurrection is not one to eternal life, but to physical life. It is a resurrection to JUDGMENT—but NOT to condemnation!

Resurrection of Israel

Ezekiel 37:7–11 describes the resurrection of the entire house of

Israel to PHYSICAL LIFE. They will be resurrected in the SECOND resurrection. When the dead of Israel are brought back again to physical life, God will deal with them as He deals with true Christians today. Once a person comes to a true understanding, accepts God's way of life, repents of his sins, believes in Christ's sacrifice and the gospel, and becomes baptized, then God grants him forgiveness and offers him the gift of the Holy Spirit—the same process of conversion taking place with those whom God is calling today. We see in Ezekiel 37:14 that the Holy Spirit is offered to the resurrected Israelites—obviously after they have repented of their sins and have become baptized. The people of the house of Israel will know God and begin to live a life pleasing to God. If they overcome and endure, they will receive immortality (compare Romans 11:32; Romans 11:26).

Resurrection of Non-Israelite Peoples

It is not only the people of Israel who will be resurrected at that time. We read in Matthew 12:41–42 that the men of Nineveh and the queen of the South “will RISE UP in the JUDGMENT” *together with people* who were alive at the time of Jesus Christ. Compare, too, Matthew 10:14–15 and Matthew 11:21–24, referring to other unconverted people who had died in the past.

Some commentaries understand that the Bible teaches more than one resurrection. The *Nelson Study Bible* comments on Revelation 20: “The resurrection of the dead will not encompass all people at the same time... there will be a first resurrection of dead believers before the thousand years of Christ's reign and a final resurrection after the millennium is finished, before the great white throne judgment...”

This is not entirely accurate, however. As we will see, the resurrection before the Great White Throne is NOT the final resurrection.

Halley's Bible Handbook states: “... there will be Two resurrections, one before, and one after, the Millennium...”

But this is not accurate, either. There will be actually TWO resurrections after the Millennium. The SECOND resurrection—after the Millennium—was discussed above. But there will be a FINAL resurrection following the second resurrection. We refer to it as the THIRD resurrection.

The Third Resurrection

Unfortunately, there are those who have rejected their opportunity to come to repentance and accept Christ. They have committed the “unpardonable sin.” They once knew and understood perfectly well that they had to submit to Christ, but they refused to do so. They became bitter, hateful, resentful and malicious. They made the irreversible decision **NEVER** to repent. If a person has reached such a state that he cannot repent, because he has made the final decision NOT to even WANT to repent, then God will not force repentance on such a person. **God grants repentance, but a person must want to receive it!** A person who maliciously rejects Christ, would only continue to live in misery and pain—and that is why God will save such a person from eternal misery, by DESTROYING him in a lake of fire.

Revelation 20:13–15 describes the THIRD resurrection, which will occur some time AFTER the judgment period of the second resurrection:

“The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”

God refers to the coming THIRD resurrection in the book of Daniel. In contrasting the FIRST resurrection with the THIRD resurrection, we are told, in Daniel 12:2: “And many of those *who sleep* in the dust of the earth *shall awake*, Some to EVERLASTING life, Some to shame and EVERLASTING CONTEMPT.”

Notice, it does not say that they will live forever in everlasting contempt. But it says that they will WAKE UP “to” everlasting contempt—their fate will be one of everlasting consequences.

The following Scriptures also describe the fate of those who will be brought back to life in the third resurrection: Obadiah 16; Malachi 4:3; Matthew 3:10; Hebrews 6:4–8; Hebrews 10:26–27; and 2 Peter 3:7.

The vast majority of all of humanity will be judged during the second resurrection. Even at this time, it may well be that some will ultimately reject God’s offer of salvation and eternal life—just

as some called before the first resurrection will have turned away from God.

However, God is “...not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9); and, God “...desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). Yet, God will not force people to choose life—even though He will give all an opportunity for eternal life in His Kingdom.

You might also want to read Christ’s parable of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16:19–31. While Lazarus was resurrected to immortal life in the FIRST resurrection, the rich man is being resurrected—more than 1,100 years later—in the THIRD resurrection. He sees the flames and acknowledges his fate, knowing that he will be cast into the lake of fire to be burned up.

In spite of what many preach and believe today, the Bible clearly reveals that there will be some who will have committed the unpardonable sin. They will be destroyed by fire: “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8).

Some have wondered why there should be a third resurrection, if their fate was already sealed at the time of their death. Why wouldn’t God just leave them in their graves rather than resurrecting them again to physical life to destroy them forever? We may not know completely the answer to this question, but God gives us several hints. God is a God of JUSTICE. In raising those who have committed the unpardonable sin to physical life, their attitude will become manifest to all alive at that time. When they witness their conduct, they will never be able to question God’s compassionate and uncompromising justice; as well as His merciful wisdom to free those hateful human beings from their emotional misery and pain.

While most professing Christians don’t believe in more than one resurrection—if they believe in a resurrection at all—the Bible clearly reveals three resurrections. True Christians are to strive to attain the FIRST or “better resurrection” (Hebrews 11:35). We read that if they attain that resurrection to eternal life, they will not “come into judgment” of the second resurrection (compare John 5:24).

God has given the responsibility of judgment to Jesus Christ (compare John 5:22), and all will appear before Christ for this judgment—whether called now or in a future resurrection (compare 2 Corinthians 5:10).

For further information on the important subject of the three resurrections, please read our free booklets, “*Do We Have an Immortal Soul?*”, “*God’s Commanded Holy Days*” “*The Meaning of God’s Spring Holy Days*” and “*The Meaning of God’s Fall Holy Days.*”

The Nature of the First Resurrection

Does the Bible teach a resurrection of the physical body? The answer to this question depends on what is meant by that term. The Bible does teach a resurrection to immortal life and a resurrection to a physical existence.

Regarding the first resurrection (of those who died “in Christ,” that is, in whom God’s Holy Spirit dwelled when they died), we read that they are resurrected with an immortal SPIRITUAL body. God will raise them up to spiritual, immortal and eternal life. God will not first resurrect their dead “physical bodies” and then “change” them into spiritual bodies. Rather, God will resurrect or raise these Christians with changed glorified spiritual bodies, as the Bible clearly indicates. We read the following, in 1 Corinthians 15:35–49, about the “first” or “better” (Hebrews 11:35) resurrection to eternal life:

“But someone will say, ‘How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?’ Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. And what you sow, you do NOT SOW THAT BODY THAT SHALL BE, but mere grain—perhaps wheat or some other grain. But God GIVES IT A BODY as He pleases, and to each seed its own body. All flesh is not the same flesh... there are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies... There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, IT IS RAISED A SPIRITUAL BODY. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body... And as we have borne the image of the man of dust (Adam), we shall also

bear the image of the heavenly Man (Jesus Christ).”

Paul tells us in the above passage that the physical body that dies, is NOT the same body “that shall be.” Rather, God GIVES us a spiritual body “as He pleases.” He does not resurrect our physical body and then change it into spirit. In fact, Paul says that in the resurrection to eternal life, we will be “absent from the [physical] body” (2 Corinthians 5:8). 2 Corinthians 5 further explains that God will give Christians a new kind of body (verses 1–4). Only the bodies of those in Christ who are alive when Christ returns will be changed into spirit, while the dead in Christ will be RAISED INCORRUPTIBLE (1 Corinthians 15:51–52).

When we die in Christ, our bodies decay. The bodies of those who died in Christ thousands of years ago have completely decayed. They became dust and ashes, as God said that they would (Genesis 3:19). The only exception was the resurrection to eternal life of Jesus Christ, who was merely dead for three days and three nights, and whose physical body did not decay before He was resurrected to immortality (Acts 2:25–27). When God the Father resurrected Jesus Christ, He changed Christ’s physical body (which was still in the grave) into a spiritual body. That is why Christ could later walk through closed doors, and why He could make Himself visible and invisible, as He pleased.

We should also note that Christ, when He again became a Spirit being—invisible to the human eye—could manifest Himself as a human being, so much so that He appeared to have flesh and bones (Luke 24:39–40). Of course, as a Spirit being, He did not really have flesh and bone, but He was able to manifest Himself in such a way. Jesus did speak of “a spirit” not having flesh and bones as He did (verse 39). However, He was speaking of demonic spirits not being able to manifest themselves in the flesh (compare our free booklet, “*Angels, Demons and the Spirit World*,” pages 42–43).

We have the example of Christ and two angels appearing as men and eating a meal with Abraham (Genesis 18:1–8). This example shows that God (Christ in the Old Testament account) and faithful angels could manifest themselves in the physical domain as men.

HOW exactly, will God resurrect those who died in Christ? We know that God gives every man a spirit that separates him from the

animals (1 Corinthians 2:11). (For more information on the spirit in man, please read our free booklet, “*The Theory of Evolution—a Fairy Tale for Adults?*,” pages 19–24.) The spirit in man records all of our thoughts and retains all of our memories, as well as our general outward appearance. We read that the spirit in man goes back to God when man dies. In addition, God’s Holy Spirit, which dwells within true Christians, will also return to God, together with the spirit in man, when the Christian dies.

In his book, “*The Incredible Human Potential*,” Herbert W. Armstrong explained the resurrection to eternal life in this way (pages 91–92, hard cover):

“If one has received the Holy Spirit, then in the Resurrection, God will provide a Spirit body, formed and shaped by the Spirit mold. The resurrected being will be composed of Spirit, not matter as the human model was... The body that comes in the resurrection is not the same body that was flesh and blood in the human lifetime... The flesh and blood physical body, after death, decomposes and decays, but the spirit that was in that body, like the sculptor’s mold, preserves all the form and shape, the memory, and the character intact... After death, whether buried in the earth, cremated, or what, the physical body returns to the earth. But the spirit that was in the man, now having recorded everything—the body’s form and shape, the facial identity, the memory and the character—returns to God. It will be preserved unchanged. Such saints as Abraham, Moses, David and Daniel died thousands of years ago... they were composed of corruptible flesh and blood. All that was them (man is composed wholly of matter) long since decomposed.”

It is through the spirit in man—combined with the Holy Spirit—that God will raise Christians with immortal spiritual bodies. The Bible reveals that the physical bodies of Christians will cease to exist in the first resurrection. They will be given new bodies composed of spirit—no longer susceptible to pain and suffering and no longer subject to death and destruction!

The Nature of the Second Resurrection

The Bible also teaches that all those who did NOT die “in Christ” will be resurrected AFTER the Millennium to be given their

opportunity to choose God's Way of Life. This is commonly referred to in the Bible as the "second resurrection." But they will be resurrected as physical beings, not as Spirit beings. When they are raised from the dead, they will receive a new physical body—not a spiritual body. But this does not mean that God will resurrect the identical physical bodies they had when they died and which subsequently decayed in their graves, or which were obliterated in atomic and nuclear blasts in Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and in a nuclear war still prophesied to come, or which became ashes during the Holocaust, or which were cremated.

HOW, exactly, will God resurrect them? God will not raise their physical bodies, which have decayed and decomposed. Rather, He will resurrect them in the same way (albeit to physical life), as He will raise those who died in Christ.

Herbert W. Armstrong wrote the following in "*Mystery of the Ages*", page 127 (hard cover), regarding the second resurrection to a physical, mortal existence:

"At death, 'then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return to God who gave it' (Eccl. 12:7). The spirit is the depository of memory and character. The spirit is like a mold. It retains even the human form and shape of the deceased, so that in the resurrection TO JUDGMENT [that is, in the second resurrection] those who have died shall look as they did in life, retain whatever character they established in life, remember everything that was stored in their memory. But in the meantime, in death, there is no consciousness—they 'know not any thing' (Eccl. 9:5)."

When those in the second resurrection are being given physical life, God is not resurrecting their physical bodies, per se. (There are a few Biblical examples of resurrections of physical bodies; for instance, Lazarus. But in these cases, the physical bodies had not yet completely decayed, so God could resurrect the bodies by putting the spirit of life back into them. Compare, too, Matthew 27:52. The resurrection to a physical existence in Ezekiel 37, describing the "valley of dry bones," is of course a vision, and uses figurative terms to describe a resurrection to physical life. It cannot be used literally to teach a resurrection of the same dead physical bodies. After all, in the vision, the very dry bones speak, verse 11).

Insofar as the second resurrection is concerned, of those who died more than 1,000 years or even several thousands of years earlier, and whose bodies decayed or were obliterated, God will be using their spirit in man (which returned to God upon death) to create through it a new physical body for them. God will give them a new flesh and blood physical body, as He pleases, using the spirit in man as a “mold” which has retained even the outward appearance of the person.

This is not to say that the persons will be raised exactly to the same physical existence they had when they died. For instance, we don’t believe that a person who, through an accident or a birth defect, had only one arm or one leg, will be resurrected to that identical state, but, in all likelihood, with two arms and two legs. We find it reasonable to conclude that blind persons will be raised with eyesight. An aborted fetus will obviously not be resurrected as a fetus, but as a human being who will be capable of living on his own. When Adam and Eve were created, God did not create them as little children, but as grown adults, perhaps in their early or mid-twenties, and He placed in them the spirit in man, even though they were without any prior experience.

We don’t know how, exactly, God will raise those in the second resurrection. The Bible does not reveal whether a person who died at age 90 will look like a 90-year old person in the second resurrection, or whether he will look like the person that he was when he was in his 20s. But it stands to reason that all will be resurrected to live healthy lives for about one hundred years, which—as the Bible indicates—is most likely the time allotted to them during the Great White Throne Judgment period, prior to the creation of the new heavens and a new earth (compare Isaiah 65:17, 20, indicating that a “child”—that is a Christian who is to become like a child—will live for one hundred years, and that an unrepented “sinner,” being “one hundred years old,” shall be “accursed”).

For more information on the second resurrection, please read our free booklets, “*Do We Have an Immortal Soul?*,” p.28, and “*God’s Commanded Holy Days*,” pp. 31–32, 53.

The Nature of the Third Resurrection

As is the case with those who are being raised in the second

resurrection, so it will be with those in the third resurrection. As has been explained before, those in the third resurrection will be burned up or destroyed forever. Since only what is physical can be destroyed or exterminated, the third resurrection must be, by necessity, a resurrection to physical life.

Chapter 23

Eternal Torment of the Beast and the False Prophet?

Revelation 20:10

Some believe that the beast and the false prophet will be tormented forever in hellfire. They claim that Revelation 20:10 teaches that much. This passage describes a time at the end of the Millennium and before the second resurrection of the Great White Throne Judgment period.

The *Authorized Version* (AV) translates Revelation 20:10, as follows:

“And the DEVIL that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet ARE, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.”

A superficial reading, especially in many of the modern translations, might indeed lead us to conclude the existence of a never-ending torture of the beast (a military leader) and the false prophet (a religious leader) in hell. However, analyzing the Scripture carefully, a different conclusion is warranted.

Torture of the Beast and the False Prophet

Please note that the subject of the sentence is the devil. It is he who will be tormented in the lake of fire. In regard to the beast and the false prophet, note that the word, “are” is in italics, in the AV. This means that there is no verb in the Greek language, so that the translators had to ADD a verb—they ADDED the English word “are,” based on how *they* understood the meaning of the sentence. However, the addition of the word “are” is clearly WRONG in this context.

We read, in Revelation 19:20, that the beast and the false prophet

were cast—about 1,000 years earlier, when the Millennium was about to begin—into the lake of fire, to be burned up and destroyed. As we have mentioned before, and as we will explain in more detail below, there is no ever-lasting hell fire, tormenting human beings forever. Rather, humans who will be thrown into the lake of fire will be instantaneously burned up and destroyed.

Since there needs to be an addition of a word or phrase in Revelation 20:10 (“where the beast and the false prophet...”), the words to be added should be, “were cast,” so that the sentence reads: “And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet WERE CAST [namely, 1,000 years earlier, as reported in Revelation 19:20]...”

It is not uncommon in the Greek to leave out a verb or phrase in a sentence when the previous clause dictates what words are to be added. However, the words to be added are to be in harmony with the previous clause. In Revelation 20:10, we read that the devil WAS CAST into the lake of fire. It is a corresponding clause (“was cast”) that must be added in the next phrase—that is, “where the beast and the false prophet WERE CAST.”

We find a similar occurrence in 1 Corinthians 10:24: “Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s well being.” In order to understand this passage correctly, one has to repeat in the second phrase the beginning of the first phrase. The clear and intended meaning is: “Let no one seek his own, but LET each one SEEK the other’s well-being.” (For additional examples, please read our free booklet, “*God’s Commanded Holy Days*,” pages 42–45.)

Note how the *Revised English Bible* translates Revelation 20:10:

“Their seducer, the Devil, was flung into the lake of fire and sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet HAD BEEN FLUNG...”

The *New International Version* states: “And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet HAD BEEN THROWN...”

Most translations continue this sentence, however, by saying: “...and THEY shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.” From this rendition, commentators argue that not only the devil, but also the beast and the false prophet will be tormented for all eternity; otherwise, the sentence would have to continue to read:

“...and HE (that is, the devil) shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.”

Not all agree. As we saw, the *Authorized Version* OMITTS the word, “they,” and renders the continuation of the sentence: “... and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever,” indicating that the subject is the devil, and not the beast and the false prophet.

Let us quote again from the *Revised English Bible*, to note how they continue their rendition of Revelation 20:10:

“Their seducer, the Devil, was flung into the lake of fire and sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet had been flung to be tormented day and night for ever.”

Of course, by not placing a comma after “had been flung,” they give the impression that it is the beast and the false prophet who will be tormented forever and ever. But since the clause, “where the beast and the false prophet had been flung,” is clearly an inserted thought—a relative sentence—the rendering should obviously include a comma after “had been flung,” making it clear that it is the DEVIL who is to be tormented day and night forever.

We see, then, that the translation of the *Revised English Bible* should read:

“Their seducer, the Devil, was flung into the lake of fire and sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet had been flung, to be tormented day and night for ever.”

Some insist, however, that the clause “THEY shall be tormented” is correct, as it is a translation of the Greek verb, “*basanisthesontai*,” which, they say, is a plural verb. If this conclusion is correct, then we must ask the question to whom the plural verb refers.

Lake of Fire Prepared For Satan and His Angels

When we understand for WHOM the lake of fire was prepared, the answer would be obvious. We read in Matthew 25:41 that the lake of fire was “prepared for the devil *and his angels*.”

Therefore, it will be the devil and his demons who will be tormented in the lake of fire, for as long as that lake exists. Since spirit beings cannot die (compare Luke 20:36), they will be tormented—in a spiritual way—while being confined to the lake of fire, when they come to the realization that they are unable to deceive man anymore,

and when they see all their “works” and evil “accomplishments” replaced by the good and prosperous ways of God.

In keeping with this explanation, we need to realize that the fact that the Scripture in Revelation 20:10 only refers to the devil, but then speaks about the devil and demons (“THEY will be tormented”), is a structure in the Greek language, known as “metonymy.” This is a figure of speech, substituting an associated term for the name itself, as in “the crown decrees” for “the ruler decrees.” The Greek word, “metonymy,” is derived from the Greek “*meta*,” meaning “altered” and “*onyma*,” meaning “name.” (compare *Britannica World Language Dictionary*). It means here that it refers first to the main representative—the devil—while subsequently including those whom he represents—the demons.

The Bible uses that way of speaking on occasion. Note one example of this “figure of speech” in the report of the demons possessing the herd of swine. In the record of Matthew, we are clearly told that Christ dealt with TWO demon-possessed men (Matthew 8:28–32). However, in the record of Mark, we are only told about ONE demon-possessed man (Mark 5:1–13). It is obvious, then, that the one man mentioned in Mark was the spokesman or leader of the other man, mentioned in Matthew. In the same way, the devil in Revelation 20:10 is the leader or representative of all the demons, mentioned or referred to in the latter part of the same sentence.

But even if we allow for the possibility that the statement “they shall be tormented for ever and ever” would include the beast and the false prophet, that would still not mean that they will be tormented for all eternity. The Greek clause for “forever and ever” is “*eis tous aionas ton aionon*.” It literally means, “to the ages of the ages.” We addressed the meaning of this clause earlier, when discussing Revelation 14:11 (“And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever,” AV). We showed that this phrase can refer to a brief period of time, as long as a particular condition exists or as long as the person lives. If applied in this way to Revelation 20:10, the beast and the false prophet would only be tormented for a very brief period of time before the fire would kill them and burn them up.

Revelation 20:10 clearly does not teach that human beings, or the souls of evil persons, will be tormented forever and ever in a hell fire, without ever dying or being annihilated.

Chapter 24

The “New Jerusalem”

Revelation 21 and 22

We are told in Revelation 21 that John sees in a vision that God will create a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1; compare 2 Peter 3:13; Isaiah 65:17–18; 66:22; Psalm 102:25–26)—apparently after this earth and the heavens have been burned up (compare 2 Peter 3:7, 10). There will be no more sea on the new earth (Revelation 21:1)

In addition, John sees the “holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” (Revelation 21:2). This is a literal city—albeit not physical, but spiritual. (For more information on the spiritual nature of the new Jerusalem, please read our free booklet, *“Angels, Demons and the Spirit World.”*) That this city is literal and not just a symbolic reference to the Church, for example, can be seen from the very detailed and specific description in Revelation 21:10–22; 22:1–5. We are told in Revelation 21:2, in conjunction with other Scriptures, that God is presently “preparing” this city in heaven (compare Revelation 3:12; Hebrews 11:9–10; 12:22; 13:14; Galatians 4:26). We also read that Jesus Christ is presently “preparing” for us a place in the “Father’s house”—the new Jerusalem (John 14:1–3).

When the heavenly Jerusalem descends to the new earth, Jesus Christ and the saints will have ruled on earth for 1,000 years and an additional 100 years during the Great White Throne Judgment. Then, God—the Father Himself—will also come down to live with Jesus Christ—the Lamb of God—and the saints (Revelation 21:3). At that time, there will be no more death (Revelation 21:4; 1 Corinthians 15:26), and nobody will be able to enter the city who does not keep all of God’s commandments (Revelation 22:14).

The Tabernacle of God With Men

The new Jerusalem is described as the “tabernacle of God... with men” (Revelation 21:3). Lehman Strauss, *The Book of Revelation*, states on page 350: “The ancient tabernacle in the wilderness represented God’s presence and glory in the midst of Israel... The word translated ‘tabernacle’ is ‘skene,’ which literally means, ‘the place where God dwells.’ This means that God will make His tabernacle with His saints forever and ever; He will give His presence to them forever and ever. ‘Behold the tabernacle [‘skene’] of God is with men, and He will tabernacle [‘sknosei’] with them’ [compare Revelation 21:3].”

Scriptures such as Ezekiel 40:2; 47:1–12 and Isaiah 60:3–22 reveal to us that a physical forerunner of the heavenly Jerusalem will exist in the Millennium—prior to the events described in Revelation 21. However, in comparing the descriptions of the future “earthly” Jerusalem and the new “heavenly” Jerusalem, we find remarkable differences. For instance, while the earthly Jerusalem will have a temple (Ezekiel 47:1), there will be no temple in the new Jerusalem (Revelation 21:22).

Rather, “in God’s Holy City, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the image of the invisible God, is the Temple... [Our comment: This wording could be misunderstood. In accordance with Revelation 21:22, “... the Lord God Almighty (God the Father) and the Lamb (Jesus Christ) ARE the temple.”] Ezekiel saw healing waters proceed from the altar in the temple, the place of sacrifice (Ezekiel 47:1), but in the new order it issues forth from the throne, the place of sovereignty, for in that day there will be no need for a sacrifice” (Strauss, pages 354, 359).

The commentary of *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown* states:

“The descent of the new Jerusalem out of heaven is plainly distinct from the earthly Jerusalem in which Israel in the flesh shall dwell during the millennium, and follows... the creation of the new heaven and earth.”

The *Life Application Bible* adds: “The new Jerusalem is where God lives among his people. Instead of going up to meet him, he comes down to be with us, just as God became man in Jesus Christ and lived among us (John 1:14).”

Description of the New Jerusalem

The new Jerusalem is described in much detail. Even its dimensions are clearly revealed.

The *Broadman Bible Commentary* explains that the heavenly Jerusalem “is cubical... Its length, breadth, and height are equal; each dimension was measured at... 1500 miles... The walls were... about 216 feet...”

Unger’s Bible Handbook adds: “This could mean 2,250,000 square miles on each tier of the cube extending 1500 miles upward, like a huge skyscraper with innumerable floors.”

Halley’s Bible Handbook writes: “A Cube, of which the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle, a cube 15 feet each way, and the Holy of Holies in Solomon’s Temple, a cube 30 feet each way, were types.”

Some commentators suggest that the new Jerusalem is in the form of a pyramid. The *Wikipedia Encyclopedia* explains:

“It is unclear whether the city is in the form of a cube or a pyramid... Many hold that the cubic form is more likely... However, the pyramid interpretation still has several adherents. A pyramid would allow a slope for the river of the water of life to flow down from the throne of God, and for the street of the city to ascend...”

In regard to the volume of the new Jerusalem, the *Wikipedia Encyclopedia* explains: “If in the form of a cube, it would have a volume of 11 thousand million cubic kilometers, which is about half the volume of the moon... If in the form of a pyramid, the New Jerusalem would have a volume of 3.7 thousand million cubic kilometers...”

Symbolic Significance

We explained earlier in [chapter 21](#) of this booklet that even though the heavenly Jerusalem is—and will continue to be—a literal city, it has also symbolic significance and relevance. We pointed out that the new Jerusalem will descend to this earth and will be, at that time, the abode of all the saints of God; they will be the blessed citizens of the holy city.

Additionally, note the symbolic significance of the foundations and gates of the heavenly Jerusalem:

The heavenly Jerusalem has twelve gates on which are written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel (Revelation 21:12). It has also

twelve foundations on which are written the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, Jesus Christ (Revelation 21:14).

The *Nelson Study Bible* states:

“The description of the great and high wall that contains twelve gates named after the twelve tribes... of Israel echoes Ezek. 48:30–35. [Some] Commentators... interpret these twelve gates as representing all of God’s people, including both Israel and the church [Our comment: It would clearly appear to include the Church, the “Israel of God,” compare Galatians 6:16] ... The twelve foundations, the huge stones upon which the wall of the New Jerusalem rests, contain the names of the twelve apostles of Christ (see Luke 6:13–16), calling to mind Paul’s imagery of the apostles as the foundation of the house of God in Eph. 2:20 (see Jesus’ promise to His apostles that they would occupy a prominent place in His kingdom in Matt. 19:28).”

Halley’s Bible Handbook points out:

“The Bible begins with a Garden, and ends with a City. The Holy City, New Jerusalem, Bride of Christ, Wife of the Lamb... ‘Holy City’ is the antithesis of ‘Babylon.’ Babylon, the Adulterous Church [described in Revelation 17, 18 and 19]. Holy City, the true Church, Bride of Christ. The Adulteress has disappeared. The True Wife, Glorified... Ancient Babylon, which had been given its name to the Adulterous church, was known as a ‘City of Gold’ (Isaiah 14:4), wonder city of the ancient world... Now the Real City of Gold appears in its Infinite Splendor and Magnificence.”

The *New Student Bible, New International Version*, contains the following annotation—comments in brackets were added by us:

“The last two chapters of Revelation contain numerous parallels to the description of the Garden of Eden in the first three chapters of Genesis. Revelation describes a new creation that excludes all the things that spoiled Eden. There will be no more night and death [Revelation 21:4, 25]. Satan will disappear forever [Revelation 20:10], and nothing impure will enter the new city [Revelation 21:27]. People [who have by that time become immortal Spirit beings; compare [chapter 25](#) of this booklet] will walk with God again [Revelation 21:24–26], just as they [Adam and Eve] did in Eden. There will be no crying or pain [Revelation 21:4; and there will be no more curse, compare Revelation 22:3]. Once again humankind [by then made

immortal] will rule over creation [Revelation 22:5], this time with open access to the tree of life [Revelation 22:2, 14]. Everything put wrong by human rebellion in Eden will be set right. In Eden, Adam and Eve were driven from the garden; in the new earth, they will see God's face [Revelation 22:4]."

Jesus says in Revelation 2:7 that the tree of life is presently in the midst of the "Paradise of God." "Paradise" describes a beautiful Garden, also called "Eden." The reference here is to a spiritual garden, which is presently in heaven (compare 2 Corinthians 12:1–4), but which will descend to this earth, together with the (spiritual) tree of life and the heavenly Jerusalem. A reference to the spiritual garden of Eden or Paradise can also be found in Ezekiel 28:13, where Lucifer's fall from heaven is described.

For the Healing of the Nations

We are told, in Revelation 22:2, that the leaves of the tree of life will be "for the healing of the nations." This is not to be understood that physical sicknesses will exist at that time, which will have to be healed.

Albert Barnes' Notes on the Bible points out: "We are not to suppose that there will be sickness, and a healing process..., for that idea is expressly excluded in [Revelation] 21:4; but the meaning is, that the life and health of that blessed world will have been imparted by partaking of that tree; and the writer says that, in fact, it was owing to it that they who dwell there had been healed of their spiritual maladies, and had been made to live forever."

Revelation 22:5 tells us that the saints will rule in God's Kingdom forever and ever, compare Daniel 7:18. They will "inherit all things" (Revelation 21:7). However, as God's children (compare again Revelation 21:7), they will always be obedient and submissive to God the Father (Revelation 22:3). As immortal members of the God Family, they will have access to the new Jerusalem—they will not and cannot sin anymore (1 John 3:9). We read in Revelation 22:14: "Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city." God tells us that those who practice sorcery, murder, idolatry and lies, as well as other violations of God's commandments, will not be allowed to enter the new Jerusalem (Revelation 22:15;

compare Revelation 21:26–27). By that time, those people practicing such things will have been burned up in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14–15; 21:8).

Chapter 25

Nations and Kings in the New World

Revelation 21:24, 26

Revelation 21:24, 26 says that the nations of those who are saved shall walk in the light of the new Jerusalem, and that the kings of the earth will bring their and the nations' glory and honor into it. Does this mean, then, that physical people will exist at the time when the heavenly Jerusalem descends to this earth—after the Millennium and the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11–15)?

We read in Revelation 21:4 that after that time, there will be no more death. We also read in Revelation 20:14 that “Death” was cast into the lake of fire. This means, that whatever physical human beings existed, they will, by that time, either have been burned up and destroyed in the lake of fire (thereby ceasing to exist forever), or they will have been changed into immortal spirit beings, unable to die. Physical people die. One cannot keep a physical human being alive forever. Therefore, since there will be no more death, there cannot exist physical people for all eternity at that future time.

We also read that we cannot enter the Kingdom of God, unless we are Spirit beings. Since God is not a respecter of persons, what He is offering to us now, He will also offer to all of mankind later—during the Great White Throne Judgment. If He were only to offer eternal life to us today, but not later to the rest of mankind (not being called today), God would arbitrarily discriminate against all of mankind—as we are called today by grace, not by our works, so that no one should boast in God's sight.

Revelation 21:24–26; 22:2 speaks, indeed, of the time after the Great White Throne Judgment. These Scriptures do not state, however, that at that time, physical humans will still exist. Rather, God the Father will dwell on the earth and those on earth will see

His face (Revelation 22:4), and we know that no human can look at God the Father in His glory and live. The fact that these Scriptures speak of “nations” or “kings of the earth” does not allow us to reach a different conclusion.

Jesus Still Called “The Man”

Christ, a Spirit being, is still referred to in Scripture as “the MAN,” even in His glorified state (1 Timothy 2:5). One may read that Scripture and misconstrue it to mean that Christ is still a physical Man today. We know, of course, that He is not. With that same rationale, we might look at the passage in Revelation 21:24–26 that speaks of “kings” and “nations,” and conclude that these passages speak of physical human beings. They might, however, only refer to those Spirit beings who WERE, during their physical state of existence, kings or subjects. The point being made in Revelation 21 would be then, that regardless of what they had been in their physical life (“kings” or “nations”), they ALL will enter Jerusalem to worship God. Everyone will come to bring glory and honor to Jerusalem. Even though all of us, as Spirit beings, will be members of the God Family and “sons” of God the Father (Revelation 21:7), we will always remain UNDER God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ—we will always remain His servants (Revelation 22:3), but we will be Spirit beings, of course, no more flesh and bone.

Kings Rule Over Others

There may be another reason why the Bible talks about “kings” and “the nations of them which are saved” (Revelation 21:24). The *Lamsa* translation says: “And the people who have been saved...” Why is there still a differentiation made between kings and nations or people?

It is possible that these passages speak of *former* human beings who will by that time make up the *nations of Spirit beings*, who will have qualified for different levels of rulership. If so, the Spirit beings would then be grouped or organized as “nations” and “kings” after the Great White Throne Judgment. That is, the “kings” would be ruling over other Spirit beings (i.e., “the nations” or “people that have been saved”). We are being rewarded according to our works.

Some will rule over more than others. In the end, though, we all will rule forever and ever (Revelation 22:5).

Some feel that Revelation 22:2 proves that there will still be physical human beings in existence after the Great White Throne Judgment. Revelation 22:2 speaks of healing of the nations, but as we saw in the previous chapter, this is not talking about physical healing, but spiritual healing or refreshment. As Spirit beings, we will still have emotions. God can feel joy or anger, depending on what we do. It says that when God had ended His recreation work of the earth, He was refreshed (compare Exodus 31:17).

Taking all the Scriptures together, it is clear that there will be no human physical life in existence after the Great White Throne Judgment, when God will create everything new (Revelation 21:5). For more information regarding that “new” world, please read our free booklet, “**God Is A Family.**”

Chapter 26

Outside Are Dogs and Sorcerers...

Revelation 22:15

Revelation 22:14–15 states the following: “(14) Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. (15) But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie.”

This passage describes a time AFTER the heavenly Jerusalem has descended to earth (described in Revelation 21)—AFTER “anyone not found in the Book of Life” had been “cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15). “Death and Hades,” that is, all physical humans not written in the Book of Life, had already been “cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death” (Revelation 20:14).

Revelation 22:19 adds that “if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book [better: Tree] of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”

Those Who Are “Outside”

Since Revelation 22:15 talks about sinners who will be “outside” the heavenly Jerusalem, is it teaching that the souls of the lost ones are still roaming outside the city? No, because we read in an earlier passage, in Revelation 21:8, that those who have committed the unpardonable sin will have been thrown into the lake of fire, to be burned up and destroyed. [Revelation 21:8 reads: “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”]

The lists of sins in Revelation 21:8 and Revelation 22:15 are

very similar, indicating that these passages address the same kinds of people. In addition, we have proven before that people will not live forever in an ever-burning hell, but that those who permanently refuse to repent will be burned up and destroyed.

The *Commentary on the Whole Bible by Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*, states: “As all the filth of the old Jerusalem was carried outside the walls and burnt there, so nothing defiled shall enter the heavenly city, but be burnt outside (cf. ch. 22:15).”

The *Broadman Bible Commentary* explains Revelation 22:15, as follows:

“The blessedness of the righteous is seen more clearly in John’s contrast with those outside. Outside does not mean that the wicked are milling around the exterior of the walls of the holy city. It means that they will never be inside the city; they are [or better: were cast into] the lake of fire (20:15). The term could have some reference to life in the present world; the righteous already know a habitation with God; the wicked are already outside.”

In fact, the Bible speaks repeatedly about those who are “outside”—who are not a part of the Church. We read in 1 Corinthians 5:12–13: “For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore put away from yourselves the evil person.” Compare, too, Colossians 4:5 and 1 Thessalonians 4:12.

The Greek word for “outside,” “*exo*,” which is used in those passages and in Revelation 22:15, can also mean “without.” In Matthew 13:47–48, it is translated as, “away”: “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to the shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad AWAY.”

The meaning is clear: Those who are “bad”—those who practice the sins described in Revelation 22:15, as a way of life, without a willingness to repent—will be “outside” or “without” or “away from” the holy city and the Kingdom of God. Many Scriptures show that those people will not inherit or enter the Kingdom (compare 1 Corinthians 6:9–10; Galatians 5:19–21; and Ephesians 5:5). Note that the lists of sins, as set forth in 1 Corinthians, Galatians and Ephesians, are very

similar to the sins mentioned in Revelation 21:8 and 22:15, including sexual immorality, idolatry, sorcery and murders. All of these lists address the same kinds of people.

Christ said in Luke 13:28: “There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out [and thrown into the lake of fire, compare Matthew 13:41–42].”

Rather than teaching that the souls of the lost ones are “milling around the exterior of the walls of the holy city,” Revelation 22:15 teaches that they will not even be there! *Moffat* translates Revelation 22:15 in this way: “Begone, you dogs, you sorcerers, you vicious creatures, you murderers, you idolaters, you who love and practice falsehood, every one of you.” Other translations render the Greek word “*exo*” (i.e., “outside” or “without,”) as “excluded.” Those who refuse to repent will be EXCLUDED from access to the Kingdom of God and the holy city. They will be destroyed in the lake of fire, which is the second and final death, from which there is no resurrection back to life.

Conclusion

We are told in Revelation 22:5 that the saints will rule in God's Kingdom forever and ever (compare Daniel 7:18). They will inherit ALL things (Revelation 21:7)—everything that exists in the physical and the spirit world. However, as God's children, they will always be submissive to God the Father (Revelation 22:3). His Name will be on their foreheads (Revelation 22:4; compare Revelation 14:1; 7:3).

We are assured that the things written in the book of Revelation will shortly come to pass (Revelation 22:6). Christ will come very soon (Revelation 22:7, 10, 20), to reward each “according to his work” (Revelation 22:12). We are therefore admonished to be mindful of the prophecy of the book of Revelation (Revelation 22:7) and to be, and continue to be, righteous and holy (Revelation 22:11), as only those who endure to the very end shall be saved (Matthew 10:22; 24:13).

If God has opened your mind to His Way of Life, He gives you the choice to respond accordingly (Revelation 22:17). All of us are specifically warned not to add to nor delete anything from the things that are written in the book of Revelation:

“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book [better: Tree] of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” (Revelation 22:18–19).

God's true servants are admonished to persevere and to live by faith, not by sight (Revelation 13:10; 2 Corinthians 5:7). And with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (Revelation 22:21), they can, and will succeed!

The following booklets are available, upon request:

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