

JUDGMENT ON THE HOUSE OF GOD

**JOHN HOLLAND
BOB THOMSON**

Published by Covenant Ministries Inc
P.O. Box 443 Warrnambool 3280
Australia
Email contact@covenanttruth.com.au

ISBN 0 7316 1117 9

JUDGMENT ON THE HOUSE OF GOD

This book presents a prophetic warning of God's judgment on the church. *"For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God" 1 Peter 4:17*

For centuries the church has been subjected to an overwhelming assault from the power of Antichrist. *"And it was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them."* Revelation 13:7 As a result of this attack, the church has been contaminated with apostasy, and left powerless to witness to an ailing world.

The church must face the Lord's judgment and be purged and refined. This is so that it might effectively receive the "latter rain" of revival and restoration.

God has revealed His purposes to "His servants the prophets" *Amos 3:7*, and has instructed them to warn His children. The burden of their message at this time is to *"Come out of her, My people, (i.e. to come out of the apostasy in the church) lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues."* Revelation 18:4

John Holland
Bob Thomson

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THE TWO WITNESSES

KEY BIBLE READINGS

Rev 11:1-13 "Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, '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. And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.' These are the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth. And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner. These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire. Now when they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. Then those from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves. And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. Now after the three and a half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, 'Come up here.' And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them. In the same hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. In the earthquake seven thousand men were killed, and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven."

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

To understand the Key Bible Reading it is necessary to appreciate the nature of the Book of Revelation. It is book deliberately obscured so that those who are yielded to the world and to the powers of darkness are unable to unravel its mysteries. Nevertheless it is a book which is meant to be understood by true believers so that they might be prepared for what is to come. The apostle John writes that the book is "**The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His servants - things which must shortly take place.**" Revelation 1:1

John declares that Jesus "**sent and signified it** (i.e. the Revelation) **by His angel to His servant John.**" Revelation 1:1 The word 'signified' is translated from the original Greek word 'semaino', which means to indicate or express by the use of signs or symbols.

Throughout the book of Revelation the reader is confronted by a procession of apparently bizarre images. In chapter 12 we read of a dragon standing before a woman in labor, ready "**to devour her child as soon as it was born.**" This is followed in chapter 13, by "**a beast rising up out of the sea**" and "**another beast coming up out of the earth.**" In an even more dramatic vision in chapter 17, we read of a harlot riding a scarlet beast.

This figurative or symbolic language is used to disguise the real meaning of Christ's Revelation from the idly curious or those with malevolent intent. However the key to unfolding the real meaning of this book for the believer is to trace the source of the symbols. That source is the Old Testament, and all the clues to understanding are to be found within it by the diligent searcher.

The Book of Revelation consists of a series of visions which are placed side by side and not necessarily in chronological sequence. These visions reveal the progress of Christ's invincible purpose in establishing His Kingdom through His church. The prophetic revelation contained with each vision can only be appreciated when we discover the meanings of the various symbols used. In addition, it is only as we abandon a complete reliance on our natural intellectual capacity, and open our hearts to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that we are able to see each revelation in its proper place in time.

With this understanding of the nature of the book of Revelation, it is possible to approach the subject of the "two witnesses" in the key Bible Reading. Because the language is symbolic, we should not expect the actual or physical appearance of two men breathing fire. Nor should we expect to observe their dead bodies being openly mocked in the streets of some great world metropolis. Instead, in order to discover their real identities (and therefore their significance), we are required to trace back to the source of those symbols contained in the vision.

THE IDENTITY OF THE TWO WITNESSES

The major clue to the identity of the two witnesses is contained in the symbolic reference to Moses and Elijah. The two witnesses are said to have **"power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and thy have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire."** Revelation 11:6.

The first phrase of this verse is a reference to the prophet Elijah, who declared God's judgment of drought to King Ahab of Israel. **"As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word."** 1 Kings 17:1.

The latter phrase is a reference to Moses dealing with the pharaoh of Egypt so that he would let the children of Israel go. Chapters 7,8,9 and 10 of the book of exodus detail nine plagues, beginning with the turning of the waters of the Nile to blood, through frogs, lice, flies, pestilence, boils, hail, locusts, and finally darkness.

The relevance of the two witnesses being related to Moses and Elijah is brought out in the last chapter of the last book in the Old Testament. **"Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord."** Malachi 4:4-5. The **"great and dreadful day of the Lord"** mentioned here is the day of judgment to take place at the second coming of Christ.

Moses was the servant of God appointed to deliver the 'law' or the 'word' to the children of Israel, and is therefore a symbol of the word of God. Elijah was the first major prophet and was fearless and obedient in his prophecy. Note that the two witnesses are not literal reincarnations of Moses and Elijah. Instead they are represented or symbolised by Moses and Elijah. The two witnesses are the WORD OF GOD, and the SPIRIT OF PROPHECY.

When Jesus was transfigured on the mountain, it was Moses and Elijah that appeared with Him. Later, when coming down the mountain with three of His disciples, Jesus prophesied that in the last days the spirit of Elijah would return to restore all things. **"And His disciples asked Him, saying 'Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?' then Jesus answered and Said to them, 'Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands.'** Then the disciples understood that he spoke to them of John the Baptist." Matthew 17:10-13.

Notice that Jesus used two tenses here. First he said, "**Elijah truly is coming first and will restore all things**" which is a statement concerning events to take place some time in the future. Then He said, "**But I say to you that Elijah has come already**" which is clearly a statement made in the past tense. The disciples understood that when Jesus said that "**Elijah has come already**", He was talking about John the Baptist, who had already come to "**prepare the way of the Lord.**" (Isaiah 40:3). In fact, at the time Jesus made this statement, John had already been executed by Herod Antipas.

Jesus' words are therefore a statement that Elijah's spirit of prophecy was on John the Baptist. They are also a promise that the same spirit of prophecy would be manifested at some time in the future "**and will restore all things**". Just as the spirit of prophecy was in John the Baptist preparing the way for the Lord's first coming, so also will the spirit of prophecy prepare the way for the Lord's second coming.

This principle is clarified by study of an incident at the end of the prophet Elijah's life. "**Elijah said to Elisha, 'Ask! What may I do for you before I am taken away from you?' And Elisha said, 'Please let a double portion of you spirit be upon me.'**" 2 Kings 2:9. After Elijah was taken up into heaven on a chariot of fire, Elisha took his mantle and used it to part the waters of the Jordan. "**Now when the sons of the prophets who were from Jericho saw him, they said, 'the spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha'**" 2 Kings 2:15.

A similar event occurred in the life of Moses. He had complained to God that he was "**not able to bear all these people alone, because the burden is too heavy for me.**" Number 11:14. In response to his prayer, God told Moses to gather seventy elders to act as his assistants. "**I will take of the spirit that is upon you and will put the same upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you.**" Numbers 11:17. In this way the elders were equipped to instruct and judge the children of Israel, using the statutes and commandments of God just as Moses did.

It is clear then that in awaiting the two witnesses, we are not to expect another Moses or another Elijah to arise as world acclaimed figures. Instead what is prophesied here is that the two witnesses will anoint God's chosen servants. The two witnesses, the spirit of prophecy which rested on Elijah and the spirit of the living word of God which rested on Moses, will rest on God's chosen servants. This anointing will equip those servants to walk as His instruments of restoration, wielding the prophetic word of God.

THE MINISTRY OF THE TWO WITNESSES

The ministry of the two witnesses is indicated early in the key bible Reading. They are likened to "**the two olive trees and two lampstands standing before the God of the earth.**" Revelation 11:4. This imagery is taken from the vision of Zechariah in the Old Testament.

"**I am looking, and there is a lampstand of solid gold with a bowl on top of it, and on the stand seven lamps with seven pipes to the seven lamps. The two olive trees are by it, one at the right of the bowl and the other at its left.**" Zechariah 4:2-3. The angel told Zechariah "**These are the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth.**" Zechariah 4:14.

The imagery from Zechariah relates to the restoration of the Jewish temple, which had been destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. The olive trees impart oil (which is a consistent symbol of the Holy Spirit), to the golden lampstand (which is a picture of the temple). The angel of the Lord explained to Zerubbabel that this vision showed that the temple would be restored "**Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit', says the Lord of hosts.**" Zechariah 4:6.

The source of the oil which brought restoration was the two olive trees. These two trees are another picture of the word of God and the spirit of prophecy. In this case the prophetic word expounded by Haggai and Zechariah, prepared the way for the restoration of the temple by Zerubbabel and Joshua.

This picture is also relevant to the restoration of the Christian church. Jesus used the candlestick as a clear symbol of the church when He told the apostle John that **"the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches."** Revelation 1:20 (Authorized King James Version). In the New Testament context then, Zechariah's vision is a picture of the two witnesses filling the Christian church with the Holy Spirit.

This picture indicates that the two witnesses come to life to minister directly to the church. The Spirit of prophecy and the power of the word of God are poured into the church as a preparation for the triumphant return of Christ. The ministry of the two witnesses is a ministry to **"restore all things"** to the body of Christ.

THE PREPARATION OF THE TWO WITNESSES

The preparation of the two witnesses is outlined in the tenth chapter of the book of Revelation, which immediately precedes the Key Bible reading. Here the apostle John is confronted by an angel clothed in the glory of God and holding **"a little book open in his hand"**. Rev 10:2.

John is directed to take the book and eat it. **"Then I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter. And he said to me, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings."** Revelation 10:10-11.

This imagery relates to the commission of Ezekiel the prophet in the Old Testament. During the Babylonian captivity a priest called Ezekiel was commanded by God to deliver His word to the children of Israel. He was given **"a scroll of a book"** on which was written **"lamentations and mourning and woe"** and instructed to **"eat what I give you"**. Ezekiel 2:9,10,8.

Ezekiel was told to **"eat what you find; eat this scroll and go, speak to the house of Israel' So I ate it, and it was in my mouth like honey in sweetness...Moreover he said to me: 'Son of man, receive in your heart all My words that I speak to you, and hear with your ears.'" Ezekiel 3:1,3,10.**

"And you, son of man... do not be afraid of their words or dismayed by their looks, though they are a rebellious house. You shall speak My words to them whether they hear of whether they refuse, for they are rebellious. But you, son of man, hear what I say to you. Do not be rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you." Ezekiel 2:6-8.

The apostle John's prophecy in the book of Revelation indicates that a similar reaction of rebelliousness awaits the two witnessed at the end of the age. John was warned that the little book would be sweet in his mouth but bitter in his stomach. The prophetic revelation of God's purposes is sweet in the receiving because the prophet is admitted into personal communion with God. It is bitter in the end however, because the prophet's commission is to pronounce that revelation of judgment on a rebellious and apostate church.

The preparation of the two witnesses is necessary because the Lord is doing a new thing in the last days. **"Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets."** Amos 3:7. This renewal of the prophet's commission assures the church that she will not lack divine guidance at the time of God's judgment.

The apostle John writes of the mighty angel who holds the little book, swearing "**that there should be delay no longer, but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as he declared to His servants the prophets.**" Revelation 10:6-7. This verse declares that the revelation of the hidden purposes of God will be completed or fulfilled at the end time through His anointed prophets.

Although God's purposes have been revealed down through the ages, it is now necessary to prophesy again. This is because God is revealing His purposes and judgment more fully as the time draws near. The servants of the Lord at this time are instructed to eat the little book. They are being instructed to eat and absorb the new revelations that they are being given so that it becomes part of them. They are called upon to be well grounded in the truth (i.e. the word of God) so that they are properly prepared to prophesy.

THE PERSECUTION OF THE TWO WITNESSES

In the last days the power of the word of God that invested Moses, and the spirit of prophecy that invested Elijah, will be invested in God's chosen servants. However it is clear that their ministry is violently opposed. "**Now when they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them.**" Revelation 11:7.

It is not difficult to accept that this prophecy of the death of the two witnesses has been fulfilled. This century has seen an unprecedented attack on the authority of the bible. In the vanguard of this attack have been church leaders and theologians. This 'higher criticism' has diluted the acceptance of the divine authority of the bible, and has left many of the mainstream denominations with major doubts about its contents. Fundamental issues like the virgin birth, the miracles, and the resurrection of Christ, are no longer considered unassailable truths in many churches.

Similarly the resurgence of the Holy Spirit in this century has been resisted and opposed by many denominations. The gifts of the Holy Spirit have been denounced as a once only phenomenon peculiar to the apostolic church. Many church goers have preferred the dry comfort of traditional doctrines and liturgies to the fresh revelations of Jesus Christ through His Spirit.

As a result of this the present climate of immorality and humanism mocks the church. "**And their dead bodies will lie in the streets of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified....And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.**" Revelation 11:8, 10. The world is much more comfortable with a church which is unsure of her spiritual foundations, and which denies her inheritance in Christ.

Initially we are told that the two witnesses "**will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.**" Revelation 11:3. 1260 days, or 42 months, or 3½ years, or "**time and times and half a time**" are symbolic measures of the same period of time - a time of persecution and suffering. The sackcloth is a sign of mourning, and this description confirms that the two witnesses would preach repentance in a climate of disbelief and spiritual darkness.

After finishing their testimony through the long centuries since the demise of the early church, we are told that the two witnesses are overcome and killed. Their dead bodies lie exposed in the world for three and a half days, which is a further period of persecution, but this time cut short. Finally however, we are told that "**after the three and a half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them.**" Revelation 11:11.

In spite of all the opposition, God's purposes cannot be prevented. In a miraculous resurrection the Spirit of God enters the two witnesses, and they stand on their feet. They begin to prophesy, and declare the revelation of the hidden purposes of God at this time.

REVELATION OF GOD'S PURPOSES

The word of God consistently promises further revelations at the close of the age. The prophet Daniel was told of a time of trouble and judgment. But then he was told to "**shut up the word, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.**" Daniel 12:4. This suggests that some of the revelation of the end times have been withheld. It also suggests that at that time new knowledge will be revealed.

This 'sealing' of knowledge until the end time is repeated in John's prophecy in the book of Revelation. "**Now when the seven thunders uttered their voices, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, 'Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them.'**" Revelation 10:4. John is then told that at the time of the sounding of the seventh and final trumpet all would be revealed. "**But in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets.**" Revelation 10:7

This is the time that the two witnesses are standing on their feet. God is about to judge an unruly and unfaithful church. The ministry of the two witnesses is directed to the many devoted children of God who are imprisoned within the legalistic and barren walls of the apostate church. These believers have been unwittingly drawn into apostasy by the subtle deception of Antichrist.

Included in the revelation of the church corrupted by apostasy, there is a warning of God's impending judgment, and a call to repentance. With this revelation comes a decision for us all. "**Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.**" Joel 3:14. We are told to "**Come out of her, My people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.**" Revelation 18:4. The choice is clear. Either we repent and come out from the power of apostasy plaguing the church, or we face God's judgment.

IN SUMMARY

The two witnesses are the Lord God's chosen vessels raised up to declare His revelations at the end of the age. God is anointing certain of His servants with the spirit of prophecy which rested on Elijah, and the spirit of the living word of God which rested on Moses.

The ministry of the two witnesses is to all who profess to be Christians, as a preparation for the triumphant return of Christ to his Body. The two witnesses have been prepared with instructions to eat (or absorb) new revelations they have been given, so that those revelations become part of them.

The two witnesses have faced persecution in the past from a rebellious and apostate church, but now the Lord is standing them on their feet again. Their ministry, like that of John the Baptist, is a call to repentance, preparing the way for the Lord's return.

Chapter 2

ONE THOUSAND YEARS

KEY BIBLE READING

Rev 20:1-10 "Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while. And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years. Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."

A PERFECT AND COMPLETE TIME

The word 'millennium' is used by theologians to describe the thousand year period referred to in the Key Bible Reading. In studying the millennium it is not our intention to analyze the various theories that abound in this area and then declare our choice. Rather it is our intention to take a fresh look at the relevant scriptures.

The most significant feature of the Key Bible Reading is its consistent reference to this thousand year period. It is both a period during which Satan is bound away from deceiving the nations and a period when the saints are reigning with Christ. However it is not necessarily a literal measure of time.

In the earlier chapter on the two witnesses the principle of symbolic interpretation was established. Likewise in this chapter the key to unraveling the true meaning of these verses lies in abandoning a strictly literal or physical position. Symbolically one thousand years is a perfectly complete time.

This is illustrated in the apostle Peter's reference to 'a thousand years'. "**But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.**" 2 Peter 3:8-9

According to Peter, the actual length of the period of time was not the priority, but rather the purpose allotted to it. The "**thousand years**" was a full and complete time for that particular purpose to be fulfilled. This understanding is confirmed by the apostle Paul, who wrote that God's final judgment would be delayed "**until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.**" Romans 11:25.

We can now focus our attention on the specific purpose for the "**thousand years**" mentioned in the Key Bible Reading. Firstly it is apparent that Satan is bound from deceiving the nations during that time. Secondly there is the emergence of a group of people who have given up their own lives for the sake of Christ and the gospel. These people are said to be "**priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.**" Their purpose as "**kings and priests**" (Revelation 5:10) is to establish Christ's kingdom on earth, and to bring lost souls into that kingdom.

The "**thousand years**" is the full and complete time required for all these things to take place. It is the full length of time designated by God to give mankind every opportunity to repent and receive salvation. It began with Christ's great atoning work on the cross, which bound Satan. It ends when Satan is released at the close of the church age, as part of God's judgment on "**the house of God**" (1Peter 4:17), and on the world.

SATAN IS BOUND BY CHRIST

Before establishing how Satan is bound during the age of salvation, it is important to establish who bound him. It is not difficult to identify the "**angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in His hand.**" Revelation 20:1. This angel is our Lord Jesus Christ. Only Christ has the key to the bottomless pit. "**I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and death.**" Revelation 1:18.

Jesus came down from God specifically to bind and bring to naught the works of Satan. "**For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.**" 1 John 3:8. Early in His ministry Jesus declared His purpose in binding Satan. "**Or else how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.**" Matthew 12:29.

Only Jesus had the spiritual chain with which to bind Satan. The act which forged that chain was the crucifixion at Calvary. Before the cross of Christ, Satan was able to stand before God and rightfully accuse mankind of sin and rebellion. After the cross Satan was bound, not so much by the cross, as the saints' knowledge of their righteousness by the cross.

The spiritual chain binding Satan is the saints' knowledge and declaration that the cross cancels out all claims made against them. No matter how accurate Satan's accusations are, there is now one infallible answer to them. 'I know I am a sinner, but Jesus Christ has paid my debt in full, in one mighty atoning work on the cross.' Satan has no answer to this. He is defeated by the knowledge of the cross of Jesus. He is bound and rendered powerless.

To ensure Satan's imprisonment Jesus "**set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished.**" Revelation 20:3. This seal is a seal of authority similar to those used in the ancient world. It was common for men in positions of power to place their personal seals on important documents, as a way of transferring their authority to the contents of those documents.

The seal Jesus set on Satan is the power and authority vested in His own name. "**Therefore God has also highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth.**" Philippians 2:9-10.

The use of the name of Jesus was to have a profound effect on the kingdom of Satan. Even before the cross and His resurrection, Jesus gave seventy of His disciples the authority to use His name to heal the sick. "**Then the seventy returned with joy, saying 'Lord, even the demons are**

subject to us in Your name." Luke 10:17. Looking ahead to the effect the use of His name would have on Satan's kingdom, Jesus replied, **"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."** Luke 10:18.

Jesus entrusted the authority to use His name to Peter first of all. **"And I will give you 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."** Mathew 16:19. The **"keys of the kingdom of heaven"** are to bind the power of Satan and loose those who are in bondage to him.

Later, when Jesus was speaking to the disciples, He gave them, and subsequently the whole church, the keys of authority. **"Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven...For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."** Matthew 18:18,20. The church has been authorised to declare the seal and so bind the operation of Satan.

BOUND FROM DECEIVING THE NATIONS

The word 'bound' has as its basis the thought of being constrained. This is illustrated by examining its use in other biblical passages. For example Jesus said, **"So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound - think of it - for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?"** Luke 13:16. Another example is provided by the apostle Paul, who said, **"I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem."** Acts 20:22.

Rather than being physically incarcerated, Satan has, by the cross of Christ, had spiritual limits put on him. The saints, or the church, are empowered to declare those limits by the use of Jesus' name. The extent to which Satan is bound therefore depends on the extent to which the church and its members testify to the power of the cross.

The agent of binding is the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, **"I cast out devils by the Spirit of God."** Matthew 12:28. Satan is actually bound now by the Holy Spirit. **"For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He (the Holy Spirit) who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way."** 2 Thessalonians 2:7. The Holy Spirit operates in binding Satan as believers testify to the truth of the cross.

The Holy Spirit testifies to the word. **"For there are three who bear witness in heaven; the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one."** 1John 5:7. Before the Holy Spirit can testify to the word, we must speak the word, and walk in the light of the word.

Before the crucifixion of Christ, Satan is called **"that serpent of old, called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world."** Revelation 12:9. Then Christ binds Satan **"and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished."** Revelation 20:3. The key concept here is Satan as the author of deception.

During the thousand years Satan is bound away from **"deceiving the nations."** He is not bound away and rendered inoperative. There is no 'kingdom reign' of bliss, free from all strife. Instead what is bound away is Satan's unlimited power to deceive. The chain that binds away this power of deception is the truth of the cross revealed to mankind.

A major difficulty in accepting that this age is **"the thousand years"** lies in our failure to appreciate that **"Satan is bound."** It is a consistent ploy of Satan to deceive people into thinking that their spiritual inheritance in Jesus is either in the past or in the future. For example it is suggested that the gifts of the Spirit were only for the early church, or that our physical healing is to take place at some time in the future. It is therefore considered by many that Satan will be bound and that the saints will reign with Christ, but that this will take place at some time in the future.

The fact is that Satan is bound NOW, and the saints who wield the authority of the name of Jesus reign NOW. This claim may seem unrealistic when all the strife in the world and the disunity of the church are considered. However to test the claim that Satan is bound, it is useful to examine the spiritual facts in the light of history.

The spiritual reality is that before the cross Satan was the undisputed "**ruler of this world.**" John 14:30. Every nation, other than a small remnant of God's people in Israel, worshipped the devil in one form or other. Despite all the evidenced of God about them, the ancient world bowed down to the created rather than the Creator.

In the beginning God gave dominion or rulership of the earth and everything in it to mankind through Adam. "**Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over everything that creeps on the earth.'**" Genesis 1:26. However, when Adam rebelled against God's law in the garden of Eden, he fell into Satan's hands, and mankind's dominion over the earth fell with him.

Jesus acknowledged that Satan ruled the world when He was being tempted in the wilderness. Satan made what seems an extravagant claim that all worldly authority had been delivered into his hands, and that he could dispose of it as he willed. Jesus rebutted the temptation, but he did not deny the claim. "**Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, 'All this authority I will give you, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me and I give it to whoever I wish. Therefore, if you will worship before me, all will be yours.'** And Jesus answered, and said to him, '**Get behind Me Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.'**" Luke 4:5-8.

It is clear from these verses that since the fall of man in Adam, the whole world had been ruled by Satan. It was not until after Christ's mighty redeeming work on the cross that this situation was overcome. With Jesus' triumphant ascent from hell to His Father's throne a dramatic event took place in heaven.

"And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, 'Now salvation and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.'" Revelation 12:7-10.

The outcome of this war in heaven was that the accuser was cast down, defeated by the victorious cross of Christ. All of Satan's claims against man were now cancelled out by that one work of atonement at Calvary. Beforehand Satan had been able to consistently accuse mankind of sin and rebellion before the throne of God. Because God is a God of justice and righteousness, He had to admit Satan's claim as ruler of this world. But now that the full price of man's sin had been paid by Christ, Satan no longer had a legal position as "**the accuser of our brethren.**" God's demand for righteousness had been fulfilled and Satan was cast out of heaven, defeated by the cross of Jesus.

Prior to the cross, the whole world, apart from a small Jewish remnant, worshipped the devil through pagan gods or demon spirits. Because of the cross, Satan has no longer had the undisputed right to hold mankind in bondage to lies and deception. The truth of the gospel has opposed and

overcome this kingdom of darkness to a great extent. Today the whole of the earth has been evangelised, and the worship of God is no longer limited to a few souls in the Middle East.

SATAN IS FINALLY RELEASED

The beginning of the one thousand year period is identified as the cross of Christ, when Satan was bound by the truth. Similarly the Key Bible Reading identifies the end of the thousand years. **"Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea."** Revelation 20:7-8.

It has already been established that the thing that binds Satan for one thousand years is the truth of the gospel. In contrast, the withdrawing or obscuring of that truth is the things that looses him. A time of renewed deception is therefore prophesied at the end of the age.

This time of confusion and lies is a time of unrestrained attack on the truth. In the chapter on the 'two witnesses,' it has already been observed that both the spirit of prophecy and the word of God would be casualties. **"Now when (the two witnesses) finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them."** Revelation 11:7.

The bible consistently forecasts a time of gross spiritual darkness prior to the end of the age and final judgment. **"The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord."** Joel 2:31. **"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken."** Matthew 24:29.

The sun, the moon, and the stars are symbols of the glory of God revealed through the word and His prophets. It is not so much a case of the truth being withdrawn, as the truth being obscured and overwhelmed by thick clouds of deception. **"And he opened the bottomless pit, and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. And the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit."** Revelation 9:2.

Satan is using this time of darkness to gather together his armies of opposition to the saints. By this same process the church is also being brought into the valley of decision. **"Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision."** Joel 3:14. As the difference between light and darkness becomes more appallingly apparent, we are being asked to choose between them.

Two processes are taking place simultaneously so that these issues are revealed. The light of revival on the one hand is burning bright in the true church as the power of Christ is being manifested. God promised, **"I will pour out My Spirit in those days."** Joel 2:29. Once again the saints are being filled with the power that quickened the early church.

On the other hand Satan's kingdom of darkness is being let loose so that his evil might be magnified. The light is getting lighter and the dark is getting darker. The false or apostate church is becoming more blatantly apostate as it fails to confront evil or shepherd the flock. The light of truth and the darkness of apostasy are openly contrasted before the believer. There is no escaping the decision.

THE OVERCOMERS

The vision contained in the Key Bible Reading presents two distinct companies of people. The first group is made up of **"those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the**

word of God" and who "lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years." Revelation 20:4. The other group contains "the rest of the dead (who) did not live again until the thousand years were finished." Revelation 20:5.

The first company are clearly believers who have been martyred for their witness to Christ. It is important to recall at this stage that the Book of Revelation relies on scriptural symbols to both obscure and reveal its message. The picture is therefore one of spiritual martyrs rather than those who are physically put to death.

The central concept is one of people losing their lives for Christ. Jesus said to His disciples, **"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it."** Luke 9:32-24.

In order to have a new life in Christ, the believer must give up his old life to death. The soul life or self life of ego and self opinion has to be beheaded. The big 'I' has to be consigned to the cross so that the believer can declare with the apostle Paul, **"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me."** Galatians 2:20.

The first company are living in the power of Christ rather than in their own strength. They know with certainty that God **'made us alive together with Christ...and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.'** Ephesians 2:5-6. The result of having died to self is that **"they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years."** Revelation 20:4.

These are the overcomers. They are a procession of saints down through the centuries who have learned to overcome the powers of darkness and reign with Christ. Their means of overcoming are quite specific. **"Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, 'Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.'"** Revelation 12:10-11.

And they overcame him (1) **"by the blood of the Lamb."** The overcomers know the power of the cross of Jesus in canceling out all of Satan's claims against them. (2) **"(A)nd by the word of their testimony."** The overcomers use the word of God in the power of Jesus' name. (3) **"(A)nd they did not love their lives to the death."** The overcomers give up their lives for the sake of Christ and the gospel.

The raising of this first company to a position where they **"sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus"** is called **"the first resurrection."** Revelation 20:5. **"Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years."** Revelation 20:6. The overcomers have adopted the spiritual position that **"we have been united together in the likeness of His (Christ's) death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection."** Romans 6:5. Their first death was the death of their self life. The second death, which is that of their physical bodies, will have no power over them.

The second company of people are those who have not given up their lives for Christ's sake, and therefore have no part in the first resurrection. They **"did not live again until the thousand years were finished,"** which is the time of the resurrection of everyone at the close of the age. Revelation 20:5.

THE NATIONS OPPOSE THE SAINTS

The nations are a group quite distinct from the overcomers. It is the nations who are deceived by Satan and gathered together to battle. The word 'nation' is translated from the Greek word 'ethnos,' and generally means a multitude of people of a similar kind. Common uses of the word relate to people of the same racial origin or who share the same political boundaries.

The use of the word varies throughout the bible, and its meaning in each case is determined by the context in which it is given. In the Book of Revelation the concept of nations is mainly a general rather than specific one. The nations are 'everything else,' as opposed to the saints who are selected out of the midst of the nations. An example of this is contained in the following verse praising Christ. **"For You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation."** Revelation 5:9.

In the Key Bible Reading the word nation is used to describe all those apart from the true church, or all those who are used to oppose the true church. This principle of the nations being used to oppose God's purposes is not new. **"Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers of the earth take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed."** Psalm 2:1-2.

THE OUTER COURT OF THE GENTILES

The nations do not only include worldly people opposed to the Christian church. The nations include all who oppose the spiritual reign of Christ in their circumstances. This definition includes the apostate church.

In his vision of the two witnesses, the apostle John **"was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, '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.'"** Revelation 11:1-2.

To understand the significance of this reading, it is helpful to explore the Greek roots of two of the words used. The word 'temple' is translated from the Greek word 'naos,' which means the central sanctuary or dwelling place of God, and was the word used consistently for the church. The temple mentioned here is therefore not the temple in Jerusalem, which in fact had already been destroyed by the Romans when John was receiving his visions from the Lord. Rather it is a symbolic picture of the true church, which is measured off to mark it as holy to the Lord, and nurtured and protected by Him.

The word 'gentiles' is translated from the Greek word 'ethnos,' which is translated as 'nations' in other parts of the New Testament. In this reading the outer court **"has been given to the Gentiles,"** but it could have been just as correctly translated as **"given to the nations."** The outer court of the Gentiles (or nations) is not to be taken as the physical addition to the Jewish temple made by Herod. It is instead a symbolic picture of the apostate church. It is appropriately represented by something man-made which is tacked on at a later date to God's already perfect and finished work. The outward appearance of the court suggests that it is part of the temple, but the angel tells John to leave it out.

The apostate church is attached to the true church and professes to be the true church. However it is in fact the preserve of the nations, and under the power of Satan. The angel warns John that the nations **"will tread the holy city underfoot for forty two months."** Revelation 11:2. It is not the

people of the world who have impeded the progress of the true church, so much as those ‘within’ who have stifled the Spirit.

SLAYING THE NATIONS

The last part of the Key Bible Reading describes the gathering together of the nations to oppose the true followers of Christ. **"Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them."** Revelation. 20:7-9..

To understand this prophecy it is necessary to open our hearts to the sovereign power and glory of God. It was the Lord who bound Satan with the truth of the gospel. It is now God's sovereign will that the powers of deception and darkness are released to deceive the nations, so that they are gathered together to face their final judgment.

God's purpose in exposing His children to the attacks of the enemy is twofold. Firstly He is purging the church of all that is initiated by man so that **"the things which cannot be shaken may remain."** Hebrews 12:27. Secondly God is bringing all those who have rejected Him into final judgment. A precedent for this occurred when **"the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the children of Israel."** Exodus 14:8. When the children of Israel were in danger of being overtaken and defeated by Pharaoh and his army, **"...the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea."** Exodus 14:27. The whole might of Egypt was consumed by the complete and final judgment of God.

God's purpose is the same in this last judgment at the end of the age. Those opposing His will as it is performed by His saints are brought into final judgment. **"And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them."** Revelation 20:9.

IN SUMMARY

There is a prophecy in the Book of Revelation that Satan will be bound for a symbolic period of one thousand years. This period is the age of salvation and began at the cross of Christ, It is prophesied to finish with the release of Satan in a time of spiritual darkness and deception.

The prophecy involves two opposing groups of people. There are the ‘overcomers’ who have put their self-lives to death and learnt to walk in obedience to the will of Christ. At the end of the age this group is surrounded by a group called the ‘nations,’ who include the apostate church.

The central point to understanding the prophecy is that Satan is ‘bound’ by the truth of Christ's complete atoning work on the cross. When this truth is obscured, and the church no longer walks in the knowledge of the truth, then Satan is no longer bound.

The next chapter will expose Satan's strategy in obscuring the truth of the cross, and introduce the mechanisms of counterfeit.

THE SATANIC TRINITY

KEY BIBLE READING

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 **"Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them up?' But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. 'Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn."'... "Then Jesus sent the multitude away and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field." He answered and said to them: "He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"**

A COUNTERFEIT SPIRITUAL STRUCTURE

The last chapters concluded that the finished work of Christ on the cross binds the power of Satan's accusations and deceptions. The knowledge of this perfect and complete work at Calvary frees mankind from bondage. However, Satan is only bound when we walk in the light of the knowledge of the freedom that Christ procured for us.

The truth of what Christ did for mankind on the cross is the thing that binds Satan. Therefore Satan's efforts to counteract the effect of his imprisonment have been directed at confusing and destroying the truth of the cross. The method that he has employed has been the introduction of a subtle substitute for the truth. He has established a counterfeit church with a counterfeit christ and a counterfeit doctrine.

The Holy Trinity has been substituted by a Satanic trinity.

GOD has been counterfeited by SATAN.

CHRIST has been counterfeited by ANTICHRIST

THE HOLY SPIRIT has been counterfeited by THE SPIRIT OF ANTICHRIST.

God's purpose has been to establish the church - a body of believers to whom He can impart His very life, His power, and His glory. In the Book of Revelation, this perfected church is called THE BRIDE OF CHRIST.

Satan's purpose has been to establish a false 'church.' This is a body of people who are deceived into directly or indirectly worshipping and obeying Satan rather than God. In the Book of Revelation, this false church is called THE HARLOT.

THE PARABLE OF THE WHEAT AND THE TARES

Christ foresaw the emergence of the false church and its accompanying false doctrine, and so He warned His followers of this in the parable of the wheat and the tares. **"Another parable He put forth to them saying: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field.'" Matthew 13:24.** He who sowed the wheat in his field is Christ. The fact that He sowed good seed indicates that the truth of His finished work on the cross is perfect.

"(B)ut while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way." Matthew 13:25. The phrase, **"while men slept"** is significant because it indicates the subtlety of Satan's attack, which went on unnoticed by the owner's servants. **"But when the corn had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared."** Matthew 13:26. Tares are a weed common in the grain fields of Israel, and are very similar in appearance to wheat as young plants. It is not until the time of ripening and harvest that the black grains distinguishing the tares appear, and the difference between the wheat and the tares becomes obvious.

Jesus calls the tares **"the children of the wicked one"** that have been sown in amongst **"the children of the kingdom."** Matthew 13:38. (Authorised King James Version). In the same field there are the wheat and the tares, and in the same church there are the children of God and the children of Satan. In both cases they look so much alike that it is almost impossible to tell the difference.

THE DECEPTION OF ANTICHRIST

The apostle John warns the church to be in its guard. **"Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us."** 1 John 2:18-19.

John concludes the warning with the statement that those in the church to whom he was writing had an anointing from the Holy Spirit, and this would enable them to see the difference. **"But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things."** 1 John 2:20. We too have to have our spiritual eyes opened in order to see the deception of antichrist operating in those around us and in our own spiritual lives.

Antichrist is a subtle deception by its very nature, and so does not necessarily present itself in clear direct opposition to Jesus Christ. In the original Greek, the prefix 'anti' in antichrist has two possible meanings. The first is 'against,' suggesting direct opposition. The second is 'instead of,' which implies replacing with a substitute. Combining these, we see that antichrist opposes Christ by substituting a false or apostate church for the true spiritual church of Christ. This false church presents a counterfeit image of God and of Christ, and replaces spiritual doctrine with the precepts of men.

These counterfeits are so subtle that Jesus warned that even the elect might be deceived by them. **"For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect."** Mark 13:22. The result of the work of antichrist is the manifestation of an alternative religion within the church itself. The alternative looks so much like the real thing that it has deceived even true believers.

The deception of antichrist aims to divert, deflect, distort and deny the truth. It operates within the Christian church and claims allegiance to Christ; however its aim is to create a false church and sidetrack the children of God off into spiritual wastelands.

IN SUMMARY

It is useful at this point to summarize the work of Satan following the cross of Christ. At that time Satan was cast out of heaven and bound from deceiving the nations by the truth of the cross. He has since attempted to counteract the truth that has bound him by engineering a counterfeit religious system. This alternative system looks so like the real church that it is only through the anointing of the Holy Spirit that man can see the difference.

Satan's aim is to divert worship from God to himself, either directly or indirectly. To this end he has propagated many false christs or antichrists, in an effort to divert worship and obedience from Christ, the true head of the church. The agent or spiritual power that Satan uses to establish his deceptive alternative is the spirit of antichrist, who is called 'the second beast, or 'the false prophet' in the Book of Revelation.

The result of this deception has been the formation of a false or apostate church which operates alongside and within then true church. Satan's attack has been very subtle. There are many children of God who have been unwittingly drawn off their true spiritual path. They have been contaminated by the spirit of antichrist and deceived into false worship. Through the deception of antichrist their allegiance has been misdirected to Satan rather than God.

The aim of the following group of chapters is to expose Satan's work through antichrist, and the nature of the false religion he has created. The Satanic trinity will be analysed in more detail, beginning with the identity and motives of Satan himself. The development and work of antichrist will then be studied, and the spirit of antichrist exposed. Finally the false church will be unveiled.

Chapter 4

SATAN

KEY BIBLE READING

Revelation 12:1-17. **"Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth. And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne. Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days. And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time. Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child. But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ."**

LUICIFER THE FALLEN ANGEL

The Key Bible reading concerns the spiritual war between God and Satan. The origins of this warfare are found in Satan's fall from his exalted position as a favoured and mighty angel who walked in God's very presence. In the beginning Satan held a special place in heaven as an angelic being who was created perfect by God. **"You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty."** Ezekiel 28:12.

God clearly loved and honoured him. **"You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; you were on the holy mountain of God; you walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones. You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you."** Ezekiel 28:14-15.

Part of the perfection of Satan's creation was a free will. This meant that he could choose his own way. Satan envied God and chose to rebel against His authority. **"Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendour."** Ezekiel 28:17.

The words of the prophet Isaiah expose the motives behind Satan's fall from favour.

**"How you are fallen from heaven,
O Lucifer, son of morning!
For you have said in your heart:
'I will ascend into heaven,
I will exalt my throne above the stars of God;
I will ascend above the heights of the clouds,
I will be like the Most High.'" Isaiah 14:12,13,14.**

God's judgment on Satan is prophesied in the subsequent verse. **"Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit."** Isaiah 14:15. This declaration of God's judgment signals the beginning of all out warfare between God and Satan. The Key Bible reading describes the progress of that war from the time of Christ's birth to the present age. It describes both the spiritual reality in heaven, and the physical working out of that reality on earth.

THE WOMAN, THE CHILD, AND THE DRAGON

The Key Bible reading describes a woman who is about to give birth to a child. The woman wore **"on her head a garland of twelve stars,"** which is a symbol of Israel. The child **"was to rule all nations with a rod of iron"** and represents Christ. A dragon stands **"before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her child as soon as it was born."** Revelation 12:4. The **"great fiery red dragon,"** with its horns of power and crowns of authority, is a symbol of Satan.

This is therefore a picture of Satan preparing to destroy Christ as He is brought forth from the nation of Israel. In fact, Satan used the infanticidal jealousy of King Herod, and later the cross at Calvary, in an attempt to eliminate Jesus. However God's plan to reconcile mankind back to Himself through His Son was not to be brought undone.

The Key Bible Reading describes how the woman **"bore a male child"** and that **"her child was caught up to God and to His throne."** Revelation 12:5. When Christ presented His own blood on the heavenly altar, it was received by God our Father as the perfect sacrifice to atone for man's sin. All of mankind was redeemed.

At this stage the Key Bible Reading changes focus to the scene taking place in the heavenly realm, and records the spiritual consequences of Jesus' act. **"And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them any longer."** Revelation 12:7-8. Satan and his angels are expelled. This is because Satan can no longer claim the legal position of **"the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night."** Revelation 12:10.

THE CHURCH IS PERSECUTED BY SATAN

The focus of the Key Bible reading then returns to the scene on earth. Unable to hold Jesus in the prison house of hell, Satan turns his attention to the woman. **"Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child."** Revelation 12:13. The dragon is still a symbol of Satan, but now with **"great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time."** Revelation 12:12.

The woman however, no longer represents the nation of Israel. This is because one result of Christ's substitutionary act has been the translation of the physical covenant with the Jewish people into a spiritual covenant with Christian believers. This means that God's chosen people are no longer represented by the nation of Israel, but by the Christian church. The scene is therefore one of Satan (having been unable to defeat Christ Himself), turning on Christ's representative on earth, the church.

"But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place." Revelation 12:14. History records the dispersal of the early church throughout the surrounding nations to escape persecution. There she is **"nourished for a time and times and half a time"** which is the symbolic 3.5 year period of persecution.

At this point Satan realises he cannot succeed in physically destroying the church, and so resorts to another stratagem. **"So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood."** Revelation 12:15. The water spewing out of the mouth of Satan is a symbol of the lies and false doctrines that assail the true church. The devil is making a concentrated attempt at diffusing and overwhelming the truth of the gospel that binds him.

"But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth." Revelation 12:16. The earth is a symbol of the peoples of the world who have an enormous capacity to **"swallow up"** strange new doctrines. These new lies and false doctrines are lost amongst the overwhelming confusion of worldly philosophies that already exist.

The Key Bible reading ends with a revelation of Satan's concentrated attack on a specific part of the church. **"And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ."** Revelation 12:17.

This special group is the overcomers who have forsaken their own lives to be totally consecrated to the Lord. They have submitted themselves to the refining power of the Holy Spirit so that they might be completely obedient to His will. They are Christ's battle warriors to whom he has entrusted the main burden of preparing His church. Because of their total obedience, Christ can use the overcomers in great works. Equally, they are a serious threat to the fulfillment of Satan's purposes, and so they are singled out for particularly heavy attack.

IN SUMMARY

Satan has been defeated by the cross of Christ. All his cunning and fury is now devoted to preventing the truth of the cross being appropriated by Christ's body of believers. The next chapter will expose the rise and development of the main mechanism used by Satan in his attack on the church. That mechanism is the power of antichrist, and it is the fundamental element in his counterfeit spiritual structure.

Chapter 5

THE EMERGENCE OF ANTICHRIST AND HIS KINGDOM

KEY BIBLE READING

Revelation 13:1-10 **"Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name. Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority. And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast. So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. If anyone has an ear, let him hear. He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints."**

THE EMERGENCE OF ANTICHRIST

Despite his defeat by the cross, Satan remains committed to his original aim of seducing mankind into worshipping him rather than God. Satan has therefore set up an elaborate counterfeit of the Holy Trinity, and the body of Christ, or church. Likewise the kingdom of heaven, through which the power and glory of Jesus Christ is expressed, has been duplicated by a kingdom of antichrist. This is an organised functional realm through which the power of antichrist operates.

The rise and development of the kingdom of antichrist is prophesied in the visions of the apostle John in the Book of Revelation (Chapters 13 & 17), and the prophet Daniel in the Book of Daniel (Chapters 2 & 7). It is the story of Satan's instrument of humanistic government being formed through a succession of worldly empires into its penultimate expression in the Papacy of the Catholic Church. This then became the springboard from which the antichrist infiltrated all denominational churches.

The emergence of the major power in this kingdom is depicted in the Key Bible Reading with a vision of **"a beast rising up out of the sea."** Revelation 13:1. The sea is a symbol of the nations of the world. This symbol is illustrated in a vision of the prophet Daniel, where he describes how **"the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea."** Daniel 7:2. This is a picture of the universal turbulence of the nations who generally opposed the sovereignty of God. Antichrist's kingdom was forged out of the turbulent striving of these nations, who wielded their worldly authority without reference to God.

The beast is portrayed as **"having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name."** Revelation 13:1 The horns are symbols of power and the crowns are symbols of worldly authority, signifying that the beast has all the authority and power of Satan in the world.

EVOLUTION OF ANTICHRIST'S KINGDOM THROUGH SUCCESSIVE EMPIRES

"Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion." Revelation 13:2. The significance of these animals lies in their symbolic reference to the great empires of the past. These symbols identify each one of the empires through which Antichrist and his kingdom was developed, and whose attributes he acquired. This symbolism can be understood by referring to the Book of Daniel and the prophet's interpretation of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

King Nebuchadnezzar ruled Babylon and its empire from 604 to 562 BC. In the second year of his reign, he had a dream in which he saw an image. **"This image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, and its feet partly of iron and partly of clay."** Daniel 2:32-33. The prophet Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that the golden head of the image represented his own kingdom of Babylon, and that others would follow.

"But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron; inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters all things; and like iron crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others." Daniel 2:39-40. It is not difficult to accept that Daniel was talking about four great empires of the ancient world that dated from the time of his prophecies in the sixth century BC - first the Babylonian, then the Medo- Persian, then the Greek, and ultimately the greatest of all - the Roman Empire.

THE FOUR BEASTS OF DANIEL

The interpretation above is supported by studying the symbols used in a dream which Daniel himself had in the later reign of King Belshazzar of Babylon.

"Daniel spoke saying, 'I saw in my vision my night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other. The first was like a lion and had eagle wings....And suddenly another beast, a second, like a bear. It was raised up on one side, and had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth....After this I looked, and there was another, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird.'" Daniel 7:2-3,4,5,6.

These animals symbolised human rulers and their kingdoms, and imply men challenging God by building great empires in their own strength. These empires were not restricted to dominating men's lives in a temporal sense. Their emperors frequently declared themselves to be gods, and demanded that their subjects worship them. All these emperors were proud and blasphemous.

The lion in Daniel's vision represents the Babylonian Empire, and corresponds to the golden head of the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The winged lions were common statues forming an 'avenue of protection' along major roads of the empire.

The animal **"like a bear"** represents the Medo-Persian Empire, and is portrayed as a ferocious flesh eater. This is appropriate for an empire that stretched from Macedonia to the Indus River, and which was ruled by such conquerors as Cyrus the Great, Darius the Great, and Xerxes

The third animal **"like a leopard"** is a symbol of the Greek Empire of Alexander the Great, which dismembered the Persian Empire. This empire survived in a disjointed form in Asia Minor until it too was replaced by the greatest of all - Rome.

THE FOURTH BEAST OF DANIEL

Daniel reports **"a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns."** Daniel 7:7.

The difference of this empire is emphasised by the fact that it is not likened to any animal. Its ten horns suggest complete power and supremacy. The Roman Empire was an almost perfect expression of humanistic government. Roman achievements in architecture, engineering, civil government, the law, all glorified man and his abilities. They celebrated man's capacity to order the lives of other men without deference to God. This model of a perfect (and Godless) society has been studied and copied ever since.

THE LITTLE HORN OF DANIEL

The Roman Empire is not the end of the story of the development of the kingdom of antichrist. The prophet Daniel went on to report a further refinement with the emergence of "a little horn." **"I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there in this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words."** Daniel 7:8.

Symbolically a horn denotes power. The little horn represents a position of great power and authority which is directly relevant to the church. **"He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time."** Daniel 7:25.

To unravel the mystery of the identity of the little horn, it is necessary to turn back to the visions of the apostle John in the Book of Revelation. The first beast was introduced as **"a beat rising out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns."** In Chapter 17, John reports another vision of the beast, with further symbols to mark his development. He is now described as **"a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns,"** and carrying on his back a great harlot (the symbol of the apostate church).

As we study this later vision, it will become apparent that the little horn of Daniel 7, and the beast of Revelation 13 and 17, are symbols for the one thing - Antichrist and his kingdom.

An obvious point of similarity is that they share a common foundation in Rome. The prophet Daniel was told, **"The fourth beast (the Roman Empire) shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all other kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, trample and break it to pieces. The ten horns are ten kings who shall arise from this kingdom. And another (the little horn) shall rise after them; he shall be different from the first ones, and shall subdue three kings."** Daniel 7:23-24. The little horn is described here as emerging out of the Roman Empire.

Likewise the first beast is clearly identified with Rome. In his later vision of the beast, the apostle John reported **"a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full on names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns,"** Revelation 17:3. It was explained to John that **"the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits."** Revelation 17:9. This is an unmistakable reference to Rome which was famous for the seven hills or mountains on which it was founded.

It is reasonable to conclude from these verses that the little horn and the first beast (i.e. the antichrist) had their foundations in the Roman Empire. A more detailed and specific identification of Antichrist is contained in the balance of Revelation Chapter 17. However, it needs to be

recognised that the following readings are difficult. Study of them will therefore require patience, and dependence of the power of the Holy Spirit to lead to understanding.

IDENTIFICATION OF ANTICHRIST

Firstly Antichrist is described as a man. The apostle John was told, **"The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go into perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is."** Revelation 17:8.

The reading declares that he **"was,"** which means that he was a person who once lived on the earth, **"and is not,"** which indicates that he subsequently died. The reading goes on to declare that he **"will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition."** This means that his spirit will ascend out of hell to rest on the antichrist, but that the inevitable end of his spirit must be final damnation.

There has been much speculation concerning the identity of this person. It is generally considered that it is the spirit of a man who was the epitome of Godlessness and lawlessness. A common suggestion is the Seleucid ruler Antiochus Epiphanes, who because of his blasphemous actions is considered by many to be the prototype of antichrist. In 167 BC he pulled down the walls of Jerusalem, desecrated the temple by erecting a statue of Jupiter in the 'holy of holies,' and sacrificed swine's flesh on the altar. However the identity of the prototype is not important. The important thing is that the spirit which rested on him will rest on all future antichrists, reproducing his nature and personality.

Secondly, the antichrist is referred to as a kingdom. This is also reasonable, as it is difficult to divorce Antichrist himself from the realm in which his power operates.

"There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time. And the beast that was, and is not, is himself the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition." Revelation 17:10-11.

"There are also seven kings. Five have fallen." At the time John wrote down his prophecy, (which was toward the end of the first century AD), five mighty empires had come into power and then fallen. They were the ancient empires of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece. **"One is."** The empire in power at the time of John's writing was Rome.

"The other is yet to come." This refers to the Holy Roman Empire which rose out of the ruins of the Roman Empire. The Holy Roman Empire was a loose federation of Christian states in Western Europe, which existed from the coronation of Otto by the Pope in 962 AD, until its dissolution by Napoleon in 1806.

"And the beast that was, and is not, is himself is also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition." The eighth king is the antichrist. He and his kingdom have been developed and refined through a progression of worldly empires. He is **"of the seven"** in that he had his roots in the seven, but is far more sinister than previous emperors. This is because he poses as the spiritual head of all Christendom.

THE PAPACY OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

The office of Pope was the perfect position for the power of antichrist to be established. The papacy declared itself to be the head of the Christian world, and eventually became head of the Holy Roman Empire. The Empire was marked by bitter dissension between emperors and popes feuding for political and religious control. This feuding continued until it was established that the choosing and crowning of emperors was a papal prerogative. It was during the reign of Pope Gregory VII from 1073 to 1085, that the most significant contributions were made to papal supremacy in temporal and religious affairs.

In his "Explanatory Notes on the New Testament," John Wesley writes the following of Pope Gregory:

"Hildebrand or Gregory VII., is the proper founder of the papal kingdom. All the patrons of the papacy allow that he made many considerable additions to it: and this very thing constitutes the beast, by completing the spiritual kingdom; the new maxims, and the new actions of Gregory, all proclaim this. Some of his maxims are,

1. That the bishop of Rome alone is universal bishop.
2. That he alone can depose bishops, or receive them again.
3. That he alone had power to make new laws in the Church.
4. That he alone ought to use the ensigns of royalty.
5. That all princes ought to kiss his foot.
6. That the name of Pope is the only name under heaven; and that his name alone should be recited in the Churches.
7. That he has the power to depose emperors.
8. That no general synod can be convened but by him.
9. That no book is canonical without his authority.
10. That none upon the earth can repeal his sentence, but he alone can repeal any sentence.
11. That he is subject to no human judgment.
12. That no power dare to pass sentence on one who appeals to the pope.
13. That all weighty matters every where ought to be referred to him.
14. That the Roman Church never did, nor ever can err.
15. That the Roman bishop, canonically ordained, is immediately made holy, by the merits of St Peter.
16. That he can absolve subjects from their allegiance.

"These the most eminent Roman writers own to be his genuine sayings. And his actions agree with his words. Hitherto the popes had been subject to the emperors, though often unwillingly. But now the pope began himself, under a spiritual pretext, to act the emperor of the whole Christian world."

Wesley concluded: "Thus did the pope claim to himself the whole authority over Christian princes. Thus did he take away or confer kingdoms and empires, as king of kings. Neither did his successors fail to tread in his steps. It is well known the following popes have not been wanting to exercise the same power, both over kings and emperors. And this then later popes have been so far from disclaiming, that three of them have sainted this very Gregory, namely Clement VIII., Paul V., and Benedict XIII. Here then is the beast, that is the king; in fact such, though not in name: according to that remarkable observation of Cardinal Bellarine, 'Antichrist will govern the Roman Empire, yet without the name of Roman Emperor.'"

The prophet Daniel describes the little horn as "**that horn which had eyes and a mouth which spoke pompous words, whose appearance was greater than his fellows.**" Daniel 7:20. The apostle John declared that the first beast "**was given a mouth speaking great things and**

blasphemies." Revelation 13:05. Here then is the little horn of Daniel 7 and the first beast of Revelation 13, having reached their penultimate expression in the office of Pope in the papal kingdom.

THE PROTESTANT MUTATION

The position of Pope of the Roman Catholic Church was the perfect pseudo-spiritual climate for Satan to propagate his alternative church. That alternative is the false or apostate church, which is called 'the harlot' in the Book of Revelation. Chapter 17 declares that the harlot was carried by the first beast, and that she sat on the seven hills of Rome.

However the papacy of the Catholic Church is certainly not the only manifestation of the antichrist and his kingdom. Rather it is the prototype of all Christian apostasy. The office of Pope was the culmination of Antichrist's evolution through a series of empires, resulting in the first 'religious' form of worldly government. The antichrist has since multiplied throughout all church denominations - including the Protestants.

Naturally there was strong opposition to the various Popes' assertions of political authority in the Middle Ages. It is no accident that much of the support for Protestantism during the reformation was from secular rulers. The Reformation was an abrupt check on the political and spiritual power of the Roman hierarchy, although it was by no means a final blow. **"I saw one of the heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed."** Revelation 13:3.

The antichrist received a **"deadly wound"** when many people and whole nations followed Martin Luther's example, and protested against the papacy and the Roman Catholic Church. The fact that its numerical strength has revived, and that much of its power and influence has been restored to it, has caused the world to marvel at its resilience. **"And all the world marvelled and followed the beast. So they worshipped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshipped the beast, saying, 'Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?'"** Revelation 13:3-4. The world has an awesome fear of standing up and exposing the apostasy in the Catholic Church.

Nevertheless the papacy is not the clearly discernable citadel of power it once was. This may lead the unwary to assume that the first beast is no longer a threat to the church. This is not the case, because when the reformers left the Roman church, they took the first beast with them. Today the contamination of antichrist is just as integral a part of the Protestant scene as is in the Catholic and Orthodox traditions.

The first beast is as content working in a congregational committee as he is in an episcopal hierarchy. Democracy is an appealing alternative to dictatorship, but any form of government which rules without reference to God has the power of antichrist at its roots. The antichrist is the fundamental power behind all forms of worldly and humanistic government. This is the case whether that government be conducted by the Politburo in Moscow, or the mother's club at the local church school.

The continued significance of the workings of antichrist for all Christians is contained in Daniel's prophecy of the little horn. **"I was watching; and the same horn was making war with the saints, and prevailing against them....Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time."** Daniel 7:21,25. This was confirmed by the apostle John, who reported that the first beast **"was given authority to continue for forty two months...And it was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them."** Revelation 13:5,7.

The attack on the true church by Antichrist has clearly been successful, and the saints given over into his power for the symbolic three and a half years of tribulation. This period is not a literal time, but includes the whole church age during which the wheat and the tares have been growing side by side. It is the period when the Two Witnesses testify in sackcloth because they are testifying in the presence of the saints who have been deceived by the antichrist.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ANTICHRIST

It is useful to review the characteristics that the antichrist has acquired during his development. This will enable us to recognise the "mark" of Satan's mechanism of antichrist in our own lives and fellowships. The first and fundamental characteristic is his lawlessness.

The antichrist is called "**the lawless one**" in the bible. **"And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception."** 2 Thessalonians 2:8-10.

In spiritual terms, to be lawless is to be opposed to the spiritual authority of God. Lawlessness is opposed to God's appointed leadership and to the leading of the Spirit. Instead a lawless person follows the dictates of his flesh or self-life.

The second characteristic of the antichrist is his promotion of humanism. He promotes the idea that God expects man to perfect the world by his own endeavours. Humanism encourages community improvements through education, science and technology, social programs, and large financial appeals. It reinforces the blasphemy that man is dependant on man to meet his needs, rather than God.

The third characteristic of the antichrist is deception. These deceptions are so subtle that Jesus warned that even the elect may be deceived. **"For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect."** Matthew 24:24.

IN SUMMARY

The first beast of the Key Bible Reading is the antichrist and his kingdom. It is the power of worldly and humanistic government which evolved through the great empires of the ancient world. The penultimate product of this process was the papacy of the Roman Catholic Church, which is the prototype of all Christian apostasy and lawlessness.

The popes of Rome were far more sinister than their imperial predecessors. They had the appearance of being spiritual and obedient to Christ as head of the church, but were in fact worldly and under the power of Antichrist. The many counterfeits produced by Antichrist throughout the denominations of the Christian church all share this subtlety. Multitudes of saints continue to be seduced by the false church.

In the next three chapters the intention is to study the main ways in which the antichrist operates. In keeping with its fundamentally lawless nature, the main thrust of Antichrist's attack is against spiritual authority. The first chapter reveals the reality of Antichrist inciting rebellion against God's anointed leaders in the church. The second chapter uncovers Antichrist's attempts to break down spiritual authority in the family. The third chapter analyses Antichrist's promotion of lawlessness within the individual, through fleshly or self initiated works and worship.

Chapter 6

ANTICHRIST (ii)

SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY AND REBELLION

KEY BIBLE READINGS

Eph 1:19-23 "according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."

John 6:38 "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."

John 7:16 "Jesus answered them and said, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me."

John 5:19 "Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner."

John 15:5 "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

Eph 4:4-8, 11-12 (Authorised King James Version) "But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore He saith, when He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men...And He gave some, apostles, and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

Hebrews 13:17 "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you."

THE BASIS OF SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

The last chapter established that Satan's kingdom of antichrist is founded on the principle of replacing the spiritual authority that Christ has delegated to His anointed servants, with worldly and humanistic leadership. It is this ploy of Antichrist that Satan uses to wrest the lordship from Christ. It is also the foundation on which the second beast on Revelation 13 (or the spirit of antichrist) and the harlot of Revelation 17 (or the false church) both rest. In fact the substitution of worldly for spiritual authority in the church is a prerequisite for their operation.

In contrast, the basis of spiritual authority in the church is Christ as head. "**And He (God) put all things under His feet, and gave Him (Christ) to be head over all things to the church, which is His body.**" Ephesians 1:22-23. Spirit authority is being exercised when Christ rules His body by delegating authority to His anointed servants, whom He directs through the Holy Spirit. Spiritual lawlessness occurs when this authority is ignored and replaced by the rule of those appointed after the fashion of the world.

After Calvary, Jesus appeared to His disciples and said, "**As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.**" John 20:21. In other words, in the same way, or under the same conditions that God sent Jesus into ministry, Jesus was also sending His disciples. He had already described those conditions of perfect obedience. "**Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.**" John 15:19.

Jesus also applied this principle to what He said. **"My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me."** John 7:16.

Our Father in heaven is the source of all authority and power, and He delegated this authority to His Son. During His time on earth Jesus was totally dependent on God. He saw what His Father wanted Him to do or say (through the Holy Spirit showing Him), and He cooperated with the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish or express it. In this way Jesus became the anointed vessel used by God to manifest His perfect will on earth.

In like manner Christ's prepared and anointed vessels are to be totally dependant on Him. They see what He wants them to do through the Holy Spirit showing them. In obeying that leading they are to rely on Jesus to do the work, **"for without Me you can do nothing."** John 15:5. The basis of spiritual authority is therefore Christ directing His anointed leaders to act, and then Him supplying them with the required faith and power to accomplish the work.

Christ's prepared and anointed vessels are completely obedient to His will, and do nothing in their own right. Consequently to be obedient to Christ's anointed vessels is to be obedient to Christ Himself. Similarly, to rebel against Christ's anointed leaders is to rebel against Christ Himself.

THE BASIS OF SPIRITUAL HEADSHIP

The basis of all spiritual headship is exemplified in the role of Jesus as head of the church. He explained His position in terms of a servant. **"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave - just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."** Matthew 20:25-28.

The person who has been entrusted with spiritual headship is required to give up his life for those under him, and to become their servant. He is also required to bear responsibility for them and to give account of them before the Lord. **"Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account."** Hebrews 13:17.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SPIRITUAL AND WORLDLY LEADERS

There are clear differences between those leaders chosen and prepared by the Lord through the power of the Holy Spirit, and those leaders elected by worldly processes. Reference to Christ's provision of leaders to the church is found in Ephesian 4. This text requires careful study to appreciate its true meaning.

Christ, as head of the church, is directing gifts to the church as a whole. **"But unto everyone of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ."** Ephesian 4:7 (Authorised King James Version). It is not correct to assume that this **"gift of Christ"** is a reference to the 'gifts of the Spirit' listed by the apostle Paul in I Corinthians 12. Instead, a close look at the reading reveals that **"the gift of Christ"** to the church is that of leaders.

Christ **"gave gifts unto men...And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelist; and some, pastors and teachers."** Ephesians 4:7,11. (Authorised King James Version). These people were given to minister to the church and build it up. The gift of anointed leaders was **"for the perfecting of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."** Ephesians 4:12. (Authorised King James Version).

It is Christ, as head of the church, who prepares leaders and then presents them to His body. Everyone in the church is blessed by the gift of such leaders **"according to the measure of Christ's**

gift." When a church fellowship believes the word and acknowledges spiritual authority, Christ prepares and anoints vessels to emerge from within that body. The degree of their acceptance of spiritual authority determines the degree, or the measure of Christ's gift of leaders.

In contrast, the influence of Antichrist on church fellowships has been to replace spiritual leaders with worldly leaders. The effect of this has been to destroy Christ's authority as head of the church. The first deception promoted by Antichrist is that the role of spiritual leaders ended with the early church, and that there are no apostles in the modern day church. It also denies that the local fellowship could ever expect to produce evangelists, prophets, pastors and teachers.

Secondly, the idea is promoted that a church leader should have academic qualifications to be legitimate. For example, a church 'minister' must have a degree or diploma in divinity from a 'reputable' bible college to be acceptable to the modern congregation. This results in church leaders being appointed on the basis of their worldly qualifications, rather than according to their preparation by Christ.

One man is therefore employed as head of the local fellowship, and he is expected to personally direct each department or activity of the 'church.' The possibility of Christ presenting His gift of leaders to each church is never seriously entertained.

The third idea promoted by the spirit of antichrist is that the church leaders should be democratically elected by the congregation. The assumption is that God's will can be more reliably established by the Holy Spirit through a large gathering of church members. This assumption is incorrect because it fails to grasp the intrinsically gentle character of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit never violates a person's free will. He is literally unable to override the decision of a person's heart and impose another view. In any one congregation there is a mixture of wheat and tares. In addition to believers matured in Christ and obedient to His Spirit, there are nominal Christians, carnal Christians, backsliders, and those under the power of Antichrist. In these circumstances it is unrealistic to expect that the Holy Spirit will succeed in steering all (or even most) of the individual wills in the congregation to the will of Christ.

The fourth idea promoted by the spirit of antichrist is that the eldership is a figurehead or honorary position. Elders are not seen as shepherds or overseers of the flock, and are denied the authority that such an interpretation of their position would demand. Instead, the attitude amongst church members is one of equality. "We are all the same," and "There is no one over anyone else." This attitude is the result of the influence of the spirit of the antichrist. In contrast, the word of God declares, "**Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account.**" Hebrews 13:17. The inevitable consequence of downgrading the eldership is that elders are more often chosen for their worldly standing than for their spiritual maturity.

ELECTION OF SPIRITUAL LEADERS

Leaders in the apostate church are elected by worldly processes and with reference to worldly qualifications. However, the pattern set in the early church is that spiritual leaders were first prepared by the Lord. They were recognised by the existing elders, who duly elected them and anointed them for service. The apostle Paul wrote, "**To Titus, my true son in our common faith, and instructed him to "set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you.**" Titus 1:4,5. Paul also wrote to Timothy, saying, "**Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery (the body of elders).**" 1 Timothy 4:14.

The New Testament pattern is one of ministers emerging from within the fellowship, and being recognised and anointed by the existing elders. The physician Luke records this process taking place in the new churches in Asia Minor. **"So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed."** Acts 14:23.

THE PREPARATION OF SPIRITUAL LEADERS

Jesus said that he did only what He saw His Father doing and that He said only the words His Father gave Him to say. This perfect obedience requires a complete separation from the power of the flesh. Before a person can meet such a high standard of obedience, all his attachment to self and self works must be removed. **"If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work."** 2 Timothy 2:21 (Authorised King James Version).

Before a man can be a **"vessel unto honour,"** he must undergo a careful preparation at the hands of the Lord. All genuine spiritual leaders are first selected by Christ, and then required to submit to the disciplining of the Holy Spirit until their flesh has been dealt with. This is a long and often painful process, but absolutely necessary before a vessel is **"meet" (or fit) for the master's use."**

A model of this preparation can be seen in the life of Moses. It is important to note the state of Moses' heart before he was prepared by God. Moses had every worldly reason to be confident of his own ability. He had enjoyed a privileged upbringing as the adopted son of the Pharaoh's daughter, and was well educated. **"And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds."** Acts 7:22.

"But when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian. For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand." Acts 7:23-25.

Even then Moses knew that he was God's chosen vessel to deliver the children of Israel out of the hands of the Egyptians. But this was prior to his preparation, and so he acted prematurely, and in the power of his own natural strength. The result of this fleshly act was the murder of an Egyptian, rejection by his own kindred, and ignominious flight into the desert to escape punishment. It had been a completely fruitless attempt to do God's work.

Moses spent the next forty years in exile in the wilderness, where he tended his father-in-law's sheep. During this time God was able to deal with the once learned and eloquent prince of Egypt. After this long period of preparation God finally renewed Moses' commission to deliver the Israelites from bondage.

God appeared to Moses from the midst of a burning bush, and said to him, **"Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt"**. Exodus 3:10. This time there was a big difference in Moses' attitude to the task because he no longer had any confidence in his own ability. **"But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?'"** Exodus 3:11.

Despite God's assurances, and the demonstration of miraculous signs, Moses remained a reluctant vessel. **"But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice: suppose they say,**

‘The Lord has not appeared to you’... O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue," Exodus 4:1,10. This was clearly a changed man from the one who had struck down an Egyptian guard forty years before.

The model of Moses indicates that the preparation of a spiritual leader is in direct contrast to the preparation of worldly leaders. The preparation of worldly leaders involves equipping the prospective executive with intellectual skills and self assurance. The Lord’s preparation of His vessels removes all the self assurance or dependence on self, so that there is a total reliance on Him. The prepared vessel is constantly turning to the Lord and constantly seeking His will. He does nothing by his own initiation or in his own power.

THE BASIS OF REBELLION AGAINST AUTHORITY

The opposition of the world to spiritual authority is manifested in disobedience and rebellion against spiritual leaders. The main principle underlying this disobedience can be observed with further study of the path of Moses. At one time during the journey of the Jews through Sinai, Moses was confronted by the rebellion of Korah.

"Now Korah.....with Dathan and Abiram..... took men; and they rose up before Moses with some of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation, men of renown. They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?" Numbers 16:1-3.

The attitudes that ‘we are all equal,’ that ‘no one is more spiritual than anyone else,’ and that ‘they take too much on themselves,’ are all incited by the spirit of antichrist. They are used to promote rebellion against the Lord’s anointed leaders, and therefore rebellion against the Lord Himself. There is no doubt that in the true church all the congregation are holy, and that the Lord is among them. But that does not remove the congregation’s obligation to obey the Lord by obeying the delegated authority He has vested in His servants.

"Then Moses said: "By this you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of my own will. If these men die naturally like all men, or if they are visited by the common fate of all men, then the LORD has not sent me. But if the LORD creates a new thing, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the pit, then you will understand that these men have rejected the LORD." Numbers 16:28-30.

Moses did not say that Korah and his followers had rejected him. He said that **"these men have rejected the Lord."** Disobedience and rebellion against the spiritual authority vested in the Lord’s chosen leaders is a serious business. This is reflected in the awful punishment meted out by God to the rebels in Moses’ camp. **"So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit; the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the congregation."** Numbers 16:33.

IN SUMMARY

God is the head of all authority and power. He has delegated His authority to Jesus Christ, who is head of all things to the church. Spiritually prepared and anointed leaders are a gift from Christ to his church. To be obedient to the authority delegated by Christ to His anointed servants is to be obedient to Christ Himself. Conversely, to be disobedient to Christ’s anointed leaders is to be disobedient to Christ Himself.

Where there is obedience to Christ's delegated authority, Christ Himself is ruling over His body, and His will is being done. Where there is rebellion and disobedience to His appointed leaders, the headship of Christ is usurped. The leading of the Holy Spirit is then replaced by lawlessness. This lawlessness is expressed by humanistic rule in the power of the flesh.

The role of the antichrist is to replace spiritual authority with lawlessness. This purpose is fundamental to Satan's strategy of usurping Christ's position as ruler and head of His church. Because of this, Satan opposes teaching on spiritual authority more than any other spiritual truth.

The next chapter will uncover the work of the antichrist in undermining spiritual authority in the family.

Chapter 7

ANTICHRIST (iii)

SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY IN THE FAMILY

KEY BIBLE READINGS

Eph 5:22-27 "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish."

Eph 6:1-4 "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise: that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth. And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord."

Matt 8:5-9 "Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented." And Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him." The centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

STRUCTURE OF AUTHORITY IN THE FAMILY

The bible is consistent in its instruction concerning the structure of authority to apply in the family. The apostle Paul wrote, "**But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.**" 1 Corinthians 11:3. This principle is confirmed throughout the Key Bible Readings. "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord, For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church," and "Children, obey your parents in the Lord."

The bible presents a clear chain of authority. Above all authority and power is God, and He is the head of Christ. Then in descending order, Christ is the head of man, man is the head of woman, and parents are the head of their children.

The basis for this headship is the same as for all spiritual headship. "**Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it.**" The one assuming the role of head is in fact assuming the role of a servant. He is to serve and be responsible for those under his headship.

THE OPERATION OF A CHAIN OF AUTHORITY

A model for the operation of a chain of authority is contained in the account of the centurion in Capernaum. The centurion approached Jesus and asked Him to heal his sick servant. When Jesus offered to go to his house to do this he demurred. "**But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one,**

‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” Matthew 8:8-9.

The centurion trusted Christ’s authority because he was in a chain of authority himself. At the top of the chain was Caesar, followed by the Governor of his Province, the Tribune of his Legion. Below him was his company of soldiers and his household servants. When the centurion gave an order he knew that it would be obeyed, because behind it was the whole weight of the Roman Empire upholding his authority.

The centurion acknowledged Christ’s position in a chain of authority when he said, **"I also am a man under authority,"** and **"only speak a word, and my servant will be healed."** In effect he acknowledged that behind Jesus was all the power and authority of Almighty God. The centurion assumed that Jesus had only to speak and the power of God would uphold Him. His confidence was not misplaced. **"And his servant was healed that same hour."** Matthew 8:13.

The thing that makes a chain of authority work is obedience. If there is obedience throughout the chain, each part will be upheld by the authority above it. Where there is obedience, each link in the chain of authority is a covering of protection for those links under it. Where there is disobedience in the chain, the authority of the disobedient is not upheld, and the chain loses its protective covering.

THE PRINCIPLE OF COVERING

The principle of spiritual covering is revealed by further study of 1 Corinthians 11. The apostle Paul began by establishing the chain of authority: **"The head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God."** He continued by describing in symbolic terms how the headship provides spiritual covering between man and wife.

"Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head.....For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man. For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels." 1 Cor 11:4-5, 7-10.

The question here is not whether a woman should wear a hat in church. The veil or head covering was traditionally worn by women at that time as a recognised symbol of marriage. It was a visible sign of a woman’s submission to the authority or headship of her husband. (The man does not have his head covered because his head, who is Christ, is not physically present on earth).

This then is Paul’s warning to the woman of the family; to maintain her spiritual covering through submission to the authority of her husband. **"(T)he woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels."** The words **"a symbol of"** have been added by the translators. A better understanding of the sense of the verse is gained by removing these words so that it states **"the woman ought to have authority on her head, because of the angels."** This is in fact the way it is written in the Authorised King James Version.

The authority that the woman should have on her head is the authority of her husband. Just as the women of the early church wore veils to show that they were married and submissive to their husbands, so should Christian women of this day have an attitude of submission to their husbands.

The **"angels"** involved here are both the angels of God who are charged to protect us, and the fallen angels of Satan. Demon spirits are always poised to take advantage of any disobedience to Christ’s delegated authority in the family. The apostle Paul is warning women that unless they have

authority on their heads, they are vulnerable to attack by Satan. In other words, unless they are obedient to their husbands, they will lose their covering of God's protection.

APPLICATION OF THE CHAIN TO THE FAMILY

There are two conditions which must be fulfilled for the chain of authority to operate in the family situation. Firstly there must be a voluntary submission to the higher authority. If the husband is obedient to the headship of Christ and to the leadings of the Holy Spirit, then his position as head of the family will be upheld. If the wife is submissive to her husband, then both her position as a wife and her position as a mother will be upheld. If the children are submissive to their parents, then they will know the nurture and protection of Christ.

The second condition is that there must be an acceptance of the responsibility of headship. The husband must accept that he is responsible for the spiritual well being of his family, and exercise his headship. **"For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church."** Ephesians 5:23. In the same way that Christ is head of the church, (i.e. With the same responsibility for oversight and protection), so the husband is head of his wife. Likewise parents must accept and exercise their responsibility as head of their children. Where there is no spirit of headship, there is no position for the Lord to uphold, and He cannot provide the required wisdom to rule well.

Where there is proper headship and submission, the Lord upholds the whole family. This particularly applies to protecting children from the wiles of Satan. The devil seeks to draw them to their complete moral and physical destruction. Headship, and submission to it, are vital elements in the protection of the family and its spiritual well being. Because headship is so important, the antichrist has launched a powerful attempt to undermine it.

His attack has been directed at two main areas. One area concerns children and their 'rights' under the law. Proper legal protection is appropriate in preventing physical abuse and economic exploitation of children. However, parents and teachers are now being placed under increasing restraints, limiting their proper functions of oversight and discipline.

There has been a worldwide program to 'protect children's rights.' The word 'protect' really means to promote in this context, and 'rights' extends to children being encouraged to make 'major life decisions' on their own. The excessive freedom (or lawlessness) created by these 'reforms' has been initiated by the spirit of antichrist. It is a direct attack aimed at removing Christ's headship and protection of the family unit.

The other area of attack has been against the spiritual position of women outlined in the bible. This century has witnessed an unprecedented assault on the position of women in the family. This is reflected in the church, with pressure to ordain women in leadership roles. It is also observed in the world, with pressure on women to conform to 'career paths', and to compete with men.. We should understand this feminist assault is the work of the antichrist, and that its target is spiritual authority in the family.

The resulting state of lawlessness is described by the prophet Isaiah. **"As for My people, children are their oppressors, And women rule over them. My people! Those who lead you cause you to err, And destroy the way of your paths."** Isaiah 3:12.

THE COMPLEMENTARY POSITIONS OF MEN AND WOMEN

The fact is that women occupy a different position relative to men, both in the home and in the church. However the deception propagated by the spirit of antichrist is that women are therefore inferior to men. It is a mistake to assume from the Key Bible Readings that the husband is better than the wife, or to dismiss the apostle Paul as a disgruntled old bachelor with a prejudice against women.

It was the same Paul who wrote, **"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."** Galatians 3:28. The different positions of men and women relate to their different functions, and not to their spiritual worth. God has equipped men and women to fulfill separate but complementary functions.

The principle of headship is not designed to manoeuvre the male sex into a position of advantage. Rather, it is God's way to ensure that the family is functioning properly, and that it has the protective covering of Christ. Paul wrote, **"Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. For as the woman was from the man, even so the man also is through the woman; but all things are from God."** 1 Corinthians 11:11-12.

There is a great deal of confusion concerning this issue. So many men have abdicated their role of spiritual headship in the home and in the church that many women have felt obliged to 'step up into the breach.' This is an understandable reaction, but it is fraught with danger. It may seem to be 'filling the gap,' but in reality it removes Christ's covering from the circumstances. Without the oversight of the man, the family is in real danger of manipulation and oppression by Satan.

THAT WOMAN JEZEBEL

In the letter to the church of Thyratira, Jesus specifically directed a warning to women who assume a position of false authority. **"Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds."** Revelation 2:20-22.

The book of Revelation is a book of symbols, and so it is necessary to examine the scriptures to understand what **"that woman Jezebel"** represents. Certainly this reading is not referring to an actual woman called Jezebel who was seducing the men of the congregation. Instead, it is a reference to Queen Jezebel of the Old Testament, who was the wife of King Ahab of Israel.

She corrupted her husband's kingdom by introducing her native pagan religions of Baal and Asherah. She also persecuted the Jewish prophets, with particular animosity towards Elijah for his faithfulness to God. However it is Jezebel's behaviour towards her husband that is most relevant. It is useful to read the story of the seizure of Naboth's vineyard in full in order to appreciate the extent to which Jezebel dominated her husband.

"And it came to pass after these things that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard which was in Jezreel, next to the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. So Ahab spoke to Naboth, saying, "Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near, next to my house; and for it I will give you a vineyard better than it. Or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its worth in money. But Naboth said to Ahab, "The LORD forbid that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to you!" So Ahab went into his house sullen and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him; for he had said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers." And he lay down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no food. But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said to him, "Why is your spirit so sullen that you eat no food?" He said to her, "Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite, and said to him, 'Give me your vineyard for money; or else, if it pleases you, I will give you another vineyard for it.' And he answered, 'I will not give you my vineyard.'" Then Jezebel his wife said to him, "You now exercise authority over Israel! Arise, eat food, and let your heart be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite." And she wrote letters in

Ahab's name, sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters to the elders and the nobles who were dwelling in the city with Naboth. She wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth with high honor among the people; and seat two men, scoundrels, before him to bear witness against him, saying, "You have blasphemed God and the king." Then take him out, and stone him, that he may die. So the men of his city, the elders and nobles who were inhabitants of his city, did as Jezebel had sent to them, as it was written in the letters which she had sent to them. They proclaimed a fast, and seated Naboth with high honor among the people. And two men, scoundrels, came in and sat before him; and the scoundrels witnessed against him, against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, "Naboth has blasphemed God and the king!" Then they took him outside the city and stoned him with stones, so that he died. Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, "Naboth has been stoned and is dead. And it came to pass, when Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, "Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money; for Naboth is not alive, but dead." So it was, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab got up and went down to take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite." I King 21:1-16.

It is apparent from this reading that Jezebel usurped the authority of her husband the king. An example of this is her blatant use of his royal seal to fulfill her purposes. In fact is that Jezebel is the epitome of witchcraft. Her witchcraft is recognised by the reference to **"the prostitutions of your mother Jezebel and her witchcraft."** 2 Kings 9:22. This is not the type of witchcraft that engages in occultist rituals and open worship of Satan. Instead it is the assumption of false authority in order to dominate or manipulate the lives of others. The desire to control people is at the foundation of all witchcraft.

THE SPIRIT OF WITCHCRAFT

At this point it is necessary to open our hearts to accept new truth. We need to open our eyes to see what is really happening to the church and our families. Remember that we are engaged in spiritual warfare, **"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."** Ephesians 6:12.

All the powers of darkness at Satan's command are at the disposal of Antichrist. In this particular case, the spirit of antichrist is directing the power of witchcraft in an out assault on our families and the church. This concept may seem macabre and fantastic at first, but we cannot dismiss it. The fact is that the power of witchcraft is having a devastating effect in destroying families and church congregations.

The spirit of witchcraft is closely associated with rebellion, **"For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft."** 1 Samuel 15:23. This spirit directs its power at women and accuses them of inferiority and worthlessness. The result is discontent and resentment at their circumstances, which in turn incites a demand for 'equality' with men. The spirit of witchcraft is based on the deception that women are inferior. This deception is at the root of all feminist demands, no matter how reasonable those demands might appear on the surface.

A family under the power of a spirit of witchcraft displays quite recognisable symptoms, many of which are only too familiar in the church today. Basically the wife 'wears the pants,' and has her own way in most things, through domination or more subtler manipulation. There are excessive reactions to decisions which do not go her way, and the family is wary of opposing her will.

In this family the wife has usurped the spiritual headship of the household, and the husband is reduced to seeking his fulfillment through worldly pursuits. The children are dominated by their

mother, who attempts to mould them into a predetermined image. The inevitable result in the children is repression, frustration, resentment, and finally rebellion. As a consequence of this they are often drawn into lawlessness and immorality.

This rebellion takes place because the spiritual covering of Christ's protection has been removed. The chain of authority is reversed with the wife ruling over the husband, and the children ruling over the parents. **"As for My people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them."** These depressing symptoms are all too often present in the families of church members. They exist despite God's consistent promises to bless and protect all those who obey Him.

THE JUDGMENT OF JEZEBEL

An additional consequence of the lack of spiritual covering is that there is often a lot of sickness in the household. Many Christian families are prevented from receiving their inheritance of health and healing in Jesus Christ **"by whose stripes you were healed."** 1 Peter 2:24. This is because Satan, who is a legalist, is able to point to the spirit of witchcraft as evidence of disobedience and rebellion against God's specific instructions concerning the family.

The Lord has declared His judgment on the woman Jezebel and her admirers. **"Indeed I will cast her into a sick-bed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds."** This is a clear warning that sickness and distress will afflict all those who submit to the power of witchcraft. **"And I will kill her children with death."** Revelation 2:23.

Both men and women are held accountable in this area. God's judgment was not only pronounced on Queen Jezebel. The prophet Elijah declared to King Ahab, **"Thus says the Lord, 'In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, dogs shall lick your blood, even yours.' And concerning Jezebel the Lord also spoke, saying, 'The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.'"** 1 Kings 21:19,23.

God's judgment falls equally on men and women. It falls on women who usurp the role of headship and invite in a spirit of witchcraft. It also falls on men who fail to take up their proper position of headship in the family or the church, and so allow themselves to be dominated or manipulated. God condemned **"Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord, because Jezebel his wife stirred him up."** 1 Kings 21:15.

IN SUMMARY

A spiritually ordained structure of authority to apply in the family is outlined in the bible. This structure provides oversight and protection by Christ, through His delegated authority to the husband as head of the family. However this headship has been seriously eroded through the spirit of the antichrist directing the power of witchcraft at the position of women. The resulting rottenness of false authority is to be purged out by Christ as part of His restoration of the church.

The next chapter will examine Antichrist's attempts to exploit the lawlessness of our flesh.

Chapter 8

ANTICHRIST (iv)

THE FLESH AND LAWLESSNESS

KEY BIBLE READINGS

1 Cor 3:11-15. "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. Matt 7:21-23. "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"

Heb 4:9-11. "There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience."

THE WORKS OF CHRIST

There are three basic types of works performed by those who profess to be Christians. Each type is determined by the source of its power or motivation. There are the works of Christ, the works of the flesh, and the works of Satan. These categories are not always clear cut as there is often a mixture of these in each individual work. There may be some of Christ and some of the flesh, or there may be some of the flesh and some of Satan.

Jesus said, "**Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit.**" Matthew 12:33. In other words, in order to make the fruit good, all corrupting influence of the flesh has to be removed, so that the work is completely of Christ.

The works of Christ are initiated by Him and done in the power of the Holy Spirit. They are performed without the intrusion of the flesh, and bear good and lasting fruit which will stand in the day of testing. On that day, "**each one's work will become manifest; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.**" 1 Corinthians 3:13.

THE WORKS OF THE FLESH

The works of the flesh are those performed out of the power of the natural man, through his own physical and intellectual skills. They are performed without the initiation of the Holy Spirit. They are born out of pride, self assurance and independence, and have at their basis a desire to glorify self. Church leaders chosen on the basis of their own natural skills and abilities are more prone to initiate fleshly works and programs than those who are spiritually prepared and anointed.

Jesus said that He did only what He saw His Father doing. If He didn't see His father working in a situation, He didn't involve Himself. He didn't work independently from God, and did only that which His Father initiated.

In contrast, the dead works of the flesh are a consequence of a restless heart which is not prepared to be still and wait on God for His will to become apparent. Typical statements introducing fleshly works are, 'We can't just sit here - We have to do something.' Or 'I am just going to step out in faith.'

Because the works of the flesh are initiated by self, the burden of their outcome is also borne by self. The initiators of self works are subject to stress and exhaustion. Their faith is easily submerged in fear and doubt. However Jesus is the **"author and finisher of our faith."** Hebrews 12:2, and apports to His obedient servants the necessary faith required to complete each work He has entrusted to them. If the work is of Christ, it is accompanied by sufficient faith, peace and joy to overcome the opposition of Satan.

The self behind fleshly works is often involved in a restless search for 'the empowering' to perform the miraculous. This may appear to be legitimate, but in reality it is the flesh which is seeking to project itself forward. The person who is engaged in the works of Christ has had his flesh dealt with, and is content to see Christ glorified. God said, **"I will not give My glory to another."** Isaiah 48:11.

Works of the flesh may have the appearance of fruitfulness. They may seem to be a good idea at the time, or even meeting a genuine need. The fact remains however that they are not Christ's works, and they are not performed in the power of the Holy Spirit. They will therefore not stand on the day of testing. Christ said that **"without Me you can do nothing."** John 15:5.

FLESHLY WORKS ARE LAWLESS

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the head of the church and the builder of the Body. He is the **"cornerstone"** and the **"foundation,"** and He gives us the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers. This is so that we **"may grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ - from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love."** Ephesians 4:15-6.

Prepared and anointed leaders are required to direct and order Christ's ministry to His body. Fleshly works are individual works which are performed independently from spiritual leading and oversight. The zealous works of the flesh ignore headship, replacing it with the lawless enthusiasm of men.

The simple fact is that men in their own strength are not competent or equipped to build or protect the body. **"Unless the Lord builds the house, They labour in vain who build it; Unless the Lord guards the city, The watchman stays awake in vain."** Psalm 127:1.

The works of the flesh (no matter how well meaning), rarely strike at the heart of the matter, and often cut right across the path of Christ's genuine ministry. At best they are a hindrance to Christ's work, and at worst they can turn a person away from the truth completely. It is small wonder that the works of the flesh are condemned as lawless.

GOD'S JUDGMENT ON FLESHLY WORKS

The apostle Paul pronounced God's judgment on the works of the flesh in his first epistle to the Corinthian church. This is the subject of the first Key Bible Reading. The foundation on which believers are to build is the gospel of Jesus Christ. **"For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."** 1 Corinthians 3:11.

There are two types of building on this foundation. **"Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become manifest; for the Day will declare it."** 1 Corinthians 3:12-13.

The **"gold, silver, precious stones"** are symbols of the true works of Christ done in the power of the Holy Spirit. The **"wood, hay, straw"** are symbols of the combustible works of the flesh which will not stand the test of fire.

The **"Day"** is the day of testing. Satan is allowed this time to challenge any believer's works that might threaten his kingdom of darkness. God permits this trial by Satan so that all the works of Christ are tempered and strengthened, whilst all that is of the flesh is consumed by the fire.

Ministers of the life of Christ can be comforted by this because they **"will receive a reward."** Ministers of the flesh on the other hand have every reason to be apprehensive. **"If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."** 1 Corinthians 3:15. They are warned that though their salvation will remain intact, their path will be **"as through fire."**

CHRIST'S WARNING TO CHARISMATICS

It is not correct to assume that the power of the flesh, (and subsequent denial of Christ's headship) is restricted to the traditional denominations. Some Pentecostal and Charismatic fellowships are no more enlightened in this respect, despite their baptism in the Spirit, and involvement in the gifts of the Spirit. In fact the baptism in the Spirit and use of the gifts of the Spirit opens the door to even more attack than would otherwise be the case.

Charismatic congregations are more vulnerable to lawlessness rather than less. The sudden influx of spiritual power is exhilarating, and without proper oversight can result in spiritual pride and lawless works of the flesh. Jesus addressed those who misuse the gifts of the Spirit. **"Many will say to me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many wonders in your name?'"** Matthew 7:22.

The works listed here are associated with some of the gifts of the Holy Spirit which are outlined by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12. Christ is referring to the misuse of the gift of prophecy, the gift of discerning spirits, and the gift of miracles. His judgment on those who have misused the gifts is uncompromising. **"And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"** Matthew 7:23.

It is commonly assumed in charismatic circles that any sign of the miraculous being manifested is a certain indication of the working of the Holy Spirit. However it has already been noted in previous chapters that Jesus warned us that it is possible for even the elect to be deceived. In fact Satan has no difficulty in duplicating the miraculous.

This was illustrated when Moses and Aaron went before the Pharaoh of Egypt, and were called to **"Show a miracle for yourselves,'.... And Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it became a serpent. But Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers; so the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. For every man threw down his rod, and they became serpents."** Exodus 7:9,10-12.

Satan can just as easily duplicate the gifts of the Holy Spirit through the immature and undisciplined believer, who is not under the headship of Christ's anointed shepherds. The severity of Christ's judgment on lawless charismatics precludes the possibility of their 'prophesying', 'deliverance,' and 'miracles,' having been performed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Instead, Christ

was declaring that many charismatic 'signs and wonders' are really duplicates of Satan, and performed in the power of the spirit of antichrist.

Many of the 'healings,' prophesyings,' deliverances,' and 'slayings in the spirit' are not of the Lord. Instead they are initiated in the flesh and subsequently empowered by Satan through his demon spirits. While having the initial appearance of blessing and benefit, the 'fruit' does not last. The gulled recipients of such wonders are often left disillusioned, and with their faith in tatters.

THE WORKS OF SATAN

The works of Satan vary from blatant occultist practices to manipulation of the works of the flesh. When Jesus urged that the tree be made good or bad, He was inferring that the most dangerous works were those which were a mixture of fleshly zeal, and Satanic influence. Most of us can recognise and avoid the occultist works of Satan., but few can discern the subtlety of the fleshly mixture. For this reason it would be better if the tree was all bad.

Satan's entry into the church is often through the flesh of well meaning and zealous Christian workers. Even the workers in the Key Bible Reading were deceived, and Jesus foretold of their pained bewilderment on the day of final judgment, when they will be confronted with their lawlessness.

The subtlety of the works of Satan through the flesh of believers, highlights the need for the covering of protection that Christ has provided for His body. This requires submission of the church to the headship and oversight of His appointed elders, who should carefully monitor the use of the gifts of the Spirit. In addition, all works should be tested. **"Test all things; hold fast to what is good."** 1 Thessalonians 5:21.

FLESHLY WORSHIP

When speaking to the woman of Samaria at the well of Joseph, Jesus prophesied that **"the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is a Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."** John 4:23-24.

Unfortunately much of the extravagant and undisciplined worship in charismatic circles is inspired by the flesh rather than the Spirit. It springs from the misconception that true spiritual worship should be accompanied by some physical or verbal display. The extravagance of this display quite often becomes the gauge of spirituality. God is not impressed by such acts of fleshly worship. This is seen by His judgment of Nadab and Abihu in the wilderness.

"Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from the LORD and devoured them, and they died before the LORD. And Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD spoke, saying: 'By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified.'" So Aaron held his peace." Leviticus 10:1-3.

In learning to **"worship the Father in spirit and truth"**, we are not to take our lead from others. Instead we are to learn to be obedient to the leadings placed on our own spirits, which will automatically react against fleshly worship. **"For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other."** Galatians 5:17. Worship in truth, (or true worship) is only experienced as we are obedient to the Holy Spirit directing worship through our spirits. When we ignore the uneasiness or lack of peace in our spirits, then we allow our worship to be taken over by the flesh. The result is fleshly or lawless worship.

ENTERING INTO GOD'S REST

The most pressing requirement for the believer today is to learn to differentiate between the works of Christ, and the works of the flesh or Satan. In order to do this we must in turn learn to be still, and wait on God, that we might enter into His rest. **"There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His."** Hebrews 4:9-10.

To enter into God's rest is to enter into a state of trust and belief in His love and faithfulness towards us. This position allows us to cease from all fretful striving in the flesh, and to trust in His absolute control over our circumstances. It is to know the Lord Jesus Christ as the head and builder of the body, and our own head and covering. This knowledge enables us to wait on Him, and not move until we are sure of His direction.

It is not sufficient to pray for God's direction and anointing, only to wrest the initiative back from Him again, and proceed in our own strength. We have to deliberately let go of the burden and then resist all temptation to pick it back up again. To be in God's rest is to accept that nothing we can do of ourselves will survive the fire of testing.

To be in God's rest does not mean to cease from all activity. Instead it means to cease from all striving in the flesh. It means to be still when the Lord is still, and to move only when He moves. It means to walk in harmony with the power of the Holy Spirit, and to cooperate with that power in the production of lasting fruit.

IN SUMMARY

Christ's authority has been usurped by humanistic zeal and the lawlessness of the flesh. The doors of the church have been opened to satanic duplication of the gifts of the Spirit, and to false worship inspired by the spirit of antichrist. While the works of Christ are performed in the power of the Holy Spirit, the works of the antichrist are performed in the power of the spirit of antichrist. The next chapter will investigate the work of the spirit of antichrist, which is presented as the second beast of Revelation 13.

THE SPIRIT OF ANTICHRIST

KEY BIBLE READING

Revelation 13:11-18. **"Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. He performs 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 in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. And he causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666."**

THE SECOND BEAST

The previous four chapters have studied the first beast (or Antichrist) of Revelation 13. The study began with the rise of Antichrist and the evolution of his kingdom, until it reached its penultimate expression in the papacy of the Roman Catholic Church. From this springboard the influence of the antichrist spread throughout all denominations in a subtle and effective attack on the headship and authority of Christ over the church. The study continued by exposing the antichrist's assault on Christ's authority through the promotion of rebellion against spiritual headship and the lawlessness of the flesh.

This chapter concerns the second beast of Revelation 13. **"Then I saw another beast."** The first beast was pictured **"rising up out of the sea,"** which symbolises its emergence from out of the nations. In contrast, the second beast is pictured **"coming up out of the earth,"** symbolizing its religious character. It is actually called **"the false prophet"** in Revelation 16 and Revelation 20.

A more accurate name for the second beast however is the spirit of antichrist. The apostle John wrote, **"By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world."** 1John 4:2-3.

Just as the first beast is a counterfeit of Christ, so the second beast is a counterfeit of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit testifies to Christ by performing the work required to manifest His kingdom. Similarly, the spirit of antichrist is working to glorify and expand the province of Antichrist.

The second beast, or spirit of antichrist, **"had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon."** This beast is clearly not what it appears. On the outside it seems gentle and harmless, but its inner nature belies this impression. Outwardly it claims to represent Christ and promotes a caring and compassionate image. It takes strong moral positions on social issues like abortion and divorce, and it abhors military aggression and economic injustice.

Inwardly however, it opposes the headship of Christ. This subtle but profound undermining work has stripped the church of its spiritual power. The gospel of Christ has been replaced by a social

gospel of good works, which, although addressing legitimate concerns, ignores the power of Christ in dealing with man's problems. This is a powerless and vulnerable version of Christianity. The spirit of antichrist is a beguiling deception which is always eager to preach: **"Peace, peace!' when there is no peace'."** Jeremiah 6:14.

There is a striking unanimity between this picture of the second beast with **"horns like a lamb and (speech) like a dragon,"** and Christ's warning of wolves in sheep's clothing. **"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves."** Matthew 7:15.

A CLIMATE OF LAWLESSNESS

It is important to understand that the spirit of antichrist works in a climate of lawlessness. The Key Bible Reading indicates that the second beast **"exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence."** It confirms that the second beast performs **"those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast."** In other words, the spirit of antichrist is unable to operate independently from the antichrist.

The spirit of antichrist can only be effective in its work where there is a climate of worldly authority, humanism, disobedience and lawlessness. Where proper spiritual authority is being exercised, then the spirit of antichrist is nullified. This is because Christ is head, and His will is being done through His anointed leaders. For this reason, any manifestation of, or teaching on, spiritual authority, (eg. Obedience to elders or submission to husbands), is more strongly opposed by Satan than any other single issue in the church.

THE IMAGE OF THE BEAST

Jesus Christ is the image of God. **"He is the image of the invisible God, the first born over all creation."** Colossians 1:15. Similarly the true church is the image of Christ. **"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."** 2 Corinthians 3:18.

The Holy Spirit has the task of transforming the church into the image of Christ by filling it with His presence. Similarly, the spirit of antichrist has been given the task of corrupting the church into the image of the antichrist. The **"image of the beast"** is the apostate church which reflects the lawlessness and worldliness of the first beast.

The Key Bible Reading records that the task of the second beast was to tell **"those who dwell on the earth to make an image of the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed."** Revelation 13:14-15.

The penultimate historical fulfillment of the image of the beast was the Roman Catholic Church. The identity of the image of the beast is indicated by repeated reference to **"the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed."** In Revelation 13. (Verses 3,12,and 14). This reference to a wound symbolises the devastating blow which the Catholic Church suffered at the time of the Protestant Reformation.

Martin Luther was instrumental in inflicting great damage to the papacy when he nailed his proclamation of 'Justification by Faith' to the door of the castle church at Wittenburg in 1517. The subsequent upheaval threatened to decimate the Catholic Church, and certainly destroyed its complete hold over Christianity in Western Europe. The whole world was therefore amazed when

the Roman Catholic Church recovered much of its worldly authority and influence as a result of the Counter Reformation.

Massive wealth flowed into Church coffers following the discovery of the New World by the Catholic nations of the Mediterranean. Much of the Church's worldly glory was restored to it with the construction of magnificent buildings which were filled with artistic masterpieces of the Renaissance. **"And all the world marvelled and followed the beast. So they worshipped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshipped the beast, saying, 'Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?'"** Revelation 13:3,-4.

At the height of its power, the papacy had absolute authority over most of Christendom. History is littered with the religious wars and prolonged persecutions that were the product of the popes jealously guarding their position. It is no exaggeration to say that **"the image of the beast (w)ould both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed."** Revelation 13:15.

WORSHIPPING THE IMAGE

While the Catholic Church is clearly the penultimate expression or prototype of the image of the beast, it is by no means the final edition. The spirit of antichrist has established an image to the beast in every denomination of every generation. Worshipping the image of the beast occurs whenever undue respect is paid to the man-made elements. The church buildings and the denominational doctrines and traditions, become more important than the Lord Himself.

Jesus said to the Pharisees, **"All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition...making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down."** Mark 7:9,13.

The subtlety of worshipping the image of the beast prevents many from detecting its presence within their own fellowships. It is often exposed when a congregation is confronted with spiritual revelation. Such a challenge provokes statements like, 'This is OUR church!' or 'We've never done that in our church', or 'We have our traditions to maintain.' The attitude behind these statements is one of worshipping the beast.

THE MARK OF THE BEAST

"He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except (one who) has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name." Revelation 13:16-17.

Note: The words **"one who"** have been added to the verb 'ekho' 'to have.'. A better translation is "except having the mark". There are many and varied interpretations of the mark of the beast. One of the most common is that the mark is an invisible tattoo which is imprinted on our hands and foreheads. The belief is that this mark will have to be presented to a detecting device at all shopping outlets before any purchase can be made by the consumer. The fear generated by this sort of interpretation has caused many fundamentalist Christians to retreat from urban society in the pursuit of self sufficiency.

In order to understand the real meaning of the mark of the beast, it is necessary to turn to the first mention made in the bible to a mark placed on the hands and foreheads of men. The 'first mention' of any topic in the bible often holds the key to understanding later references on the same topic. The appropriate reading in this case concerns Moses instituting a ceremony of remembrance for the deliverance of the children of Israel from bondage in Egypt.

"Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the LORD....." And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, 'This is done because of what the LORD did for me when I came up from Egypt.' It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the LORD'S law may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt." Exodus 13:6-9. The Lord initiated a ceremony through His servant Moses in order to engrave a lasting impression on His children. The ceremony was designed to imprint this impression on their hands (i.e. everything they did), and between their eyes or on their foreheads (i.e. everything they thought). This **"sign"** or **"memorial"** was to be a perpetual reminder to the Jews that it was the Lord who had defeated Pharaoh, and who had brought them out of Egypt. It was to remind them that it was God who provided for all their needs.

The mark of the beast is also an invisible **"sign"** or **"memorial"** which is 'engraved' on our hands and our foreheads (i.e. on everything we do and in everything we think). It is incurred through the everyday 'ceremony' of buying and selling. This common 'ritual' is used by the spirit of antichrist to condition all of mankind into believing that the source of their provision is their own effort.

Antichrist's aim is to so condition all people through the process of buying and selling that no one might buy or sell "except having" his "mark" of bondage, or his **"name"** or character, or **"the number of his name"** (which is a symbol for humanism). The mark of the beast has been very successful in turning us away from dependence on God as He who provides for all our needs. It operates as a perpetual reminder that our financial security and our economic success are determined by our own individual industry and intellect. Once accepted, this blasphemy is imbued into men's actions and thoughts, including those in the church. A statement like 'He has done well' is not likely to be a reference to a fellow church member's spiritual growth. It is more likely to be a reference to his successful career and his numerous material possessions.

THE MARK IS UNIVERSAL

It is important to acknowledge that everyone has to some degree received the mark of the beast. **"And he causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark."** Everyone has had the mark implanted into their personalities from earliest childhood, and it has been continually reinforced as part of the way we think and the things we do.

"And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others." Ephesians 2:1-3.

Before salvation all men are unredeemed and fallen before God, and in this state all of us were invested with the mark of the beast. We were all impregnated with the mark of independence from God that declares 'I have earned this,' or "This is the product of my efforts." However it is not necessary for us to remain in this position once our life is renewed in Christ.

VICTORY OVER THE MARK

It is clearly possible to gain victory over the mark of the beast. **"And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire, and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having harps of God."** Revelation 15:2. (Authorised King James Version)

The overcomers standing on the sea of glass had not escaped receiving the mark of the beast, but rather they had "gotten the victory over" it. They had received it in the same way as everyone else because the mark of the beast is an inescapable feature of unredeemed mankind. However they had since rejected the mark, and succeeded in overcoming its power and influence on their lives.

It is futile to try to avoid the mark of the beast by fleeing to a rural retreat. In fact these actions reveal the already implanted mark at work. It is the mark of the beast which generates fear about our provision, and it is this fear which is expressed in attempts to become self sufficient. Victory over the mark of the beast is expressed when we indicate by our actions and thoughts that we have placed our trust in God for our provision.

THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST'S NAME

(N)o one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666." Revelation 13:17-18. The number of his name" is declared to be 666, which is also said to be the "number of a man." It could have been just as correctly translated as "the number of man," and in fact this translation gives a clearer insight into the real meaning of the number.

Symbolically, the number 6 is the number of man, and 666 represents the sum total of man's efforts. The number 666 is therefore the number of humanism. The philosophy of humanism is the belief that man is capable of achieving fulfillment in all things without reference to God. It is a blasphemous attitude that asserts man's independence from God through reliance on human effort rather than divine power.

There is ample evidence of the number of the beast, or 666, being engraved in the hands and foreheads of mankind. The world wide New Age Movement, which has its basis in humanism, promotes the concept of a 'New World Order' which will arise through mankind untapping the vast reservoirs of 'human potential' within each of us. They believe that the problems of an ailing world can be solved through advances in science, education, and technology. The mark of the beast also promotes an attitude of humanistic philanthropy that generates involvement in world wide community welfare programs.

The number 666 is not restricted to the world. It is present in the denominational church too, with frantic efforts to 'keep the ship afloat'. It is expressed in never ending cake stalls, garage sales, and building appeals. Behind this atmosphere of anxious activity is the erroneous belief that the church's provision is our responsibility.

THE NAME OF GOD

In the ancient Hebrew language, names held a far greater significance than their modern day use would suggest. The name of God was used to indicate all of His attributes, and so it embraced the whole of His divine character. God acquired His name before men by His mighty acts of deliverance and provision as He brought the Israelites out from their bondage in Egypt. This is of model of God's care of His children in all ages.

"And who is like Your people Israel, the one nation on the earth whom God went to redeem for Himself as a people - to make for Yourself a name by great and awesome deeds." 1 Chronicles 17:21. By these actions, God has received many holy titles, and the word Jehovah has become His character revealed to us. Two examples are Jehovah Elohim, which means 'Merciful and Gracious', and Jehovah Tsidkenu, which means 'Our Righteousness'. There is one name which is particularly relevant to the Key Bible Reading. It is Jehovah Jireh, or "The Lord Will Provide.'

God sent ravens to feed the prophet Elijah by the Brook Cherith. **"The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the brook."** 1 Kings 17:6. God miraculously sustained a widow's meager reserves of flour and oil for Elijah's benefit. **"(A)nd she and he and her household ate for many days. The Bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry."** 1 Kings 17:15-16.

Jesus said, **"I have manifested Your name,"** meaning that He had manifested all of the attributes of God. Jesus manifested His Father's name Jehovah Jireh, when He fed the five thousand with five loaves of bread and two fish. **"So they ate and were filled."** Mark 6:42. Again Jesus manifested His Father's name Jehovah Jireh by feeding four thousand with seven loaves of bread and a few small fish. **"So they ate and were filled."** Mark 8:8.

Jesus taught His disciples **"do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on."** Luke 12:22. He said that they were not to **"have an anxious mind. For all things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things. But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you."** Luke 12:29-31.

Jesus was teaching His servants to cease from all fretful activity directed at providing for themselves. Instead they were to rest in God's name of Jehovah Jireh - "the Lord will Provide." God would have us rest in His provision for us.

"As a beast (i.e. cattle) goes down into the valley, And the Spirit of the Lord causes him to rest, So you lead Your people, To make Yourself a glorious name." Isaiah 63:14.

In contrast, the number of the name of the beast represents complete independence from God. It maintains that created man can do very well without the help of God the Creator. As a result, the spirit of antichrist leads man into a frenzy of activity, aimed at meeting all of his needs, and solving all of his problems in his own strength.

GOD'S JUDGMENT IS ANNOUNCED

"If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, 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. 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." Revelation 14:9-11.

We should carefully consider this warning of God's judgment on those who continue to receive the mark of the beast. We have all received the mark in our unredeemed state prior to salvation. Now that we are saved however, we have the knowledge to make a clear choice. We can choose to reject and discard the mark of the beast, or we can continue to receive its influence, and face God's judgment.

The judgment on those wearing the mark of the beast is not damnation in hell, because it takes place **"in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb."** The **"fire and brimstone"** are symbols of judgments rather than literal descriptions of it. The reading suggests that this is a tormenting judgment from which there is no relief.

As long as we feel responsible for our own provision, God has no alternative but to withdraw and wait for us to exhaust ourselves in the struggle. The pressure of acquiring substance becomes even more intense as this judgment falls. Those who are being judged **"have no rest day or night"**

as they are increasingly assailed by fear and anxiety. Many have already succumbed to the emotional and psychological disorders which are becoming a common-place feature of modern society.

IN SUMMARY

The second beast, or spirit of antichrist, acts as a counterfeit to the Holy Spirit, and it requires a climate of spiritual lawlessness in order to operate. It has the task of glorifying the antichrist by making an image to him in the form of the false or apostate church. This image is worshipped whenever man-made elements such as buildings or traditions, become more important than our Lord Jesus Christ.

In addition, the work of the spirit of antichrist involves conditioning man with a mark of economic and humanistic independence from God. The effect of this mark is to steal away man's rest in God's provision for him. We are required renounce both the image of the beast and the mark of the beast, or to face the judgmental wrath of God.

The apostate church is called the Woman Babylon, or the Harlot, in the Book of Revelation. The next two chapters will examine the alternative religion promoted by this power of darkness, and its ultimate judgment by God.

THE APOSTATE CHURCH

KEY BIBLE READING

Revelation 17:1-7,9. **"Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. And on her forehead a name was written:**

MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement. But the angel said to me, "Why did you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns..."Here is the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits."

OUR PREPARATION TO SEE THE VISION

The Key Bible Reading presents a vision of an opulently attired woman astride a scarlet beast. The significance of this rather bizarre picture is difficult to grasp without a certain amount of preparation to open our spiritual eyes. It is therefore useful to study the apostle John's preparation to receive the vision.

Firstly, John had to be shown the meaning of the vision because what he saw was entirely unexpected. **"And when I saw her I marveled with great amazement."** Revelation 17:6. Secondly, John was **"carried away in the Spirit."** Revelation 17:3. John had to have the meaning of the vision revealed to him by the power of the Holy Spirit. Such comprehension was beyond the capacity of his own human intellect.

Thirdly, John was taken **"into the wilderness"** to see the woman. Revelation 17:3 The wilderness is a symbol of spiritual dryness and deadness. In order to recognise the apostate church, we must look beyond the misleading physical appearance. We must ignore the magnificent buildings, the international membership, and the multitude of programs. **"The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls."** Revelation 17:4. In reality the spiritual climate surrounding the apostate church is dry and dead.

THE EXTENT OF THE WOMAN'S OPERATION

The key figure in the vision is the woman. **"And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast."** Revelation 17:3. It has already been established in earlier chapters that the woman, who is called the harlot, is the apostate church. Similarly, the beast has already been identified as the first beast of Revelation 13, or the antichrist.

The vision depicts the harlot riding on the back of the beast. This indicates the closely dependent relationship between the apostate church and the antichrist who carries her. Rome is declared to be a source or base of foundational importance to the harlot. **"Here is the mind that has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits."** Revelation 17:9

The last chapter exposed the work of the spirit of antichrist in making an image or model of spiritual apostasy in the form of the Roman Catholic Church. The replacement of the true worship of God with an alternative and false religion is a basic function of the harlot. This alternative religion aggresses directly on the church. Note John's description of the **"woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus."** Revelation 17:6.

However the influence of the harlot is not limited to the seven hills of Rome, or even the whole of denominational Christianity. The Key Bible Reading describes a **"great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication."** Revelation 17:1-2. The apostle John was told that **"The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues."** Revelation 17:15.

The area of the harlot's operation extends to every major aspect of man's existence, including the political and economic. Not only **"the kings of the earth....will weep and lament for her" but also "the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her."** Revelation 18:9, 11. In conclusion therefore, the area of her operation includes both the church and the world, and extends over the whole earth.

This understanding of the all-pervasive influence of the alternative religion of the harlot is confirmed by studying each of her titles. **"And on her forehead a name was written:**

**MYSTERY
BABYLON THE GREAT,
THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS,
AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS
OF THE EARTH."**

Revelation 17:5.

The last chapter indicated the importance of names in describing the attributes and overall character of someone. The balance of this chapter will go on to explore the nature of the harlot as it is revealed in each of her names.

BABYLON THE GREAT

Throughout the Old Testament, the city of Babylon is consistently condemned as a symbol of false worship and idolatry. Babylon represented worldliness, wantonness and wealth, and eventually the ancient city was destroyed by God for its pride and wickedness. However the idolatrous religious system that it spawned had survived and multiplied throughout the world.

The first reference to Babylon in the bible is made in regard to its founder Nimrod, whose name means 'rebel' in the Hebrew language. **"Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one on the earth.... And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. From that land he went to Assyria and built Niniveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah, and Resen."**

Genesis 10:8,10-12. Nimrod was described as **"the mighty hunter before the Lord."** Genesis 10:9, and is the first character in the bible to assume earthly imperial power. His foundational role is implicit in the words of the prophet Micah, who recorded Babylon as **"the land of Nimrod."** Micah

5:6. Nimrod was therefore the first great world ruler - "**a mighty one on the earth.**" and a builder of cities.

Nimrod is recorded in ancient history not only as a proud man, but also the first one to be deified and worshipped. He was known as "the liberator" and "the deliverer" from the fear of God, and he led his people to seek their fulfillment in sensual pursuits. He was the original type of Antichrist, who promoted man's rebellion from God by glorifying his own achievements, and revelling in material luxury.

However, it is necessary to turn to Nimrod's beautiful and amoral wife Semiramis in order to see the full expression of "Babylon the Great." When Nimrod died, his widow Semiramis claimed that his death had been a sacrificial one for his people, and that he had been 'resurrected' in the form of her baby son. Through this contrivance Semiramis transferred the worship of the deified Nimrod to the worship of herself and her child.

This mother and infant son image provided the foundation for similar idolatrous worship in later pagan religions. The image was worshipped as Isis and Horus in Egypt, as Aphrodite and Eros in Greece, and as Venus and Cupid in Rome. When the apostate church emerged, the image was adapted to the idolatrous worship of the Virgin Mary and the Infant Jesus.

The worship of Semiramis and her child evolved into the worship of Semiramis alone, reigning as 'the queen of heaven.' The prophet Jeremiah specifically prohibited the Jewish people from "**burning incense to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her.**" Jeremiah 44:18. The worship of 'the queen of heaven' was the worship of everything that Semiramis represented. It was the abandoning of all moral restraints to pursue fulfillment in the gratification of physical desires.

Historically Semiramis was renowned for her glamorous lifestyle, being surrounded by the luxuries of the ancient world, and waited on by flattering courtiers. She was a sexually immoral woman and used her beauty to manipulate those around her. While worshipping the 'queen of heaven' no longer comprises "**burning incense**" or "**pouring out drink offerings**" in a temple, the alluring attraction of glamour and luxury remains. Now man worships 'the queen of heaven' in the coveting of her wares, and his consequent pursuit of the material pleasures and luxuries that she flaunts before him.

The origins of Semiramis and Babylon are reflected in the climate of worldliness and wantonness that drives modern society. The 'queen of heaven' is unrepentant in her continued stimulation of the desire "**for all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.**" 1 John 2:16.

Things like food, clothes, houses, cars, and appliances, assume such a degree of importance in the world that they compete directly with man's commitment to God. These objects are idolized to the extent that they provide the focal point of an alternative religion. "**Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.**" 1 John 2:15. This alternative religion glorifies man and his achievements, and it entices him to seek fulfillment through the flesh rather than the spirit.

THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS

The next title of the woman relates to the Old Testament use of the term 'harlot' as a symbol of Israel's apostasy. God warned the Jewish people of the dangers of tolerating idolatrous altars, pillars, and images in their midst "**lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods.**" Exodus 34:15. Despite

repeated warnings, **"they would not listen to their judges, but they played the harlot with other gods, and bowed down to them."** Judges 3:17.

From out of the city of Babylon there emerged an apostate religious system which idolized the physical achievements of man, and worshipped a woman as goddess. Originally the title **"mother of harlots"** applied to the city of Babylon and to the idolatrous religion she had spawned. However after the destruction of Babylon, the seat of corruption moved to Rome.

At the time of the early church, the capital of Roman government in the province of Asia was Pergamos. The apostle John was instructed to write to the church at Pergamos, and clearly identified the city as **"where Satan's throne is"** and **"where Satan dwells."** Revelation 2:13.

To the leaders of the early church, the corruption of Rome was so closely related to the apostasy of Babylon, that the titles were interchangeable. This is illustrated by the apostle's Peter's letter to the Christians in Asia Minor. **"The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you."** I Peter 5:13.

This is a symbolic reference to Rome rather than the desolate ruins of ancient Babylon. Rome became the centre of religious idolatry that had its origins in Babylon. The spiritual roots of the Papacy in Rome are betrayed by its direct inheritance of numerous idolatrous rites and practices from Babylon. The following features were translated into the observances of the Roman Catholic Church.

Celibate priests and dedicated virgins.

Spiritual knowledge restricted to an elite priesthood.

Mary the mother of Jesus deified. The mother and infant son image worshipped as the 'Madonna and child.'

The doctrine of purgatorial purification.

The use of 'holy water.'

In addition, the College of Cardinals with the pope at its head can trace its ancestry back through the Roman college of pontiffs to the Babylonian college of pontiffs.

The title **"mother of harlots"** originally applied to Babylon, which was the 'mother' of all apostasy. This title was translated to Rome, and was manifested in the papacy of the Catholic Church. In this form it became the first fully developed expression of apostate religion claiming to represent the Christian church. The Key Bible Reading describes the harlot riding on the back of Antichrist, and with her seat in Rome.

The most significant form of apostasy is the counterfeit of the divine precepts of God with those initiated by men. Jesus condemned the Pharisees, saying, **"Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honour Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"** Matthew 15:7—9.

An example of the introduction of a man-made precept to replace the truth of the gospel concerns the doctrine of Jesus Christ as our high priest. This spiritual doctrine informs the believer that his approach to God is through Jesus, on the basis that His blood has made us worthy. However the man-made precept declares that man is too unworthy to approach even Jesus directly, and so must rely on the intercession of Mary or the 'saints.'

The man-made precept replaces the redeeming blood of Jesus,(and His office as our high priest), with the worship of Mary, who was a created being. Jesus specifically warned His disciples not to exalt the members of His family. On one occasion He was told that His mother and His brothers were waiting outside to speak to Him. He replied, **"Here are My mother and My brothers! For**

whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother." Matthew 12:49-50.

Man-made precepts abound in the apostate church, and they all serve to divert true worship away from Christ. Believers are deflected by idolatrous reverence towards statues and relics, or by legalistic adherence to religious custom such as celibacy and abstinence from meals. False doctrines such as priestly absolution and papal infallibility all undermine the finished work of Christ on the cross.

However it would be a mistake to level the whole weight of the charge of apostasy solely on the Roman Catholic Church. The title is the "**mother of harlots**," and this 'mother' has spawned many 'children.' The tares of apostasy have found their way into every denomination. The exaltation of the man-made in magnificent buildings or 'high liturgy' or religious traditions, all proclaim the presence of the harlot.

The prophet Isaiah paints a vivid picture of the apostate church as a degenerate city. "**How the faithful city has become a harlot. It was full of justice; righteousness lodged in it, but now murders. Your silver (our redeemed life in Christ) has become dross. Your wine (our joy in the Spirit) mixed with water.**" Isaiah 1:21-22.

MYSTERY

The next title of the harlot is "Mystery", which is an appropriate shroud for the apostate church. Frequently mystery is mistaken for spirituality. However in this case is a device which the spirit of antichrist uses to seduce carnal Christians into submitting to Satan.

Once a person submits blindly to things he does not understand, he is in effect submitting himself to those who claim to understand them. Because these mysteries are considered impenetrable by the ordinary person, it is assumed that those who do 'understand' them are spiritually superior. This belief inevitably places the uninitiated into occultist bondage to a select group who are initiated.

The origin of the use of mystery as a source of occultist power over others is to be found in the religious rites of Babylon. All pagan religions have a similarity which exposes their common origin in Nimrod and Semiramis. As a result of this common origin, all pagan religions share an atmosphere of secretiveness. They invariably involve secret rites and hidden mysteries entrusted to an elite priesthood. Entry into the religion is restricted to those prepared to submit blindly to peculiar initiation rites, the details of which are jealously guarded.

An atmosphere of mystery was promoted by the remotely situated pagan altars of Old Testament Israel., "**They set up for themselves sacred pillars and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree.**" 2 Kings 17:10. The isolation of mountain sides and forest groves enhanced the secret and forbidden nature of these cults, and enticed the children of Israel into idolatrous worship.

Later on, the power of the harlot fell on the craft guilds and trade unions of ancient society. The same pattern of secret initiation rites and practices, and the worship of a pagan goddess, welded an occultist bondage between members. This bondage was so strong that threats to the prosperity or viability of such a league were often met with rage and violence.

On one occasion Paul and his companions were preaching in the city of Ephesus. This city was also the site of the major temple of the goddess Diana, and the centre of that religious cult. A silversmith called Demetrius gathered together all the craftsmen who depended on the manufacture of idolatrous objects. "**Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade....not only is**

this trade falling into disrepute, but the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised." Acts 19:25,27. The resulting riot nearly cost the missionaries' lives.

It was out of the great mediaeval craft guilds and trade unions that the various lodges and secret societies of our own times emerged. These lodges have a respectable image based on their apparent concern for their members' welfare. However their pagan origins and use of secret ceremonies and mystical symbols impose an occultist bondage on their members.

This requirement of blind obedience to an order of priests soon infiltrated Christianity. In the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches it manifested itself in an intricate liturgy, and restriction of all spiritual knowledge to the clergy. The sacred mysteries of the early church were allegedly entrusted into the hands of a spiritually elite priesthood. The true meaning of the sacraments soon became remote to the majority of believers, who were held captive in a thrall of mystery.

This effect is illustrated by two examples from the Roman Catholic Church. For most of the Church's history the liturgy (the Mass) was said in Latin, which rendered it incomprehensible to the ordinary believer. Furthermore, bibles were literally chained to the pulpit, with access to them restricted to the clergy. In this atmosphere of mystery and ignorance, the spirit of antichrist has little difficulty in deceiving believers into idolatrous worship. The created religious trappings and rites became the objects of worship, rather than the Creator Himself.

The church was diverted from its divine course with Jesus at the head of His working body of saints. Instead, the extravagantly decorated building became 'the Church,' and its religious artifacts became objects of worship. Access to the kingdom of heaven became a matter of compliance to the mysterious doctrines and practices of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, rather than salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

The use of mystery and ignorance was not entirely eradicated by the Protestant reformers. There has been a trend over the past decades to restore 'mystery' in worship, by reverting to 'high' liturgy and practices. The spirit of antichrist has duped many into believing that the 'higher' the worship, the more spiritual it is. The pressure to submit to the antichrist in this way has become more intense in our own generation.

(THE MOTHER OF) THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH

The harlot is called "**the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth**" in the Key Bible Reading. The word 'abominations' is used here to describe what is highly esteemed by men, but reviled by God. It is a word constantly associated with idolatry in the Old Testament, and suggests that what men esteem can easily become an idol in their hearts.

The alternative religion of the harlot or the Woman Babylon is the religion of the world. It is a seductive combination of success and sensual gratification. The Woman Babylon says that if it feels good then do it! She encourages man to cast off all moral restraint and to pursue the instant gratification of his fleshly desires. A flick of the television dial is sufficient to confirm that the whole world is under the power of the Woman Babylon.

An angel told the apostle John that "**the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury.**" Revelation 18:3. Later, in the same vision, the angel told John that "**the kings of the earth....committed fornication and lives luxuriously with her.**" Revelation 18:9. It is clear that the leaders of both the political and the commercial worlds are tainted by the harlot, but this corruption also extends over the rest of mankind. The apostle John was told that "**the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication.**" Revelation 17:2.

This is an all inclusive statement, and reinforces the charge laid against the Woman Babylon that **"by your sorcery all the nations were deceived."** Revelation 18:23.

All of us have been overawed by the extravagance of the Woman Babylon. All of us have partaken of her sickly sweet perfume, and tasted her **"golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication."** Revelation 17:4. The harlot is the goddess of profit and intrigue, and is worshipped in all the respectable financial institutions and commercial corporations. She is also goddess of the sexual indulgence and occultist violence that is worshipped as legitimate artistic expression on stage and screen. The harlot has infiltrated medicine, education, media, science, and even the church. She has corrupted all that she has touched in her indiscriminate seduction of anyone and everything.

It is important in a situation as comprehensively devastating as this to be absolutely obedient to our Father in heaven. When we listen to God in our spirits we do not in all honesty hear exhortations to political action. We are not commanded to reform our society with civic protest or legislative programs. Instead we are simply told the get out.

It is not our position to destroy the Woman Babylon because God has undertaken to judge and pass sentence on her Himself. **"For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He had avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her."** Revelation 19:2.

Her end will not come through the frantic efforts of the saints, but by a sovereign act of God. **"For in one hour your judgment has come,"** and again, **"For in one hour such great riches came to nothing."** Revelation 18:10,17. God promises her complete destruction. **"Therefore her plagues will come in one day – death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judges her."** Revelation 18:8. God's instructions to His children are equally clear. **"Come out of her, My people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues."** Revelation 18:4.

IN SUMMARY

Through the working of the spirit of antichrist, the power of apostasy which had its origin in Babylon has infiltrated the church. It has manifested an alternative religion which diverts worship away from Christ towards things man has made.

The attack of the harlot, or Woman Babylon, has been twofold in seducing both those in the world and those in the church. She has manufactured a counterfeit 'church' to delude the saints, and she has developed a worldly religion which seduces all and sundry away from seeking God. The harlot transfers the attention of man away from the spiritual towards the fleshly and physical.

It is important to recognise that God is not asking us to reform the harlot. Instead, He is commanding us to **"Come out of her"** so that we escape His judgment on her. The next chapter will study this judgment of the Woman Babylon and her consequent destruction.

THE FALL OF BABYLON

KEY BIBLE READING

Revelation 18:1-8 "After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury. And I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. Render to her just as she rendered to you, and repay her double according to her works; in the cup which she has mixed, mix double for her. In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow; for she says in her heart, 'I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.' Therefore her plagues will come in one day-- death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judges her."

THE TWOFOLD JUDGMENT OF GOD

The last chapter established that the harlot, or the Woman Babylon, is an alternative religion which had its origin in ancient Babylon. This alternative religion operates in the two areas of the world, and the church, but its fundamental aim remains the same in each case. It seeks to divert true worship away from God the Creator, and substitute it with false worship of the created things of man.

In the church, the woman Babylon, replaces spiritual authority with worldly authority, spiritual teaching with the precepts of man, and spiritual worship with idolatrous worship. In the world, the Woman Babylon idolises the products of man's own efforts, and urges him to satisfy all his needs with them. By encouraging man to glory in his own achievement, the harlot is promoting the blasphemy that man has no need of God.

The twofold judgment of the harlot by God is prophesied in the Book of Revelation. Firstly there is the judgment of the apostate church, which involves anyone who "**worships the beast and his image...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.**" Revelation 14:9,10. The second part of God's judgment on the Woman Babylon is directed at her worldly religion. It is pronounced against the idolatrous system of worshipping "**the world or the things in the world.**" 1 John 2:15. Included in this judgment is anyone who submits to "**the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.**" Revelation 13:17.

1. JUDGMENT OF THE WORLD'S RELIGION

"**The kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.'** And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore: merchandise of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of citron wood, every kind of

object of ivory, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble; and cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and bodies and souls of men. And the fruit that your soul longed for has gone from you, and all the things which are rich and splendid have gone from you, and you shall find them no more at all. The merchants of these things, who became rich by her, will stand at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, and saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls! 'For in one hour such great riches came to nothing.' Every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, 'What is like this great city?' They threw dust on their heads and cried out, weeping and wailing, and saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth! For in one hour she is made desolate.'" Revelation 18:9-19.

This reading prophesies the final and complete destruction of the Woman Babylon. It prophesies an end to the alternative religion of the world which idolises man-made objects. The great system of international trade and commerce, and the worship of affluence and luxury are judged here. Items like gold, precious stones, citron wood, and fragrant oil, symbolise affluence and luxury.

Items like oil, wheat, cattle and sheep, symbolise trade and commerce. Items like "**horses and chariots, and bodies and souls of men,**" symbolise the power which this alternative religion has over mankind.

God pronounces His judgment against the harlot and all the objects she has used to seduce His children into idolatrous worship. "**And the fruit that your soul longed for has gone from you, and all the things which are rich and splendid have gone from you, and you shall find them no more at all.**" Revelation 18:14.

THE TEN KINGS INSTRUMENTS OF GOD'S JUDGMENT

The destruction of the Woman Babylon is not our responsibility. "**Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!**" Revelation 18:20. The Lord God of all creation has righteously judged her, and He will bring about her destruction. The instruments He will use are the ten kings of Revelation 17.

"And the ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful." Then he said to me, "The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues. **And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled.**" Revelation 17:12-17.

It is useful at this point to recall that the Book of Revelation is a book of symbols. In this reading the "**ten kings**" are not actual monarchs, but representative of great positions of power and authority. Because they have "**no kingdom as yet**" they are not heads of nations either. Nor should the number ten be taken literally, but rather as the complete number necessary for God to fulfil His purposes.

The **"ten kings"** are the great economic heads of power: the giant international corporations and financial institutions, whose boardroom decisions determine prosperity or poverty for the rest of the world. As they **"give their power and authority to the beast"** they will **"receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast."** While these **"kings"** have no **"kingdom"** of their own, they will now reign **"as kings"** for **"one hour,"** so that even rulers of nations are forced to comply with their demands.

The instruments that God will use to destroy the Woman Babylon are the same forces that were instrumental in her formation. They are the leaders of trade and commerce, the **"merchants"** and **"shipowners,"** who now occupy the seats of economic power in the world. God has put it into their hearts to cooperate with Antichrist in the absolute destruction of all they have created. The sovereign power and glory of God is demonstrated as he bends the powers of darkness to perform His will.

This process has already occurred during partial fulfillments of the prophecy. During the 1890's, and again in the 1930's, the world's economy plummeted towards bankruptcy and destitution. Man's greed had fuelled the flames of speculation and inflation, until a crisis in confidence finally caused the bubble to burst. The resulting fear and panic led to a dramatic contraction of economic activity, and many lost all their material wealth in the subsequent collapse.

These past depressions and recessions have been God's warning signs, in an effort to cause man to rethink his values. They have been designed to turn man away from the reliance on his own skills and strength, and towards God as the real source of his provision. Man has been prompted by God to search for a more significant meaning to his life than the unreliable pursuit of material prosperity.

There now remains one final and conclusive judgment of the Woman Babylon. She is to be completely destroyed, never to rise again. **"Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, 'Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found any more.'"** Revelation 18:21.

THE DRUNKEN STUPOR OF THE WORLD

The apostle John was told that **"the inhabitants of the earth were made drink with the wine of her fornication."** Revelation 17:2. The harlot has intoxicated us with her mystery, and overwhelmed us with her opulence. We have been seduced by her comforting and undemanding doctrine, and so we are declared to be drunk, or blind to the truth.

In the general euphoria of the years immediately after the Second World War, it seemed as if man had finally overcome Adam's curse of sweat and toil. **"Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat from it all the days of your life."** Genesis 3:17. With intellectual theories and technological advances, man seemed destined to overcome the law of want and replace it with the law of plenty.

The Keynesian revolution promised the economies of the world unlimited, and equitably distributed material wealth. All governments had to do was borrow money and spend their way into prosperity. Likewise big advances in agricultural science promised to free the undeveloped countries from their acute poverty. With extensive application of fertilizers and trace elements, starving countries had the potential to become rice bowls.

In those years of post war reconstruction, the social planners and politicians envisaged a 'brave new world,' of civil liberties and moral permissiveness. They foresaw an enlightened society freed from the constraints of 'Victorian morality.' Man would be able to indulge all of his desires, provided they did not infringe of the rights of his neighbour to do the same.

The blind pursuit of these dreams of 'paradise on earth' has engulfed man in the perfume of the harlot. He has become intoxicated by visions of 'the good life,' surrounded by material affluence, and freed from all moral restraints. Man is in a drunken stupor, and continues to stumble towards his destruction in the arms of the harlot.

**"With her enticing speech she caused him to yield,
With her flattering lips she seduced him.
Immediately he went after her, as an ox goes to the slaughter,
Or as a fool to the correction of the stocks,
Till an arrow struck his liver.
As a bird hastens to the snare,
He did not know it would cost his life.....
For she has cast down many wounded,
And all who were slain by her were strong men.
Her house is the way to hell,
Descending to the chambers of death." Proverbs 7:223, 26-27**

2. JUDGMENT OF THE WORLDLY CHURCH

The institutional church will not be able to avoid God's judgment on the worldly religious system of the Woman Babylon. **"And the fruit that your soul longed for has gone from you, and all the things which are rich and splendid have gone from you, and you shall find them no more at all."** Revelation 18:14.

The first five chapters of the book of Isaiah present a prophetic picture of God's dealings with the church. Although this picture is **"concerning Judah and Jerusalem,"** it is also valid to project it into the church age. **"Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it."** Isaiah 2:2.

First of all the opulent state of the institutional church is described. **"Their land is also full of silver and gold, and there is no end to their treasures;.....Their land is also full of idols; They worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made."** Isaiah 2:7,8.

Then the awesome judgment of God on this idolatry is pronounced. **"In that day a man will cast away his idols of gold, which they made, each for himself to worship....From the terror of the Lord and the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily....For behold, the Lord, the Lord of hosts, takes away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stock and the store, the whole supply of bread, and the whole supply of water."** Isaiah 2:20,21, 3:1.

This judgment will be so comprehensive that it will decimate the man-made institution. All that is valued by man will fall under and be broken by the power of God's judgment. The impact of God's judgment in this area is prophesied in Zechariah 14. This prophecy presents a picture of **"the day of the Lord"** and the **"battle against Jerusalem."** The city of Jerusalem is a symbol of the whole church including both true and false elements. The nations who surround the city are symbols of God's appointed instruments of judgment.

"Behold the day of the Lord is coming, and your spoil will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city." Zechariah 14:1-2. God's judgment is pronounced on the institutional church's dependence on money. The inhabitants of Jerusalem are told **"your spoil will be divided in your midst...the city shall be taken, the houses rifled."**

Members of the institutional church have become complacent in their apparent wealth and prosperity. They have been running it like a business, by paying their fees and then employing a professional minister to manage 'the enterprise.' Because of this apathetic worldliness, the 'church' no longer presents a distinctive witness of truth to the world. It has failed to be different from the world.

It is clear that the church is to be purged clean of its dependence on material wealth and humanistic endeavour. Church members have sought security in economic well-being, but this is now to be stripped from them. They have run their denominations with money, but now this economic scaffolding is to collapse. All the impressive structures put up by man instead of God are set to crumble.

In a similar manner Jesus rebuked the church of the Laodiceans. **"Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' - and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked - I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich."** Revelation 3:17-18.

GOD'S ASSURANCE TO THE FAITHFUL

There are two companies of people who are sealed in the book of Revelation. First there are those who have the mark of the beast sealed on their foreheads. They have been seduced by the Woman Babylon into idolising man's abilities and the objects he makes.

Secondly there are those who have the name of God sealed on their foreheads. **"Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads."** Revelation 7:3. This is a seal of God's ownership. **"Then I looked and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads."** Revelation 14:4.

Those who are sealed by God, are separated and totally consecrated to Him. **"These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins."** Revelation 14:4. Their virginity symbolises the purity of their dedication to God and the absence of any flirtation with the harlot. They are wholly God's and **"follow the Lamb wherever He goes."** Revelation 14:4. Because the **"one hundred and forty-four thousand"** trust God to supply all their needs, He bestows His seal of ownership on them. This signifies that He is responsible for them, and will protect them and provide for them.

**"Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord,
And whose hope is the Lord.
For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters.
Which spreads out its roots by the river,
And will not fear when heat comes;
But her leaf will be green,
And will not be anxious in the year of drought,
Nor will cease from yielding fruit."** Jeremiah 17:7-8.

THE JUDGMENT OF GOD

KEY BIBLE READING

Revelation 19:1-6 "After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God! For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her. Again they said, "Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever!" And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne, saying, "Amen! Alleluia!" Then a voice came from the throne, saying, "Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!" And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!"

THE HOLINESS OF GOD

Before we can rightly apprehend the nature of God's judgments, we must have had our hearts opened, so that by the Holy Spirit and the word of God, we might begin to see the holiness of God, and the justice of God. The prerequisite for this revelation is a humble spirit which has been opened to the knowledge of the fear of God. **"But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word."** Isaiah 66:2.

The first thing we need to understand is that God alone is holy. The overcomers proclaim, **"Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy."** Revelation 15:4. The only holiness we have as God's children is that which is due to His presence in us.

The essence of holiness is a complete and utter separation from all sin and darkness. God dwells in a light that to man is unapproachable. That light is the full knowledge of God's holiness and glory. After he returned from the presence of God, **"the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance."** 2 Corinthians 3:7.

The bible declares that **"righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne."** Psalm 97:2. Righteousness and justice are so fundamental to the holiness of God, that it is impossible for Him to tolerate sin. To God sin is so abhorrent, that every stain and trace of it had to be dealt with, even in His own children. In this respect He ordained His own Son to bear the full extent of our punishment, until every demand of justice was silenced. **"He did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all."** Romans 8:32.

LEARNING TO FEAR GOD

The revelation of God's holiness and learning to fear God go hand in hand. **"Who shall not fear You, O Lord....For You alone are holy."** Revelation 15:04. To fear God is to revere His holiness, and consequently to tremble at His word.

As baby Christians we have an immature image of God as a kindly grandfather type figure dispensing 'jellybeans' to His children. This 'Father Christmas' image precludes any notion of Him disciplining His children. The most pressing need in our church today is for us to shake off this childish picture of God, and begin to learn to fear Him. **"Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord."** Psalm 34:11.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." Proverbs 9:10. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom because it is the beginning of the knowledge and understanding of God. We are also told that **"the fear of the Lord is to hate evil."** Proverbs 8:13. Involved in learning to fear God is to share with Him the hatred of all evil.

The immature Christian has little real fear of God, and does not see the pressing need to separate himself and the sanctuary from all evil. There is a current permissiveness in the denominational church which welcomes unrepentant sinners into the family of God (such as practicing homosexuals and adulterers), on the basis that 'God is love'. The apostle Paul warns, **"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor revilers, nor extortioners, will inherit the kingdom of God."** 1 Corinthians 6:9-10.

CLEANSING THE SANCTUARY

God spoke to the prophet Ezekiel, saying, **"Mark well who may enter the house and all who go out from the sanctuary."** Ezekiel 44:5. He then went on to declare the neglect of the children of Israel in not honouring His holiness, **"when you brought in foreigners, uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in My sanctuary to defile it - My house....And you have not kept charge of My holy things, but you have set others to keep charge of My sanctuary for you."** Ezekiel 4:7,8.

King David had to be taught a terrible lesson when he too fell into complacency concerning the holiness of God. The first time he attempted to return the holy ark, (which was the object over which God chose to manifest His presence to the Israelites) to Jerusalem, he used unanointed servants. **"And when they came to Chidon's threshing floor, Uzza put out his hand to hold the ark, for the oxen stumbled. Then the anger of the Lord was aroused against Uzza, and He struck him because he put his hand to the ark; and he died there before God....David was afraid of God that day, saying, 'How can I bring the ark to me?'"** 1 Chronicles 13:9,10,12.

With some reflection, King David learnt from his mistake, and before making another attempt to retrieve the ark, he made proper arrangements. **"Then David said, 'no one may carry the ark of God but the Levites, for the Lord has chosen them to carry the ark of God and to minister before Him forever.'" 1 Chronicles 15:2.**

These warnings are not limited to observances in the temple of the Old Testament. We should be careful to heed Christ's warning in the parable of the wheat and the tares. **"The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness."** Matthew 13:41.

GOD WILL JUDGE ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS

The bible is full of uncompromising statements that declare God's inevitable judgment of all unrighteousness. For example:

**"Behold, the day of the Lord comes,
Cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger,
To lay the land desolate;
And He will destroy sinners from it...
I will punish the world for its evil,
And the wicked for their iniquity;**

And I will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible." Isaiah 13:9,11.

**"The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken in pieces;
From heaven He will thunder against them.
The Lord will judge the ends of the earth." 1 Samuel 2:10.**

**"Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people;
For He will avenge the blood of His servants,
And vengeance to His adversaries;
He will provide atonement for His land and His people." Deuteronomy 32:43.**

These readings must be disturbing to those who have no feeling for the holiness of God. No doubt they would prefer to confine them to the Old Testament Hebrews. It must therefore be even more disturbing for them to read the warnings to the New Testament Hebrews who were Christians.

"For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries....For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, says the Lord.' And again, 'The Lord will judge His people.' It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Hebrews 10:26-27,30-31.

Believers are tempted to try and justify God's fearsome judgments of sinful man, by declaring it to be borne out of love, and a concern to bring sinners to repentance. While God does have that concern, it is not the heart of the matter. God will judge all unrighteousness because of who He is - The Holy One of Israel, and the God of all Justice and Righteousness. GOD WILL JUDGE SIN BECAUSE HE IS HOLY. He cannot entertain an unrepentant heart even in His own children, nor accept anything less than the blood of Jesus as the basis of our righteousness.

OUR RESPONSE TO GOD'S JUDGMENTS

Those who have not learned to fear God tend to try to make His awesome judgments more palatable. They discount and discredit His word because they refuse to believe a God of love could punish with such severity. They become rebellious and defiant when they are faced with God's justice.

Those who have caught a glimpse of the holiness of God have a different response. **"Shall not the Judge of the earth do right?"** Genesis 18:25. They will agree in their hearts with Paul's expression of praise. **"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!"** Romans 11:33.

There is an automatic response of praise and worship from those who have learnt the fear of God, and have opened their hearts to the knowledge of His holiness. In the Key Bible reading a great multitude in heaven praise God for His judgment of the harlot. **"For true and righteous are His judgments."** Similarly, the overcomers heralded God's judgmental bowls of wrath.

**"Great and marvellous are Your works, Lord God Almighty!
Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints!
Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name?
For You alone are holy.
For all the nations shall come and worship before You,
For Your judgments have been manifested." Revelation 15:3-4.**

THE NATURE OF GOD'S JUDGMENT

In order to understand the nature of God's judgments, we must first, like Elisha's servant, have our eyes opened to see our true positions in the spiritual realm. At one stage the prophet Elisha and his servant found themselves entirely surrounded by the might of the Syrian army. The servant cried out in alarm to his master, wondering what they were to do.

Elisha reassured his servant. **"Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them."** And Elisha prayed, and said, **'Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.'** Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. **And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire, all around Elisha."** 2 Kings 6:16-17.

Among the many blessings that are counted to those who fear the Lord is the blessing of the Lord's protection. **"The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them."** Psalm 34:7. When Satan contended with God for Job's soul, he bemoaned the fact that Job was under God's protection. **"Have you not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side?"** Job 1:10.

We too are surrounded with a 'hedge' of God's protection. God patiently guards His children from the overwhelming power of Satan, whose hatred would consume us in an instant if it was allowed. We are protected by the hedge so that we have every opportunity to draw closer to our Father in heaven.

The nature of God's judgment is to withdraw this hedge by degrees, and so confront the rebellious in heart with the powers of darkness that they had been courting. The Old Testament book of the prophet Isaiah provides a picture of this process in the story of the disappointing vineyard.

"My Well- beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. He dug it up and cleared out its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, and also made a winepress in it; so He expected it to bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes." Isaiah 5:1-2. There was nothing more that God could have done to ensure a pure crop, and yet the result was rank.

"And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned; and break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will lay it to waste; it shall not be pruned or dug, but there shall come up briars and thorns." Isaiah 5:5-6. God removed the vineyard's protection so that it was exposed to the wilderness it had reverted to.

THE VALLEY OF JEHOSEPHAT

God has disclosed the nature of His judgment on the nations, (i.e. those who have resisted Him and afflicted His children). He has said He is bringing them into the Valley of Jehoshaphat. **"I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will enter into judgment with them there on account of My people."** Joel 3:2.

It is useful to consider the experience of King Jehoshaphat in this context. Jehoshaphat lived and reigned over Judah in the 9th century BC. At one stage his kingdom was invaded by some neighbouring states. **"And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord."** 2 Chronicles 20:3. The king and his people were told, **"Do not be afraid or dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's..... You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord."** 2 Chronicles 20:15,17.

Instead of panicking, or suing for peace, Jehoshaphat believed this word from the Lord and trusted in it. He counseled His people to **"Believe in the Lord your God, and you shall be**

established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper." 2 Chronicles 2:20. Then he appointed singers to go out before the enemy and **"sing to the Lord,"** and **"praise the beauty of holiness."** 2 Chronicles 20:21. The fruit of this act of faith and obedience was the complete self destruction of the opposing armies.

"Now when they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated. For the people of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir to utterly kill and destroy them. And when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, they helped destroy one another." 2 Chronicles 20:22-23.

At the close of the age, the true church is in the same position as the armies of Jehoshaphat. **"They (i.e. the nations deceived by Satan) went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city."** Revelation 20:9. The church is surrounded by the hostile apostate church which has been incited to violent hatred by the antichrist. When we are confronted with this opposition, we are not to fear or be dismayed. We are to position ourselves and stand still. We are to believe in the Lord and His prophets, and praise the beauty of holiness.

The rest is up to the Lord. When God lowers the hedge, He withdraws His restraining hand which has been holding back the powers of darkness. The spirits of hatred and resentment and jealousy that are in league against the saints will then turn on one another. The resulting process of self destruction will go on until all that opposes the true church will be brought to naught.

THE VALLEY OF DECISION

The valley of Jehoshaphat is a valley of judgment. At the end of the age God's mighty angels will gather out **"all those who practice lawlessness"** and enter into judgment with them. **"Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations."** Joel 3:12. As a prelude to this judgment God is bringing mankind into as valley of decision. **"Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision."** Joel 3:14. This is the place or time to which God brings us all to make our choice. It is the moment when we make the decision which results in the separation of **"the children of the wicked one"** from **"the children of the kingdom."**

The prophet sets the scene. **"For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon will grow dark, and the stars will diminish their brightness."** Joel 3:14-15. The multitudes of the world have been plunged into spiritual darkness because of their indifference and hardness of heart. The tragedy is **"that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."** John 3:19.

Jesus said that **"the heart of this people has grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their heart and turn."** Matthew 13:15. Paul wrote that **"our gospel is veiled...to those...whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe."** 2 Corinthians 4:3,4.

The apostle Paul warned Timothy that even Christians would compromise the truth. **"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."** 2 Timothy 4:3-4.

This is the scene then. The two witnesses, the word of God and the spirit of prophecy, lie dead in the street because men loved darkness rather than the truth. Even the church lies in darkness.

Suddenly the power of the Spirit of God falls, drenching the church and the nations in the 'latter rain'. This is a deluge of power and light and truth which is a preparation for the last great harvest. The two witnesses stand on their feet to proclaim God's prophetic truths for this time.

Immediately this truth falls on the ears of anyone, that person is brought into the valley of decision. He has to make a choice, because before him lies two paths. One is the path of darkness on which he has been walking, and this threatens to become even darker as it leads to the judgment of God. The second path is the way of light and truth. This path leads out of Satan's prison house of deception and darkness, and into the knowledge and glory of Christ.

HEAVEN AND EARTH ARE SHAKEN

The Lord is coming into His church. **"His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."** Matthew 3:12. The wrath of God will fall, and **"the heavens and earth will shake; but the Lord will be a shelter for His people, and the strength of the children of Israel."** Joel 3:16.

This is a time of great sifting within the church. **"For thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Once more...I will shake heaven and earth.'" Haggai 2:6.** The writer of the letter to the Hebrews concludes that **"this 'Yet once more,' indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain." Hebrews 12:27.**

The Lord will not tolerate sectarian bigotry or the divisions of denominationalism. He will expose the works of Antichrist, and purge His church of apostasy. **"And the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth (the testimony of the two witnesses) and destroy with the brightness of His coming."** 2 Thessalonians 2:8.

There is no escaping the valley of decision. God is confronting everyone with a choice. On the one hand the works of darkness are being revealed, and on the other hand the true works of Christ are being set before us. We can remain in darkness and suffer the judgmental wrath of God, or we can repent of darkness and choose light.

**"Therefore
'Come out from among them
And be separate, says the Lord.
Do not touch what is unclean,
And I will receive you.'" 2 Corinthians 6:17.**

IN SUMMARY

Before we are able to understand the nature of God's judgments, we have to learn to fear Him, and open our hearts to the knowledge of His holiness. When we learn to hate evil as God hates evil, then we can do nothing but praise Him as His judgments are manifested.

The saints are required to separate themselves from all evil and protect the sanctuary of God. To this end we are all brought into the valley of decision, where we have to make the choice that determines whether we follow the path of apostasy or the path of light. As God's judgment falls on apostasy, the saints are to rest in the Lord and **"praise the beauty of holiness."**

The following three chapters will study God's judgment in some detail. The next chapter will examine the 'Great Tribulation' or God's judgment on the Jewish nation. This is a physical judgment which has often been confused with God's last and spiritual judgment at the end of the age. The

subsequent two chapters will go on to study the specific features of that final judgment. These are outlined in the seven trumpets and the seven plagues of the Book of Revelation.

THE GREAT TRIBULATION

KEY BIBLE READING

Matthew 24:1-4 "Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down." Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be?" And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" And Jesus answered and said to them:"

Matthew 24:4-14 "...Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. . And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come."

Matthew 24:15-22 "Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place' (whoever reads, let him understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house.. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened."

Matthew 24:23-31"Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; or 'Look, He is in the inner rooms!' do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together. Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

THE DISCIPLES ASK TWO QUESTIONS

The Key Bible Reading describes the disciples coming to Jesus to show Him the temple buildings in Jerusalem. They approached Him with some pride, because these buildings were the focal point of Jewish religion and national life. The disciples were therefore taken aback by Jesus' response. That **"not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down."** Later they sought Him out, and asked Him two quite distinct questions. The first was **"when will these things be?"** Which referred to Jesus' startling prediction of the physical destruction of the temple. The second question was **"what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"**

The Key Bible Reading contains Christ's answer to both these questions, but it does not present them in strictly sequential order. This has led to a lot of confusion, and to the common but erroneous belief that the Great Tribulation refers to the Last Judgment. Careful study of the reading reveals however, that the Great Tribulation is God's physical judgment on the Jewish nation, and has already taken place. Jesus dealt with the second question of **"what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"** in verses 4 to 14, and again in verses 23 to 31. However our main concern in this chapter is Christ's specific answer to the first question of **"when will these things be?"**, which referred directly to the destruction of the temple. This answer is contained in verses 15 to 22.

THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION

Jesus provided the disciples with a clear indication of the timing of the destruction of the temple. It was **"when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place."** Matthew 24:15. Note that this warning was made directly to the Jews. **"(T)hen let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains."** Matthew 24:16. When the Jewish Christians recognised the abomination in **"the holy place"** they were to **"flee to the mountains."**

In referring to the **"abomination of desolation"** Jesus was drawing on a prophecy by Daniel. **"And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate."** Daniel 9:27. The word 'abomination' is closely associated with apostasy and idolatry in the Old Testament. The prophet Daniel's words were warning of a prelude of apostasy that would precede the ultimate destruction of the city and its temple.

A further insight into what the Jewish Christians could expect was provided by Jesus' words as recorded in Luke's gospel. **"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those in Judea flee to the mountains."** Luke 21:20-21. The warnings were precise. There was a clear prelude of apostasy as the Jewish priests persisted with the Mosaic observances despite the lordship of Christ. This was followed by the actual occupation of the city and the temple by rebellious and profane Zealots. Finally the city was surrounded by the legions of Rome. At this final warning the Jewish Christians took the first opportunity provided to them, and fled Jerusalem.

THE HISTORICAL RECORD

When Jesus drew near and saw the city of Jerusalem in those last days before the crucifixion, he wept over it. **"For the days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation."** Luke 19:43-44.

Immediately after the crucifixion at Calvary in 33 AD, the gospel of Christ began to spread throughout the known world. The Roman Empire provided the boundaries of this world, and contained the elements required to speed the process of evangelism. The use of the Greek language was widespread, and the efficient network of Roman roads provided ready access to places throughout the empire.

However within Palestine the tensions between the Jewish inhabitants and their Romans rulers became more pronounced. The Jews were provoked by various insensitive Roman decrees and deeds, such as Pontius Pilate placing legion standards within the temple. A fiercely anti-Roman sect of Zealots continually incited violence, and the country was filled with armed malcontents. False prophets were in evidence throughout the region promoting confusion and division, and finally the Jews revolted. In the initial days they drove all the Romans out from Jerusalem, and set up a revolutionary government in their place.

In 66AD Vespasian was ordered by Nero to conduct a military campaign in Judea, and restore Roman authority. Vespasian duly laid siege to the important city of Jerusalem. In 69 AD Vespasian was suddenly recalled to Rome to be proclaimed emperor. This withdrawal of the besieging forces puzzled the hard-pressed Jews within the city. This sudden and unexpected improvement in their situation led many to believe that they were victorious over Rome. The Christians within Jerusalem were not so deluded. They remembered the words of Jesus to His disciples, "**(T)hen let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.**" Matthew 24:16. They realised that this was their opportunity to escape, and so they all fled across the Jordan or into the hills. Not one Christian was left in Jerusalem.

The jubilant catcalls of the Jews, taunting the retreating Roman soldiers, had scarcely ceased, when the legions returned. This time they were led by Titus, the son of Vespasian. And this time the siege was not to end before God's terrible judgment had been worked out on the Jews of the old covenant.

THE CURSE OF THE LAW

Jesus wept over Jerusalem because the people "**did not know the time of (their) visitation.**" Luke 19:44. He wept because the Jewish people and their religious leaders refused to come out from under the curse of the law and accept His grace. He knew that this disobedience meant the end of the covenant race of Israel.

Moses had told the people of Israel that God would bless them as a nation and as individuals, so long as they fulfilled the conditions of His covenant. Their part was to diligently obey the voice of their God, and to carefully observe all His commandments. The rich blessings which would follow on from this obedience can be read in Deuteronomy 28:1-14.

However, there was another side to this covenant. "**But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you.**" Deuteronomy 28:15. The list of curses reads for the next 53 verses.

"**Cursed shall be the fruit of your body and the produce of your land.....The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies.....The Lord will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of heart....The Lord will bring a nation against you from afar....You shall eat the fruit of your own body, the flesh of your sons and your daughters whom the Lord your God has given you, in the siege and desperate straits in which your enemy will distress you....Then the Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other.**" Deuteronomy 28:18,25,28,49,53,64.

Jesus knew that if the Jewish nation refused to acknowledge Him as the Son of God, they would have to bear every one of those curses. Jesus knew the Scripture, and so He knew the final horror of their judgment. Little wonder that He wept.

Between the time that Vespasian withdrew, and the time that Titus returned, there fell a Passover festival in Jerusalem. It is estimated that 3,000,000 Jews were in the city when the siege was resumed. With such an unnaturally large population within the walls, the effects of starvation were quickly felt. People were reduced to eating their own children as a result of their acute hunger. Under great stress the Jews began turning on each other, with Zealots killing pacifists, and rebels killing Zealots.

God removed the protective hedge, and the Israelites were goaded into action by the spirits of darkness they had entertained in rejecting the Lord. The result was a horrendous slaughter. In 70 AD, when the Roman soldiers finally entered Jerusalem, they found an estimated one and a half million Jews killed by their own countrymen. The historian Josephus reported that the temple was awash with blood. When Titus entered the city he was recorded as looking up into heaven and uttering the words, 'Bear me witness, I didn't do this!'

The temple was burned and the city sacked. Thousands of Jews were taken into captivity as slaves. This once proud people were dispersed from the Iberian Peninsula to India. It was the end of the Jewish nation as God's covenant people.

They had refused to accept the Son of God who bore the curse of the law for them. **"Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law having become a curse for us (for it is written 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree')."** Galatians 3:13. Because of this refusal to accept God's grace, the Jews were compelled to bear that curse themselves.

DANIEL'S SEVENTY WEEKS PROPHECY

The understanding of the Great Tribulation as God's judgment of the Jews is confirmed in the 'seventy weeks prophecy.' **"Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy."** Daniel 9:24.

This prophecy is directed specifically to the Jewish people. It was given to the prophet Daniel by the angel Gabriel, who made pointed reference to **"your people,"** and **"your holy city."** Daniel's people were the Jews, and his holy city was Jerusalem.

Certain events are prophesied to take place over a period of time which is symbolised by **"seventy weeks."** Later in the prophecy, this time is divided into a period of sixty nine weeks, and a period of one week. Much emphasis is then placed on the events prophesied to occur in the last week. Initially however, **"seventy weeks"** is the symbolic period of time which is designated for the complete fulfillment of the whole prophecy.

During the time God determined to **"to finish the transgression"** of the Jewish nation, He determined to **"make an end of sins,"** with the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ on the cross. He determined **"to make reconciliation for iniquity,"** by redeeming fallen man back to God his Creator. He determined to **"bring in everlasting righteousness,"** by the resurrection of Christ to intercede as our great High Priest for ever.

The result of the performance of these things was **"to seal up vision and prophecy,"** because the cross of Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of all vision and prophecy. It was also **"to anoint the Most Holy,"** by declaring that in Christ **"dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily."**

Colossians 2:9. It established that God has **"highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on the earth, and of those under the earth."** Philippians 2:9-10.

The seventy week period of the prophecy is now divided into three unequal parts; 7 weeks in which the temple and walls were to be restored, 62 weeks during which the city of Jerusalem would be re-established as the religious centre of Israel, and a final week in which God's dealings with Israel would be consummated. **"Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times."** Daniel 9:25.

The sixty nine week period begins with the command to Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and ends with the coming of Jesus Christ the Messiah. It is clear that by the time of Christ's ministry in Palestine, the physical city of Jerusalem would be restored. However the key interest of the prophecy is focused on the final period of one week which surrounds the cross of Christ.

THE LAST CLIMACTIC WEEK

"And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined. Then He shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate." Daniel 9:26-27.

Jesus came to establish a new covenant. **"He shall confirm a covenant with many for one week."** This new covenant was manifested in His earthly ministry of teaching, healing, deliverance, and miraculous provision. It was continued after His death by the ministry of the apostles, who taught, healed, delivered, and performed miracles in His name.

In the middle of the week Jesus was crucified, and the veil in the temple was torn from top to bottom. **"(I)n the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering."** Christ's perfect act of atonement on the cross removed the need for the continuous Mosaic ritual of temple sacrifices and offerings. **"And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself."** The words **"cut off"** suggest violent death, and are consistent with the cruel death on the cross.

The final events of the week took place after the crucifixion. **"And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate."** Despite God's grace being extended to them through the miraculous and evangelistic ministries of the early church, the Jewish nation continued in apostasy. The anointed words of the apostle Peter and the martyr Stephen were ignored. **"(A)nd the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary."** God's further period of grace eventually ran out, and the Jews were brought face to face with their terrible judgment.

IN SUMMARY

The Great Tribulation was God's judgment on the Jewish nation. It involved the complete physical destruction of the city of Jerusalem and its temple, both of which were central to the religious and national identity of the Jews. God judged them in this awesome way because they refused to accept the grace He was offering them through His Son Jesus Christ.

The Scriptures prophecy another judgment awaiting mankind at the end of the age. In the Last Judgment, the church will be purged of apostasy and lawlessness. Then all the nations who have rejected Christ, and aggressed on the saints, will be confronted with the judgmental wrath of God. The next two chapters will study the particular aspects of this Last Judgment as prophesied in the Book of Revelation.

THE LAST JUDGMENT (I)

A SPIRITUAL JUDGMENT

In the last chapter we studied the Great Tribulation of the Jewish nation. It was most significantly a physical judgment. God judged His people in a physical way because they were operating under ordinances involving daily physical sacrifices to God.

But Jesus Christ **"does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself."** Hebrews 7:27. We, as the body of Christ, are spiritual heirs to a spiritual kingdom. We appropriate our spiritual promises by faith. We are the spiritual children of Israel. This spirituality does not dilute the terms of our judgment. It merely changes the form.

"Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought of worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?" Hebrews 10:28-29.

The Last Judgment follows a similar pattern to God's judgment of Israel, but instead of being a physical judgment, it is a spiritual one. Rather than the city of Jerusalem being surrounded by Roman armies, the church is surrounded by the spiritual forces of Satan.

God's judgments in the 'end time' begin with the church, and go on to include the unbelieving world. These judgments are unveiled in the writings of the Old Testament prophets, and confirmed in the Book of Revelation. Our study on the end time judgment involves the comparison of two sections of Revelation. It is not uncommon in the bible for one topic to be dealt with in complementary sections, with each section presented from a different viewpoint. The story of creation in the Book of Genesis is an example of this approach. Genesis 1:1 - 2:3 presents the overall picture of creation, and Genesis 2:4 -25 presents a more specific picture from man's perspective.

The first account of judgment in the Book of Revelation finishes at the end of Chapter 11. Here God's judgment on **"those who destroy the earth"** is proclaimed, and we are told that **"the temple of God was opened in heaven"** Revelation 11:18,19. This signifies that from that time the scene of our worship is transferred from earth to heaven. The second account ends in Chapter 22 with a view of the holy city, testifying to the power and glory of Christ enthroned.

Each section contains an account of the Last Judgment. The first section outlines the events to occur in the form of seven trumpets of judgment. The second section outlines these events in the form of seven plagues, or bowls of wrath. These two accounts will be studied side by side.

THE FIRST TRUMPET: THE FIRST PLAGUE

Revelation 8:7. **"The first angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up."**

Revelation 16:2. **"So the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image."**

It was noted in an earlier chapter that the earth is a symbol of the church. This judgment is directed at the church and its involvement with humanism and apostasy. It is specifically directed at **"the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image."** The apostle Peter wrote that **"the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and ...it begins with us first."** 1 Peter 4:17.

The **"hail and fire...mingled with blood"** are symbols of God's judgment, and indicate a severe time of testing and refining. The **"foul and loathsome sore"** that comes upon men is an eruption onto the surface of all the spiritual foulness that had been hidden beneath.

We are told that **"all green grass was burned up"** and it is clear that those who take the gospel lightly, (or who are nominal Christians), will not stand in the day of judgment. That **"a third of the trees were burned up"** suggests that even a proportion of apparently 'strong' church members will not stand correction, or be open to change.

The principle of refining the church by the fire of judgment is revealed in the Old Testament. **"For He is like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver."** Malachi 3:2-3.

This principle is confirmed in the New Testament. Christ. **"For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become manifest; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is."** 1 Corinthians 3:3:11-13.

The only things to survive this fire will be those of the Lord. All impurities and imperfections grafted on by the power of our flesh will be exposed and seared away. Only those works performed in perfect obedience to the Spirit will stand.

THE SECOND TRUMPET: THE SECOND PLAGUE

Revelation 8:8-9. **"Then the second trumpet sounded: And something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood; and a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed."**

Revelation 16:3. **"Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood as of a dead man; and every living creature in the sea died."**

This time the judgment is on the sea, which is a symbol of the 'nations', or the world outside the church. It is a principle of judgment that those who have been used by God to execute judgment on His people, are then faced with their own judgment. An example of this is the judgment of the Babylonian empire after the Jewish captivity.

This spiritual principle is useful in guiding us to the meaning of the **"great mountain burning with fire (which) was thrown into the sea."** We can trace the symbolism of the burning mountain to the prophet Jeremiah, who identifies it as Babylon. **"And I will repay Babylon....Behold, I am against you, O destroying mountain...stretch out My hand against you, roll you down from the rocks, and make you a burnt mountain."** Jeremiah 51:24,25.

The sea **"became blood as of a dead man,"** and **"a third of the sea became blood."** These phrases are vivid descriptions of worldly corruption. The perfume of the Woman Babylon permeates every aspect of the world until there is nothing else but the stench of decay.

We are told that **"a third of the living creatures in the sea died,"** and that **"every living creature in the sea died."** Once a man succumbs to the perfume of the Woman Babylon, the inevitable result is spiritual death. **"And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth."** Revelation 18:24.

The fact that **"a third of the ships were destroyed"** confirms that this judgment involves the Woman Babylon. These words refer to God's judgment on man's commercial enterprises and **"that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth!"** Revelation 18:19.

THE THIRD TRUMPET: THE THIRD PLAGUE

Revelation 8: 10-11. **"Then the third angel sounded: And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water; and the name of the star is Wormwood; and a third of the waters became wormwood; and many men died from the water, because it was made bitter."**

Revelation 16:4-7. **"Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters saying, 'You are righteous, O Lord, the One who is and who was and who is to come because You have judged these things. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. For it is their just due.' And I heard another from the altar saying, 'Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments.'"**

The great star falling from heaven is a picture of one of Satan's angels. This great star, **"burning like a torch,"** gives the impression of light and truth, but in reality it is an angel of darkness and deception. This darkness and deception falls **"on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water."** The rivers are symbols of spiritual life, and the springs are symbols of the source of that life. The waters feeding mankind are fouled by the spiritual slush of lies and half truths. The poison enters the stream at its headquarters: i.e. institutions like the seminary and bible colleges entrusted with dispensing spiritual truth.

The church has rejected the Lord's way of presenting His spiritually prepared and anointed leaders. It has rejected the possibility of Christ's gift of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, **"for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God."** Ephesians 4:12-13.

Instead the church has chosen to accept leaders who are prepared after the manner of the world. God is announcing His judgment on those worldly religious institutions, and the 'leaders' that they produce. These worldly institutions have corrupted the truth and become dispensers of spiritual death.

THE FOURTH TRUMPET: THE FOURTH PLAGUE

Revelation 8:12. **"Then the fourth angel sounded: And a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened; and a third of the day did not shine, and likewise the night."**

Revelation 16:8-9. **"Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory."**

This prophecy echoes similar prophecies in the Old Testament. The prophet Isaiah wrote, **"Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine."** Isaiah 13:9-10.

The prophet Joel repeats this symbolism. **"The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord...The sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will diminish their brightness,"** Joel 2:31, 3:15.

The sun is a symbol of the light of the knowledge of God, who is the source of all truth and life. The moon symbolises the light of God reflected by Jesus, through whom all men must approach the knowledge of God. The stars are those anointed teachers and prophets, whose task it is to fill the church with the fullness of the knowledge of Christ.

This judgment is on those who have wittingly turned their backs on the truth, and hardened their hearts to it. Because men prefer **"philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world,"** (Colossians 2:8) God has delivered them over to it.

Down through the centuries God has consistently and patiently declared His truth to His children by His Spirit and through His prophets. **"But they refused to heed, shrugged their shoulders, and stopped their ears so that they could not hear. Yes, they made their hearts like flint, refusing to hear the law and the words which the Lord of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets."** Zechariah 7:11-12.

God even sent His only begotten Son into the world as a tangible and living witness of his truth. **"and this is the condemnation, that the light as come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."** John 3:19.

The apostle Paul warned his disciple Timothy that this hard heartedness towards the truth would increase toward the end of the age. **"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."** 2 Timothy 4:3-4.

The fourth judgment is God's judgment on those who have deliberately hardened their hearts to His truth. **"The coming of the lawless one 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 strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."** 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12.

Throughout the bible the times of deception and confusion are associated with a darkening of the skies. In these times people are unable to discern truth from untruth. **"Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!"** Isaiah 5:20.

Similarly the worldly leaders of the church are unable to shepherd their flocks through the confusion of the end times. **"Therefore My people have gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge; their honourable men are famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst."** Isaiah 5:13. For every age there is a need for the vision of God's purposes, so that his children

are able to endure the times of trial. "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Proverbs 29:18. (Authorised King James Version).

Worldly leaders are not able to provide this vital vision of God's purposes to His people at the end of the age. They are unable to present the fullness of Christ as deliverer, protector, healer, and saviour. Consequently men are left in darkness and despair and anguish, with no light to provide relief. **"And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who had power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory."** Revelation 16:9.

THE LAST JUDGMENT (ii)

THE FIFTH TRUMPET: THE FIFTH PLAGUE

Revelation 9:1-11 **"Then the fifth angel sounded: And I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key to the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit, and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. So the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit. Then out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth. And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. And they were not given authority to kill them, but to torment them for five months. And their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man. In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them. The shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle. On their heads were crowns of something like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. They had hair like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle. They had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails. Their power was to hurt men five months. And they had as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon."**

Revelation 16v10-11 **"Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain. And they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds."**

HORDES OF DEMON SPIRITS

A fallen angel is given the authority to open **"the bottomless pit,"** which is the abode of demon spirits. Immediately the pit is opened the smoke of confusion and deception pours out, **"and the sun and the air were darkened."** Then from **"out of the smoke"** emerge hordes of locusts, symbolising the unleashing of an army of demon spirits to torment mankind.

It is necessary for spiritual darkness to precede the demon spirits, because they are unable to operate in the light of truth. Their tormenting power lies in their **"tails like scorpions."** These tails are symbols of lies and deception. It was by his tail that Satan **"drew a third of the stars of heaven (angels) and threw them to the earth."** Revelation 12:4.

The torment inflicted by the demon spirits in this climate of confusion and darkness is **"like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man."** The result is so distressing that although **"they were not given the authority to kill them"** yet **"men will seek death"** and **"they will desire to die."** The unrelenting attacks of the plagues of locusts pouring out from the pit are so intense that men undergo increasing affliction from physical, mental, and emotional disorders. Many have already succumbed to drug addiction or attempted suicide as a result of this tormenting assault.

GOD'S GREAT ARMY

The prophet Joel records a similar account of a great mass of locusts used by God as His instruments of judgment. In this account God calls "**the swarming locust...the crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust, 'My great army which I sent among you.'**" Joel 2:25. It is worthwhile reading Joel's description of this demonic army, as it bears a striking resemblance to the hordes which emerge out of the smoke at the sounding of the fifth trumpet.

Joel 2:1-11 **"For the day of the LORD is coming, for it is at hand: A day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, like the morning clouds spread over the mountains. A people come, great and strong, the like of whom has never been; nor will there ever be any such after them, even for many successive generations. A fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns; the land is like the Garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; surely nothing shall escape them. Their appearance is like the appearance of horses; and like swift steeds, so they run. With a noise like chariots over mountaintops they leap, like the noise of a flaming fire that devours the stubble, like a strong people set in battle array. Before them the people writhe in pain; all faces are drained of color. They run like mighty men, they climb the wall like men of war; every one marches in formation, and they do not break ranks. They do not push one another; every one marches in his own column. Though they lunge between the weapons, they are not cut down. They run to and fro in the city, they run on the wall; they climb into the houses, they enter at the windows like a thief. The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble; the sun and moon grow dark, and the stars diminish their brightness. The LORD gives voice before His army, for His camp is very great; for strong is the One who executes His word. For the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; who can endure it?"**

THE SEAL OF GOD OR THE MARK OF THE BEAST

The language used by the prophet Joel reinforces an image of restless torment befalling those who worship the beast. **"And the smoke of their torment ascends for ever 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."** Revelation 14:11. Those who seek fulfillment in the apostate church, or who strive for their own provision will not know peace. Rather they will be afflicted with nervous tension, emotional disorders, and demonic oppression.

The apostate church is clearly included in this judgment, for it **"has become a habitation of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!"** Revelation 18:2. The result is very distressing. **"Before them the people writhe in pain; all faces are drained of colour."** Joel 2:6. The tragedy is that they will not repent. **"(A)nd they gnawed their tongues because of the pain. And they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds."** Revelation 16:10-11.

This fifth judgment is on all **"those who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads."** Revelation 9:4. The **"seal of God"** is the seal of God's ownership. It is an invisible seal set by the Holy Spirit, signifying that those who wear it have given up their lives to the death, and so are totally consecrated to God. They have become His property. They have ceased striving, and trust in God to provide for their every need. Those who are protected from this judgment have **"gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark and over the number of his name."** Revelation 15:2. (Authorised King James Version). They stand with the Lamb **"having His Father's name written on their foreheads."** (Revelation 14:1), rather than with the beast's **"mark on their right hand or on their foreheads."** (Revelation 13:16)..

THE SIXTH TRUMPET: THE SIXTH PLAGUE

Revelation 9:13-21 "Then the sixth angel sounded: And I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, **"Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates."** So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind. **Now the number of the army of the horsemen was two hundred million;** I heard the number of them. And thus I saw the horses in the vision: those who sat on them had breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow; and the heads of the horses were like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone. By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed-- by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths. **For their power is in their mouth and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents, having heads; and with them they do harm.** But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts."

Revelation 16:12-16 "Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the **great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up,** so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. **For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.** "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame." **And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.**

The sixth judgment is presented in a picture of great and final conflict at a place called Armageddon. The Greek name comes from the Hebrew 'hill of Megiddo.' This was the traditional battlefield of Israel, where many of its greatest struggles were fought. The 'battle of Armageddon' is therefore a symbol of a mighty and conclusive spiritual battle between the children of God and the forces of darkness.

All the enemies of the church are gathered together to face God's final judgment for them. In the same way the Egyptian armies were drawn to the Red Sea to face a final and complete judgment at God's hands. In this case the enemies of the church are drawn into this conflict by the very forces of darkness that they have been cooperating with.

The apostle John "saw **three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon (Satan), out of the mouth of the beast (Antichrist), and out of the mouth of the false prophet (the spirit of antichrist),**" Revelation 16:13. The forces that draw them into this conflict "are **spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of the God Almighty.**" Revelation 16:14.

These demon spirits are agents of deceit and deception, "**for their power is in their mouth and in their tails.**" Revelation 9:19. This reminds us of another account of this final battle which we are already familiar with. "**Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea..**" Revelation 20:7-8.

God has been holding back the powers of darkness until this time when He withdraws His hedge of protection. **"Release the four angels who are bound at the great River Euphrates."** Revelation 9:14. **"(T)he great River Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared."** Revelation 16:12.

The Euphrates was a natural barrier between the nation of Israel and her enemies from the north and the east. It is used here as a symbol of God's restraining hand being withdrawn. **"For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way."** 2 Thessalonians 2:7.

The battle lines are now formed. The saints have been called out of the apostate church and stand united in the Lord. They are surrounded by those who have been deceived by Satan into attacking the true church. **"They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city."** Revelation 20:9.

At this point the power and glory of God are demonstrated. **"And the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming."** 2 Thessalonians 2:8. This is not the emergence of one figure who is recognized as Antichrist himself. Rather it is the exposure of all the works of the antichrist by the two witnesses, and the subsequent destruction of those works by Christ coming into His true church. The light of His truth, accompanied by the manifestation of His power and glory in His servants, will expose and destroy the darkness of Antichrist's deceptions.

The enemies of the church now face God's judgment. **"And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them."** Revelation 20:9. The spirits of darkness that they have cooperated with are God's instruments of judgment, **"by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths."** Revelation 9:18.

Again we are reminded of the Valley of Jehoshaphat with the enemies of the children of God turning on one another until they are all destroyed. Similarly all that oppose the church are consumed by the very powers of darkness they formerly courted. There is **"all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved."** Thessalonians 2:10.

THE SEVENTH TRUMPET: THE SEVENTH PLAGUE

Revelation 11:15-19 **"Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying: "We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was and who is to come, because You have taken Your great power and reigned. The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth." Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail."**

Revelation 16:17-21 **"Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered**

before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. **And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent. And men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great.**"

In the seventh judgment it is announced that **"it is done!"** Revelation 16:17. It is declared that the **"kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever!"** Revelation 11:15. This is a victorious heavenly proclamation of the consummation of all of God's dealings and judgments.

The final and complete destruction of the Woman Babylon is declared as **"great Babylon was remembered before the Lord"** and **"the great city was divided into three parts."** Revelation 16:19. This describes the disintegration of the satanic trinity, and the harlot being destroyed by the very powers that established her, and operate within her.

This is consistent with God's great principle of judgment. **"And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purposes, to be of one mind and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled."** Revelation 17:16-17.

The seventh trumpet heralds the end of this earthly dispensation. It announces "the time of the dead that they should be judged" and the destruction of **"those who destroy the earth."** **It is also the time that God will "reward (His) servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear (His) name."** Revelation 11:18.

The end of this earthly dispensation is confirmed by the opening of the temple in heaven. Now that the thousand years reign on earth is over, all worship will take place in heaven. **"Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of the covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail."** Revelation 11:19.

COME OUT MY PEOPLE

KEY BIBLE READING

Revelation 18:1-4 **"After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury. And I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.""**

A POLLUTED CHURCH

It has been established in previous chapters that the true church of Christ has been subjected to an overwhelming assault by the power of antichrist. This attack has been very successful. Unwittingly the saints have allowed themselves to be overtaken by the forces of darkness and deception. The church was warned by the prophet Daniel **"Then the saints shall be given into his (the little horn's or Antichrist's) hand for a time and times and half a time."** Daniel 7:25. This warning was repeated to the church by the apostle John. **"And it was granted to him (the first beast, or Antichrist) to make war with the saints and to overcome them."** Revelation 13:7.

To a large extent the true church's reflection of the image of Christ has been replaced by a counterfeit image of humanistic worldliness. The true church is an expression of Christ's love, His authority and power, His wisdom and truth, His righteousness and holiness, His provision and protection, and His judgments. It is an expression or manifestation of His presence, as He rules over it, and inhabits it in the power of God. It is filled with His glory.

This true image has been tainted by **"the image of the beast,"** in the exaltation of man and the things of the world. Christ's authority, through spiritually prepared and anointed leaders, has been counterfeited by leaders with worldly qualifications and titles. The authority of the scriptures has been undermined and replaced with man made doctrines. Worship has been directed away from the Creator and towards the created. The object of worship has become the building, the furnishings, the liturgy, the denominational traditions, and the leaders.

Christ left the church with an inheritance of empowering, by pouring out the Holy Spirit upon her, and equipping her with the gifts of the Spirit. The denial and rejection of this empowering has left the church defenseless and vulnerable. The ministering power of the Holy Spirit has been replaced by the impotence of ministers ordained by man. Fearful obedience of the Spirit has been replaced by the lawless works of the flesh.

Paul exhorts us to **"cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."** 2 Corinthians 7:1. This is in stark contrast to the current climate of liberality and permissiveness in the institutional church, which has lost the fear of God. The sanctuary has been polluted with an unrepentant company of idolaters, extortioners, homosexuals, and adulterers.

In assessing the measure of our reflection of Christ, the most decisive test we can apply is our relationship to one another. Our instruction to love one another is unequivocal. Jesus said, **"This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."** John 15:12. He told the Pharisees that the commandment to **"love your neighbour as yourself"** was second only to the

first and great commandment to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind," Mathew 22:39,37.

The fundamental nature of this commandment to love our brothers is emphasised by the apostle John. **"We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him."** 1 John 3:14-15.

The picture of the **"harlot"** or false church is in stark contrast to the body of Christ. It is an image of hatred and persecution, rather than love and forgiveness. **"And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement."** Revelation 17:6. The apostle John was amazed because he saw the saints persecuted and murdered by their fellow church members.

This growing tide of lawlessness and lack of love was prophesied by Jesus. **"And because lawlessness will abound, the love (i.e. 'agape' or spiritual love) of many will grow cold."** Matthew 24:12. The Key Bible Reading declares that the **"harlot"** or false church **"has become a habitation of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!"** Revelation 18:2. The **"harlot"** has become the dwelling place of **"debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults."** 2 Corinthians 12:20. (Authorised King James Version). This environment is **"earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every foul thing will be there."** James 3:15-16.

It is not difficult to recognise the tainting of the Christian church by her close proximity to the **"harlot"** within her midst. Even the world sees that the institutional church is ailing and powerless. Few however can see the path to restoration. Many 'Pentecostals' place their faith in 'charismatic renewal.' Despite this spiritual movement being one of the most significant in church history, it is still not sufficient to remedy the situation. This is because **"The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints.. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores."** Isaiah 1:5-6.

The whole church must first face God's judgment and pass through the refining fire. **"For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God."** 1 Peter 4:17. God is beginning to shake the church for the **"removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made (by man), that the things which cannot be shaken may remain."** Hebrews 12:27. What remains after the shaking will provide a sure foundation from which the restored church will rise.

CALL TO REPENTANCE

Previous chapters have presented an outline of God's impending judgment on the apostate church, and on the people of the world who have rejected Christ. Accompanying this declaration of judgment there is a call to repentance, and a command to come out. **"And I heard another voice from heaven saying, 'Come out of her, My people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues."** Revelation 18:4.

To prepare the way for Christ's first coming, **"John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!'"** Matthew 3:1. Just as the way was prepared for the Lord's first coming, so will the way be prepared for His second coming.. Jesus told His disciples that **"Elijah has come already" in the person of John the Baptist. He also told them that "Elijah truly is coming first and will restore all things."** Matthew 17:11.

This is a reference to the ministry of the two witnesses prior to Christ's second coming, and **"the times of restoration of all things."** Acts 3:21. The spirit of prophecy that rested on Elijah and

the spirit of the living word that rested on Moses, will anoint those servants God has chosen to proclaim His truth. The two witnesses are entrusted with the burden of preparing the way for the second coming of the Lord.

The task of the two witnesses is to wield the spirit of prophecy and the word of God to unmask the work of Antichrist. In this way people are brought into the "**valley of decision**," and repentance. (Joel 3:14). Their job is to urge the people to "**Come out of her**" before God's judgment falls, and His church is purged of "**all things that offend**." Mathew 13:41.

THE NATURE OF REPENTANCE

Repentance is a frequently misunderstood concept. To many it suggests a dramatic emotional change bringing a sinner into a state of heart-felt guilt. The real meaning of repentance is to change our minds, or change our direction. Repentance is not a change in our emotional state, but an act of the will.

When a carnal Christian is confronted by the truth and repents, he is making a decision to change the direction of his life. He is turning away from a fleshly path, towards a path of submission to the will of Christ. Repentance must incorporate an actual change in direction, and be accompanied by appropriate steps in obedience.

Any believer who has been travelling along a path which has been initiated by the spirit of antichrist is required to repent. It may be a Baptist path, a Catholic path, or a Pentecostal path. In fact it can be any path which is determined by man-made doctrine, traditions and authority, rather than direct submission to the will of Christ. Those who are confronted with the revelations of the two witnesses are required to repent, whatever their path has been. They are required to change their minds and change their directions and to "**Come out of her**."

SEPARATION OF THE WHEAT AND THE TARES

Up to this point in time God has restrained His hand of judgment from the harlot's children. In Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares, the servants asked the owner of the field, "**Do you want us then to go and gather them up?**" But He said, '**No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.**'" Matthew 13:28-30. ;;

Jesus later explained this parable to His disciples. "**(T)he harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!**" Matthew 13:39-43.

The end of the age is upon us and the time of the last great harvest is at hand. Christ is about to purge and purify His church "**that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that is should be holy and without blemish.**" Ephesians 5:27. If we open our spiritual eyes we can already see the Lord at work. His angels are beginning to "**gather together the tares and bind them in bundles.**" Congregations are separating into opposing factions in a direct response to the witness of truth. The children of the harlot are banding together in vehement and spiritually violent opposition to the saints.

COME OUT OF HER

It is not our job to prevent this separation, or to try to 'heal' the differences between the wheat and the tares. It is an inevitable and divinely ordained process. While **"the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father,"** the tares will know **"wailing and gnashing of teeth."**

Our position in God's judgment of the apostate church is to be obedient to His command, **"Come out of her, My people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues."** Revelation 18:4.

The antichrist is well aware that Christ is going to separate the wheat from the tares at the close of the age. He knows that at that time Christ **"will say to the reapers, 'First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into My barn.'"** Matthew 13:30. The ploy of antichrist is to counterfeit this process with a plausible substitute called 'ecumenism.'

The artifice of ecumenism uses the obvious denominational differences and divisions in the church, to incite concerned church members into a worldly unity. Strenuous efforts are made to draw the different traditions together on the basis of common doctrine, government, or history. A superficial binding together is attempted through legal amalgamation of organizations, or sharing buildings and services. The end result is a man-made unity of things which were initiated by the antichrist in the first place. This is merely tying the wheat and the tares into the one bundle.

Christ's way is to call His children out of all association with apostasy. This is not necessarily a physical separation from the institutional church, but a deliberate decision to reject apostasy in all its forms. Where a church fellowship is entrenched and bound in apostasy, and Christ's Spirit is stifled, then we have no choice other than to physically **"Come out of her."**

There can be no compromise. Jesus asked His disciples, **"Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division. For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three. Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."** Luke 12:51-53.

Christ is not coming back to an impure church, but to **"a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but ...holy and without blemish."** Ephesians 5:27. Our position is to be obedient, trusting that in spite of the confrontation and persecution, the Lord is our refuge. **"The heavens and the earth will shake; but the Lord will be a shelter for His people, and the strength of the children of Israel."** Joel 3:16.

Jesus is the head of the body, and only He can build the body. It is He who will restore all things. Implicit in our obedience to His command to come out of the apostate church, is our trust in Him to place us in his true body. He is our good shepherd and He will not let us go.

The accusations of 'splitting the church' are of no consequence, despite their apparent accuracy in worldly terms. The true church is not what the world sees. Only the Lord knows His flock, and He has promised His Father not to lose a single one of us. Our position is to withdraw in obedience and wait on Him to lead us to the right spiritual fellowship.

THE HOUR OF DECISION

Christ is about to enter His temple to purge it from all apostasy, as a prelude to it being filled with His glory. **"And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple....as a refiner**

and purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi (His anointed servants), and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness." Malachi 3:1,3. The two witnesses are preparing the way as they stand on their feet and proclaim God's truth. People are being brought into the valley of decision, where they are being presented with the choice between Christ and Antichrist.

On one hand there is continued involvement in the things of the antichrist. A church member can choose to continue to worship the beast, and receive the mark of the name of the beast, and the number of his name. The consequence of this choice is that **"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."** Revelation 14:10.

The alternative is to open our hearts to the truths being revealed by the two witnesses. It is to recognise the work of Christ going on around us as He purges His church of apostasy. It is to repent of all personal involvement in the things of antichrist, and to resolve to no longer partake of them. It is to cooperate with Christ and His mighty angels as they separate the wheat from the tares.

IN SUMMARY

God is about to pour out a fire of judgment on the church to purge it and refine it, This is so that it can effectively receive the 'latter rain' of His Spirit, restoring it to its former glory.

He has prepared and anointed servants to reveal the true state of the church, and to call its members to repentance so that they might escape His judgment. Believers are called to come out of apostasy and be established in the true body of Christ, where they will take part in the restoration of all things.

THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

KEY BIBLE READINGS

Revelation 19:7-9 "**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.**" 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!'**" And he said to me, "**These are the true sayings of God.**"

Revelation 21:2-3 "**Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.** And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "**Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.**"

Revelation 21:9-11 "**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,** having the glory of God. Song of Songs 6:9-10 "**Who is she who looks forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, awesome as an army with banners?"**

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE LAMB AND HIS BRIDE

The book of Revelation reaches its climax with a description of "**the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.**" This indicates the true relationship which is to prevail between Jesus Christ (who is the husband and head), and His perfected church (who is the bride).

This relationship between the Lamb and His bride can be more fully appreciated after study of the relationship between Adam and Eve. Before his fall, Adam was a 'type' of Christ in as much as he was called "**Adam, the son of God.**" Luke 3:38. In like manner Eve is a 'type' of the church, and their relationship sets out the pattern which applies between Christ and the bride.

"**And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."** Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: "**This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.**" Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." Genesis 2:18-24.

This relationship between husband and wife is used by Paul as an illustration of the relationship between Christ and His church. "**For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.** For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church." Ephesians 5:30-32.

God saw that it was not right for man to be alone, and so He promised to provide Adam with a companion. As a prelude to this, all the animals were paraded before Adam to be named. As they passed he examined them intently, in case one of them proved to be his promised partner. **"But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him."** Adam was looking for someone with the same nature and of the same substance as himself, but he found nothing in the animal kingdom which was **"comparable to him."**

Then God **"caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam"** and **"took one of his ribs"** to fashion into the promised partner. When God brought Eve to him, Adam's response was **"This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."**

Adam looked at Eve and saw himself. She had a separate identity from him, and yet she was made from him. Adam knew that he could have fellowship with her because she was created from the same substance as himself. She was bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh.

THE PREPARATION OF THE BRIDE

The formation of Eve from the substance of Adam is mirrored in the creation of the bride of Christ. Just as Eve was taken from the side of Adam, the church was symbolically taken out of the side of Christ. At the cross, **"one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out."** John 19:34. Out of Christ's side flowed the blood of redemption and the water of life.

The church is formed out of the substance of Christ's life and nature implanted in us. We are not vessels fashioned in the likeness of Jesus, but vessels which contain the life of Jesus. **"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us."** 2 Corinthians 4:7. The bride has to be formed out of the same substance as Christ. To imagine that Christ could have fellowship with the flesh of man is to imagine that Adam could have fellowship with the animals.

Before a believer can become part of the bride, he must first be cleansed and redeemed by the blood, and then filled with the life and nature of Christ. This latter aspect is not an automatic process which is completed at the time of our salvation. The **"marriage of the Lamb"** only come after **"His wife had made herself ready."** Revelation 19:7. There is a necessary period during which she is **"prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."** Revelation 21:2.

The preparation is a long and thorough one. It can only be performed by the Holy Spirit with our full cooperation. It requires a complete separation from, and coming out of, the apostate church and the power of the world. It means the Holy Spirit putting our self life to death, and perfecting our obedience to Christ. This is not reaching a state of sinlessness, but a perfecting of our commitment and separation unto Christ. It is as Paul says: **"perfecting holiness in the fear of God."**

**"...As God has said: 'I will dwell in them
And walk among them.
I will be their God,
And they shall be My people.
Therefore
'Come out from among them
And be separate, says the Lord.
Do not touch what is unclean,
And I will receive you. I will be a Father to you,
And you shall be My sons and daughters,
Says the Lord Almighty.'** 6:16-18

Therefore having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." 2 Corinthians 7:1

The preparation of the bride requires us to receive Christ into our spirits and souls and bodies so that we become indivisible "**members of His body, of his flesh and of His bones.**" Ephesians 5:30. To be adorned as His bride is to be filled with the light and glory of His presence.

"Who is she who looks forth as the morning, Fair as the moon, Clear as the sun, Awesome as an army with banners?" Song of Songs 6:10.

The bride emerges from the night, splendid in her reflection of the light of Christ and the glory of God. She is graced with the jewels of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and anointed for spiritual warfare against the powers of darkness. As they behold the power and authority vested in her, she appears "**Awesome as an army with banners.**"

THE STATUS OF THE BRIDE

It is commonly assumed that the whole church constitutes the bride of Christ, but this is not entirely correct. In referring to "**the holy city, New Jerusalem,**" there is consistent mention of two groups. These are the saints in general, and the bride of Christ in particular. For example, Satan's forces "**went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints** (i.e. those who are saved in general) **and the beloved city** (i.e. the bride of Christ in particular)." Revelation 20:9.

Another example is given in a later and more detailed description of the holy city. "**And the city had no need of the sun or the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it, and the Lamb is its light. And the nations of those who are saved (i.e. the saints) shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honour into it.**" Revelation 21:23-24.

Christ told parables which concerned invitations to wedding feasts. These parables clearly assume that there is a difference between the bride and the wedding guests. The apostle John was told, "**Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!**" Revelation 19:9. These guests are the saints in general rather than the bride in particular.

THE PURITY OF THE BRIDE

The strength of the bride is in her purity. "**Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments (the life of Christ), O Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean.**" Isaiah 52:1. (Authorised King James Version).

The bride is the perfected church because no uncircumcised or unclean person can come into her. This is clearly a reference to the circumcision of the heart, which is "**the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ.**" Colossians 2:11.

The prophet Daniel saw the Roman Empire with "**its feet partly of iron and partly of clay**" as an indication that it "**shall be partly strong and partly fragile.**" Daniel 2:33,42. It was a mixture of the weak and the strong, and consequently it fell. Likewise if there is a mixture of the strength of Christ and the weakness of the flesh in us, we will fall under the relentless opposition of Satan.

The mixture must be purged of the impurities of the flesh before we can be entrusted with Christ's work. In the perfected church there is no such weakness because the power of the flesh has

been dealt with. Because of her purity and strength, the bride is given the task to usher in the kingdom reign of Christ.

THE HOLINESS OF THE BRIDE

The extent of our holiness is the extent to which the life of God has been imparted to us through Christ. All holiness is from God, and His purpose in redeeming mankind back to Himself is to fill us with the glory of His holiness. The bride is called "**the holy city, New Jerusalem.**" Revelation 1:2. She is "**the city (who) had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it, and the Lamb is its light.**" Revelation 21:23.

Another representation of the bride is given by the "**one hundred and forty-four thousand**" who stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion "**having His Father's name written on their foreheads.**" Revelation 14:1. They are declared to be virgins, not because of any physical chastity, but because they are wholly dedicated to God. "**These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes.**" Revelation 14:4.

The 144,000 walk in the light of Christ's life, and so "**are without fault before the throne of God.**" Revelation 14:5. They reflect God's purpose, not only to redeem us, but also to impart His holiness to us. They are therefore said to be "**redeemed from among men, being first-fruits to God and to the Lamb.**" Revelation 14:4.

THE OVERCOMERS ARE PART OF THE BRIDE

The overcomers have known the power of Christ's indwelling life in getting "**the victory over the beast, over his image, and over his mark and over the number of his name.**" Revelation 15:2. Jesus said, "**He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.**" Revelation 3:12.

The overcomers are "**pillar(s) in the temple,**" or Christ's anointed leaders in the true church. Jesus declared that "**he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations - 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron.'**" Revelation 2:26-27. The overcomers are appointed to rule throughout the church age. "And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years." Revelation 20:4.

THE INVITATION FROM THE SPIRIT AND THE BRIDE

Just as the Lord has asked us to come out of the world and out of the apostate church, He is now asking us to come into the bride relationship Christ. "**And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. And whoever desires, let him take of the water of life (i.e. Christ) freely.**" Revelation 22:17.

The way into the bride relationship with Christ is the way into the new and holy city Jerusalem. It is through the gates of pearl. The city has "**a great and high wall with twelve gatesAnd the twelve gates were twelve pearls: each gate was of one pearl.**" Revelation 18:12,21. The use of the pearl as a symbol indicates the nature of this entry into the city. The final beauty of a pearl is the result of a prolonged period of suffering. In a similar manner the bride of Christ is prepared through a period of refining which is both prolonged and painful. It is a process through which the fleshly self life is put to death, and the beauty of Christ's life and nature is worked out in us.

"**The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him,**

that we may also be glorified together." Romans 8:16-17. Once through the gates of pearl the bride walks on streets which are "pure gold, like transparent glass." Revelation 18:21. Gold symbolises the divine nature of God. It indicates that once through the gates of pearl the believer walks on a path which expresses the divine life and nature of Christ.

RESTORATION OF ALL THINGS

The restored church is "**a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but....holy and without blemish.**" Ephesians 5:27. It is a refined and purified church which has been purged of sin. She has no "**spot**" (stain) or "**wrinkle**" (flaw), and is without "**blemish**" (i.e. blameless). She is declared to be "**holy**," which means that she is filled with the life and nature of Christ.

The restored church is a "**glorious church.**" The word 'glory,' in a spiritual context, expresses God's own nature as it is manifested to our senses. Most commonly His glory is manifested in the person of Christ. A glorious church is one which therefore manifests the attributes of God, through the real and obvious presence of Christ.

The apostle Peter urged his audience in the temple to repent "**so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.**" Acts 3:19. The church has already experienced "**times of refreshing**" in various outpourings of the Spirit resulting in revival. However these are only an introduction to the last great outpouring of the Spirit when God will "**send Jesus Christ....whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things.**" Acts 3:20,21.

A GLORIOUS CHURCH IN THE DARKNESS OF THE WORLD

The prophet Isaiah cries out to the church, "**Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you.**" Isaiah 60:1. While the rest of the world is submerged in darkness the church comes forth shining in all the glory of the Lord. "**For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the Lord will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you.**" Isaiah 60:2

The reason for this darkness is explained in a preceding verse. "**So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and His glory from the rising of the sun; when the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him.**" Isaiah 59:19. There is no doubt that darkness covers the earth and that the enemy has poured in like a flood. The bottomless pit of the fifth trumpet has been opened, and the demonic hordes have emerged to overwhelm the world with their torments.

In this climate of despair and confusion, "**the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him.**" Isaiah 59:19. This is a reference to a traditional battle strategy which was resorted to when an army was particularly hard pressed by the enemy. In this event the standard bearer chose some high ground, and then lifted up the standard as a signal for the rest of the army to regroup around it. In this case the standard-bearer is the Holy Spirit, and He is lifting up the standard of Jesus Christ.

The result of this will be that although "**darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people.... The Lord will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.**" Isaiah 60:2,3.

OUR RESPONSE

Two choices confront the saints at this time. The first choice to be made relates to our response to God's command to come out of the apostate church. One alternative is to remain in the darkness

of apostasy, surrounded by the worldly perfume of the harlot, and the lawless works of the flesh. The other is to choose the light of the full knowledge of Jesus Christ and obedience to His ways.

There is no neutral ground in this area, and a decision has to be made. Jesus said, "**He who is not with Me is against me.**" Matthew 12:30. He said, "**because you are lukewarm, and neither cold, nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth.**" Revelation 3:16. We either "**Come out of her**" or we "**receive of her plagues.**" Revelation 18:4.

The second choice facing us summarised in the question 'How far do we want to go?' The Lord is calling us out of the apostate church so that we might enter into the bride relationship with Him. Are we prepared to submit to the long refining work of the Holy Spirit to become "**a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use?**" 2 Timothy 2:21 (Authorised King James Version).

"And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely." Revelation 22:17.