

Revelation



Unveiling the Symbolism

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Mary and Ernie Kroeger



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Published by Cornerstone Press of PO Box 400, Easton, Maine 04740

Publisher can also be reached through <https://www.bibleconcepts.com>

Scripture quotations are taken from The New American Standard Version, (NASB).

ISBN: 9781699639467 (Softcover perfect-bound)

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	ix
About the Authors.....	xi
Preface	xv
Introduction	1
Chapter 1	11
Chapter 2	31
Chapter 3	49
Chapter 4	65
Chapter 5	79
Chapter 6	87
Chapter 7	99
Chapter 8	111
Chapter 9	123
Chapter 10.....	137
Chapter 11.....	145
Chapter 12.....	161
Chapter 13.....	173
Chapter 14.....	191
Chapter 15.....	209
Chapter 16.....	219
Chapter 17.....	233
Chapter 18.....	245
Chapter 19.....	259
Chapter 20.....	277
Chapter 21	301
Chapter 22	329

Acknowledgments

Our appreciation for Eric Ellis' work of love in reprinting this book is beyond words! He has spent many hours editing and formatting it both for print and for Kindle. It's been a joy and a privilege to work with him and to receive his insights.

My husband, Ernie, went to be the Lord in 2013 at age 94. At present I am 100 years old and am legally blind. Now my daughter, Bev Lewis, has been 'my eyes'. She has also blessed me by reading all our writings on the "Unveiling of the Symbolism in Revelation" on to CDs for me! Now I can listen to them and continue to marvel at God's fantastic message in symbolism! I am so thankful for Bev's contribution in working with Eric in this endeavour!

The writings of Lloyd Ellefson, J. Preston Eby, and David Fields, as well as tapes by Malcolm Smith have helped us immeasurably in gaining spiritual understanding of the scriptures. We also want to thank Neal Sutherland for his help in researching the meaning of Greek words and supplying historical background. Our cover page is the work of Tom Andrich, a well-known artist in our city. We are extremely thankful to him for volunteering his services!

This has been a most rewarding work for us! It has taken us out of the fear of future historical events to an understanding of God's dealings with us so that Christ Jesus will be revealed in us. Letting the scriptures interpret the symbolism has opened our eyes to understand and further explore the richness of our inheritance in Christ. We realize that in this book we are only laying a foundation. So much more could be written, and many more scripture references could be quoted. We pray that all who read these pages will be blessed together with us and be open and inspired to receive further illumination from the Lord!

Mary (and Ernie) Kroeger, 2018

About the Authors

About Ernie and Mary Kroeger

By David Pang, our Student in China, 1983-86

I have known Ernie and Mary Kroeger for over 30 years. The word “known” does not just mean a nodding acquaintance, but more like a parent-son relationship. I call them my “Canadian Mom and Dad”, because they were the ones who first showed me that “God” or “Jesus” were not dirty or derogative words, but something most beautiful and precious.

I was born and grew up during the so-called “Cultural Revolution” in China in the 60’s and 70’s, a time when “love”, “kindness” and “forgiveness” were considered bad, “counter-revolutionary” feelings. The only love that was allowed was for the Communist Party and Mao Zedong, the Party leader. Mao, in order to “create a new type of human being” who would be loyal to him only, had systematically killed millions of people who he and his party deemed “counter-revolutionaries”. It was a time of collective madness; a time of complete physical and mental torture and brutality; a time when everyone suffered, or knew someone who suffered. And I was born into this chaotic period when the only 'moral' education I received was hating any -isms, any kind of love and feelings except for the Communist Party.

Therefore, one morning, over their breakfast, when Ernie and Mary prayed this prayer, I was completely broken down. I had never heard of anything so amazing before. This was what they said to God: "Dear Lord, we pray that today, whatever we do or say, will not bring harm to anyone." I know this seems very “normal” to many Christians, but for a Chinese who was born into the “cultural revolution”, and was educated with the most bloody and merciless doctrines, in a land where sons could bring fathers to the killing fields to show loyalty to the Party, where no one trusted anyone, and everyone was looking for a chance to get rid of anyone who might pose as a threat to his/her existence, during a time when everyone was wary and watchful not to be destroyed by others ... this was very extremely “abnormal”.

I was like a bug living under a rock, in the dark. Someone had just removed the rock and showed me the beauty of light. Honestly, I was crying on my way out, for a long time. Why didn't we think of something so simple, so beautiful like this before?

Why was something so sweet and so possible so impossible and so surreal to the Chinese, including me? And Mom & Dad (Ernie & Mary), practice what they believe, in every waking moment of their lives. They use every opportunity to share with others the love of God. When they were in China as teachers, they openly refused to teach “class struggle”, hatred, unforgiveness, but instead, sought every chance to spread the true nature of God. Every trip they went on, every meal they attended, every conversation, for them, is a chance to share the love of God.

When they were in China, they had students from various nationalities read the New Testament onto tapes in their own language. The students then took the tapes and tape recorders to their own villages, and had the people listen to them. Many people came to the Lord, including an entire village. Mom & Dad would help anyone who was in need. With their meager income in China, and later in Hong Kong, they were able to help a lot of refugees by bringing them clothes and food.

Here is a little story about their generosity, and every time I say it, I still have to fight back my tears. We used to live and work in Hong Kong together in the mid 90's. Every Friday after school, I would visit them and spend the weekends with them. I would pass that “fruit lady”, as we called her, and I would buy bags of fruit. The fruit lady was looking down on us, for we always bought her fruit late at night, when she was ready to wrap up and throw away most of the fruit that was too ripe and would not stay another day in the heat. So she had to sell it much, much cheaper, and she felt that we were taking advantage of her. Until one day, when she asked me why they (Ernie and Mary), were so “cheap”, and I told her because they wanted to help more people (especially the refugees in Hong Kong, whom Mom and Dad visited often, bringing them lots of better things). From then on, the fruit lady told me to take as much as I wanted.

Another wonderful thing about Ernie and Mary is that they are willing to change. Whenever God shows them the way, they would go for it, regardless of the objections they have to face. And God always reveals to them in a very special way the true nature of Himself, because of their obedience to Him. Whatever God reveals to them, they would be excited in sharing it with others, through their website (www.thegoodseed.org), their Bible study group, and their books.

And “Revelation: Unveiling the Symbolism” is one of the books that they wrote. For me, in order to judge if a book is good or not, it is important to know the character of the writer, especially when the book is about spirituality,

belief and morals. Everything Ernie and Mary do or say is out of a desire for total obedience to God. The book was written after years of careful research and study, and their daily praying for God's guiding and leading. They depend on God to reveal truth to them as they study the scripture and what God has revealed to others.

Their writing always points to one thing: God is love. There is no condemnation from God, for He is almighty, and He desires to see us to be with Him; and anything He desires comes true. That no one could "escape" the love and protection of God. That "Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord." They never want to do or say something out of the need to please others, to win favour, or to earn personal gain. They are always eager to tell others how wonderful God is. Every hour I spend with Ernie and Mary has always been a time of better and deeper understanding of God.

Preface

Our Journey Into Truth

by Mary Kroeger

Both Ernie and I were raised in a traditional Bible believing church, and were firmly entrenched in its doctrines. We attended Sunday school and church faithfully, participated in the leadership of its programs, enjoyed Bible School and Bible College, yet remained woefully ignorant of the true message of the scriptures.

My journey into truth began one Saturday evening when I was preparing my Sunday school lesson. My lesson manual told me that we do not really see what the Bible teaches because we interpret it according to our preconceived ideas – according to our former teaching and the philosophies that we have accepted. As I read that, I said, “Thank you God, that is not our church. I know that we don’t live up to our doctrines, but our doctrines are pure and good.” After I was through telling God how wonderful our church doctrines were (as if He didn’t know), He asked me one short, simple question, “Are you sure?” That came as a shock, and it broke me up; I burst into tears and replied, “If that is not true, then teach me.”

About six months later we listened to a speaker who was saying that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is for today. That was against our doctrines, so I was furious, and began to search the scriptures to prove him wrong. To my great surprise, I realized that he was right and I was wrong. Two days later we were both baptized in the Holy Spirit and we experienced an inner joy and peace that was beyond description!

At this time we were already in our fifties, and we grieved over all the time we had spent in ignorance. One evening as we prayed, I said to the Lord that He would have to do a very fast cleansing work in me because I was already past half of my life, and I still wanted to work for Him in my newly found knowledge. God answered that prayer too!

At that time (in the seventies), fasting was the “IN” thing to do. I couldn’t fast longer than a day because I would become violently ill. So I prayed that God would enable me to fast at least three days. Finally it happened! On the fourth

day I felt an urge to pray. After all, what was the use of fasting if we didn't spend time in prayer? As I prayed, I had an out-of-body experience. I was taken out of my body, and from the sky I watched what was happening to me on earth. There, while I was standing on a platform, I was surrounded by a very angry mob of people who were shouting at me and trying to hurt me. I remember thinking that this cannot be true. People don't hate me; they love me.

Yet it was true! I won't go into the details of that very difficult time, but both Ernie and I experienced the consuming fire of our loving God! At the same time we experienced His loving hand on us. He led us, gave us visions, dreams and encouragement. We experienced such an intimate relationship with our Lord that we kept saying that it was worth it all!

In 1978 we felt the need for a little rest before the next onslaught. So we rented a little motel room, and armed with our Bibles and study books, we moved in. On the third night, God spoke to each of us individually. To Ernie God spoke audibly saying, "I am sending you to the nations of the world." Ernie replied, "Thank you, Lord, that's fine," and then he fell asleep again. Then the Lord came to him a second time with the same message. Again Ernie replied, "Thank you, Lord, that's fine," and as an afterthought he added, "Do you mind confirming that with Mary?" Ernie wanted me to know that this truly was God's will for us. To me God said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel." In the morning, as we shared what the Lord had spoken to us, we felt an inner excitement, great joy and a deep peace! At the same time we wondered what the future held for us.

A few months later we made a 3-month trip around the world, speaking and teaching as the Lord opened doors. During the first part of the journey we traveled together with an evangelist from Australia and his party, then by ourselves. God did some amazing things and we rejoiced in His ability!

After we came home, we didn't know what God wanted next. My parents were getting old and needed help. In January of 1981 I prayed and said to the Lord that I knew His message to us included more than one trip around the world, but my parents would not understand if we left them now when they needed us. To our surprise, within the next month and a half both my parents had gone to be with the Lord and there was nothing to hinder us from following His plan for us. That led us to more travels and some hard training, but eventually God brought us to Hong Kong and China where we would spend a number of years teaching."

Ever since we had been baptized in the Holy Spirit, we were very hungry for spiritual understanding. We were introduced to many new teachings, like “inner healing”, the prosperity doctrine, the name it and claim it faith, etc., but as we examined them in the light of the scriptures, we recognized the errors, and we had to discard them. Eventually we got to the place where we said, “God you will have to show us the way; we really don’t know what to believe.”

In our travels, we frequently had to wait for our plane in Minneapolis. There we met a friend who was very special to us. He was a Christian in a leadership role, yet in whom we did not detect any jealousy. This was interesting, and a new experience for us. He came to the airport and gave us books and pamphlets that explained the scriptures spiritually. Although they were written in a style that made it more difficult for us to understand, we realized that at long last we were getting the answers we had been looking for! They contained some wonderful nuggets! This was our introduction to the writings of Andrew Murray, A.P. Adams and Lloyd Ellefson.

As we studied our new treasures, the Lord began to reveal the scriptures to us and we began to recognize the lies that we had considered to be the truth. “Although we didn’t look forward to the rejection we would receive from the church, and even from Spirit-baptized believers, we knew there was no future in putting our faith in lies. As we were persuaded to believe the truth, we were again filled with tremendous joy!

With the passage of time, we became the transcribers and editors of Lloyd Ellefson’s writings. In this ministry of love, we were blessed beyond measure! When, in the late 1900s, Lloyd’s daughter took over this ministry, we were free to devote more time to personal study and writing.

We are very thankful for the many who have contributed the spiritual insights they have received, and passed them on to us and others. We thank God for His faithfulness, and for His revelation of Himself in Christ!

Introduction to Revelation

by Ernie & Mary Kroeger

The purpose of this glorious vision is to unveil Jesus Christ. Since He is spirit, He is hidden from our physical eyes. In order for Him to become visible to us, we need to see Him spiritually. Just as the Christ was hidden in the physical Jesus, so He is now hidden in those who have been born again. The unveiling of the Christ within us takes place when we recognize our union with Him and His nature becomes our nature. All fleshly thinking and actions have to be overcome. In this vision we see what God does to rid us of all our fleshly reasoning and ideas.

Understanding this vision makes us aware of God's eternal power within us, and brings us encouragement in the midst of apostasy, difficulties and trials. It takes us out of the natural realm and brings us into the spiritual realm - into the precious results of the internal workings of God in us. John saw the saints who had overcome the nations - and these nations symbolize all the opposing forces that are raging in the carnal mind against Christ. He saw them receiving the fulfillment of the promise of reigning together with Christ. **Only those who have overcome the nations within them can reign over the nations of this earth.** They will reign in righteousness and truth, and the inhabitants of this earth will enjoy peace!

The Author of Revelation

This book was written by John, the youngest of all the apostles. When he began to follow Jesus, he was probably no more than 16 or 17. He outlived the other apostles. John did not believe in the pantheon of Roman gods, so he refused to bow to the emperor, and was probably accused of being an atheist. It is said that they tried to kill him by boiling him in oil. When that did not work he was banished to the island of Patmos - a very small rocky island in the Mediterranean - to eke out a living as best he could. There was no way of escape. Living conditions were extremely difficult, especially for an old man, probably on the edge of his nineties! Although many claim that his exile entailed hard labor in the island's quarries, this is not recorded. Neither do we know how long he had been on the island when he received this revelation from God. John was freed in October of 96AD after Domitian's death. Apparently he returned to Ephesus after his release.

Scholars say that the Greek in this book is not as good as the Greek in the rest of the New Testament. There are both similarities and differences in the Greek from John's previous writings, and the dissimilarities may be due to the fact that the subject matter is very different. The images in this exciting and strange drama were hard to describe, and John had to write fast and had no time for grammatical corrections.

Before his banishment he may have had people around to correct his Greek whenever he wrote anything official, but on this island there was no one to help him. Some scholars think that John may have dictated what he saw to a secretary, but there is no scriptural evidence to substantiate this.

As John was meditating on God, he was suddenly taken out of his surroundings and shown vision after vision of such strange and unfamiliar scenes that he could not find words to describe them, so he needed to compare them with familiar things!

Symbolism and its Interpretation

Since this vision was signified to John, its message is contained in symbolism, and therefore it is not to be understood literally. The symbolism has to be simple enough for saints to comprehend, yet difficult enough to hide it from pagans, emperors and the religious hierarchy, for if they could understand it, that would make it even worse for the Christians. The true message needs to be hidden from the uninitiated and revealed to the initiated! So the code that unlocks the interpretation of the symbols must be so simple that Christians can receive the key, but so mysterious that even the most self-righteous pagan cannot understand it. God did not give Jesus Christ a message that is too difficult for Christians to understand. Those who are being persecuted for their faith need to understand this message.

Symbolism gives us a deep and wide scope of understanding with just a few words. The explanations given in revelation are very brief in comparison with what could be written, but the symbolism tells us so much more than words can express.

A blessing is promised to all who understand and heed the message of this book, so it must apply to Christians of that time as well as to Christians in every generation. A message that does not apply to everyone cannot bless everyone. If we view these visions as prophecies of future historical events, we will miss the blessing this book is intended to bring us. If these events are taken out of their symbolic meaning, they do not apply to everyone in every generation; they would only apply to those who live in a certain future time in history. If we interpret these visions according to our own ideas, it becomes very scary. However, it is for every Christian in every generation, not only for those living thousands of years down the line.

Our interpretation has to unveil Jesus Christ. **We are not looking for a physical Jesus, but for the corporate, spiritual Christ.** Christ is not complete without His body - the church. So the unveiling of Jesus Christ takes place through the inward processing that rids us of all our fleshly thinking. This brings us into oneness with His thinking, and Christ receives a church without spot or wrinkle. **The signs and symbols reveal the workings of Christ in the individuals that form the bride of Christ!** Everything is brought into the light of Jesus Christ.

There is a reason for placing this book at the end of the Bible, for it is filled with allusions to the books that precede it. The various symbols have a direct or implied reference to another part of the Bible. For example, it mentions the new Jerusalem. In **Galatians 4** we read about the Jerusalem that is in slavery with her children, and the Jerusalem that is above - the free Jerusalem. When we learn the significance of Jerusalem in the Bible, we have the key to its meaning in Revelation. The same thing holds true for Babylon, the beasts, the witnesses, the serpent, etc. The Bible gives us the key.

The characters and events have symbolic meaning. To interpret the symbolism we need to draw from both the Old and the New Testaments, and heed any explanations given in the text. **1 Cor. 10:3-4** is a good example in showing us how Old Testament events symbolize spiritual realities. Paul wrote, *“And all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ.”* The manna symbolizes the bread of life that we have in Christ, and the water from the rock symbolizes the living water that Christ gives us. To interpret this vision correctly we need to be willing to let go of our preconceived ideas, and receive the Holy Spirit’s understanding.

Eastern people feel at home with symbolism. They often think in symbolism, and convey ideas symbolically in speech, writings and paintings. The symbolism that Chinese art embodies was explained to us by an artist when we were teaching in China. This gave us a greater appreciation of their paintings. Likewise, an understanding of the symbols in Revelation is necessary in order to receive the promised blessing. The drama enacted before John is not for entertaining us, but for teaching us spiritual realities.

Most of the born-again believers in the first century did not own a copy of the scriptures, but the teaching they had received would clue them in to the meaning of the symbols. The Holy Spirit has to reveal its spiritual meaning. If a Roman would read this book, he would consider it stupid because he did not have the key to unlock the code. The code is only revealed to those who have learned to see spiritually and have learned to listen to the teaching of the Spirit.

The Spirit teaches us that beyond our natural world, there is a real world where Jesus Christ is central, and we are caught in a tension between the two worlds. Since the natural world still seems very real to us, it is very difficult to relinquish this idea. Yet this is a prerequisite to understanding this book. Here we see that everything is based on the salvation we have in Christ; everything finds its fulfillment in Him. It teaches us that we do not have to despair in the midst of difficulties and afflictions, for Christ is our provision in every situation. **Drawing on His power makes us overcomers. God wants us to rest in this glorious fact!**

An unveiling displays what is already in existence. Every Christian throughout the ages must experience this unveiling. What a relief it is to know that the unveiling of the Christ in us does not need any great accomplishments on our part, for that would be self-effort. The unveiling takes place through our submission and obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ. As we receive truth and walk in obedience to truth, the manifestation of the Christ will take place. **We are not trying to anticipate what Christ will do historically, but we are observing what He is accomplishing in His saints!** The salvation that Christ has completed is now being worked into His saints.

Our mind needs to be transformed so that it can come into agreement with the mind of Christ. There is an ongoing battle in us if we do not believe the mind of Christ within us. This has nothing to do with a great battle between Jesus and the devil, for the latter has already been defeated! Our carnal mind is ever in opposition to the mind of the Spirit, and tries to rule us forcefully and persuasively. **This book teaches us that we have to be cleansed of all our carnal thinking and learn to live in the obedience of faith!**

Revelation teaches us to interpret what is happening within us in the light of what needs to be accomplished in order for us to be conformed to His image! We view the present in the light of the end. The sufferings we have to endure are needed to produce the finished product! It is like sewing a dress - every cut and stitch is made with the finished product in mind. To the uninitiated, the cutting up of beautiful material looks unreasonable, wasteful and destructive, but when the finished garment is on display, it looks gorgeous! So the Master is working in us - some things are painful and often misunderstood, but the end result is beautiful!

This vision is divided into seven visions, yet it is one vision. The first is in chapters 1-3; the second is in chapters 4-7; the third in chapters 8-11; the fourth in chapters 12-14; the fifth in chapters 15-16; the sixth in chapters 17-19; and the seventh or final vision in chapters 20-22. These visions are not to be viewed as occurring consecutively; they are all part of one vision, and each one gives us light on a certain aspect of the unfolding of Jesus Christ to us and in us. **These visions reveal that Christ is our protection against all evil, and that victory is ours in Him. It ends with the church and the Spirit in full unity proclaiming the same message of invitation for all to come!** The Lord reigns! Hallelujah!

The numbers in Revelation are also symbolic. For example, seven is the number of divine completeness. This number is repeated again and again: seven visions, seven stars, seven Spirits, seven churches, seven golden lampstands, etc. Just like seven different colors are needed to complete a rainbow, so there are seven aspects needed to complete the whole. We know there is only one Holy Spirit, but here we have seven Spirits - the seven Spirits are the Holy Spirit in His totality.

Faulty Natural Interpretations

If we overlook the fact that this message was symbolized to John, many fanciful and carnal interpretations will result. These interpretations may be given in all sincerity, but that does not make them right. Those who base their interpretation on natural events combined with a futuristic view of events that will take place in apostate Christianity, miss the intent of this message entirely. Consequently, Napoleon, Mohammed, Hitler, Mussolini and Sadat, in turn have been seen as the Antichrist - but then they all died!

In spite of the fact that these predictions were all wrong, many Christians quickly forget that fact, and continue in their fanciful predictions. Their lack of repentance is illustrated in one of the great Pentecostal evangelists of the past, who wrote a book that “absolutely proved” that Mussolini was the Antichrist. The day after Mussolini died, instead of offering an apology to the world and admitting his mistake, the evangelist thanked God that he had sold all the books before Mussolini died. After Sadat died, a Christian bookstore sold the book that proclaimed Sadat as the Antichrist, for half price without explaining the reason for its reduced price. We took advantage of the sale and felt tricked when we got to that part. The once popular book, “88 Reasons Why Christ Will Return In 1988” is now obsolete. All these popular carnal ideas were wrong! All the various ideas about the mark of the beast as an actual number are also wrong.

Many expositions of Revelation are concerned with future events - events that are to take place during the end-time. Have you ever wondered what is meant by “end-time”? Are they events that take place just before time ends, and there is only eternity, or are they events that shall precede the so-called “second-coming” of Christ? I say “so-called” because Christ has already come a second time at Pentecost. In 2 Cor. 3:17 it says, “*The Lord is the Spirit.*” Since the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, Christ came again in the Spirit at that time. Every coming again is now over and above the second time!

Notice also that the Bible does not mention a “second-coming”. This designation has been coined by the carnal mind of man. The only reference to a second appearing (not a second coming) is in Heb. 9:28. “*So Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.*” Since He has already dealt with sin, He is not appearing to deal with sin a second time. In His glorious priesthood He appears to us for salvation. Time and again He appears to us to bring us encouragement, understanding, etc.

There is a difference between appearing and coming, but the translators have not been careful in their translation of these words. A research of these words in Strong's

or Young's Concordance reveals this. The scriptures say Christ will come again! He **has** come again, for He lives and abides in us; He is here, for He has promised never to leave us or forsake us; He comes again in those who have been changed into His image. Every time we receive a new revelation of Christ, He comes to us in our awareness. The Spirit (Christ) is omnipresent; He fills all things. He is always with us and He never leaves us nor forsakes us. So how does He come again? Because we are not always aware of His presence, He can only come to us time and again in our awareness of Him. **Whenever He manifests Himself to us in revelation and in power, we say He came to us.** And of course, He did!

It grieves us to say that most Christians do not recognize that Jesus is no longer physical. In 2 Cor. 5:16 we read, *"Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer."* The only way we can see Him in physical form is when He is revealed in the overcomers. It is to our advantage that He has come again in the Spirit! Now we can all have fellowship and communion with Him at the same time. We don't have to go to Jerusalem and stand in line for years and years to have a ten-minute meeting with Him!

The Recipients of This Revelation

This revelation of Jesus Christ was not only for John, but for all the bond-servants of Jesus Christ. A bond-servant is someone who desires to remain a slave because he loves his master. (Ex. 21) This book is written to those who love Christ to the point of being willing to stand up and be counted, and if necessary, to die because of their allegiance to Him. They are His love slaves forever!

Becoming a Christian at that time, truly meant being a slave of Jesus Christ. The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. (Acts 11:26) The name, Christian, was given them by pagans. The pagans heard them talk about Christ, and that they belonged to Him exclusively - they were His slaves, so they nicknamed them the Christianos - the slaves of Christ. ANOS at the end of a word simply means "the slaves of". The pagans used it as a derogatory term.

It is helpful to know that the Greek word for witness is MARTUS or MARTUR. A martyr is one who bears witness by his death. A declaration of facts is also translated witness, and this helps us to understand its relationship to testimony (MARTURIA). The Greek word for a false witness is PSEUDOMARTUS or -TUR. John *"testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw."* (Rev.1:2)

A witness had a martyr mentality; that is, he had already faced the issue of death.

Therefore the idea of martyr and witness was never separated. In those days (as in some countries today) those who became witnesses of Jesus Christ, faced the fact that they would most likely suffer persecution and death. They considered this eventuality before they were baptized.

Over the years the word “witness” has degenerated and lost its martyr mentality. The thought that we might be forced to exit this world as a punishment for being baptized, would never enter our minds. To us witnessing means giving a testimony about Jesus. To the early Christians it meant things like the loss of a job, loss of a home, probable torture, death or banishment - as in the case of John.

The first century Christians were under great persecution, and needed sustenance and the comfort of the Holy Spirit. They were not interested in a world figure posing as an Antichrist. They were not toying around with future events that Christians are so concerned about today. They may have had a better understanding of the fact that the natural mind is anti-Christ than most Christians do today. Since God promised a blessing to everyone who reads this book and heeds its words, it cannot be about things that only apply to those who live in the far-distant future. Unless it applies to all people in every generation, that would be a mockery!

Nowhere in the New Testament do we see people becoming Christians in order to escape hell or to go to heaven after they die. They didn't even think in those terms. They had a wonderful perspective of the greatness of the salvation God had provided for them. They believed that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, and that life in Christ was worth more than physical life! If we say we believe, but our actions don't reflect that belief, it is only a mental belief - not a heart belief.

This letter was written to seven churches that were on the mainland over which John had been the pastor and overseer. Though there were many other churches on the mainland, these seven were very strategically placed. The seven churches are listed in the order that a messenger from John in exile on Patmos would have visited them. From Patmos he would have crossed over to Ephesus, and then taken a circular route ending in Laodicea. After the church had read the letter, it was in a position to pass it on to the next church. In most cases these churches stood at the head of a valley, or at a pass beyond which were other churches.

Historic Background

To understand the Christians who lived at the time this book was written, it is helpful to know a little about the historical context. From history we learn that the Roman emperors had brought a lot of good, like roads and civilization. The people

were happy to respond by worshiping Caesar. This became a long-standing custom in Rome, but the enforcement depended on the emperor and his officials in the far-flung empire.

This book was written approximately 95 A.D. At that time Domitian was the reigning emperor of the Roman empire. He was fanatical in his insistence that emperor worship be strictly enforced. He insisted that the people had to proclaim him as their lord and their god. Emperor worship was intended to bring cohesion to the empire. Some emperors were not as concerned about it as others, and under their rule the Christians had an easier time. Domitian was assassinated in September 96AD. He was also the last of the twelve Caesars.

Christians refused to stand before a statue of the emperor, and say, "He is lord." In fact many of them would simply say, "Jesus Christ is Lord." They also preached that "Jesus Christ is Lord and God." That not only annoyed Caesar, but it made him so furious that he arrested Christians, imprisoned them and fed them to the wild beasts.

Christians living on the mainland of Asia at that time were noted for being jobless and homeless. Their civic rights were taken away, and they were called traitors, third-class citizens and considered to be lower than slaves. They were bullied and thrown out on the streets, and many had to live in caves. Many lost their lives; if they were not killed, they died of hunger.

It was in Pergamum that emperor worship was first instituted, and therefore the most fanatical about it. Here the very first temple was built in honor of a Caesar. They also had many patron deities. For example, every blacksmith had to worship the same patron deity in order to become a blacksmith. If the patron deity was Venus, their worship of Venus included all kinds of immorality and sexual orgies. If Christians refused to participate in those things, and this part of the ceremony was overlooked, they still needed to worship the emperor in order to get a job.

Understanding the symbolism will bless us by unveiling the power and greatness of our Lord Jesus Christ and His wonderful salvation! Let's keep this in mind as we study these visions.

Chapter 1

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John.” (v.1)

This book is a revelation of Jesus Christ. The word **revelation** means **the unveiling**. An unveiling is a disclosure of something that is present but still unknown to the populace. Christ lives in the believers, but he is not revealed in them until the veil (our fleshly thinking) is removed. The unveiling is a disclosure of His very essence - who He is, who He has always been, who He is in us and His relationship to the church. The unveiling consists of the processing needed to change us into His image.

Jesus came to bring us His life and His mind. Since the natural mind is in darkness and deception, truth has to be revealed to us. We need truth in order to be released from every form of deception presented by the lie, and from all the desires of the flesh. To achieve this goal the processings of God are needed in our lives. The visions reveal the work **that He does within us**. Christ is working through the anointing that He is within us! He is the Anointed One, so if we have Christ, we have the anointing. Our degree of obedience to Christ determines the measure of His anointing within us.

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave Him...” An unveiling will reveal either the reality or absence of what we thought was hidden by the veil. When the veil between the holy place and the most holy was torn, it revealed what was present, but had been hidden from their view. It revealed its emptiness, for the Ark of the Covenant had been lost. Without it, their place was left desolate. (*Matt. 23:38*) Jesus Christ is now our Ark of the Covenant, and without Him we are empty. Formerly the knowledge of the missing ark was only known to the high priest, but when the veil was rent, it became available to the priesthood. Here, in Revelation, is a disclosure of truth, that was formerly only known to our High Priest, Jesus Christ, and He is now making it available to the royal priesthood - and God’s children are that priesthood!

The revelation of Jesus Christ as the corporate Son of God, was given to Jesus by the Father. Jesus recognized that everything He was and is, came from the Father! He was completely dependent on Him, for He only did what the Father showed Him to do! God had revealed to Him that He had come for the purpose of dying a cruel death on the cross, but His terrible agony in the garden was a real battle for His

submission to that purpose! His complete submission in the face of the greatest torture ever endured, gave Him the name that is above every name. That name gave Him all authority in heaven and on earth!

Before going to the cross, Jesus prayed, *“And the glory which You have given Me, I have given to them; that they may be one, just as we are one.”* Everything Jesus is, He gives to His ecclesia, His called-out ones! Just as Jesus Christ, while on earth, had to receive the awareness of who He was by revelation, so we have to receive the awareness of who we are in Him by revelation! This revelation unveils the fact that Christ is not complete without His body - His called-out ones!

Jesus Christ came to bring us a revelation of the Father! In *Hebrews 1:3* we read that *“He (Jesus) is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature...”* In the same way that Jesus came to reveal the Father, **we are to reveal the nature of Christ to the world by being an exact representation of His nature! This book is a revelation of the processings of God in our lives to bring this about!**

This revelation concerns what He has done - His completed great salvation - His death, resurrection and the outpouring of His Spirit into our hearts! It is a revelation of Him and His great salvation that brings us into unity with Him! It is not a revelation of a second coming. In fact, He has already come a second time in the Holy Spirit, for He is the Spirit! (2 Cor. 3:17) The scriptures say that He is coming again, and there is a big difference between that and a second coming! A second coming would specify that He has only come once. It would mean that He has never come to you and me in the Spirit, for that would be more than one coming. Saying that He is coming again does not specify a number.

Revelation reveals who Christ is now. He is the corporate Christ, the second corporate man! In Adam, the first corporate man, all die, and in Christ, the second corporate man, all are made alive. It reveals His relationship to the universe and to the world of men. It shows us all that He has in store for us. This includes His eternal reign in us, and His reign in union with us over the nations. In Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, He put away sin, He defeated the devil, and fulfilled everything that was needed to accomplish His work on earth as a human being. That work is finished! His work is now in the Spirit - changing us into His image!

God gave Jesus this revelation to show to His bondservants. A bondservant is a slave who belongs to his master because he loves him. He knows that his master will take good care of him. A bondservant does not only love his master, but his whole life is in the hands of his master, and he is dedicated to do his master's will. He could be on his own and depend on his self-effort for survival, but he has realized that it is to his advantage to belong to his master. Those who are Christ's by mental assent only, will not understand this.

God wants us to know all about the great salvation that has been accomplished! He wants us to know that the devil has been defeated, that we can trust God even as Jesus did, and that everything flows out of His great salvation! The trials and difficulties we face will demonstrate the degree of our submission to the Father - to His purpose for us!

Notice that it says these things must shortly take place, and in v. 3 it says that the time is near. These are not things that take place in history after several millennia have passed. It is not a revelation of future historical events. We do not read of the fulfillment of these events in the daily newspapers, because they are not speaking of world events. These are things that come to pass in us. It could be termed an allegorical drama of the constant processings of God that bring change in the lives of the overcomers (firstfruit) of every generation! For the multitudes, this change will come later.

This message came to John in a series of visions. It was signified to John - the KJV has translated it correctly here. It says **signified**; it came to him in symbolic form. The Greek word SEMAINO means to make something known by signs and symbols. So it is not an obvious message, but one that was communicated by signs and symbols. Jerusalem, Babylon, the river Euphrates, beasts of various descriptions, a Lamb as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, horsemen, locusts, a woman sitting on a beast that lumbers across the desert carrying a cup full of blood, etc., are all symbols. They all have meaning, but they cannot be interpreted in the natural sense, for then they would not be symbols. Jerusalem does not refer to the Jerusalem in Palestine; it is not literal; it is spiritual. The same is true of the other figures mentioned. The light of Jesus Christ exposes the reality of what they truly are, not to bring fear, but to bring us into life and victory!

It was signified to John by an angel or messenger. The Greek word ANGELOS really means messenger. Here Jesus is the messenger sent by the Father to signify a message to John by the use of symbols. John was the writer, the one who described the visions that were given him. He was the secretary for a message from Jesus Christ to the churches. Christ is ever interested in the welfare of His church, and He knew His people were in need of encouragement. Just as they needed a message of grace and peace from the Holy Spirit, so do we!

John *“testified (bore witness) to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.”* (v.2) A witness states what he has seen, not what he thinks. If he inserts his own ideas, he is no longer a witness. The scriptures always have to be our plumb line. If we testify to our own soulish ideas and declare them to be truth, we are not being a witness to the word of God and a testimony of Jesus Christ. If Christians would understand this, there would not be so many different denominations today.

Generally speaking, Christians are not as interested in the deeper things of God that necessitate a change in their thinking, as they are in knowing the future. They are not interested in receiving revelation knowledge. Instead of wanting to learn more, they want to hear what they already believe. We have personally experienced this. When we were first told, and shown in the scriptures, that Christ's obedience is greater than Adam's disobedience, we were furious. But our love for truth caused the seed that had been planted to bear fruit. The Berean Christians wanted to learn more. When they heard new things, they searched the scriptures to see if these things agreed with the scriptures. They did not just accept everything they heard, but they were willing to change when they saw it was true. The Pharisees were not willing to receive Christ's teaching. They were established in their own doctrines. We need to hear and receive the teaching of the Holy Spirit. This requires submission to the Spirit because our natural mind is always against the Spirit.

Verse 3 contains a unique promise - "*Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.*" Since the early Christians were the first to read this message, this promise was for them and for all who follow after them! It doesn't say that this blessing is only for the first century Christians, or that it is only for those who live in the end-times. It is for all - it is an open-ended blessing! There is no blessing like that attached to any other book of the Bible. In our interpretation we must see what it meant for them, and then we will see what it means for us.

A book that blesses people at all times has to be a practical book - one that brings comfort and hope to people in every situation in life - even to those who are under persecution, whether in AD 95 or in AD 2020! For example, if you came home, bloody from the beating you had received, then found your house ransacked and your wife and children missing, you wouldn't worry about an Antichrist hundreds of years down the road. You would know that he was present now.

A prophecy is an anointed message from God. Blessed are those who pay attention to this message, for the time is at hand; the time is now! To pay attention or to heed this message means to act upon it; to listen to it, and to live accordingly!

"John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth..." (vv.4-5a) Here is a wonderful message of grace and peace from Jesus Christ! Grace and peace is ours in every difficulty! Grace cannot be merited; it doesn't come to us because we deserve it! God's divine favor and power are present for us at all times! We can draw upon His grace continually!

God wants us to have peace - even in the midst of adversity and persecution! How

would we like it if our children were constantly worrying whether we cared for them, and whether we would provide the necessities of life for them, when we have the means to supply them? We'd say there was something wrong in that relationship! Yet the majority of God's children are great worriers. They have so many fears. Why? Because they are not heeding this message. They are not trusting God to provide the grace that is needed for every situation, and for the completeness of their salvation. They recognize their own limitations and do not trust God to give of His limitless resources!

We know that the Holy Spirit is one spirit, yet in this vision He is spoken of as the seven Spirits who are before God's throne. The number **seven** symbolizes divine completeness. It is repeated over and over again: seven visions, seven stars, seven Spirits, seven churches, seven golden lampstands, etc. Seven different colors are needed to complete a rainbow, each color adding its own beauty to the whole. Cut a pizza into seven pieces, and the seven pieces form the whole, and are needed to complete the whole. So the seven spirits are the Holy Spirit in His totality. In **Is.11:2** they are listed as the Spirit of the Lord, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. We can trust the fullness of the Spirit to bring about the redemption and the restoration that God has purposed and promised!

Jesus Christ is the faithful witness! He is a true witness of the Father! His declarations come from the heart of the Father. He is the firstborn of the dead. His message is backed up by His experience of resurrection. He has conquered death and come forth in the fullness of life! Now He is bringing that victory into us!

He is the ruler of the kings of the earth. The word **ruler** is translated from the Greek ARCHON meaning **first in rank and power**, and we have words like archenemy, archbishop, archdeacon, derived from it. So this message comes from the elevated height where there is no power higher than His. This power can rule over every king of the earth; no king can successfully rise up against Him. There are many kings in our carnal thinking that do not want to submit to God's thinking. But He is able to rule them! When the mind of Christ rules in us, every natural thought has to bow to His mind.

From God's position of faithfulness, truth and power, He then proceeds to give us our identity! *"To Him who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood, and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father..."* (5b-6a) Many today are seeking for their identity in their ancestors and/or in their beliefs and traditions. Those who are in Christ do not have their identity in their human ancestry, but in their **spiritual** identity - who they are in Christ. We have become a new creation by being born of the Spirit. This means we have been born from above!

In this verse Christ is telling us that He loves us! He does not want His children to feel insecure; He wants them to know that they are loved! Have you ever wondered whether God loves you? That question no longer belongs to God's children. His life and death and words are in agreement to prove His love for us! His love is pure; it has no hidden motives, no hidden agendas and no selfish desires! We can totally trust His faithful witness!

Next He tells us that we are released from our sins through His blood. This is good news! We have received total cleansing - a loosing from all our sins! We are freed from all condemnation! **If we still have condemnation, we are listening to our carnal mind.** *"Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* (Rom. 8:1) How can we still have condemnation when we have been released from all our sins? What a glorious revelation! Our guilt complex is gone! So let's think of what He has done for us! Let's look beyond our sins, our suffering and hunger pangs, and the reviling that comes our way because of our faith.

Children have their parents' nature, and God's children have His nature. We, who are His children, have been born of the Spirit; we have been born from above! The Spirit has been poured into our hearts, so we have His DNA and we have His love! We don't have to seek to obtain His love and favor - we **are** loved! We don't have to do things to merit his favor - we **have** His favor! And because we have His love and favor, we are obedient children!

Furthermore, He has made us a kingdom, priests to our God! The words "to be" are not in the Greek text. Way back in **Exodus 19:6**, God said to the Israelites, *"And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."* But the Israelites worshiped the golden calf; they failed in their God-given identity, so God chose Levi to be the priestly tribe. **Now, in Christ, God's desire becomes reality!** He now has a kingdom of priests! We function as priests because we are priests, and corporately a kingdom of priests! We are a royal priesthood! (1 Peter 2:9) We may be beaten, downcast and outcasts, **but the reality is that individually and corporately we are a royal priesthood!**

Priests are intercessors. They form a bridge between God and humanity. They are reconcilers. What a high calling we have in Christ! We are ambassadors on behalf of Christ; He has committed to us the word of reconciliation! (2 Cor. 5:18-19) This is the ministry He has given us!

Imagine a kingdom of priests - a kingdom of intercessors! This can only happen in union with Christ. This union brings transformation, and we are changed into the image of Christ. **God wants to see Himself mirrored in His people, so the world can get an idea or concept of what God is like.** The transformed life will bring glory to God and to His dominion to the ages of the ages! (The correct translation of the Greek AION, is **age** - not forever.) What a wonderful plan God has for His people!

Jesus Christ is our intercessor. *“Hence, also, He is able to save forever (or completely) those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”* (Heb. 7:25) Jesus shared our humanity. In fact, His identification with us was so complete that He could die for us. He did this in the knowledge that we could then share His high estate with Him! He makes this possible by giving us His life and nature! His desire for us is that we might have the same relationship with the Father that He had. Having the same relationship with the Father elevates us to being with Him where He is! (Jn. 14:3) This high calling that is ours in Christ causes us to join Him in His intercession!

“Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.” (v.7)

Christ comes in the midst of clouds. Clouds symbolize overcomers as well as the presence of God. Paul said, *“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us...”* (Heb. 12:1) So Christ comes in the midst of overcomers. He comes in the transformed life of the overcomers while we are residing here on earth!

Clouds consist of little droplets of water that have left the earthly realm; they have left the dirt and residue that once muddied them and have risen to a higher realm. So overcomers have left their earthy thinking and have entered into a higher realm. They have received the mind of Christ and are functioning in it.

In the Old Testament we see that God used a pillar of cloud in which to reveal His presence when He led the Israelites out of Egypt. (Ex. 13:21) When Moses had finished building the tabernacle, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple, and Moses was unable to enter the tabernacle. Moses symbolized the law, and the law is unable to enter the presence of God.

“And every eye will see Him.” How do people see Christ? After Christ’s resurrection, only believers saw Him. At that time it was necessary for Him to manifest Himself as a physical person to the disciples so that they would believe He had truly been resurrected. After He appeared to them, He disappeared before them by **returning to His true spirit being.**

Saul of Tarsus met Christ on his way to Damascus. He did not see Him physically, but he saw Him spiritually. The light of Jesus Christ suddenly burst upon Saul’s ignorance and darkness! This brought repentance (mourning) and change! Isn’t that the way Christ came to you and to me? He came to us in our darkness and ignorance and brought light! We saw Him and recognized that He is our Savior! **Everyone who sees Christ becomes a believer. Since every eye will see Him, every eye will receive light, and everyone will become a believer!**

Let's put away the ideas of darkness - that Jesus will suddenly emerge out of the sky as a giant man, so big that everyone can see Him physically. The Lord is the Spirit, and every eye has to see Him spiritually! When the flesh sees Him, it has to die. *"No man can see God and live."* **Man** refers to the Adamic man, not to the spiritual man. Our carnal thinking (the flesh) has to die when it sees God!

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.'" (v.8) Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and Omega is the last one. All the words we need to communicate are formed with the letters of the alphabet. In like manner, the Lord is everything we need! He is our source, our life and our supply for all our needs. He is the one Being - the One that was, and the One that is, and the One that is coming. He is always the First, the Almighty. He is God, for God is the Almighty! He is, for He never changes. He keeps coming to us, ever revealing Himself to us in greater depth! No one can upset His plans. He always remains the First, and He always comes as the Almighty. He never changes; He has the power to perform His will! God's omnipotence is the foundation on which Christ builds.

"I, John, your brother and fellow-partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus." (v.9)

After laying a foundation, John introduced himself. Though he had been the overseer of these seven churches, he simply said he was their brother. He did not say, "John, your overseer." Our office doesn't change our relationship to one another. He did not write from a superior position, or from soliciting their sympathy. He was a companion in their tribulation.

Notice that tribulation and kingdom and perseverance are all in Jesus! We can easily understand that the kingdom and perseverance are in Jesus, but tribulation seems out of place. However, when we are suffering tribulation, we are not in the devil's kingdom. He opposed Jesus when He was on earth, and now he opposes the Jesus in us, but he does not have power over us. We may be martyred for being Christians, but the devil has no power over the real you and me. We are in Christ's kingdom and we are under His authority and power. We have His perseverance!

John wrote from a real island called Patmos - a very small rock island in the Mediterranean, a place where they dumped prisoners so they would not have to feed them. This was a forced situation - John was not there on a sightseeing tour. He had refused to bow to the emperor. It is said that they tried to kill him by boiling him in oil. When that did not work he was banished to the island of Patmos to eke out a living as best he could. This was God's doing. He set the Roman government up so John would be sent to Patmos. John had known Jesus in the flesh, but now he was

to receive revelation of the spiritual Jesus. Later he would be released to take this message to the churches.

The name Patmos means **our killing**. Our Patmos, our death to our carnal thinking, to our ego, is also a forced situation. We do not volunteer to travel there, but God sets up the situations and causes us to be there. These places are uncomfortable, rocky and difficult. Although we have been crucified together with Christ, this death has to be worked out in our lives so we can learn to live in the Spirit and **receive a revelation of Jesus Christ!**

“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, saying, ‘Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.’” (vv.10-11)

This reference to the Lord’s day has nothing to do with a particular day of the week. In the Spirit, the Lord’s day is always. Day or light is always. Darkness is the result of an obstruction barring the light from getting to us. With the Lord there are no obstructions. He dwells in unapproachable light. When John was in the Spirit, he was receiving spiritual light. This light is the Lord’s day. He was in the timelessness of the Spirit, communing with God, and the Spirit was giving him a revelation of the true Christ, and the triumph and victory that is ours in Him! Jesus Christ is not an individual entity; He is a corporate Man. He is the head, and the church is His body. He is the stem of the lampstand, and our identity and life are in Him! He is the corporate Son of Man!

As John worshiped, he heard a voice like the sound of a trumpet, speaking from behind him! Why from behind him? To see this voice, he had to change his focus. He had to look at his past and see that God was also the God of his past. Before we can truly comprehend the greatness of our salvation, we have to see that our past, our present and our future are in Him!

In Deuteronomy 8:2-3 God said, *“You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart...He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.”*

In the knowledge that all our negatives are for our good, we can leave the past and go on in our Christian walk! In this knowledge we can also know that all the negatives of the future will be for our good!

Notice that he doesn't say that the voice is a trumpet, but that it sounded like one. The symbolism continues. What does the sound of a trumpet indicate? In the Old Testament the trumpet was usually sounded in order to call people together for a definite purpose: into the presence of the Lord, before the ark of the covenant, for celebrations, to sound an alarm, to call men to war, etc.

In this passage we see a similarity to **Ex. 19**. Before God gave the Israelites the law covenant, they were all gathered together in order to hear what God would say to them. The awesome presence of the Lord caused Mt. Sinai to quake, and there was thick darkness and lightning and thunder. It was a magnificent, stirring sight! After the growing sound of a trumpet broke forth, God spoke! In this majestic setting God revealed Himself as an awesome, powerful and holy God making a law covenant with Israel!

In the unveiling of the new covenant, it is significant that John heard a voice calling him, and the voice sounded like a trumpet. In the Old Testament the trumpet was always used to call the people together for a definite purpose, so this tells us that this is a call to all the covenant people of the New Testament. This message is not only for John and the seven churches - Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea, but also for all of us. These seven churches symbolize seven components of the one church of Jesus Christ, and in them we see the areas that need cleansing in us. Jesus Christ only has one church, and we are part of that church. Everyone is to hear the words of the covenant and understand who Jesus Christ is!

These were seven strategically placed real churches. When one church was through reading the letter, it was passed on to the next church. The order of the churches is according to the route one would take in going from Patmos to visit them. Of these seven churches, only Ephesus is well-known. **Acts 16:14** mentions Thyatira as Lydia's home town. The church at Laodicea is mentioned in **Colossians 4:15-16**. The other churches are not mentioned in any of the other books of the New Testament.

These churches were symbolic. There were many more churches in Asia at that time, but these churches symbolize the one complete church. Their names reveal something about them. **Ephesus** means **permitted**. They had permitted themselves to go back into natural thinking, and thus lost their first love. **Smyrna** comes from myrrh, and that means **suffering**. **Pergamos** means **fortified**; they were fortified by self-effort, and that is pride. **Thyatira** means **odor of affliction** - the smell of affliction is self-pity. **Sardis** comes from the red sardine stone. Adam means **red**; the Adamic nature is showing. **Philadelphia** means **brotherly love**, and **Laodicea** means **justice of the people** - democracy. Instead of being God-centered it was man-centered.

“Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters.” (vv.12-15)

As John turned to see the voice, he first saw seven golden lampstands, seven symbolizing completeness and perfection. In v. 20 we learn that these represent the seven churches - the complete church. In the tabernacle the seven-branched lampstand stood in the holy place. Although it was made of gold, symbolizing God's divine nature, it was in the holy place - not in the holy of holies. Here the churches are pictured as being in the holy place. They still had areas that were not submitted to Christ, as we see in chapters 2 and 3. They were not yet in the city where there are no shadows, where the only light is the light of Christ, and where He is all and in all! Many processings were needed before they would get to that place, as mentioned in chapter 21.

The lampstand in the temple had 7 branches with a light on the top of each branch. All the branches of the lampstand were joined to a central stem. That central stem represents Jesus Christ. All the 7 lampstands are directly connected to Jesus. They are all united with Him, but they are not directly connected to one another! They are only connected with one another in their union with Christ. He is the life of the church, for it is from Him that life is going to the churches. This tells us that the seven lampstands are really one. One yet seven; seven, yet one! Together they make up the total expression of every aspect of Christ in His body.

In the midst of these lampstands John saw someone very different from anyone he had ever seen before. He could not identify him, so he began to describe him. He is **like** a son of man, his head and hair are **like** white wool, his eyes **like** a flame of fire, his feet **like** burnished bronze, his voice **like** the sound of many waters, his face **like** bright sunlight. What does all this mean?

This is not a photographic image of the Jesus who was on earth. John was intimately acquainted with the physical person of Jesus. But that was not what he saw, because that is not who Jesus is now! He is the corporate Son of Man as symbolized by the seven-branched lampstand in the holy place. Each branch symbolized one of the seven churches, and the seven churches symbolized the complete church, just as the seven colors of the rainbow make up the rainbow. However, the lampstand is not complete without the stem, and the stem is not complete without the branches. The One who was like a son of man in the midst of the lampstands, is the Christ, the stem of the lampstand. As the seven were actually one lampstand, so Christ, the Son

of Man is not complete without the church, His bride! They are one! He is **like** a son of man, but He is different! Let's see what He is like.

The only way John could describe what he saw, was by the symbolism in which Jesus chose to present Himself. He was wearing a robe reaching to the feet. The long flowing robe reminds us of the garment worn by priests and also by ancient judges. In fact this whole picture, as we shall see, has much to do with the priesthood that judges, because judging was one of the duties of the priesthood.

The robe was gathered together by a golden girdle or belt, around the breasts. Breasts are created for supplying sustenance to the young. The gold signifies God's pure nature. Just as the stem of the lampstand contained the perfect oil for the lamps, so Christ is the perfect divine food for the churches!

His head and hair are **like** white wool. His head is white and his hair is white. White symbolizes purity, and a white head symbolizes purity of thought. White hair is always associated with someone who has been around for a long time. Life has taught him many lessons; he has found answers and has become wise; he has discernment and therefore he can judge.

A symbol among judges is white hair. In England, and in some other countries, you are given a white wig with curls down to your shoulders as soon as you become a judge. An attorney gets a white toupee - a little wig. Why do they do that? Because white symbolizes wisdom.

Here we see a similarity to Daniel's vision of the Ancient of Days. It says that the hair of His head was like pure wool. This is the eternal One, the One who has ultimate wisdom and ultimate discernment! Many scriptures extol the wisdom of God as it is exemplified in creation and in our salvation! *"But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God...in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."* (1 Cor. 1:30; Col. 2:3) The ultimate wisdom of God is focused in Jesus Christ. He is the judge of all men; He judges in truth and orders the affairs of men in absolute wisdom! In so doing He is achieving the most perfect end to the glory of God.

"His eyes were like a flame of fire" - a fire that burns through all our masks, through all our external behavior, through all our unbelief, and sees the new creation man that we are in Him. He knows that we have been made a new creation and that in Him we have His righteousness! But we are not always conscious of that. We need to discover and believe that we are who God says we are in Christ! So His eyes have to burn away all the lies, deception and unbelief that keep us from seeing how great His all-encompassing salvation is! In **John 10:27** Jesus said, *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them..."* He knows each one of us! Our facades may deceive us as

well as others, but they do not fool Christ's penetrating eyes! We are better known to Him than we are to ourselves.

Paul said, "*For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord.*" (1 Cor. 4:4) His verdict is engraved in truth! Placing ourselves under the eyes of the penetrating flame of fire can be both a glorious and a terrifying experience. When Saul of Tarsus met these eyes, he fell to the ground and said, "What shall I do, Lord?" **Coming into the presence of the One who knows us perfectly, brings us a revelation of ourselves in relationship to His Omnipotence!**

"And His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace..." Some translations read brass. The three words, brass, bronze and copper are often used interchangeably in various Bible translations. Bronze is a copper alloy of copper and tin. It is the material from which utensils (Lev. 6:21), altars (Ex. 38:30), and other objects were fashioned. This material could be polished or shined. Here it was very highly shined up!

Feet symbolize our walk, our lifestyle. Christ's life of obedience to the Father had matured in the fire of tribulation. Temptations pressure us to act independently of God, to reject what God has said, to trust in our own resources, and to forget about faith in God and His promises! When obedience to our God brings rejection, abuse, pain and torture, the temptation to disobey Him becomes very strong. Jesus "*learned obedience from the things which he suffered.*" (Heb. 5:8) We mature in the same way, and every victory brings a greater gleam to our feet!

Bronze typifies judgment. Judgment is not only in our words but also in our feet, i.e., in our lifestyle. Jesus spoke truth, and His life demonstrated truth. He walked the talk! True judgment can only take place when truth is present. Truth does away with the lie even as light does away with darkness. Wherever truth walks, the lie is judged. All the enemies of truth are judged by the truth they hate.

In Numbers 10:35 we read that when the ark set out, Moses said, "*Rise up, O LORD! And let your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate you flee before you.*" Psalm 68 was written on the occasion of taking the ark to Jerusalem. It begins with, "*Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered, and let those who hate Him flee before Him.*" Here we have a picture of Christ and His church marching with feet of burnished bronze. His judgment scatters His enemies; they melt like wax, they disperse like the wind! Nothing can stop the onward march of the church of Jesus Christ!

"His voice was like the sound of many waters." When we think of this sound, we think of Niagara Falls. All the water going over those falls sounds as one sound. It is a sound of perfect harmony, awesome frightening power, and a majesty that strikes

wonder in the heart and inspires us to worship.

What is this saying to us? Many waters symbolize many people. This is the many-membered body of Christ in agreement, speaking with one voice by the Holy Spirit. If they were not in agreement, they would not be understood; they would only be a confused babble of voices. This great choir of many voices, old and young, black and white or whatever color, speaking the same message, is awesome and commands attention. There is no discrepancy in the message.

“In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.” (v.16) Can you form a mental image of a hand that is big enough to hold seven stars? That would be quite bizarre. Obviously, this has to be symbolic.

In v. 20 we read that the seven stars are the seven angels of the seven churches. The Greek word ANGELOS means **messenger**. The number seven in the scriptures always refers to completeness. The seven spirits of God are the Holy Spirit in His completeness, and the seven churches are the church in its completeness, and the seven stars represent the complete message needed so that the church can grow into spiritual maturity. This message is brought to the church by messengers. Who brings us messages from God? Is it not the Christ, by His Holy Spirit who leads and guides us? He speaks to His church in various ways. He may speak to us directly, through the scriptures, through prophets, visions or experiences. He is very innovative!

Stars function in the heavenly or spiritual realm. Spiritual leaders do not sit above the lampstands, nor do they lord it over any of the lampstands. They are not sitting on an elevated platform, exerting power over a group of people. They are in the Lord's right hand of power, for His right hand typifies His power and authority! They are in submission to the authority of God, hear His voice, and obey Him!

Stars bring light into darkness. Pastors and elders are to shepherd the church of God. They are under-shepherds of the Great Shepherd, our Lord Jesus Christ. They are to care for the welfare of the flock, not by politics, dictatorship, denominationalism or hierarchy, but by feeding and caring. Each church and each member of each church has a vital union with Christ! Our unity and relationship is all in Christ and under His authority!

These stars are called by God and do not function according to the religious systems of man. Salary, power and prestige have no fascination for them. They do not get their messages from a religious center or from headquarters. They get their messages from God, and they speak the words God has given them! Seasons and traditions do not dictate the topic for discussion. They value spiritual advice and take it to the Lord for confirmation or rejection. Everything has to come from Christ, for He is the chief Shepherd.

Notice that every church is described as a light-bearer. When John saw Jesus, he saw Him shining as the sun; when he saw the church, he saw it as a lampstand, a small light in the darkness. The sun brings the day; lampstands provide light for those who are in darkness. The light of the lampstands has its source in the light of Jesus Christ, but it does not have the same intensity! When we look at Jesus Christ, we see Him as the sun of righteousness!

The world cannot see the face of Jesus Christ. The only light they see is the church - for we *“are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness.”* (1 Thess. 5:5) Jesus said that we are the light of the world. (Matt. 5:14) What a profound and solemn thought!

After Christ’s resurrection, He was only seen by believers. Unbelievers were to be convinced of the reality of the risen Christ in the life and testimony of the believers! The unbelievers saw the church in action, and asked, *“By what name do you do these things?”* They could only command the disciples never again to speak about Jesus and the resurrection, but they couldn’t stop them; they could not extinguish the light! The world was threatened because there was light. The church had seen something the world had not seen.

The world hates the light. Those who live in darkness are blind. Years ago we visited a cave in Austria which Hitler had used to manufacture airplane parts. We were told that the horses there became blind because they never saw sunlight. The world is in darkness and it needs to receive light that it may see! We all know how hard it is on our eyes to come out of darkness into bright sunlight. When light comes to people who have been in darkness, it hurts their eyes. Many want the light dimmed or turned off!; they don’t want the light of Jesus to reveal what is in their hearts. That is why Jesus said that we will be persecuted, and even put to death for His sake. Saul of Tarsus was actually persecuting Jesus when He persecuted the Christians.

“And out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword.” Again, this is not a literal picture of Jesus with a sword sticking out of His mouth. That would be quite unsightly. The words that were coming from this voice were like a sword coming out of His mouth. In Hebrews 4:12 it says, *“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword...”* His words are like a two-edged sword, one that defeats all the enemies of truth, and at the same time prunes the branches so that they may bring forth more fruit! It is able to divide asunder the soul and the spirit. It is the only word that can do this because it comes from the Christ within them. So this is the spiritual ministry that is in the words spoken by Christ’s bondslaves!

“And His face was like the sun shining in its strength.” The face sums up the person. When you want a photograph of a person, you don’t take a picture of his midriff, his

hands, or his legs. Although these parts belong to him, they do not represent him. You want the face! It is only a limited part of him, but it personifies him.

So the face of Jesus describes His being. It shone like the sun! There are many references in the scriptures depicting Christ as light. He is *“the sun of righteousness”* who will rise with healing in its wings. He is *“the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”* (Mal.4:2; 2 Cor. 4:6) God lives in unapproachable light.

Jesus Christ has burst into our world of sin and darkness with the dazzling noonday light of His love and grace and mercy! As John looked into His face of brilliant light, he *“fell at His feet like a dead man.”* (v.17). This was not the Jesus he had known in the days of his youth when he laid his head upon Christ’s breast. This was the ascended glorified Christ, the wisdom of God, the sun of righteousness, the Lord of lords and King of kings, the judge of all men!

There is a big difference between the Jesus of Nazareth who walked this earth in the days of His humiliation, and the exalted Christ! When He came in the flesh as a babe, only those who had received a specific revelation from God knew that He was special. He didn’t come with a halo around His head. He didn’t have any unusual identification marks that caused Him to look different from other human beings. He was among us as us - completely clothed in flesh. Only when people saw Him perform miracles, did they exalt Him.

But now He is the exalted Christ! God has given Him a name which is above every other name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and confess HE IS LORD! And no man can say Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Spirit. “Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus is accursed’; and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.” (1 Cor. 12:3) The name that is above every other name is Lord. After Jesus rose from the dead, the disciples always addressed Him as Lord! The Jesus of Nazareth is now the Lord Jesus Christ! No longer do we know Him according to the flesh. (2 Cor. 5:16)

“When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man...” This did not happen to John when he saw Jesus in the flesh and enjoyed the intimacy of resting his head on the breast of Jesus. At that time the true essence of Christ was veiled by His flesh. Now He appeared to John as the unveiled, corporate, spiritual Son of Man, and John fell at His feet as one dead! **Seeing Christ in His brightness and righteousness causes the flesh to stop functioning!**

In this revelation of Jesus Christ we catch a glimpse of the greatness of our Lord! Understanding the vastness of our salvation in Christ causes us to lose our taste for the many songs that only see Him from an earthly perception. We are not dealing

with Jesus of Nazareth; at that time anyone, even His enemies could call Him "Jesus". But here we see the glorified, unveiled Christ who has become our Lord! Only His bondslaves can call Him Lord!

"And He placed His right hand on me, saying, 'Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.'" (vv.17b-18)

"And He placed His right hand on me." The right hand symbolizes power, blessing and authority. When Jacob blessed Joseph's sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, he crossed his arms so that his right hand was on the younger son. Joseph didn't like that because he thought his firstborn should get the blessing of the firstborn. But Jacob was being led by God, so Ephraim received the greater blessing - the blessing of the firstborn! Now, in Christ, this power and authority is given to those who no longer function in the desires of the flesh.

With this blessing came the identification of the speaker. A blessing cannot come into being unless the power is present to bring it about. Christ's credentials are in the omnipotence of His being, and they assure us that we can trust Him. He said, *"I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore."* He is the first, the One who is before all the other firsts in the world! All the other firsts came into being because He **is** - not because He was. He always **is**! He is the first and the last! He is the ever-present One! Therefore everything - past, present and future - finds its consummation in Him.

Everything began because He is the first, and He is the only meaning and purpose of all that is! There would be no meaning and purpose to life if it did not find its consummation in Jesus Christ! There is no meaning to the history of the nations of this world unless we see that Jesus Christ is the life that has overcome death. All that is imperishable flows out from Him. He is the first; He is the last; He always is! That is the great confession of the church.

There are many philosophies in the world today, but none of them carry the hope that Christianity has. In eastern philosophy, history is an endless circle of rebirths and incarnations - around and around and around! The existentialists say that man is alone in a meaningless world; history is the throbbing now. But in Christianity we know where we began and where we are going. Only Christianity has a living Savior! Everything is in Christ! We know that we are progressing in, and moving toward a further unveiling of Jesus Christ - of who He is in His elect.

"I am the living One." All the so-called saviors of this world have died; not one has been resurrected! Only Christ is the living One, the One who has conquered death! He was dead, but He is alive forevermore! In Him we also are alive forevermore!

He has *“the keys of death and of Hades.”* There is no death in Christ: He is the living One! Keys are used to open and close doors. **Romans 8:6** tells us that *“the mind set on the flesh is death.”* So this is not referring to physical death, but to the natural, carnal mind. Christ has the key, the power and authority, to open our mind to spiritual realities! Hades simply refers to the grave, the place of the dead. He has the key that is able to access death and conquer it!

“Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after” (actually, in the midst of) *“these things.”* (v.19) He is to write down what is happening in the midst of our life. To write what will happen 500 or 2000 years down the line does not help us now. We want answers to what is happening in our life today! God wants us to know what He is accomplishing in us. God has laid a foundation, and that foundation is Christ! Since the foundation is Christ, everything that is built on that foundation has to consist of the very essence of His being!

“As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.” (v.20) This is a symbolic picture of Christ and His called-out ones. The Greek word EKKLESIA, usually translated CHURCH, means the **called-out ones**. So this does not refer to meeting places - buildings with steeples and stained glass windows. It is about people who have Christ's name, His nature and His character!

Here Jesus Himself gives us the interpretation of this vision. He tells us that the stars are the angels (messengers) of the seven churches. The lampstands are the seven churches. Seven symbolizes completeness and perfection. Christ only has one church, one body. The seven churches are seven aspects of the complete church. The message brought by a messenger is more important than the messenger. The spiritual word of God to the church is of utmost importance, and the seven stars symbolize this spiritual ministry to the church.

The seven stars are in Christ's right hand - in His power and authority! He is able to accomplish whatever is in the message He gives to His called-out ones. Their responses to life's situations come from a nature that is the same as Christ's nature. It is very sad that so often we see people who call themselves Christians, reacting in a way that does not glorify Christ. Sometimes their reactions are even worse than those of non-Christians.

The ascended Christ has joined Himself to the believers. Before His crucifixion, Jesus talked to the disciples about the outpouring of His Spirit. He said, *“In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.”* (Jn. 14:20) Since that day He is always joined to His people! He is not an individual Jesus, but the corporate Christ!

So in the midst of the lampstands is the glorified ascended Christ! Vitaly united with Him are the seven churches. Each local body of believers is the light of that area. Together with all the other local bodies of believers, they form the one worldwide body of Christ!

Each lampstand stands in the darkness, and the darkness does not want the light. Let's remember that the world does not like us because we are united to the central stem of the lampstand, which is none other than the Christ, shining in all His brightness! What an honor He has bestowed on us!

Chapter 2

Chapters 2 and 3 are linked to chapter one. In greater detail John is shown the relationship of the church to its source, that is the stem of the lampstand, and it represents the Lord Jesus Christ! This is a very important truth! Christ is the source and the head of the church, and He has only one body, one church!

Although the letter was written to seven individual churches which were experiencing very real persecution from a very real government, these seven churches symbolize the complete church. Together they symbolize seven aspects of the church, just like the seven Spirits of God symbolize seven aspects of the Holy Spirit, and the seven colors of the rainbow symbolize seven aspects of the rainbow. We focus on the individual, and God sees the complete picture. We focus on the seven branches of the lampstand, and God shows us that there is only one lampstand and that there is no light without the stem!

The symbolism of the seven churches identifies and makes real to us the pitfalls the church is prone to fall into. Each letter to each individual church begins with a reference to the vision in chapter 1. It is a revelation of Christ in His essence, and that His being is the provision for our need. We get sidetracked so easily! Instead of focusing on Christ, we are drawn back to our old way of thinking. The world's way seems so much easier than the walk of faith because of the deception that is in the carnal mind.

These seven churches do not represent seven ages of church history. At any time in church history we can find the conditions that are represented by the various churches - we can find a church like the one in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Philadelphia, Laodicea, etc. God is speaking to the church and showing us how important our relationship is to Him! God is against everything that is not His nature!

The Message to Ephesus

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:” (v.1)

This message for the church in Ephesus comes from the One who holds the stars (their spiritual ministry) in His right hand - the hand of power and authority. The church is reminded that Christ is in the midst of them. Why? Because they had forgotten that! They thought they were in charge. They had forgotten that their ministry was a spiritual ministry, and that they had to submit their thinking to God's thinking. They had permitted natural thinking to lead and guide them. Our natural

thinking says God is on our side, but God does not say that. He says He is **for** us! That means He always wants what is best for us. He does not take sides; He always does what is right!

The light of the lampstand has the highest position. Since we are the lampstand, where is our light? It has to be in the highest realm, and that is in our mind, isn't it? It has to come from a mind that is enlightened by the light of Christ! A mind that thinks carnal thoughts is in the death realm. (**Rom. 8:6**)

“I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.” (vv. 2-3)

Christ, the central stem, knows all about the work we are doing, and the situation in which we find ourselves. He looked at the church in Ephesus and saw their perseverance in the face of their toil, grief, sorrow and pain. They could not tolerate the depravity of evil men. They scrutinized those who claimed to be apostles, and those who did not pass the test were labeled “false apostles”. They were very keen in their judgment. Every church has a right to scrutinize the life of its elders, but not without love!

It is impossible to grow spiritually without leaving our old way of thinking. Paul said that the Bereans were more noble than those in Thessalonica because they examined the scriptures to see if these things were true. (**Acts 17:11**) They had to search the scriptures because spiritual realities were being presented to them. Unless we are willing to bow in humility to the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and have a burning love for truth, we will not be willing to forsake our old traditions and our old concepts. If we search the scriptures without receiving enlightenment from the Holy Spirit, we will be enriched with knowledge but we won't receive life-giving food. Life is in Christ, not in the scriptures. The scriptures are a witness of this life! Jesus told the Jews, *“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.”* (**Jn. 5:39-40**) Life is only in Christ, and they refused to come to Him. Life and light come to us through our spiritual union with Christ!

“But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place - unless you repent.” (vv.4-5)

Christ comes and finds us where we are. He does not look at the external impression that we are trying to make; He looks at the heart - the motive. He saw that this

church was not functioning in their first love. First love can mean that which we used to love, or that which we love first in our priorities, or both. At the beginning, the first priority of the Ephesian church was to love Jesus Christ. Now their priority had changed! Love for Christ no longer dominated their thinking.

Although the church had endured persecution and remained zealous, they needed to shape up and return to their first love where Christ was first in their priorities. Do you remember when you first fell in love? Everything centered in the person of your love! Nothing was too much for him/her! In **Acts 19** we read about the first love of the Ephesian church for the risen Lord! They burned all their magic books, and they experienced miracles! Their light was so great that a riot developed because the craftsmen were afraid the worship of the goddess Diana would become extinct. What an exciting time that was when they first knew the Lord and He was first in their priorities. How things had changed!

Instead of growing and maturing in love, the church had fallen **from** love. The enthusiastic excitement their love for Christ had brought them, had vanished. With it went their love for their brethren! Knowledge became more important than love, but **love is greater than knowledge!** Without love the church had grown very legalistic and pharisaical.

This condition introduces formalism, the strict attention to outward forms, rituals and customs. Legalism means that we have fallen from grace. (**Gal. 5:4**) There is no grace in legalism. The law is based on self-effort and therefore majors on works, blame and guilt! Legalism is a severance from Christ - from our union with Him and from the oil of His anointing! The result? Darkness and death, for anything that is separated from Christ is without life.

The word Ephesus means **permitted**. This church had permitted natural thinking and knowledge to displace spiritual thinking and knowledge. They had permitted themselves to fall from love into legalism. **They had permitted works to take the place of love.** They had permitted doctrines to become more important than love.

The Ephesian church was to remember from where they had fallen! It does not say they are to remember their sins. They were to remember where they were before, and then recognize that they had fallen from the lofty position of loving Christ and their brethren! They needed to recognize what had caused their fall; they needed to repent and get back into the place they had been. Christ said that if they did not repent, their light would die out and their lampstand would be removed! How important our union with Christ is!

They needed to repent from the root of their problem - from their carnal thinking. Then everything else would fall into place. They needed to repent, and let the love of Christ reign - the love that had been poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit!

Repentance requires a change of heart - a change in one's thinking. They had forgotten that the source of their being and of their works was important. When Christ is the source of our works, our works will not be works for righteousness or **for** the church, but works that flow out of our obedience and love for Christ, and the righteousness that is ours in Him!

Unless repentance occurs, their lampstand will be removed. Its light will be extinguished because it is not receiving oil from the stem. Separation from the source of its existence extinguishes the light. Instead of light, there will only be darkness!
We have to remain in Him who is the Light in order to be a light!

“Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.” (v.6) Who were the Nicolaitans? This word is derived from NIKOS meaning **victory**, to utterly vanquish or conquer; and from LAOS meaning people - **laity** is derived from this word. In its earliest form it divided equal brothers into priests and laity, the priests having power over the people. We are to hate the hierarchy that brings division among God's people.

What a wonderful relief to know that God has not given us a hierarchy to lord it over us, but pastors and elders who are to lead us into a relationship with Christ, the great Shepherd! Pastors and elders are to be undershepherds that guide us to green pastures (Christ) and to the water of life. As we feed on Christ we will learn to be obedient to the Lord of lords, whose word is a sword that cuts off all our fleshly desires.

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.” (v.7) These are not physical ears that pick up physical vibrations, but inside ears that can hear the Spirit! Not everyone has them. Jesus said, *“My sheep hear My voice.”* Only the sheep in the Shepherd's flock have spiritual ears. We received them when we were born again, so let's use them. The mark of a born-again Christian is the ability to hear what the Spirit is saying. It requires humility of heart to hear Him; those who are full of pride consider themselves to be self-sufficient and have need of nothing.

Hearing implies obedience. Children may hear what their parents have said, but when they do not obey, we say that they did not hear them. To hear what the Spirit says means we are obedient to His instructions.

This does away with choice. Choice comes from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but there is no choice in the tree of life because it has no evil. Living in God's kingdom requires a life of obedience! He has chosen us, and He chooses the way we are to go. Jesus did not choose for Himself; He only did what the Father showed Him to do! He is the pattern Son, and we need to follow His example.

Next is a promise or blessing limited to overcomers, for it is linked to the state of overcoming. Therefore it is not for escapists nor for the whole church. Overcoming is not always a popular word because it carries with it the knowledge that there will be testings and trials. Obstacles will be placed in one's way, and they will have to be overcome by faith in what the Spirit is saying. Listening to the Spirit does away with carnal thinking, for carnal thinking is always against the Spirit. We have been called out of carnal thinking into spiritual thinking. God has purposed that His ecclesia, His called-out ones, will be overcomers, for they have received the mind of Christ!

Overcomers let Christ rule them; they do not obey their carnal thinking. Christ is the Captain of our salvation. He is the Firstborn; He is the first to triumph over all the lusts of the flesh! By His Spirit He comes to live in us and to rule us until our every thought and action is under His control. The Christ in us is the power, the dynamo that overcomes every lie, every deception, and every obstacle that the enemy would hurl at us. This is the omnipotence of Christ! In His strength there is power and victory! Overcomers, like Moses, proclaim the deliverance of God when everything around them in the natural proclaims gloom and doom! These can eat of the tree of life that is in the Paradise of God.

To eat of this tree, we have to be in Paradise, because that is where this tree is found. Paradise is a place where God rules. It is one with the kingdom of God! And Jesus said that the kingdom of God is within us! God rules from within - by His Spirit who has been poured into our hearts! So Paradise is not a place we go to after we die; **it is a place we are in when we are ruled by God!** The tree of life is Jesus Christ - He is the life! His words are spirit and are life! Since Jesus is life and truth, eating of Him means we are receiving life and truth. Truth brings us into life because it does away with the lies and deception of darkness! It brings us into who Christ is!

Those who tour the East and visit Ephesus, will see the ruins, but they will not find a strong Christian church. Over the centuries its lampstand has been removed.

The Message to Smyrna

The name Smyrna is of Semitic origin. It comes from the Hebrew MOR, from a root meaning bitter, a gum resin of a fruit that is smooth and a little larger than a pea. The color of myrrh varies from pale reddish-yellow to reddish brown or red. The taste is bitter. Among its many uses it is well-known as an ingredient in perfume, for its use in the purification of women and for embalming. Hence its association with suffering and death.

“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last who was dead, and has come to life, says this.” (v.8) This message comes from the One who is in the midst of the lampstands; it ties in with the vision in chapter 1:17b-19 where it says,

“I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore.” The message is clear. Don’t be afraid of death. Just as I was dead and have come to life, so you will also come to life through death!

Jesus Christ experienced two deaths. His first death was His death to sin, *“For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.”* (Rom. 6:10) His second death was the death of His physical body. His life did not receive carnal thinking or any thoughts that did not come from the Father; His life gave Him the power to be dead to sin. He was the resurrection even before He passed through physical death. His life has no death in it; His life gave Him the power to be dead to sin. Death did its utmost to destroy that life, but it couldn’t! It could kill the physical body, but it couldn’t do away with His life!

And death can’t do away with our life in Christ either! For this reason we are not to be afraid of death. Death to our self-will seems so tragic to us, and many of us fear it and fight it, but it is our only way to life. The life of Jesus proved that He was dead to self-will; He always did the will of the Father! We too have to pass through this death to sin while we are alive and living on this earth in order to reign in life with Jesus Christ! This is for now!

“I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.” (v.9) The church at Smyrna was under heavy persecution because they wouldn’t proclaim the emperor as Lord. This caused them to be jobless and hungry.

Christ sees our tribulation. He sees the pressures we are under - the things that cause our affliction, distress and misery. He sees our poverty and our struggle to survive. He then quickly reminds us not to focus on that. **Our focus is to be on the riches that are ours in Christ!** We think we are poor, but we aren’t - we are rich, **we have all that Christ is!** But we have to appropriate it by faith. As we walk in life we will appropriate His nature, and radiate His love.

He also sees all the blasphemy or slander that we have to endure from the religious ranks - from those who say they are Jews but are not. This slander comes from pretenders, from those who come as angels of light, but in actuality are of the synagogue of Satan. These accusations come from religiosity, from false pretense.

These religious pretenders symbolize the carnal mind. It is very religious, full of legalism and against everything God says. The word Satan means **an adversary**. Satan is an adversary to whatever God says and is! Our natural mind tells us to believe the things we see and feel instead of the promises of God! It is the synagogue or school of Satan. It is full of lies and contradictions. It accuses us of wrongdoing, makes excuses for not believing God, or inflates our ego. It teaches us to disobey God!

As long as we blame the devil or others for our own problems, we will not change. We will not recognize that our problems come **from the condition our heart is in**. If we find it difficult to love and to forgive, it is because we are filled with legalism instead of grace. Loving people does not mean that we entrust ourselves to them and let them rule us. Jesus loved everyone, yet He could not entrust himself to anyone because He knew what was in the heart of man. **Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit and only did what the Father showed Him to do, so He loved and forgave!**

In order to grow spiritually, we need difficulties and pressures to show us what is in our heart, as well as obstacles to overcome. Without experiencing pressures we may think that we are walking righteously before God, when in actuality we are only creating a religious impression - like the scribes and Pharisees. Difficulties prove whether we actually believe God or whether we are just giving mental assent to His promises.

“Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” (v.10)

What a message! Do not fear sufferings! Most of us fear them and try to evade them! We even invent a rapture theory that will bring an escape from the sufferings of the great tribulation. The message to the church is that **it will suffer**, but it is **not to be afraid of it**. Paul and Barnabas strengthened and encouraged the church by saying, *“Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:22)*

To a prosperity-minded church this message is not an encouragement, is it? But to those who are suffering and enduring persecution, it is a great encouragement to know that this is God’s will for them. It is a normal part of living in the kingdom while we are in this world. Through tribulation we enter into the kingdom and obtain the promises! Tribulation reveals the reality and extent of our faith! Abraham’s long wait for the promised son, then his obedience to God’s order to sacrifice that son, proved the extent of his faith. His faith had grown to the point that he knew God would resurrect his son, if necessary, to fulfill His promise! Similarly, we have to believe that when God asks us to lay down the ministry He has given us, He will also resurrect it in a greater spiritual dimension!

“Behold the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested (or disciplined).” This is not the devil’s reason for casting us into prison, but it is God’s reason for giving the devil some leeway. This may not be a prison consisting of bars, locks and bolts, but the prison that the carnal mind puts us in. The lies and deception of the carnal mind lock up our thought processes so we walk in unbelief. These lies keep us from believing who God says we are in Christ. Our natural, carnal mind tells us that we have control over our life, and that our own works of righteousness

will cancel out our mistakes. Lies don't function logically. On the one hand they tell us our problems stem from wrong treatment by others and on the other hand, they accuse us of wrongdoing and heap condemnation on us. Why do some of us need to be put back into that prison? Because we have forgotten that the truth makes us free! We have to get back into truth, into Christ, to be free!

Lies keep us from seeing who God is! They block our understanding. When difficulties come our way, lies cause us to think God is against us. We cannot see His wonderful purpose for us. Job's faith was unshaken during his adversity, for he did not rail against God in the midst of his affliction. He did not blame the devil, nor did he blame people. Instead, he blessed God! In the end he saw God in a new way! This revelation became the basis for new and greater blessings! The pressures of life and the rejection and censure by religious friends cause us to look to God in a greater way. So why should we get angry with these people, when through them we are blessed with greater revelation of God and His ways?

This tribulation will continue for ten days. Again, ten is a spiritual number, a symbolic number for completeness. Because the law is summed up in the ten commandments, some people associate ten with the law. However, the law has ten commandments to symbolize the completeness of the law. If man could keep the whole law, he would be righteous. But he can't, and therefore he needs Christ who has kept the law. This tribulation will continue for ten days - that is, **until it has accomplished what it was sent to accomplish**. Once we truly recognize that truth is only in Christ, we will come out of that prison and into the freedom that truth brings!

“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” What is death? Let's remember that this is a message in symbolism. **Rom. 8:6** says that the mind set on the flesh is death. The carnal mind is death. Being faithful to God puts this mind of death to death in us, and it no longer rules us. This brings us into life. A crown symbolizes authority or victory. It is worn on the head - the highest place of our body. That is also where our thinking takes place. The crown of life symbolizes our victory over our old thinking. Our old mind has been replaced with a new mind - the mind of Christ! Notice that it does not say “a crown”, but “the crown”. There is *only one mind of Christ, one crown of life!*

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.” (v.11) We are to hear what the Spirit says to the churches because He always conveys true spiritual messages that are customized to fit our need! If we do not hear the Spirit, we will hear lies and follow them.

Let's look at some verses that talk about the second death. *“Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power...*

Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire...But for the cowardly and unbelieving...their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” (Rev. 20:6, 14; 21:8)

Notice that it does not say that overcomers will not encounter the second death, but that they will not be **hurt** by the second death. In death we pass from one form into another form. When Adam ate the forbidden fruit he departed from the realm of righteousness and life, and entered the realm of self-will, the realm of death. So in Adam we have all been cast into the first death, the realm of self-will. The degeneration and decay at the death of our physical body symbolize the corruption, lies and deception that are in the mind of the flesh.

The second death is not a repetition of the first death, just as the new covenant is not a repetition of the old covenant. God's seconds are never duplicates of the first; they are always in a higher realm - in a spiritual realm. Sin brought us into the first death, and God in his wisdom, then uses death to bring us into life. Let me explain.

The second death takes us back into the realm of righteousness. Our second death is our death to sin. Christ's whole life was a death to sin. (**Rom. 6:10**) The second death or the lake of fire for Christ consisted of all the rejection, temptations, loneliness, persecution, and the horrible death on the cross. He passed through the second death, but it had no power over Him, neither did it hurt Him. He went through this death, and came forth in victory and life!

We too have to pass through this death process. A planted seed has to die in order to produce a harvest. In order to grow into the image of Christ we need to pass through the second death. This is not a pleasant experience, but God has given us this precious promise that it won't hurt us. Our God is a consuming fire, and He burns away everything in us that is not of Him!

The lake of fire has no power over those who have participated in the first resurrection. Our first resurrection took place when we were raised with Christ - symbolized by our water baptism. *“Having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.” (Col. 2:12)* We have been raised with Christ, and have been made a new creation, and this new creation has a new mind - the mind of Christ! His mind does not need to be purified; it is pure and holy. It already is in life; it does not need a second death to bring it into life. But we need to appropriate it in every aspect of our life experiences. For this to materialize, we need to be cleansed of all our wrong thinking. This cleansing by the fire of the Holy Spirit brings us into truth and the freedom that truth brings. God's fire is a spiritual fire. The trials we face give us an opportunity to grow in faith. The temptation is to function in the mind of the flesh rather than in the mind of Christ. An overcomer is not ruled by the mind of the flesh but by the mind of Christ.

What is the meaning of “*the lake of fire that burns with fire and brimstone*”? It is a spiritual fire, not a literal fire. Brimstone is another word for sulphur, and sulphur is a cleansing agent - it kills disease germs. It says that death and Hades will be thrown into the lake of fire, and the last enemy to be overcome is death. Hades is a place of darkness and “unperception” - figurative of death, that is, all who are not in life! This includes all unbelievers. We have already seen that the carnal mind is death, so this is a place where all lies and deception, where everything that is perishable, is burned away. Fire only burns that which is perishable. So the lake of fire does away with death; it does away with the carnal mind; it does away with all that is perishable. **The first death got us into self-will, and the second death takes us out of self-will!**

How can the second death hurt us? It cannot hurt those who are ruled by Christ because their deeds had their source in Him. But those who did all their good deeds for self-exaltation or for self-gratification, will not receive a reward. Our encounter with truth is painful at first, for it brings with it a revelation of the depravity of natural man. It shows us the areas which have not yet been submitted to Christ; the areas in which we are still functioning in self-will and unbelief.

Message To Pergamum

“And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this: ‘I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.’” (vv.12-13)

To the church in Pergamum, Christ reveals Himself as the One who has the sharp two-edged sword in His mouth. This is the word of God that cuts deep, and shows us whether we are living in truth or religiosity. We cannot deceive God! He knows exactly what the condition of our heart is. He knows how deep or how shallow our Christianity is.

The church in Pergamum had yielded on the inside to the world system. Pergamum was the principal center of emperor-worship in the region. An immense altar to Zeus dominated the town from the acropolis. This was Satan’s throne room. The people of that time were well acquainted with this, and could understand the symbolism. The throne is the place from which a king or despot rules. From where does Satan rule us? He rules us from our carnal mind, doesn’t he? So they were being ruled by their carnal mind - the mind that is in death. They were not dwelling in Christ, and they were not being ruled by the mind of Christ; they were receiving spiritual truth in their carnal minds, thus carnalizing the word of God.

This church, with all its programs and zealotry, looked like a flourishing church.

Externally it seemed to be growing and in good condition. But there was something wrong inside. The two-edged sword of the Spirit finds the core problem and addresses this problem.

Judaism, in Jesus' time, also looked good externally, but because of their carnal thinking, the Jews could not accept Jesus as their Messiah. Carnality always rejects Jesus, and works against Him. Jesus told these Jews that they were of their father, the devil. Their throne or authority came from the wrong place. Natural thinking was their authority. Those who receive the message of Revelation in the natural, carnal mind are also dwelling where Satan's throne is. They expect a physical brilliant city with its mansions and backyard waterslides for the elite, to come down from the sky, and Jesus to come back as a giant man, and rule the world from present-day Jerusalem. These thoughts do not come from Christ! They come from Satan's throne room!

In spite of the fact that the church in Pergamum was thinking carnally, it kept its faith while under persecution. The name ANTIPAS means **like the father**. According to tradition, Antipas was the bishop in Pergamum, and had been martyred for his faith.

“But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality.” (v.14)

You remember the prophet Balaam who was offered money to curse Israel. But God wouldn't let him curse Israel; instead, he had to bless them! This made Balak, the king who had hired Balaam, very angry. What a dilemma now faced Balaam! He desperately wanted Balak's goodwill because he craved the money that had been offered him if he would curse Israel. His love for money overpowered his morals. If he had to sacrifice the morals of God's people to obtain it, he was willing! To achieve this end he hatched a plan that later cost him his life. He advised Balak to throw a great religious party and invite the Israelites to join them. At this gathering scrumptious food that had been offered to idols would be served. The pagan women were instructed to entice the men of Israel to commit acts of immorality with them. This would bring the wrath of God upon the Israelites, nullify the blessing, and achieve the mission for which he had been hired.

Balaam was unfaithful to God. Outwardly it seemed as though he was faithful, for he only spoke the words God gave him. Secretly, he used his spiritual insights to cause God's people to stumble. His love of money brought in an immoral practice.

“So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.” (v.15) There is a similarity between Balaam's behavior and that of the Nicolaitans. In the message to the church in Ephesus, we already mentioned that the Nicolaitans

divided equal brothers into priests who exercised power and control over the laity. Why? They wanted to use the laity to serve their ego, and to make money at the expense of the laity. Once they conquered the people, this would be possible. So they caused them to eat spiritually of things that are not of God.

This practice is still going on in ever so many clever disguises. Many leaders of ministries beg for money, and get rich in the process. They make you pay for your information about God, pay for getting your sins forgiven, pay for being counseled, etc. Instead of being faithful to Christ's words, "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons; freely you received, freely give," God's name is put into disrepute, because God's people do not trust God to provide for them. It is so much easier to manipulate and use worldly methods than to trust God! How careful we have to be to do God's work in His way - under His direction! We need to hate the things God hates, and love the things He loves!

"Repent therefore; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth." (v.16) Repent means to turn, to change direction. We need to change our way of thinking. Instead of indulging in natural thinking, we have to change to God's way of thinking. If we don't, God will make war against us with the sword of His mouth. This is not a literal sword to pierce us, but He will speak His words into our heart. Just as a sword cuts, God's words will war against our carnal thinking and cut it off.

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it." (v.17)

To qualify for this blessing we have to have ears that hear the Spirit's teaching. Hearing encompasses listening and obeying. Hearing His teaching enables us to overcome the lies and deception of natural thinking. These lies are an obstacle to faith. Truth, the Spirit's teaching, dissipates these lies just as light dissipates darkness. Walking in truth makes us overcomers.

To receive the hidden manna is a blessing. The Israelites received manna from heaven that sustained their natural bodies. They could see that manna. Hidden manna is in the unseen realm. This is spiritual food - the food that sustains spiritual life. Jesus said that His words are spirit and are life. Spiritual words have to be received spiritually. Receiving the revelation of what His words mean spiritually, feeds us and brings us into a greater dimension of His life. Jesus said, *"If any man eats of this bread, he shall live forever."* Christ (the truth) is the living bread that came down from heaven. Eating Christ's flesh means receiving Christ's nature, for He is the truth.

“And I will give him a white stone.” A white stone was the pebble of acquittal in the Greek courts. In the Greek judicial system, if an individual was handed a black stone, it meant condemnation, and if the word “theta” was engraved on it, it meant he was guilty and condemned to die. But if he was handed a white stone, he was judged not guilty and was acquitted of all sin.

We have been justified by faith! (**Rom. 5:1**) The meaning of the Greek word for justified means “not guilty, never been guilty.” How can God say that we are not guilty and have never been guilty when we know that *“all have sinned and come short of the glory of God”*? **It is because we have been made a new creation in Christ. This new creation has no past. Christ has never sinned and He now dwells in us and we in Him. His life has become our life!!** The old I no longer lives in us; it has been replaced by Christ! His righteousness has become our righteousness! Our identification with the old man who sins, is completely gone!

The Greeks also used the white stone in casting lots in elections. The black stone indicated **nay**, and the white stone **yea**. In giving us the white stone, Christ is saying that **He has chosen us!** We are His, not because we chose Him, but because He chose us!

A white stone was also given to the victors of a race. Christ ran the race and overcame death! In union with Him, we too are overcomers and share His victory!

Sometimes a white stone was handed to a guest as a sign of welcome. This meant that the guest had the right to everything that was in the house. Similarly, when Christ gives the white stone to us, it means that all that is His is ours. **God has given us the Holy Spirit, and in Him we have everything God is!**

White stones were also used in the allotting of an inheritance. We receive an inheritance that is imperishable and undefiled; it does not fade away, and it is reserved in heaven for us. (**1 Pe. 1:4**)

He also gives us a new name! In this stone there is a new name, a new nature. Notice that this white stone is Christ! Everything is in Him! The Greek word for name is ONOMA, and it covers everything a person is - character, power, excellence, rank, majesty, and personal attributes. To qualify for receiving a new name, we too have to submit to the Father’s purpose for us, even as Jesus did.

The world does not know who is within us. We have a wonderful treasure in this vessel of clay. We may be told that we do not look like Christ, but all we have to do is to walk like He did. As we live out of His life and nature, we will progressively grow to be like Him.

Message To Thyatira

“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this: ‘I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first.’” (vv.18-19)

Again we see the connection between the Son of God and the One who walks in the midst of the churches in chapter 1:14. Eyes can convey many attitudes and emotions. Before Christ was crucified He was taken to the house of the high priest, and Peter denied Him three times. Then Jesus turned and looked at Peter. What do you think Peter saw in the eyes of Jesus? I think he saw eyes burning with a love so deep that Peter went out and wept bitterly in repentance! Christ’s love also produces repentance in us. Just as Jesus prophesied into Peter’s life, so He prophesies into our life, and we see those eyes of love. They are not eyes of condemnation, for there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

His eyes also convey a love for purity in us. God’s fire always symbolizes cleansing. His eyes, like a flame of fire, reveal His love for purity. The eyes of Christ see beyond the surface and see what is in the heart. His eyes like fire see into the depth of our being - past all our pretenses and masks and the impression we are trying to convey.

What a commendation this church receives! Here is a group of believers who are commended for their love and faith and deeds! They are alive with love and a living faith! Love and faith go hand in hand; both are necessary for service that is pleasing to God. Love cannot be measured by shallow fervency, but by faith. Christ also saw their perseverance. They persevered through suffering and reproaches, and did even greater deeds than at first!

“His feet were of burnished bronze!” Feet symbolize our walk. Jesus Christ lived the perfect life. His life touched the nitty-gritty of human life but His walk remained pure. What about our walk? Do difficulties, rejection and persecution affect our thoughts, actions and speech negatively? His verdict is always correct, for He is the truth, and truth always reveals the error. Christ sees whether His life and love are evident in our walk.

This letter was written to the church in Thyatira (**odor of affliction**). Something does not smell right. The odor of affliction is not pleasing, for it is the smell of corruption, decay and of death. Affliction speaks of pain, suffering and calamities. Sufferings can be endured victoriously, but when suffering is mixed with self-pity, it produces an unpleasing odor. Everything that is not rooted in Christ is tainted with corruption, and it does not produce a good smell. The sacrifices in the Old Testament were to produce a sweet smell to the Lord. The Lord is not pleased with mixtures. The good

works of the flesh are tainted by pride and self-glorification, and therefore do not produce a pleasing smell. Eternal values speak of life, and there is no corruption or death in life.

“But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bondservants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality.” (vv. 20-21)

In spite of the terrific commendation this church received, something was very wrong. It tolerated a wrong teaching. In the Old Testament, Jezebel was the wife of King Ahab, and she influenced him to act wickedly and corruptly. She persecuted Elijah and those who would not worship Baal. She symbolizes **the corrupt nature**. She takes the mind away from devotion to God, and directs it to a substitute god and to unholy desires. Instead of the Spirit ruling the flesh, the corrupt nature rules.

Jezebel comes in religiosity, in the guise of a prophetess. She even calls herself a prophetess; God did not call her that. Humanistic thinking comes in the guise of spirituality. It produces religious works that lead us astray. We get so caught up with good works that we have no time to hear the Spirit and to receive truth!

She teaches the church to commit acts of immorality. We are quite aware of physical adultery and fornication, but spiritual adultery and fornication are more subtle and harder to identify. Adultery and fornication are illicit relationships. Anything we substitute for a relationship with God is immoral and constitutes spiritual adultery, for it takes away His Lordship and gives it to another. Fornication, or adultery of the heart and mind, is more dangerous and even worse than that of the body. Every mixture, every duality, every carnal thought has to be cast down!

Duality is in the soul. When God formed Adam from the dust of the ground and blew His breath (His Spirit) into him, he became **a living soul**. Adam was a mixture of dust (earthiness) and God’s breath. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is a duality - good and evil. It carries the odor of death - if you eat of it you will die. The new creation man is born of the Spirit, born from above; there is no duality in him! There is no duality in the tree of life; there is only goodness!

How important it is to let the Lord direct our thoughts and minds! We are so blind to our own failings. We need to bow to Christ’s sovereignty constantly, and recognize that everything we do has to be initiated by Him! Every desire for honor, praise, or pity has to be cast down. All selfish desires carry the odor of death, for they are death! To God belongs all honor and glory and praise!

Here we see the result of a mind that is withdrawn from God. Those who do not want to repent, will be thrown *“on a bed of sickness”* (**of sickness** has been inserted;

it is not in the Greek manuscripts), *“and those who commit adultery with her, into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.”* (vv. 22-23)

Those who do not want to repent will be cast upon a bed. They are all lumped together and put under **pressure** - that is the meaning of the word tribulation. He lets them go on with their fornication and unfaithfulness, but they will find themselves in a pressure cooker - that is, until they repent.

“And I will kill her children with pestilence.” These children are not the offspring of our bodies, but of our mind - the offspring of humanistic thinking. The mind that focuses on the flesh is death. We have to die to the carnal mind so we can come into life.

Christ will give each of us according to our deeds. This is also promised in **Matt. 16:27** and **Rev. 22:12**. This is not a threat, but a promise! It is an encouragement to do the things that have eternal rewards, not the deeds that bring only temporary accolades. He searches our inner being, and knows the intent of everything we do!

“But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them - I place no other burden on you. Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come.” (vv.24-25) Here the Greek HEKO for **come**, stresses the arrival, not a coming or going like the Greek ERCHOMAI.

This is good news! Not all are carrying that bad odor! Not all are interested in knowing the deep things of Satan - the deep things of self that are in the carnal mind. **When you examine yourself, are you examining the deep things of the carnal mind, the Adamic self, or do you examine what is yours in Christ, the new man?** In **2 Cor. 13:5**, Paul exclaims, *“...do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?”* Know who you are in Christ! Let's concentrate on knowing the deep things of life in Christ instead of the so-called deep things of Satan! Let's not be side-tracked by the teachings of men, but hold fast to the teaching of the Spirit!

“He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father; and I will give him the morning star.” (vv.26-28)

Only those who have overcome the enticements of the natural mind are able to follow the Spirit's directives and keep Christ's deeds. They do not do their own will, even as Christ did not do His own will! Like Moses, they do everything according to the pattern that was shown him on the Mount when he was in communion with God

and receiving instruction. Those who have learned obedience will be given authority, for they can be trusted to carry out the Father's wishes! God gives those who hear His voice and have learned to obey His voice, the right to act on His behalf.

They shall rule over the nations with a rod of iron. A rod of iron symbolizes inflexibility. It is rigid; it cannot be bent. This rod of iron is the scepter of truth. Truth cannot be bent; it cannot be changed in any way, for then it is no longer truth. When truth rules, there can be no corruption, no bribery, no dishonesty, no compromise and no scandals. Strict adherence to the Spirit's teaching is the norm.

At this point we need to recognize the difference between a legalistic approach to the word of God and a spiritual approach. Keeping the **letter** of the law differs greatly from keeping the **spirit** of the law. Lawyers can always find loopholes in laws because of their legalistic adherence to the wording of the laws. They are not interested in the spirit or intent of the law. Those who can hear the Spirit, will speak words of edification. The sword, or word of the Lord, cuts off the fleshly desires in order that spiritual growth can take place! God's purpose is always redemptive!

"As the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces." As a potter works with clay, he has power and authority over the vessels he makes. He can crush or break a vessel as he sees fit. God sent Jesus and crushed Him in order to bring us life! Since He did that to Jesus, don't you think He will also raise us up to be a sacrifice? He will do things His way, and He won't ask for our opinion. Our natural way of thinking has to be completely subdued so that we will do things God's way!

Just as Jesus received everything from the Father, so we receive everything from Him. Whatever comes our way, comes from His heart of love. All our rejections and all our crushings help us to mature in Christ. The more we mature, the more we will be a blessing to others.

"And I will give him the morning star." In **Rev. 22:16** Jesus said, *"...I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."* The morning star gives light and direction to mankind. It is the first to announce the coming of a new day! Christ is the morning star! His coming to earth announced the coming of a new day. This new day came to us in the Holy Spirit! This great light of God is spreading over the earth. We too have been called to be light-bearers - what a glorious calling! This is not a message of gloom and doom, but one of victory, proclaiming that Christ is the true light, and He brings light to the world through His sons! In **Daniel 12:3** we read, *"Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever."*

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." (v.29)
As in verse 2, this blessing depends on a hearing ear! A deaf ear will not receive

admonition, insight and encouragement. All are necessary in our spiritual growth and development!

Chapter 3

“To the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.” (v.1)

Sardis was situated about 50 miles northeast of Smyrna, and was known for its wealth. It probably got its name, Sardis, meaning **red ones**, because the red sardian stone was found there. The stone is very beautiful in its transparent brilliance.

The church in Sardis was only concerned about its reputation. It had a reputation for being alive, but it was dead. It just looked as if it had life - like a beautiful dead person made to look alive as it lies in state in a coffin. The dead do not have life. This church in Sardis was dead even though it had many church programs and many good works. Externally, the church looked alive but internally it was without life. The people looked at the externals and thought they had life, but they were mistaken. The deeds of the spiritually dead are not initiated nor inspired by the Spirit.

This message to the church in Sardis came from Him who has the seven Spirits of God. These are listed in **Is.11:2**, namely: the Spirit of the LORD, the spirit of wisdom, of understanding, of counsel, of strength, of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. These seven Spirits are seven manifestations of the Holy Spirit, for He is only one Spirit. He is the One who has power and authority over the churches, as we saw in chapter 1.

It's interesting to note that the color red is associated with the Hebrew word **Adem** meaning **to be red!** So red symbolizes the Adamic, natural thinking. This church looked at spiritual realities from a human, Adamic standpoint. They had forgotten that Christ's words are spirit and therefore have to be received spiritually. Therefore it was necessary for Christ to reveal Himself to this church as the One who has the completeness of the Spirit. Without Christ the church is dead, and all their good works are in the death realm.

In **Romans 8:6** we read that *“to be carnally-minded is death”*. The natural mind is very religious, and religiosity is against the Spirit and against the truth. It understands everything literally, and thinks it can manipulate God by doing good deeds, by fastings and prayers, and by positive thinking. Carnally-minded people think they have a free will - a will that is not influenced by selfishness, situations, emotions and desires, and that this ability enables them to make right choices. They still think of Christ as He was in His humanity instead of recognizing that He is now Spirit. They only see prophecies fulfilled in the natural, and live in this deception.

Those who have a humanistic, carnal view of spiritual realities will miss all the spiritual things God wants to give us. **Their man-centered ideas displace the Christ-centered realities.** They look very alive because they have programs galore and are ever so active. However, zealotry for God cannot bring us into life. The Jews in Jesus' time were very zealous for God, but they hated Jesus and crucified Him. Why? Because they did not have ears to hear spiritual realities! They only received them in their carnal mind.

For example, when Jesus said, "*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up,*" the Jews were angry because they thought He was speaking of their physical temple. (Jn. 2:19) They did not understand that He was speaking of the temple of His body. Their ideas of God were also wrong, so they thought it was blasphemy for Jesus to call God His Father. Religiosity and philosophies cannot give us life. Many Christians love Jesus but are still carnally-minded.

Life can only be ours in union with Christ's life! So Christ told the church in Sardis that in spite of their good reputation, they were dead! Shocking, isn't it that these good people could do so many good things, enjoy honor and prestige, yet be declared dead by the omniscient God! They were dead because their thinking came from their natural mind instead of from the mind of Christ. It did not come from the Holy Spirit.

The divine light of the Holy Spirit discovers what is hidden! We wonder how many churches today, are actually dead, even though they have a reputation for being alive spiritually. Shepherds who eat the butter and drink the milk of their flock, and cover themselves with the wool of their flock, but do not defend or guard or feed them, are spiritually dead. The Holy Spirit sees what is hidden from human eyes!

Only the Spirit can give us life. The things we do and say, cannot bring us into life; our ministries do not make us alive, and our church affiliation cannot make us alive. They can give us a reputation for being alive, but it is only Christ who can give us life!

"Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God." (v.2) Which deeds are complete in the sight of God, and which are not? Humanity thinks it has the answer. It believes that if it tries hard enough and often enough and long enough, it can be successful. **The fact that humanity killed the exact representation of God's nature proves its inability to make right choices and to merit righteousness!** If humanity's deeds could be complete in God's sight, there would be no reason for Christ's death and resurrection! **Only the deeds that have their source in Christ and are performed according to His directives, can be complete in God's sight.**

In **John 1:51** Jesus said, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”* Notice that the **ascending precedes the descending**. God’s messengers first have to ascend and receive a message before they descend to do His bidding!

“So remember what you have received and heard; and keep (or guard) it, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.” (v.3)

At school or family reunions a lot of “remembering” takes place. But these are not the things God is telling us to remember. He wants us to remember what we have heard from Him! Most people walk out of a church building and forget what they have heard. They either don’t know how to hear spiritually, or they are preoccupied with thoughts of pleasure or cares. In their everyday life they forget that they have received Christ! Instead of walking in Christ, they are walking in their carnality! Instead of living in the power and strength He is within them, their eyes are on the devil, and they are preoccupied with fighting him. They have to remember that Christ has already won the battle, so they only need to abide in Him. The road called **repentance** is the only way back into spirituality, and that requires a change in one’s thinking!

If we have a mindset that refuses to wake up, beware! In my childhood I was aware of what would happen if I didn’t get up at the first wake-up call! But God’s wake-up call is a spiritual one - not a physical one! Wake up from your state of spiritual unawareness! Get out of your carnal thinking and recognize that the spiritual is greater! Get into the faith that is in Christ!

If we don’t wake up, He will come to us as a thief. A thief comes unexpectedly, takes what we treasure, and we lament because of our loss. When Christ comes as a thief, He does not take anything of eternal value away from us. Sometimes our earthly treasures have to be taken away so that we learn to focus on the things that cannot be corrupted - things that are impervious to moths, mildew and rust! Thieves cannot access them. When reverses and difficulties come into a Christian’s life, they either come as a test, or as a reaping of what has been sown.

“But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.” (v.4) Here God declares that walking in carnal thinking dirties or soils our white garments of righteousness. We thought they were only soiled by sinful acts, didn’t we? But God directs His arrows at the source - at the Adamic man! Everything that originates in the Adamic man is death, whether it comes in the guise of good or in the monstrosity of evil.

In **1 Cor. 10:23** Paul wrote, *“All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All*

things are lawful, but not all things edify.” The Christian walk is one of love, not of legalism that trumpets commandments. Love does not flaunt its freedom and cause others to stumble. Actions that are not prompted by love will soil our garments.

Among the carnally-minded Christians in Sardis was a remnant which had not soiled its garments. They recognized that Christ had become their righteousness! This is not an imputed righteousness. An imputed righteousness means that righteousness would be imputed to the Adamic man. It does not recognize that our new birth has truly made us a **new creation** in Christ! This new creation has been born of the Spirit, and is therefore righteous. Imputed righteousness does not recognize our union with Christ nor does it accept the fact that we have truly been justified.

To be justified means that we are not guilty and have never been guilty. This is only possible because we have been taken out of the man who sins and have been put into Christ, the Man who has never sinned. Receiving Christ’s life unites us with Him, and we are declared guiltless. These are worthy to walk with Christ in white garments! Feeding on truth keeps us in life and righteousness. Christ has become our life, and we now live in this new state of being!

“He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name (or nature) before My Father and before His angels (messengers).” (v.5)

“He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments.” White always symbolizes purity. Our new birth brings us into the spiritual realm; it makes us a new creation, and we receive the righteousness of Christ. This is wonderful, but this is not maturity. Christ’s righteousness has to be worked into the fabric of our being. This occurs when we overcome the various hardships and difficulties in life in the power of the Holy Spirit. By learning to keep an attitude of love, faith and humility in every interplay of good and evil in our life, Christ’s nature becomes our nature. This is the white garment of the overcomers!

The book of life is not a literal book. Paul wrote, *“You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts.”* (2 Cor. 3:2–3) So this book is actually a people who have the Spirit of the living God within them, leading and directing them. They live out of the Christ who is within them, and He has become their life. Carnally-minded people do not do that, so they have no place in this book.

“I will not erase his name from the book of life.” Since it says that God will not erase

our name from the book of life, it follows that our name can be erased. At the same time it gives us the assurance that overcomers will not have their names erased. What does this mean? An overcomer has overcome the desires of the flesh and the lustful pride of life. He has overcome his natural thinking and has received the thinking of the mind of Christ. He will always reveal the nature of Christ to the world. Only those who do not reveal the life of Christ in their daily walk will not have their name in the book of life. So this does not refer to our salvation but to our maturity.

“I will confess his name (or nature) before My Father and before His angels (messengers).” Name and nature go hand in hand. The nature of someone is proclaimed by his name. Those who live in life have a new nature. They no longer live in the self-life of Adam (which is actually death) but in the love of Christ! The Father knows His sons and acknowledges them. When parents brag about their children, they are acknowledging them! Just as God boasted about righteous Job, so He also boasts about all who walk in His nature!

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (v.6) This message is directed to those who have hearing ears. It is not for unbelievers. It is for the church, the ecclesia - the called-out ones. The church is not a denomination nor an organization; it is a living organism; it consists of those who have been called out of the carnal nature and into the living Christ!

The Message to Philadelphia

“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this:” (v.7)

Here Christ, the oil or light of the lampstand, is revealed in His awesome power of truth and holiness! As truth marches on triumphantly, it reveals all the nothingness of lies dressed in either glorious or formidable fabrications. Holiness is truth, and truth is holiness! Christ is the truth! Satan, the liar, tries to convince us that truth will be detrimental to us - that it will withhold pleasure, prosperity, honor and prestige from us. God wants us to recognize the lies Satan spews out as truth. God wants us to know that He is sovereign and that life, peace and joy are only in Him. Lies cannot triumph over truth; Christ holds the key that opens and closes doors! Any power that comes against Him will be utterly destroyed!

Doors are openings to a new place, a new dimension. Jesus said that He is the door! Before we enter in, we do not know what lies beyond the door. Jesus is the door to our salvation. He is an open door to all who come to Him; in fact, He invites us in

to discover the wealth that is ours in Him! This wealth consists of spiritual realities that cannot be corrupted! No one can steal them, and no one can shut that door. This gives us great security!

However, the door is closed to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. The road that leads to destruction gives ample opportunity to yield to all lusting, and to experience its emptiness. Reality is only found in Christ!

The name **Philadelphia** means **brotherly love**. This church functioned in love, and this is the greatest virtue. It is the only church that is not reprimanded for anything! Love covers a multitude of sins. It is not selfish; it seeks the good of everyone concerned! If we say that we love God, but do not love our brother, we lie. (1 Jn. 4:20-21) Without love we cannot manifest Christ to the world!

This is not a namby-pamby permissive love. Loving those who wrong us or irritate us does not mean that we let them rule our thinking and our actions. The love of God has a very clear understanding of what is right and what is wrong. It is not governed by what others do; it flows from a heart of grace! We have received grace and we pass it on. **Our love for those who hurt us opens the way for them to repent.**

This can be illustrated by a very moving testimony which we heard recently. The leader of a gang tried to intimidate a pastor and to move him to anger by every method he could think of. Besides speaking to the pastor angrily and defiantly, he scattered garbage all over his lawn. The pastor responded by inviting him in for a cool drink. The leader and his gang even tried to burn the church down. The pastor remained friendly. Then they began to follow him around. They followed him into a restaurant just as the pastor was about to enjoy a chicken dinner, knife and fork in hand. As the gang trooped in and moved to the pastor, all eyes were upon them. In a belligerent voice the leader said, "Whatever you are going to do to this chicken, we are going to do to you." To everyone's amazement, the pastor picked up the chicken and kissed it. Laughter rippled through the restaurant, and the gang joined in. Love won this leader's heart, and he became a Christian and is now a powerful witness of the love of God.

"I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name. Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie - I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you." (vv.8-9)

Here is a word of encouragement for Philadelphia. "Don't worry, Philadelphia, I know they are trying to shut doors, but I have doors that are open, and no man can close them." An open door means that we have the right to enter in! We can

enter the holy place, and then move into the holy of holies, because we have been given Christ's righteousness. The door is closed to all self-righteousness. Self is the only thing that can stop us from entering the throne room of God. Bemoaning the unrighteousness of the carnal man is mere religiosity. In Christ we have been made a new creation, and we are no longer the carnal man. All the depravity and sinfulness that used to be our nature, is no longer us! Love is the result and proof that God's nature has become our nature!

How do we deny His name? Both denying and confessing His name is demonstrated by the manner in which we live, as well as by the words we speak. If we call ourselves Christians, yet live in legalism and all that goes with it, we are denying His name. Grace and truth came in Jesus Christ! To confess His name means that we manifest His nature in our everyday walk. We live in grace and truth, and extend grace to others. We love even as He has loved us! Those who confess His name will find an open door to all the spiritual treasures that are in Christ!

Christ has a strong word for those who say they are Jews, symbolizing Christians, but do not live out of the mind of Christ. They are pretending to be something they are not. Pretense is not truth, and everything that is not truth does not come from Christ. Christ says they are of the synagogue of Satan - their thinking has been schooled by Satan. They are proud of their natural concepts of the scriptures and make fun of Christians who receive the scriptures spiritually. When people persecute us, it feels as if the world is triumphant - but things are not what they seem to be.

Accusations do not only come from people, but also from Satan. The word **Satan** means **adversary**. He is the accuser of the brethren. Our natural mind accuses us. These accusations come to us internally, and therefore are more painful than those that come from others. Our natural mind loves to beat us up! It is ever ready to tell us that our failures keep God from loving us! It wants us to keep our eyes on self instead of on Christ and all that He has achieved for us! Repentance from listening to those accusations brings a change in our thinking, and a change in our words and actions! We no longer doubt God's love for us!

All that Christ asks of the churches is that they maintain their vital union with Him. As long as that is in correct order, nothing from the outside can ever move them. It's as if He is saying, "I am showing you that Satan has already been defeated, so you can relax about that. Don't get all uptight about those who don't understand you. I want you to know that I'm in charge. I know it doesn't seem like that when the world is breathing fire all over you, and you feel as if your light is almost extinguished. But don't worry, as long as you remain in union with Me, your light will ever shine brightly! When I rose from the dead, I overcame death. I have already overcome the world, and My life in you will also overcome it. Just keep on receiving from My

Spirit, and you'll be OK. I want you to know that circumstances are going to change. I will cause your enemies to bow down at your feet - to come to you in humility. I will bring them to a place of humility, and they too will know that I love you!" Why? Because Christ wants us to know His love for us! What a comfort to know that God's love for us does not depend on how people treat us! **In the midst of rejection and persecution we are secure in God's love!**

"Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth." (v.10)

Revelation 12 teaches us that there are three dwelling places:

1. In the sea, symbolizing the multitudes that have no knowledge of God
2. On the earth, symbolizing those who have experienced salvation but are still living in their carnal thinking
3. In the heavenlies, symbolizing those who are living in the mind of Christ.

Although Philadelphia was quivering under heavy persecution, they did not get off track. They patiently endured it! Christ guards us and makes sure that no test is too hard for us. Then a promise follows. He will keep us out of or from the hour of testing that comes on all those who dwell on the earth, symbolically meaning Christians who are still dwelling in their carnal thinking. An hour of testing is a period of testing. This testing does not come to everyone at the same time, but each person's faith has to be tested to see whether his faith is in self-reliance or in God. Testing also reveals what weakness or strength is in us. Adversity tests our faith and confidence in God. The carnality and deception in the natural mind will always test those who are living in the earth realm. As long as their faith is only in external things, it is not real faith.

This testing is not for those who dwell in the heavenlies - in the mind of Christ! They have already passed that test. They see the promises of God that are in the unseen realm and declare them to be true. They are kept out of the hour of testing because they have died to that beastly nature. They have ascended into the heavenlies and are seated with Christ in the heavenly places. (**Eph. 2:6**) Christ is our refuge - our place of safety! Living in the heavenlies does not eliminate the pain we feel when our bones are broken, but it won't get us off course.

"I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown." (v.11) What do we have? How do we hold on to it so that we do not lose our crown? We have faith and love! How can someone rob us of our crown? When difficulties, philosophies, or situations turn us back into humanistic and legalistic thinking, we will be robbed of our crown. Once we begin pointing fingers instead of looking to Christ, we will lose our love. We don't want to be robbed of our crown of life! This

is not a literal crown. A crown symbolizes victory and is worn on the head. So this symbolizes that our carnal thinking has been overcome and that we are now living in spiritual thinking! Jesus Christ is life! Abiding in Him keeps us!

“He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; 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 My new name.” (v.12)

Those who overcome will be made a pillar in the temple of God. A pillar symbolizes permanency, strength, and the ability to carry weight. God has said that He dwells in His people. (**2 Cor. 6:16**) This is a permanent union. He completely satisfies; He takes away all our restlessness and all our selfish desires! It is not an on-again and off-again possession. It remains in place!

Pillars are load-tested. Overcomers have faced many trials; obstacles have been placed in their pathway, and they have withstood the many darts of the enemy. Instead of becoming weary and discouraged, they have become strong in the process of overcoming. This strength is not for the purpose of boasting and display, but for burden-bearing. They lift up the weary, encourage them, and build them up in the Lord. Overcomers fulfill these requirements!

These pillars are in the temple. They are not Christians who think of themselves as pillars - legalistically spewing out rules and doctrines, and being offended when others do not conform - like the Pharisees of old. Overcomers have been placed in the temple **by God**. They know how to communicate with God and intercede for others. Pillars are not moved or shaken by every wind of doctrine. They know Him who is their life!

“And he will not go out from it anymore,” that is, he lives in Christ continually! Christ is the vine, we are the branches. Once we have experienced how wonderful life in Christ is, we will never leave it! We don't depart from life and go back into the death-realm of carnal thinking. We remain in life as we go out to minister to humanity. **Jesus left the heavenly glory to minister to humanity, but He always remained in life!** We also have to leave the glory we feel and enjoy in the presence of our Lord, and go out to lift up the weary, heal the broken-hearted, and impart life to them! This is the ministry of those who are in life!

“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 My new name.” (v 12) This is really exciting! In the scriptures a name denotes the nature of that person. Receiving the name of God means that we receive the very nature of God. Christ overcame every trial the devil could throw at Him physically, mentally and

spiritually! Because He overcame He was given a name that is above every name. **Now He shares that name (nature) with the overcomers!** He has given us a new nature, a new heart! The city of God is the new Jerusalem that comes down out of heaven. So this new nature comes to us from heaven. Therefore it has to come to us spiritually! This nature has nothing to do with the old nature that came from Adam who was formed of earth! It is entirely new!

A city is filled with people, living together in a designated area that is called by a certain name. So the new Jerusalem is actually a people who have been born from above and who are living in Christ. They are overcomers, and Christ writes on them the name "New Jerusalem." The new Jerusalem and the bride of Christ and the overcomers are one.

Before Jesus died on the cross, He said, "*It is finished.*" What was finished? His work on earth as a physical man was finished. He was not coming back in a physical body to finish some unfinished business. His work on earth now takes place by His Spirit and through His body - His called-out ones. He has put His nature within us so that His work on earth can continue! Let's remember that we have a new nature; the old nature no longer belongs to us!

This new nature was promised in **Eze. 36:26**. "*Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you.*" That which is new is not a revision or transformation of the old. Our new birth brings us into a new realm, and this is a spiritual realm! This spiritual new creation that we are, has a new heart and a new spirit! Out of the old heart came evil thoughts and words; out of our new heart come the things that are of God! If we don't have "ears to hear what the Spirit is saying," we won't hear them. We'll let our natural mind overrule what the Spirit is saying. However, if we have "ears to hear what the Spirit is saying," the spiritual mind will rule over the carnal mind. The "greater works" can only take place through those who have "ears to hear what the Spirit is saying."

Message To Laodicea

"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this;" (v.14)

This message comes from the faithful and true Witness - from the One who can be trusted! The word **Beginning** comes from the Greek ARCHE, meaning the first in worth, commencement, or the **Beginner** of God's creation. "The Beginning" gives a wrong impression. The Son of God is eternal; He has no beginning and no ending! His message is true, so church take note of what He says!

Laodicea means **justice of the people**. This was a democratic church. They voted on things - just like many churches do today. God's church is a theocratic church. Christ is Lord and He leads and directs it. In God's church, the pastors, elders and whoever else is involved in ministry, do not control the church. Neither does the one who contributes the most money. In His church all hear from Him and do His bidding!

"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth." (vv.15-16)

Would you like to have been the pastor of the Laodicean church. Can you imagine what it would be like to read a document like that at a Sunday morning service?

Their deeds proved that they were neither hot nor cold. Christ wanted them to be either hot or cold! So hot is good, and cold is good! What does that mean? To be hot means that they know what to accept, and to be cold means that they know what to reject. Their deeds proved that they did not have this discernment! Therefore they did not have truth, for without truth it is impossible to have true judgment. Without judgment we fall prey to deception and lies. When we have truth, we can have true judgment and know what to accept and what to reject. Thus hot is good and cold is good, but lukewarm is unacceptable because that means they are unable to make a correct judgment.

Those who are lukewarm will accept anything that sounds good. They do not check things out with the scriptures, nor do they ask the Holy Spirit's guidance. We see this happening everywhere around us. For example, the scriptures do not teach that man has a **free** will, but Christians accept this teaching without batting an eye. A free will is one that cannot be influenced by lust, emotions or situations. All the advertising that is taking place every day, proves that we not only can be influenced, but that we are influenced by them.

Many Christians also accept the teaching that man can make himself better by his choices. Adam and Eve also fell prey to that idea due to believing the serpent's lie. But how can an unbeliever make the right choice when he is dead in his trespasses and sins? And how can Christians who do not hear the Spirit make right choices? Many do not understand that living by choices means that they are partaking of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In Christ there is no choice because there is no evil in Him. Hearing the Spirit results in a life of obedience. Jesus only did what the Father told Him to do, and His followers are also children of obedience.

The lukewarm have no place in Christ. The true Witness says, *"I will spit them out of My mouth."* What does He mean by that? In Christ's mouth are words of truth! His

witnesses must also have truth coming from their mouths. God wants mouthpieces who speak the words He gives them! Anything that does not come from Him is not truth. Those who speak out of their own desires and thoughts are cast out! He has no need of them; they are unusable.

At one time Laodicea was a Christian city of eminence, the see (the official seat or center of authority) of a bishop and a meeting-place of councils. But then the Mohammedan invaders destroyed it, and it is now a scene of utter desolation - as was prophesied. The Laodicean Christians did not recognize their true state. They thought they were pleasing to God because of their material blessings, and therefore did not repent. They did not hear the Spirit's teaching!

"Because you say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,' and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eyesalve to anoint your eyes so that you may see." (vv.17-18)

Fasten your seat belts! Our material wealth has nothing to do with our spiritual state! Our positive confession does not make us spiritual. The Laodicean church had a very positive confession. Its members were rich; they were a wealthy, healthy bunch! They thought they had need of nothing! They had a very positive confession, but it was not based on truth! A positive confession sees no need of repentance. God's judgments are based on truth, therefore we have to hear His judgment before we can make a true judgment. His evaluation or assessment is the one that counts, because it is the only true one! Had the Laodiceans heard the Spirit, they would have repented of their wrong ideas.

However, they remained ignorant of their spiritual state. They did not know that they were wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. **They were poor because they did not have the riches of God in their life.** Their nature had not been refined by fire. **They were blind because they could not see spiritually;** they didn't have vision because they were only interested in a good reputation. They were good church-going people. They enjoyed their social Bible club and their bingo parties. They were proud of their "bigness", their large Sunday School enrollment, and their affluence.

It didn't matter that they were naked, for they were all blind. They could sit around and enjoy themselves in their naked state, and no one knew the difference. Only those who have eyes to see spiritually can see that!

Have you ever spoken to a group of people who sit with glazed eyes as you try to explain some spiritual realities? You may as well conserve your energy because they are not hearing or understanding a word you are saying. They may even become belligerent and angry!

This church was advised to buy gold refined by fire! This gold cannot be bought with money. It is a godly nature, and the only way we can get it, is by going through the fire! That is the real road to riches - not to worldly wealth, but to enduring wealth in God. The fire just consumes that which is not of God, and if we only want that which is of God there is nothing to fear!

They were also counselled to get white garments - garments of righteousness! The only righteousness that counts is Christ's righteousness. Our zealotry for righteousness by trying to fulfill the law and doing good works is useless; it can't measure up to God's standard. Only the righteousness obtained through faith in Christ can take away our nakedness.

Unless the eye salve of the Holy Spirit has opened our eyes, we will remain blind. We won't see our true condition. When I was in that blind condition, I told God what a good church I was in, and how pure our doctrines were. When I was through telling Him how wonderful our church is, He startled me by saying, "Are you sure?" That broke me up, and I replied, "If I'm wrong, show me!" God applied that eye salve to my eyes. I went through the fire, and emerged with joy unspeakable! **How we need His eye salve to open our eyes to our wretched condition, and to the riches we have in Christ!**

"Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent." (v.19) Parents reprove and discipline their children because they love them. They don't discipline the neighbor's children. At times they may feel like punishing them, but they are not their responsibility. And there is a big difference between discipline and punishment!

Reproof and discipline are needed for correction. When a pilot veers off course, he receives a course correction. This is not a punishment; it is an advantage, for it helps him get to his destination. **God loves us, and His goal for us is that we are to be the exact image of His Son!** This change requires a lot of loving discipline, for we often get off course - we are headed in the wrong direction. Repentance simply means an about turn. Instead of going our way, we go God's way. This is our course correction, and it is to our advantage!

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me." (v.20) This is a message to the church. The church is busy with its programs and Bible studies, and it does not realize that often Christ is not a part of them. He is standing on the outside of the church, desiring to be welcomed in.

To this church Jesus said in effect, "I have excommunicated the entire church. You are so busy with all your committee meetings and plans for a big crusade and

building program that you have no room for Me.” Then He directed His attention to the individual: *“If anyone hears My voice.”* In the midst of this church of which Christ is not a part, there is still hope for individuals.

Jesus said, *“I am the door.”* He is the door that is open to us. He desires that we come in and receive of His wealth - and His wealth is His nature! Now He is standing at our door - the door to our understanding. Before our understanding can be opened to His understanding, we must pay attention to His knocking. This means we have to be willing to relinquish our own natural understanding of spiritual realities. As long as we cling to our natural ideas of spiritual realities we are not letting Christ in! If we do not pay attention to His knocking, our door will remain closed.

Next, we have a wonderful promise to all who open the door to Christ and receive Him. When we receive Him, He dines with us! That means we are eating the same food Christ eats. Christ only dines on truth, so together with Him we will dine on truth! Anything that is not truth will be rejected.

“He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.” (v.21) What a glorious promise to the overcomers! **Everything the Father has given to the Son, He shares with the overcomers!** Notice the oneness! In **John 17:22** Jesus prayed, *“The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as we are one.”* Here we see the answer to that prayer!

Oneness in authority! The throne symbolizes authority; a king’s authority is manifested when he sits down on his throne. God’s rule is one of righteousness. In **Ps. 89:14** we read, *“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; lovingkindness and truth go before You.”* To share the honor of sitting on the throne with Christ, we need to be able to have correct judgment - the very thing the Laodicean church lacked! Dining with Christ brings us righteousness and truth and the ability to judge rightly!

Lovingkindness (mercy) and truth are incorporated in His righteousness! We are to be merciful even as our Father in heaven is merciful. Overcomers are given the honor of sharing Christ’s authority because they have learned to submit to His authority! They are overcomers because they do not do their own will, even as Christ did not do His own will! **Authority is ours only in union with Him and in submission to His authority!**

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (v.22) The solution to every spiritual problem is to hear what the Spirit is saying! Christ goes from church to church and lists the wonderful promises for the overcomers! They may **eat of the tree of life**, they **will not be hurt by the second death**, for in Christ

all loss is turned into gain! They **may eat of the hidden manna** and **receive all the blessings and advantages that a white stone carries with it**. They **receive authority over the nations** - the nations no longer have authority over them. They are **clothed in white garments**, and **the Father brags on them**. They **become pillars in the temple of God and have the same nature Christ has**. Therefore they **are given authority to sit on the throne with Christ!** To share His throne and His glory, does not rob Christ of any glory; in fact it intensifies it!

Christ's ecclesia, His called-out ones, is a company of people who are vitally united with Christ through the new birth. Anything less than that is not a church. He is the oil of the lampstand! Only those who have ears to hear what the Spirit is saying are connected to Him. If they do not hear, the lampstand will be removed.

Only a percentage of Christians down through church history have heeded the warnings issued to the seven churches. Instead of listening to the Spirit, they have listened to the carnal teaching of men, and their lampstand has been removed. Go to Ephesus, Thyatira, Pergamum, etc.; the ruins are still there, but the lampstand has been removed.

Just because we have a land full of church buildings, does not mean that a church is meeting in every building. **The church is a people who are united with Christ!** The buildings may be called churches, but that does not guarantee that there is a church. Let's heed the warning, and hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches! Our relationship with Christ can only grow when there is communication and intimacy!

This is the first vision. All the other visions relate to this one and together they form one vision. The church needs to know that it is vitally linked to the risen Christ and that Satan has been defeated! The warnings and the blessings are for all ages!

Chapter 4

These visions bring us the revelation of Jesus Christ. They do not follow in chronological order, but run parallel to one another. They are like the insets of a map, giving us a clearer account of certain aspects. Each vision contains certain principles, and these principles are being worked out in the lives of God's people throughout the ages. Each vision moves toward the grand finale when truth reigns. Truth always judges the false, deceptive, misleading counterfeit. So we don't look to specific events to happen at a specific time in history.

In the first vision Christ, the Son of Man, is revealed in the midst of the churches, and He will always be in the midst of His church, for He only has one church. The seven churches are seven aspects of one church, and these aspects are always present somewhere among the churches, and they will always be present until God establishes something new.

The second vision also begins with Christ, but we see Him in a different way. Here He is the exalted Lamb of God, sitting on the throne and unfolding the purposes of God for humanity. Since this vision is pivotal to the rest of the book, it is important to have the right interpretation of it. If we are wrong here, we are wrong everywhere. A great number of modern expositors say that it contains a description of the 7-year tribulation, which many think is coming. But the knowledge of a future event would not bless people who were living in 95 AD, nor in the ages leading up to the event. John certainly would not have wept greatly over something coming thousands of years later.

In order to be blessed by these visions, we need to understand the vivid imagery portrayed throughout this book. The key or code to understanding them is found somewhere in the 66 books of the Bible. So we need to look to the scriptures to unlock the code. In this vision John saw the spiritual fulfillment of what God had shown Moses on the mountain when he received a scale model of the tabernacle. Moses saw the tabernacle as a prophecy of Christ in picture form. In Christ it has become reality. In these visions there are many parallels to the tabernacle and to the events in Exodus.

The majestic drama John relates in this vision is a powerful representation of the sovereignty of our God! Our attention is immediately directed to the throne, to Him who is on the throne, and to those who are before and around the throne. The throne of God is the central focus! This concept was foreshadowed in the tabernacle of

Moses. The most holy place where God dwelt was the central focus. Everything was situated before or around it. In this vision we see that everything has a relationship to the throne - on, before, or around! Everything in our lives is related to the throne!

“After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, ‘Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.’ Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne.” (vv.1-2)

“After these things.” In the preceding chapters, the overcomer has been identified. As we overcome the obstacles that present themselves in our life, we are moving on in the Spirit. It is marvelous to receive the revelation that our sovereign God is in control of all the interplays of good and evil as they touch our lives. We cannot progress spiritually if we try to evade God’s disciplines for our growth and development. If we try to escape, we are not building on truth. If we say we have truth, but are living according to the lie, we are in deception and present a false picture to the world.

“A door standing open in heaven.” Hypocrisy will never lead to an open door in heaven. A hypocrite knows truth, but uses it for his own selfish ends, and in the process he hurts others. He does not live according to the message he trumpets. Only by receiving truth and the discipline of God can we recognize the lie and overcome our selfish desires.

Christ Jesus is the door. His death, resurrection and the pouring out of His Spirit, opened the door for us to receive divine revelation. The overcomer receives free access to ascend to higher realms of divine revelation. According to the symbolism represented by the tabernacle, entry into the throne room is only possible by passing from the outer court and through the first holy place.

“And the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me.” God’s word to us is often compared to a trumpet call. Doug Fortune relates how his friend Rick was caught up to the throne of God shortly before he went there permanently. Rick said that everything there was alive, moving and full of colour. Then the Lord showed him a trumpet. “When you play this instrument, not only music comes out of it, but colours and words. It is the word of God and it is ALIVE,” Rick said.

John heard that voice from the trumpet. Just as Moses was summoned into the awesome presence of God by a trumpet sound to receive God’s message, so John was summoned into the invisible universe of God’s presence by a voice like a trumpet call. In order to understand how we are to function in the material universe, we first

have to enter the invisible, spiritual universe. The cause for what is happening around us is in the spiritual realm. We see the effect, but not the cause.

The invitation to “*come up here*” called John out of the physical to see the world of causes - “*to see what must take place after these things*”. Immediately John was in the Spirit. This is important because the realm of the Spirit is beyond the reach of the natural. These things are about us, because we live and move and have our being in Christ, but the natural man can never see them. We won’t hear the Spirit if we are engulfed in all the worldly things this world is enticing us with. The Holy Spirit has to take us out of the natural realm so we can see with the eyes of the Spirit. Our faculties have to come under the control of the Spirit. He reveals things to us; we don’t conjure them up. Each of us has to hear this voice from deep within!

“And behold, a throne was standing in heaven.” The first thing John saw when he stepped into this vast spiritual expanse was a throne. The throne symbolizes God’s kingly **rule and authority**. Here it symbolizes God’s absolute dominion and omnipotent power! This gives us a tremendous feeling of peace! In the center, in the very core of everything that is happening, it says, *“Behold, a throne.”* In the previous chapters we learned that the church was being bitterly persecuted. From **her** viewpoint, it did not seem as though Christ was in control. Becoming a Christian was almost like signing up for some kind of martyrdom. Altar calls saying, “If you want to enjoy health, peace and healing, come to Jesus” were foreign to them. It was more like, “If you want to lose your job and your life, come to Jesus.” It was a very different approach. Under persecution it is very easy to lose a right perspective, and it doesn’t feel as if God is in control.

Yet the very first thing John is shown is that God is in control! At the very center of the universe and in the very center of each of our lives, God has everything under control. Though Diocletian, the Roman emperor, could arrogantly proclaim, “I am lord and god, and everyone must worship me,” he was wrong! Far above the throne of Diocletian, far above all the wars, and far above all the evil that we experience, there is a throne. Jesus saw that throne, for He said to Pilate, *“You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above.”* (Jn. 19:11) God is always in control!

In Revelation 4 and 5 the throne is mentioned 17 times. This emphasizes the fact that we are to understand that God is in control. He is a sovereign God, and He rules! His promises are fulfilled to the minutest detail. The Israelites were delivered out of Egypt on the very day God had promised! When the time was fulfilled, Jesus was born! Everything that was prophesied about His death came to pass. God has a plan, and He knows how to bring it to pass! He has the power and ability to do everything He has purposed to do!

This throne is in heaven. Where is heaven? We point to the sky and say heaven is somewhere beyond the blue. Simultaneously, the Chinese in China do the same - but we are pointing in opposite directions. Jesus taught us to pray, "*Our Father who is in heaven,*" and the scriptures teach us that we are the tabernacle of the living God. Since God is in heaven and He is within us, it follows that heaven is in us. Heaven is where God rules. So if God rules us by His Spirit within us, the throne of God is also within us!

All spiritual realities are related to the throne of God. The One sitting on the throne is a corporate being - Christ, a many-membered body! God is a God of corporateness. In chapter 3:21 Jesus said, "*He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.*" So on the throne is Christ together with the overcomers. Jesus put great stress on this oneness in His prayer in **John 17!**

"And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance." (v.3) An indescribable glory surrounds the One sitting on the throne! The brilliance emanating from the One on the throne is compared to the brilliance of the jasper stone, which can be tinged with red, yellow or brown. A jasper stone is a crystal - a clear, shining, radiant crystal, revealing that God is light without any darkness. This compares with the awesome presence of God as seen in the shekinah glory above the mercy seat in the tabernacle. It speaks of the absolute holiness of God. And the sardius is a fiery, angry red stone, brilliant as a flame of fire! God's holiness and purity demand wrath against all ungodliness.

Surrounding this brilliance is a rainbow spelling out His covenant! It gives us hope in the midst of His holy anger against unrighteousness! The rainbow is first mentioned after Noah stepped out of the ark. As the sun shone on the mist in the atmosphere, human eyes, for the very first time, saw a rainbow. God said that the rainbow was the sign of His covenant that He would never again send a flood of that proportion onto the earth. This is an everlasting covenant of peace. History reveals that this thought is embedded in the hearts of many nations, for all are descended from Noah and his family.

The rainbow was like an emerald in appearance. The emerald is also one of the foundation stones of the new Jerusalem. An emerald has a green hue, and it symbolizes life. With the coming of spring we see new life in the budding trees and the dry grass turning green. So the emerald reminds us of His covenant that brings life and peace!

"And around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads." (v.4) What do the 24 elders represent? Because the natural mind cannot

understand the imagery, it says that they represent the twelve apostles plus the twelve tribes of Israel.

Again the Old Testament gives us the key to true understanding in **1 Chronicles 24**. Under David the Levitical priesthood was divided into 24 courses under the leadership of 24 elders. They were chosen by families according to Aaron's 24 grandsons. Each course was named for one of them, and the male descendants of each grandson constituted one of the 24 courses throughout their generations. The priesthood was divided into 24 orders for an express purpose: *"This was their order for coming on duty to serve in the house of the Lord, according to the procedure ordered for them by their forefather Aaron, as the Lord God of Israel had commanded him."* (v.19 - Amplified)

Since the whole priesthood could not serve in the temple at the same time, they were divided into courses, and were assigned to work in shifts, from one Sabbath to the next Sabbath. All the members belonging to the course had to appear in the temple, and the work was divided among them. The point is that it took all 24 courses to make up the entire priesthood of God! The 24 elders sitting on 24 thrones round about the throne of God represent the complete priesthood of God. They reveal the glory of the priesthood! God wanted His perfect rule over Israel to come through the priesthood, but Israel rebelled and demanded a king. Here we see the 24 elders, the entire priesthood, on thrones around the throne. In 1 Peter 2:9 we read that we are a royal priesthood.

"Twenty-four elders." Numbers in this book have nothing to do with arithmetic. They describe ideas, not numerical facts. They are not to be used to try to figure out when this or that will happen. Twelve is the number of divine government, and two is the number of witness. So 24 is a witness to the government of God. The royal priesthood is a witness to what the government of God has accomplished. It is a witness to the power of God to change us! His rule has changed us from selfish, greedy, power-hungry individuals, to loving, compassionate and forgiving creatures! **We are being changed into the image of Christ!** What a beautiful picture this is of Christ ruling in and through His priesthood! His throne is within us, and we are seated with Him in heavenly places. He is in the midst of us, in our spirit, ruling us from within!

The elders were seated. That's quite a statement when you think about it. In the presence of a holy God they were not groveling in the dust - as if there would be any dust there. No, they are seated. To be seated in God's presence means you are not running around doing your good works to obtain righteousness. The elders were not striving to obtain righteousness; they were resting in the reality that they had obtained it in Christ; not by their works, but by the grace of God. The

entire priesthood is resting from its own works. This is the church that has existed throughout the ages - the church that has entered into the rest of God! (**Heb. 4**)

In their submission to the throne they have become rulers over their own lusts, and are therefore qualified to rule others. This rulership is always together with Christ! **Eph. 2:6** says that God *“has seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”* Notice that this has already happened. This is for now! We are seated with Christ because we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ, and are resting from our own works for obtaining righteousness!

The elders were clothed in white garments. White, throughout the book of Revelation, consistently speaks of righteousness. Wherever there is a description of Christ's clothing, it is always white. Here, the entire royal priesthood is clothed in the righteousness of Christ through the covenant mercy of God! We have actually been brought into the kingdom of God and are under His government. Where He rules, it is heaven. We now experience life in a heavenly dimension.

Gold always symbolizes God's divine nature. Crowns are worn on the head, and people's thinking takes place in the head. Crowns are also the symbol of victory, so this pictures the overcomers - those who have overcome their natural thinking and whose actions now flow from the mind of Christ! They are not being led by their natural mind, but by the mind of Christ!

“Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder...”
(v.5) What does all this mean?

When John looked at the throne, it was as if that whole throne was filled with flashing, radiant, blazing light accompanied by a message of great importance! The lightning reminds us of Mt. Sinai. As a prelude to the giving of the law, the whole mountain rocked and quaked, and there was lightning and thunder. It was a fearful experience, so the people rejected a personal relationship with God! They saw Him as the One to be feared, for He demanded the absolute keeping of the law; any infraction of it would be punished. John saw God differently. As he gazed upon this majestic display of fireworks and power, he was filled with awe at the holiness of God, the giver of life and the giver of the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus! He is the One who gives us spiritual life and also sustains it.

This awesome sight came from the throne. We have already seen that His throne is within us. His words to us come swiftly, like lightning, giving us understanding and showing us the way in the darkness of our human understanding. Sometimes His words come with the ominous sound of thunder to deliver us from our bondage to the flesh. Once they have accomplished their work in us, we will speak with words that reveal the life of God that is resident within us. Those who reject this life remain

in the darkness of their human understanding; those who desire it will receive a refreshing, life-giving shower!

“And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God; and before the throne there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind.” (vv. 5b-6) In this imagery we are reminded of the seven-branched lampstand that was kept burning continuously in the holy place of the tabernacle. It was a small model, yet it symbolized a great reality. These seven lamps are identified for us; they are the seven Spirits of God, symbolizing the Holy Spirit in His completeness! They appear as fire before the throne of God, making sure that nothing corruptible is part of God’s rule. This pictures the fact that no flesh can sit on the throne. The fire only burns and consumes that which is consumable and perishable. Everything that is eternal is incorruptible, and therefore will not be hurt by the fire.

A sea of glass was also before the throne! In the scriptures, a sea represents a multitude of people. *“But the wicked are like the tossing sea, for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up refuse and mud. ‘There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked.’”* (Is. 57:20-21) A tossing sea is a description of those who do not have the peace of God. Their minds dwell on filth and rubbish, and their words toss these thoughts around.

Here, before the throne, it is peaceful. There is no raging tossing sea; there is no mud-slinging! Glass is a hard and usually transparent substance, obtained by putting sand through a fiery ordeal that brings a fusion of substances. We call this fusion glass. A sea of glass pictures a people who have experienced God’s consuming fire. His fire has consumed all their differences and all the lies they thought were truth! They see the oneness that is theirs in Christ! They are in perfect peace! They are “like crystal.” Crystal is clear; you can see through it. These people have nothing to hide; their words and their actions are in agreement. The peace of God is on their countenance. They have found that the grace of God is sufficient for every circumstance of life! This depicts the nature of those who sit on the thrones.

Then the four living creatures are brought into view. *“And in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind.”* It is unfortunate that the KJV has translated the Greek word ZOON, as beasts, instead of living creatures. The Greek word THERION is used when a wild beast is meant, and we associate wild beasts with ferocious ravenous animals. The word ZOON “primarily denotes a living being (zoe, life).” (Vine’s) This word is found about 20 times in Revelation, and it always refers to the creatures that stand before the throne. They give glory and thanks to God, and act in perfect harmony with His will.

These living creatures, or living beings (Wuest's translation) express life, and occupy the central position in the throne and around it. In the natural this is hard to fathom, for how can four creatures be in the throne and around it? So let's look at the spiritual message it is giving us.

In chapter 5:6 we find that a Lamb is standing with the four living creatures and the elders in the midst of the throne. These living creatures are very clearly representing the life of Him who is on the throne. This life, symbolized by the four living creatures, is not confined to God alone, but is also present in the Lamb and in the elders. **This expresses our unity with Christ and the Father, and the fulfillment of Christ's prayer for unity in John 17.**

Four, as "in the four corners of the earth," symbolizes completeness. So these beings are four representations of the very nature of the life of God. They represent His life in us in entirety. In Jesus Christ they were made visible to humanity. Since they are in the midst of the throne, we know that they symbolize the nature of the life that has dominion over every form of evil!

These creatures are not four different entities; they are four manifestations of one identity. *"The first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle."* (v. 7)

Again we go back to the Old Testament to receive greater understanding. When Israel camped around the tabernacle in the wilderness, they had four standards or flags under which they camped. (**Numbers 2**) According to Jewish tradition, the standard for Judah on the east was the lion; for Ephraim on the west it was the ox; for Reuben on the south it was the man; for Dan on the north it was the eagle. **Thus natural Israel prefigured the true Israel that would reveal Christ and who He is in them.**

The four gospels also show us these different aspects of Jesus Christ. In Matthew we see Him as the lion of the tribe of Judah; in Mark we see Him as the servant, the calf; in Luke we see Him as the perfect man, and in John as the eagle, soaring high above the problems of life! These are four depictions of the Lamb of God.

The first creature was like a lion. In chapter 5:5, Christ is identified as the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah. A lion, the most powerful of all the big cats, is called the king of the jungle because of his strength, power and dominion. Thus the lion symbolizes kingdom authority. Jesus revealed His kingdom authority by His life, His teaching and His miracles.

The second creature was like a calf or an ox, and an ox is known as a beast of burden - a beast that serves us. This identifies Christ as the patient servant, serving mankind.

He *“emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant...” (Phil. 2:7)* He served humanity by feeding the multitudes, healing the sick, washing the disciples’ feet, enduring rejection and the curse of dying on the cross for our redemption.

The third creature had a man’s face. Christ came in the likeness of sinful flesh, in the form of man. As a man He felt the same weaknesses we do. He knew what it was like to feel hungry, thirsty, tired, disappointed, rejected, lonely and racked with pain. He learned these things experientially! He did these things for us, that we might see His grace, mercy and love!

The fourth creature was like a flying eagle! Christ is also pictured as a flying eagle. To a flying eagle the winds of adversity are no obstacle to its ascent, for it uses the air currents of these winds to its advantage. It lives in the heavenlies! This illustrates that the negatives of the earthy realm had no hold on Christ, and they have no hold on those who live in Him. They only answer to their heavenly calling! What a beautiful revelation of Jesus Christ! It is also a revelation of who Christ is in the life of the overcomers, as well as the life that the overcomers are to reveal to the world!

These four depictions of Jesus Christ reveal the nature of the sons of God. Those who share the throne in union with Christ need to have the same nature Christ has. His nature has been, and is being worked into them. For that nature to come into the visible realm, it has to pass through the birth canal - through pressures, molding and pain. When a baby passes through the birth canal, it receives its nourishment from the mother through the umbilical cord. Similarly, we receive our food and power for overcoming from the Holy Spirit as we experience the various trials and difficulties of life. All the interplays of good and evil bring us into maturity as we draw on Christ’s life to sustain us. Without the winds of adversity we would be like a hothouse plant; we would not be deeply rooted, and therefore would wilt and die under pressure.

“And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.’” (v.8) The six wings - six being the number of man - identify these creatures with man. Wings tell us that this man is moving in the heavenlies. He has left his natural understanding of spiritual realities and is functioning in the mind of Christ!

“Being full of eyes,” reminds us of the Holy Spirit. His eyes penetrate our pretense of spirituality so that we may come into reality. These creatures symbolize the life of Christ in the overcomers. This life is symbolized by the royal priesthood (the overcomers) who are sitting on thrones around and in the midst of the throne! In order to share the throne with Christ, we must have the same nature that is in God and in the Lamb, as exemplified by the four living creatures.

These living creatures compare to the seraphim in **Isaiah 6**. Isaiah saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and the seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings, saying, *“Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.”* Since the seraphim have wings, we think of them as a higher order of angels. But our thinking needs to be submitted to the Holy Spirit’s teaching.

Isaiah saw a vision similar to John’s vision, both the seraphim and the living creatures having six wings. What Isaiah called seraphim, John called living creatures. Both refer to a new humanity whose thinking has been freed from earth’s gravity! Earthly pleasures and riches have no attraction for this spiritual humanity. Their whole being is full of reverence and praise for the One who has wrought this great salvation in them! He is no longer One who is separated from them; He now indwells them; they have become one with Him!

The living creatures continually praise the Lord! *“Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.”* They recognize His holiness and are in awe of it! Our Lord is separate from everything that is not holy. The Spirit of the Almighty God is not subject to union hours, for He works in His people day and night! We know that in God there is no night. The fact that these creatures are saying this day and night tells us that this is happening in the time realm - not after we die, but while we are still in the domain of day and night.

“Who was and who is and who is to come,” also refers to God in the realm of time. In the eternal realm He always IS, for there is no time. He is the unchanging One, without beginning and without end! The dimension that is without time is hard for us to comprehend, for we are so clock-oriented. Past, present and future are expressions we use in our time frame.

He is the Almighty One who was. He was manifested in the flesh, for the Word was God. He once walked the streets of Nazareth. He was dead and He was resurrected.

He is the Almighty One who is. He is alive; His life is now manifested in His people, and is now being demonstrated in His many-membered body. Many Christians take great pleasure in remembering Jesus as He was in the days of His flesh, instead of seeing Him as He is now. Many still think that walking in the same land where Jesus once walked, and being baptized in the same river where Jesus was baptized, will give them a spiritual experience. Many non-Christians have walked those same streets and still reject Christ. The physical can never give us a spiritual experience!

We need to recognize that Christ is spirit, and we need to worship Him in spirit and in truth. *“Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer.”* (2 Cor. 5:16) Christ is no longer in the flesh. *“The Lord is the Spirit,”* and we now know Him spiritually! **Our vision needs to be**

enlarged to see who Christ is in us!

He is also the Almighty One who is to come. He is the coming One. The word come (Greek: ERCHOMAI) stresses the arrival. This is not a physical coming in the sky. Those who function in natural thinking look for Christ outside of themselves, so they look to the skies to see Him appear in the natural heavens. They say that He lives within them, but they don't really believe it. If they believed it, they wouldn't look to an external coming again of Christ Jesus. If He dwells within us, we don't wait for Him to come externally. When the family is home, parents don't wait for their children to come home, for they are home.

We are not to cling to a fleshly idea of Jesus. This is illustrated by the appearance of Jesus to Mary at the tomb after His resurrection. Mary had lost Jesus once when He was crucified, and she did not want to lose Him again, so she clung to Him. The word to Mary is, *“Stop clinging to Me for I have not yet ascended to My Father and your Father, to My God and to your God.”* In essence He was saying that Mary should not cling to a fleshly idea of Him. After He had ascended to the Father He would be poured out as Spirit. Then and only then, was she to cling to Him! She was to cling to who He is spiritually. We also are to cling to Jesus as He is now! He is no longer flesh - He is Spirit! Those who worship Him must worship Him *“in spirit and in truth”!* (John 4:22-24)

He indwells us; His Spirit is united with our spirit! As His government in us increases, our self-life will decrease. His increase in us refers to our spiritual growth. Since Christ never leaves us nor forsakes us, His presence is ever with us. God is ever faithful to accomplish His purpose in us. His presence with us, however, does not mean that we have come into maturity; neither does it come and go. He is with us continuously.

Christ comes to us in revelation. We notice this particularly when we go through turbulent times and experience difficulties, or when we ask God to interpret scripture to us. It is then that we receive illumination and a precious revelation of His loving care and guidance! His comings to us bring development and maturity to our spiritual growth, and make His nature visible in us. So often we only express the Christ nature in certain areas of our lives. Here we have the assurance that we are growing into His exact image! He lives within us, but if our carnal thinking rules us, it will block and hide this fact. When we live in the heavenlies, we live out of Christ's mind and are governed by His Spirit. This unveils the Christ in us. The world sees Him, and people either hate us or are drawn to Him!

To unveil the Spirit or nature of Christ we need to know Him. This is very different from only having intellectual knowledge of Him. If we do not know Him, our image of Him will be wrong, and we will display that wrong image. If we think He will

torment throughout eternity the humanity He has created, even though they were ignorant of His love, we will also have a hardened attitude toward unbelievers. If we think He is legalistic, we will also be legalistic. If we think He tortures unbelievers, why shouldn't we? However, when we see Him in truth and grace and in the love that is beyond comprehension, we too will respond by having love and grace toward those who hurt us! We will marvel at His ability to make us a new creation and to mold us into His exact image!

So often our image of God is formed by the teachings of those who want to gain control over people by instilling fear in them. They say that God is punishing us for our sins, whenever something bad happens to us. They don't realize that God has put certain laws into effect, and when these laws are disobeyed, we automatically reap the results. The law of sowing and reaping states: if you plant wheat, you will reap wheat; if you jump out the window you will fall to the ground; if you touch fire, your finger will get burned. This is reaping what you sow; these are the results of our actions; they are not punishments or rewards. Jesus Christ deals with us when we sin - not to punish us, but to save us out of it. He did not come to condemn the world, but to save the world!

“And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever (“into the aeons of the aeons” - Concordant Literal),” and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Worthy are Thou, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed and were created.” (vv.9-11)

The living creatures represent the life of Christ that is in the twenty-four elders. They exhibit the life of the elders. So when the living creatures exalt the Almighty (the One who was and is and is to come), the elders (we, the entire royal priesthood) are exalting Him. We cannot exalt the LORD GOD without worshiping Him. Without worship, He is not exalted, for He is the One who always IS!

To worship means to make obeisance. It is translated from the Greek PROSKUNEO; from PROS, meaning towards, and KUNEO, meaning to kiss. It is interesting to note that this word is not defined in the scriptures. However, as we take into consideration the various ways in which it is used, we see that it is not confined to praise. Rather, it is an acknowledgement of who God is in His very essence and in His ways and in His claims. In this acknowledgement we assert His worthiness and our submission to His will. True worship can only take place when we submit our will to His will. Without submission, an act of worship is faithless and deceitful worship.

Why do you think the elders would cast their crowns of gold before the throne? We have already seen that the crowns of gold symbolize the mind of Christ. The thinking of the elders has become one with Christ's thinking. It is the final act in proclaiming that their will is completely in submission to God's will and government! It is like putting your signature to an agreement or covenant. Even as Jesus only did what the Father showed Him to do, so the 24 elders, who symbolize the complete royal priesthood, only do what the Father shows them to do! Here is a government where the co-rulers are in complete submission to the head - not because of an egotistical, forceful control that damns if you don't obey - but because the very life of their Creator permeates and indwells them. This is the life that is exemplified by the four living creatures!

“Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.” (v.11) As we are awed in our spirit by Christ's worthiness, we joyfully join in this beautiful chorus!

Overcomers have received a revelation of the greatness of our Lord God. He has created all for His purpose! Christ *“is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together...For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him.”* (Col. 1:15-17,19) He is worthy to receive all glory and honor and praise!

God created for a purpose! Everything is to come under His rule because only His rule is good! He is good, His rule is good, and His purpose for humanity is good! He achieves His purpose, not by force, but by giving us His life! Glory to God!

Chapter 5

In chapter 4 we received a description of the throne room and the worship of our Creator. Now the action continues and focuses on something specific. An exciting scene follows.

“I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals.” (v.1) John saw Him who is on the throne! We know that the Father is the One who sits on the throne! This clearly shows us that Satan is not on the throne. Neither is there a tug-of-war for the throne going on between God and Satan, as many believe. Adam’s sin in no way displaced God from His rightful place on the throne, nor did it undermine His sovereignty. It only changed Adam’s perspective of God, but it didn’t change God.

Then why is Satan spoken of as *“the god of this world”* and the *“prince of the power of the air”*? It is to show us that his rule is limited to this world - the world that is governed by the carnal mind. It operates by choices instead of obedience, thereby putting man in the driver’s seat instead of God. It does not know truth and therefore submits to Satan’s lying reign. Satan’s rule is not a rightful dominion; he has usurped God’s place in people’s minds; he is a god without divinity, a prince without right. He can only rule in those who are blind to the truth. His rule has absolutely no power in the world of righteousness

And in His right hand is a book. Let’s remember that all these things are symbols. This book is in God’s right hand, and the right hand is symbolic of His sovereign power! Therefore we know that He is able to keep His covenant and bring about His purposes, namely, to do away with sins, to destroy the works of the devil, to be the Savior of the world and to change us into His image! (**1 John 3:3,8; 4:14; Romans 8:29**)

In those days a book was not like our books - it was a scroll. It was generally made of skins or parchment rolled together. One could write on the inside and outside of the scroll, and that is what this scroll had. On the inside was written the nature that is ours in Christ, and on the outside the nature of the Adamic man, and it unmask the nature of the beast. The challenge consisted of getting someone who was worthy of breaking the seals so that the nature of Christ could be revealed, for only it can overcome and do away with the nature of the beast. As living epistles, we are to have His word hidden in our hearts and let it become flesh in us, so that Christ is manifested in our everyday walk.

This scroll was sealed with seven seals. According to the custom of that day, seven scrolls were sealed within each other. Like the layers of an onion, the first seal had to be broken in order to get to the second seal, etc. There is nothing to indicate whether these seals were cylindrical or molten wax wafers impressed with a design or something else, because that is not important. A seal indicated ownership, protection and authenticity. The importance of this scroll is in its symbolism!

The message it conveys is tremendous! John was brought into a place where he could see God's intention of releasing His people from everything that sin and death had robbed them of. This release would bring them into the totality of God's being and the complete revelation of His will and purpose. God's people will begin to experience and express the fullness of all that God is, as these seals are loosed within them.

Our search for the symbolism of this scroll takes us to **Jeremiah 32** where Hanamel, Jeremiah's cousin, came to Jeremiah and asked him to buy his field, for Jeremiah had the right to redeem it. God's plan for Israel was that their inheritance could never be lost permanently. There was a plan of redemption in the law that secured this fact. A legal transaction for redemption had to take place, and this involved two scrolls.

Jeremiah was very careful that all was done legally. He signed and sealed the deed, called in witnesses, paid the silver (silver symbolizes redemption), then *"took the deeds of purchase, both the sealed copy containing the terms and conditions and the open copy."* (v.11) The open scroll was a public record of the right of the purchaser to buy the property, and the sealed scroll was for future use. It contained the details of the sale, the cause or specifics of why it was sold, and the terms or cost of redemption.

Jeremiah's prayer at the close of this transaction shows that he realized that the redemption of one small parcel of land symbolized what God purposes for the whole of His creation! Read the whole chapter! Nothing is too difficult for the Lord! *"They shall be My people, and I will be their God."* (v.38) The Israelites were sold into slavery, but the lovingkindness of the Lord would redeem them!

This sealed scroll was very important because it contained the conditions of redemption. After Adam sinned he could no longer remain in the garden. Instead of resting in God's provision, he was forced to live on the lower level of self-effort, and eke out a living through hard work. To be released from our slavery to self, we need a redeemer who will return our inheritance to us! No wonder a search was made for someone who could open the seven seals! As long as the scroll was sealed, it was a sign that someone had lost his inheritance; it still needed to be redeemed. Seven is not a literal number; it is the number of divine perfection or completeness. As the seven seals are opened, we will see what it takes to perfect us and to take us out of our slavery to self.

The seven seals symbolize the strongholds, the spirits that keep us bound to our human nature. These strongholds have to be torn down so that we can be loosed. In Christ we are sealed with the Holy Spirit of truth. Only truth can break the seals of lies that bind us to our earthy thinking!

“And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?’” (v.2) Who is this strong angel or strong messenger? No being is stronger than Jesus Christ! All power has been given to Him! The question is, *“Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?”* Not just anyone had the right to open the book. Certain conditions had to be met. To be worthy to open this book he had to be related to humanity, have a flawless character and possess certain credentials. Natural strength, knowledge or position had nothing to do with the authority to open the book. He had to be worthy! **When Adam lost his inheritance, Satan did not get the legal deed to it. God kept it until the One who is worthy could receive it!**

“And no one (man) in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it. Then I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it.” (vv.3-4) A search was made for a man who could open the scroll. This had to be someone who was identified with humanity. Humanity thinks it can redeem itself by making right choices - that if given enough time and enough lifetimes, it will be successful. In the deceptiveness of man’s imagination, he has a wrong image of himself. He does not realize that he is a slave to sin and Satan, because Adam sold himself and all his progeny into death! Therefore, according to the law, it has to be a man, a relative of Adam, who is worthy, willing and able, to redeem man. Only someone who is identified with humanity can open the scroll of God’s purposes; this someone must also be worthy to meet the requirements needed to bring redemption; it must be a man who can take us out of death!

In the garden of Eden, when Adam obeyed Satan instead of God, he sealed up the purpose that God had for man. Man was made for the purpose of walking with God, but Adam effectively put a stop to this relationship by his disobedience. In other words, he sealed up the will and purpose that God had for humanity. This completely changed Adam’s perspective of God. Instead of enjoying God, Adam now feared Him. Ever since Adam and Eve sewed fig leaves together for a covering, man has tried to work out his own redemption by self-effort, and has failed miserably. Can you see the great dilemma? Whoever is able to take away sin and its bondage, and bring humanity into life, must himself be without sin and be victorious over death. Only such a man has the authority to break the seals!

The search for someone who was worthy included every conceivable place - heaven, earth and under the earth! In heaven, the angels were of no use; although they were

sinless, they were not of human descent. Since the search was for a man, and I say this reverently, God Himself could not do it because He is not a man either. So there was nobody in heaven.

Then the divine searchlight focused on the earth. There are plenty of men there, but they are not worthy. No man was found worthy to perform this task! Man cannot pull himself up by his bootstraps. Man does not have the right lineage; his connection with, and fascination for the earth, invalidate him. Those who have died are not worthy either, because the fact that they are still in death proves that their life could not resurrect them. So He said there is no man in heaven, there is no man on earth and there is no man under the earth who is worthy.

This is the only time in this book that John wept - and he saw some pretty incredible things. He just looked at them and wrote down what he saw. When no one was found worthy to open this book, he recognized that he himself was not worthy. Even though he had walked with Jesus and laid his head on Christ's breast, and suffered persecution and had been boiled in oil, he was not worthy. Neither was anyone else! He was so overwhelmed and involved in what he saw that he wept greatly.

The contents of this book are extremely important to everyone everywhere; they were vital to all the Christians on the island of Patmos and on the mainland, and they remain vital to all Christians everywhere throughout the ages, for this book contains the promise and details of redemption!

It was at this point that he heard a voice behind him. *"And one of the elders said to me, 'Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.'" (v.5)* This is wonderful news! There is One who is worthy! The word "overcome" is translated from the Greek NIKAO, meaning to conquer, to gain the victory. The Lion from the tribe of Judah has overcome death! Who is He? When Jacob blessed his sons, and he came to his son, Judah, he called him a lion's whelp. He said, *"The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to Him shall be the obedience of the peoples."* (Gen. 49:10) The word "Shiloh" means to whom it belongs or whose right it is, that is, until He who alone has the right to reign shall come. Only Shiloh has the right to rule.

What does *"of the Root of David"* mean? The Lion of the tribe of Judah has His roots in David. In **2 Samuel 7:12-13** God said to David that he would have a descendant whose kingdom would be established forever. That is, David would be a root; out of his flesh and blood would come One who would rule forever. This prophecy does not refer to Solomon, for he lost the kingdom. Even the greatest wisdom of man cannot keep the kingdom. David was the first young lion of Judah; he was the first king of Judah's tribe. In **Matthew 1**, the "begat" chapter, it clearly shows that Jesus is

a descendant of David, and David was of the tribe of Judah. So Jesus is the Lion that was spoken of to Judah.

In Jesus Christ, God joined Himself to our humanity. Jesus Christ was of heaven; He was a man from heaven, but He was also joined to humanity, for He was born of a woman. He alone fulfilled all the requirements of worthiness to open the seals, for He was united with humanity, yet without sin; He had died, yet He was alive; He had overcome death!

“And I saw between” (actually, “in the midst of”) *“the throne* (with the four living creatures) *and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth.”* (v.6) In the midst of the throne, with the four living creatures and the elders was a Lamb! What glorious unity, what glorious oneness with the One who sits on the throne! On the throne, in the perfect expression of life, and with the Lamb, are the elders - the royal priesthood!

We don't need to interpret what the Lamb means. Everyone immediately says, “Of course that is Jesus.” If we use that same logic for every other part of Revelation, it will help our understanding of the book! Didn't John the Baptist describe Jesus as the Lamb that takes away the sins of the world? A lamb summed up all the bloody sacrifices of the Old Testament. They had rams, bulls, goats and pigeons - but in the mind of a Jew, the one animal that summed up all animals offered to God, was a lamb. Someone described it as “the theological shorthand for all the sacrifices of the Old Testament.”

It says, *“a Lamb, as if slain.”* Incidentally, the word lamb, as used here, is “little lamb”. Our attention is drawn to a little white lamb, as if freshly slain. Sacrificial lambs were killed by slitting their throats. This lamb showed the evidence of having been killed, yet it was alive! Here is Jesus, the One spoken of in prophecy; He is a man, yet sinless; He has been crucified and has been resurrected! Death could not hold Him! **He is worthy to break the seals and shower blessings upon the human race by redeeming it.**

The Lamb had seven horns. Have you ever seen a lamb with seven horns? Obviously we are not looking at a natural reality but at a symbol. In the scriptures and universally, horns speak of power. Seven is the number of God - God in perfect power! God's perfect power expressed in the crucified and resurrected Lamb of God and in the Lion of the tribe of Judah! A lamb is the epitome of weakness, and a lion is the epitome of strength. As the Lamb of God, Jesus portrayed perfect weakness - He did nothing in His own power; He remained on the cross and died for His enemies! As the Lion He overcame every temptation and even death itself!

His seven eyes are the seven Spirits of God. The divine completeness of the Holy Spirit was resident in Jesus Christ! He is the Spirit of the Lord! He is complete wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge and fear or reverence of the Lord! Therefore He can loose us from every bondage that binds us to our wrong thinking! He has been “*sent out into all the earth.*” Not into all parts of the earth, but into all the earth. He has been sent into all our earth, to deliver us from all of our earthiness!

“And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.” (v.7) We have to see this spiritually. This does not refer to a four-footed lamb going to the throne and taking a book in its mouth, but to the Lamb, Jesus Christ. He took the book containing all the instructions for the complete redemption of all humanity. He went to Him who has all authority, and received His commendation that He had successfully completed His assignment. He had overcome death, and therefore could impart His life to humanity!

In the symbolism of this act, we see a high priest of a higher dimension, of a higher order than the Aaronic high priesthood. To make atonement for Israel, Aaron had to offer a sacrifice for his own sins before he could take the blood of animals into the holiest - the throne room. In this chapter the high priest and the sacrifice have become one. The Lamb has shed His own blood, but death could not keep Him! In life, He now brings His own blood right up to the throne.

In **Lev. 17:11** the correct translation says, “*The soul of the flesh is in the blood.*” The soul is our sense of being. The Israelites were not to drink the blood of animals because they were not to receive the sense of being of an animal. Christ’s blood is the only blood we are to drink! His sense of being was perfect! He knew that submission to the Father’s will was best for Him. In submission, He would never sin. As we receive Christ’s sense of being, we too will only desire to do the Father’s will. His sense of being will keep us from sinning. It cleanses us from the wrong thinking of the Adamic man; it takes away our sin-consciousness and gives us Christ’s consciousness! His blood (His sense of being) is accepted as the atonement for all of humanity throughout the ages!

“And when He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.” (v.8) This scene is a victory celebration! The Lamb’s accomplishment is so great that it immediately induces worship! Christ, the Son of Man, is the beginning of a new creation! He is proclaimed worthy to take the book that describes the humanity that is locked into self, and redeem it from its rebellion against God. He has full power and authority to fulfill the requirements of redemption! The requisites for redemption have been fulfilled, but they still have to be worked into humanity.

The prostration of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders symbolizes submission, adoration and worship. The harps symbolize praise, and the golden bowls full of incense are the prayers of the saints - not the selfish petitions of "give me," or the prayers of rote and recitation, but the earnest prayers for the redemption of humanity! These are prayers for those who do not have understanding, and for the hurting and the lost!

It is very significant that at this moment a new song of praise erupted in the throne room! *"And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.'"* (vv.9-10)

As He took the book out of the hand of Him who sat on the throne, a new song burst forth from those on and around the throne. They represent all that are governed by God. The Greek word that is translated new means new in kind; it is a kind of song that has never been sung before. Never before had there been someone worthy to bring redemption to humanity! This new kind of song is entitled, *"Worthy is the Lamb"*. We shall be dealing with some of these songs as we go through the book.

This Lamb, this Shiloh (whose right it is), is worthy to break the seals! What do the seals signify? They symbolize the bonds and spirits that keep us bound in slavery to self. Carnal thinking cannot break these bonds, for when it tries to do so, it brings total disaster. Only the Lamb, whose very life has overcome death, is worthy to redeem humanity. **This redemption is so complete that the new humanity has no earthiness in it!** All who have received and function in this new humanity are citizens of heaven, and are called a royal priesthood. This royal priesthood is under the government of God, and through it God's government is established over all earthiness.

"Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands." (v.11) Can you imagine the number of them? No specific number is given, because they are innumerable. One hundred trillion? Maybe more! The exact number is not important. The important thing is that they were all gathered around the throne of God! The government of God was central in their lives!

If we just picture this scene in a far-away heaven, it won't change us. We need to see the throne of God within us, for the Holy Spirit rules us from within! We need to see that the life of God, depicted by the living creatures, is one with God's authority and government in all who form the royal priesthood, as well as in all of God's messengers. God wants us to know that we are not alone in our awe of His

wonderful government and His great purpose for humanity! An anthem of praise fills our hearts as we become spiritually aware of God's wonderful salvation.

“Saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.’” (v.12) Notice the rising crescendo in the praise of Christ's worthiness! Here we see His worthiness to receive power, riches, wisdom, might, honor, glory and blessing! This worthiness is based on Christ's submission to the Father while He was subjected to the highest degree of suffering. This proved His complete obedience to the will of the Father! What an inspiration for us to bow in total submission to the will of the Father! **The cost to the comfort of the self-life is eclipsed by the blessings, glory and honor that accompany obedience!**

“And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, ‘To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.’” (v.13) The actual translation is not *“forever and ever”*, but *“into the ages of the ages”*. This is very impressive! No created thing is left out of this universal praise! It includes every created thing! To make sure that this is fully understood it lists all known locations - in heaven, on earth, under the earth, on the sea and all things in them. This includes everything that is within us - everything within us praises Him! Bitterness and unforgiveness would not praise Him. Take time to meditate on the inclusiveness of this praise! Colossians 1 tells us that all things, visible and invisible, have been created by Him and for Him! All glorify the Lamb! There are no exceptions!

“And the four living creatures kept saying, ‘Amen’. And the elders fell down and worshiped.” (v.14) The living creatures, representing the life of God, say *“Amen”* to all the redemptive disciplines of God. They do not fight and fume against God. They know that He loves them even though the way is rough. They say, *“Amen”*. They are in agreement with everything God does!

The elders fell down and worshiped! Worship of God cannot take place without the surrender of one's will to the will of God. Salvation includes so much more than a ticket to heaven. **It brings us into a vital union with Christ; it takes us out of the Adamic man and puts us into the Christ man; it takes us out of death and darkness, and gives us life and light; it takes us out of self-love and gives us Christ's love; it takes us out of self-righteousness and gives us Christ's righteousness; it takes us out of carnal thinking and gives us the mind of Christ!** What a glorious salvation is ours! Let's worship Him who is worthy of our worship!

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 is a continuation of the second vision. The throne is in the very center of this impressive, moving vision that dominates the sky. The Lamb, having been proclaimed worthy, proceeds to break the seals. An illuminating vision follows after the breaking of each seal, each one being part of the second vision. The seals need to be broken in progression, one by one, before the complete scroll can be read.

As we follow through the breaking of the seals, we need to understand that this is not a record of any particular time in history. These are things that happen when the Lamb, the Christ, becomes Lord in our life - the things that happen when Christ rules in us. So we are not looking for dates; nor do we try to fit in certain events that have happened historically. We are seeing principles in the form of visions. These things happen in His people at anytime and anywhere when Christ becomes Lord in their life.

This scroll describes the process of redemption in us. Wherever and whenever the resurrected Lord is proclaimed as the ruler, certain things inevitably begin to happen. That's why this book is a blessing to everyone who reads it. It isn't only for this people or that people - it is for ALL people, wherever they happen to be. The principles in this book are always applicable.

“Then I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, ‘Come.’”(v.1)

Let's remember that the seals symbolize the things that are keeping us earthbound. Our carnal thinking and fleshly desires keep us from receiving the light of the gospel. They keep us from seeing the meaning of this symbolism. After the Lamb breaks a seal, one of the four living creatures, who symbolizes the very life that God is, sounds forth with a message that needs to be heeded.

When the first seal was broken, the thunderous voice of the first living creature said, *“Come.”* Come and receive illumination! What does the voice of thunder symbolize? When the people were gathered around Mt. Sinai, they heard thunder before God spoke. **Job 37:5** says, *“God thunders with His voice wondrously.”* When God spoke to Jesus in **John 12:28-29**, the people heard thunder. Only Jesus understood the words. So we see that thunder is associated with God speaking.

The breaking of this seal removed a barrier, and John saw a white horse galloping into view. *“I looked, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to Him, and He went out conquering and to conquer.”*(v.2)

To understand what is happening, we have to disregard the headings the translators have inserted in the various editions of the Bible. Some even have the audacity to say, "First Seal - the False Christ." The code used to interpret Revelation has to be consistent. The rider of the white horse has to be the same in this chapter as he is in chapter 19. Neither the rider nor the white horse can have different interpretations at different times. The rider is clearly identified in chapter 19 as He who is called Faithful and True, the Word of God, and King of kings and Lord of lords. And we know that is our Lord Jesus Christ!

A horse symbolizes strength, vitality and fearlessness. In ancient times, horses were specifically used in war and by messengers. In **Zechariah 6:2-5**, the four colored horses symbolize the four spirits of heaven; they came after they had stood before the Lord. They first received a message from the Lord, and then they came to accomplish the specific purpose for which they were sent.

In this vision the color of the horse symbolizes the type of message that Christ brings to us. White symbolizes cleanness and purity. In **1 Peter 1:15** we read, "*... like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior, because it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'*" He comes to cleanse us from all the impurities of the flesh! Every bit of self-life has to be overcome! He comes to take away all that brings us hurt and injury in order to give us eternal well-being! The horse and the rider are one in purpose!

The rider had a bow. Although the type of bow is not specified, we naturally think of a bow that shoots arrows. **Psalms 45:4-5** gives us a beautiful picture of this. "*And in Your majesty ride on victoriously, for the cause of truth and meekness and righteousness... Your arrows are sharp; the peoples fall under You; Your arrows are in the heart of the King's enemies.*" The purpose of these arrows, these words, is to bring truth, meekness and righteousness, so that all lies and unrighteousness are done away with!

Whenever God's arrows find their place in us, we are convicted of some form of unrighteousness. They bring conviction and repentance - just like they did to Saul of Tarsus. Saul was told that it would be hard for him to kick against the goads. Goads are sharp-pointed sticks used in driving oxen. The point of an arrow is much like the point of a goad; it's much the same imagery. But after the initial pain and surprise of God's arrows, we are guided into the right path, and it's beautiful!

Since we are dealing with symbolism, and the bow is not identified, it can also symbolize a rainbow. The rainbow is the first bow mentioned in the scriptures, and it is a covenant. A covenant is His word, and His word is a two-edged sword. Guns and bombs conquer by force, but they do not bring about an internal change.

However, Christ conquers with His word, and changes us internally! This process continues until His death to sin becomes ours experientially, and we are conformed to His image. Only then can we live in purity and righteousness!

The rider is also given a crown. This is a crown given by God; it is not the crown of thorns that people pressed into the head of Jesus. This crown symbolizes government and authority, and is only worn by those whose thinking comes from God. In **Matt. 28:18** Jesus said, *“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”* His authority is all-inclusive - it begins in heaven and reaches down to all the earth! All must know that the Lamb reigns, and that He is King of kings and Lord of lords! All must know that He is Lord in every area of their life! His word searches our hearts and shows us where the ego with its fleshly desires is still reigning. All must be brought under Christ’s Lordship!

The horse and rider have become one unit with one objective. What a beautiful picture of Christ going forth to conquer with a covenant and kingly authority to rule! He rides into the nitty-gritty of our life and shows us areas that are not submitted to Him. He rides victoriously! He will continue His conquest until we come into the fullness of His life and love, and bring forth a revelation of the Christ within us!

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

The opening of the second seal begins with another invitation to come and receive illumination. And into this life-giving drama gallops a red horse. More illumination intensifies the process. The word red is translated from the Greek PURRHOS, meaning fiery red. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a baptism of fire. *“He (Jesus) will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”* (Matt. 3:11) Fire is needed for purification. From the Latin PURUS come words like pure, purify and purification. *“Our God is a consuming fire,”* for He consumes all our dross and all our chaff that we may be formed into His image!

Notice that it states, *“and it was granted to take peace from the earth.”* It was granted means the rider was given permission. In **Matt. 10:34** Jesus said, *“Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”* He brings division. Our allegiance to Christ separates us from those who do not follow Him! Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace, yet He brought a sword! *“The word of God is a living and active sword.”* (Heb.4:12) His word illumines our darkness, and the carnal man wars against the truth that Christ is! This brings persecution.

Becoming a Christian usually means persecution in one form or another. Though

we don't like persecution, it is necessary for the growth and development of Christian character. In communist countries and others, loss of property and jobs, imprisonment, torture and even death may result! The rights of Christians as citizens are taken away. They can't buy or sell when people discover that they are Christians. Their families disown them and their jobs are taken away.

At the present time we only see a modified form of this in America. After we receive the gospel, people who used to like us, begin to hate us. We wonder what on earth has happened! If we move on in Christ, most of our persecution will come from Christians who want to remain in their traditions. They slay us with words. Jesus also experienced this. His rejection from the religious hierarchy was so severe that it led to His death on the cross. God wants us to know that the persecution that follows because of our acceptance of the gospel, is granted by God. So those who read this book will be blessed to know God is in control!

“And a great sword was given to him.” The Greek word here indicates a short sword. If your Bible has the heading “The Second Seal - War,” just disregard it! Wars were not fought with a short sword; they were fought with a great big sword - with the sword mentioned in verse 8. The short one had different uses. It's the same word that is used of the two-edged sword in **Heb. 4:12**. It comes to take away the peace in our earth. It invades our self-realm, and cuts away all our fleshly desires. This is a spiritual circumcision - the circumcision of the heart. The things we used to enjoy no longer fascinate us. This is necessary so that our joy and peace can be brought onto a higher level. We now find our contentment in Christ!

The red horse is followed by a black horse. *“When He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, ‘Come.’ I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand.”* (v.5)

Black symbolizes the dark times in our lives. Here our focus is on the dark times in our life, for they bring balance to us. When God created, *“There was evening and there was morning, one day.”* Out of the darkness God brought light! He included the darkness in the formation of a day. In God's day there is only light, but for us there is still darkness in it. Out of the darkness He brings light! Joy comes in the morning!

Darkness brings sifting. Peter had to be sifted - the lumps are the things that don't belong; these are taken out through sifting. That is why the offering to God was to be of “fine flour”. No other grain and no foreign objects were to be included. Only fine sifted flour could be brought as an offering to God.

Balance comes with these dark times. We need dark times to bring balance into our lives. In Jesus we see the balanced life! **His gentleness and compassion never**

became weakness, His love never became lust, His firmness never became arrogance, and His peacefulness never became indifference.

Belshazzar, the king, was weighed in the balances and was found deficient. In our darkness we realize our need of light! Christ has come to be our light, our life, our sufficiency, our truth, our wisdom and our righteousness! Let's remember that this is how the process of redemption is worked out in us! He is able to save us to the uttermost; He is able to free us from all our self-adoration - from all the lusting that is inherent in the self-life!

“And I heard something like a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, ‘A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not damage the oil and the wine.’” (v.6)

A denarius was a day's wage. So for one day's wage one man could buy enough to feed himself. A quart of wheat would just about feed you for a day. Or if you wanted more, you could buy three quarts of barley for a denarius. Barley wasn't as fine as wheat. You could feed three people for a day's wage if necessary. The oil and the wine were the luxury items. There is enough of everything if you have the money to buy it. That's not famine!

Now let's look at the symbolism. The feasts that the Israelites were to celebrate give us light on this subject. Barley always symbolizes Passover, and wheat, Pentecost; the oil symbolizes the anointing, the wine symbolizes revelation of the word of God; and a denarius, one day's wage. A wage represents self-effort. So what are we warned against? We are warned against trying to earn spiritual food through intellectual pursuit and self-endeavor. All self-effort hurts the anointing and the revelation of who Christ is! Spirituality is received by revelation - by listening to the Spirit, believing Him and obeying Him. Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness.

In spite of God's clear directives, leaders are continually admonishing us to apply self-effort. We are strongly advised to try to do better, to be more zealous and to work harder. This is self-effort. Jesus said that the work of God consists of believing in Him. (**Jn. 6:29**) Many of those who are anointed and gifted, misuse them as a power-play for their own benefit and advantage. The word anointing is translated from the Greek, CHRISTOS. Christ in us is the anointing! So all who are in Christ, are equal. When people rank themselves higher than others because of their anointing or gifting, they are rejecting the revelation of who Christ is in all of us. Those who only interpret the scriptures in the natural realm, and scoff at those who are receiving spiritual revelation, are harming the oil and the wine! The black horse rides to do away with all these evils in our lives!

The black horse was followed by an ashen horse. *“When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, ‘Come’. I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.”* (v. 8)

John looked and beheld a further revelation of God’s wonderful redemption by seeing an ashen horse. The word ‘ashen’ comes from the Greek CHLOROS, meaning pale green or faintly colored. The Logos Library System equates this greenish color as being verdant, i.e. dun-colored. Green symbolizes life. A greenish horse - a little life, but not much. Though it looks like life, it really isn’t, because the rider’s name is Death. Hades, or the grave, accompanies him as a disciple accompanies his teacher. That which is dead has to be put away; it needs to be buried.

Romans 8:6 tells us that the carnal mind is death. Every carnal mind is death and therefore needs to be buried. Nothing is allowed to remain. Notice that this horse’s commission is to the fourth part of the earth. This tells us that the previous three horses have accomplished their purpose for our redemption. However, the victory over the natural mind is not fully complete until the ashen horse and rider have accomplished their work. Their work is the final blow to the mind’s control over us. This control is the most difficult to overcome, but God knows exactly how to achieve its death.

This death does not refer to the death of the physical body. Just as Christ died to sin, so we have to die to sin! We dislike the thought of death, but death is necessary to bring forth life! The grain of wheat has to die to generate life. In **Hebrews 2:14** we read that Christ Himself had to die that *“through death (He) might render powerless him who had the power of death.”* When we are dead to sin, sin has lost its power over us!

Death entered this world as a negative thing. Then Christ came and used the negative to free us from death. He uses death to free us from death. For example, the death of the grain of wheat becomes the basis for new life to spring up. When we are dead to sin, sin can no longer fascinate us, and we are freed from our bondage to sin. Our death to sin is the foundation for being freed from sin. Just trying to get rid of a certain sin is not enough; we need to die to the desire or fascination that we have for it. The sins that still cling to us show us that our ego has not lost all its power over us. Only our death to our ego or self can bring us into the fullness of Christ’s life! Death to sin frees us from every form of fascination we used to have for sin.

When Jesus was tempted to yield to the desires of the flesh, He used the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, to overcome the temptation. Overcoming temptation is the process by which we die to sin. Jesus died to every desire of the

flesh. Read **Romans 6:2-14**, and recognize the importance of our death to sin!

The horseman of the ashen horse was given authority to get rid of the carnal mind's deceptive authority and power over us, and to use whatever means necessary to do the job. One of the things he did was to bring enemies into our lives - enemies who used the sword that was used in warfare. What a battle takes place because our natural mind wants to remain in control!

To do away with the control of the natural mind we need both famine and pestilence, because both produce death. A famine symbolizes intense hunger because our natural need for food is not being satisfied. When difficult times come in our spiritual walk, we tend to blame the enemy, but God has us in this situation so we hunger afresh for Him. We need to have a hunger for Christ that is only satisfied with an intimate relationship with Him - not merely messages about Him. He is the truth, and only truth can satisfy us! **Only when we have that intense hunger for Christ that is symbolized by famine, will we be able to overcome every thought and every imagination that is not from Him!**

"And by the wild beasts of the earth." Paul said that he fought with wild beasts - meaning those who were opposed to his teaching. The wild beast of the earth is the carnal nature of man. The Greek THERION is translated beast (singular) in all the other references in Revelation, and should also be translated in the singular here. It is the carnal nature within humanity that rises up against the mind of Christ within believers. We need every form of opposition to make sure that our reliance is on the Lord and not on our own resources!

As these troubles are experienced, Christians are to know that this is happening because the Lamb is breaking the seals. He is working out His purpose in our lives in the midst of a world of sin. He is changing us into His image! As His will is being worked out in our lives, we begin to understand the purpose of all the difficulties we encounter when the scroll is opened and unrolled. The Lamb has control! These principles unlock the mystery of God's dealings with us.

"When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained." (v.9)

The imagery here is very vivid - the souls are under the altar. Where is this altar? We know that there is no need for an altar in heaven. If we picture this altar like the altar we have in churches, we have a wrong image of this scene. In the tabernacle there were two altars - the brazen altar and the altar of incense. The altar under discussion is the brazen altar where the animals were killed, for no blood was ever shed on the altar of incense. This brazen altar had a grating of bronze so that the blood could run

down underneath the altar. In **Lev. 17** the correct translation says that the soul is in the blood. John saw that the souls of those who had been slain were underneath the altar.

These are the people who have been slain or sacrificed because of the word of God. We are to know that if we preach the truth, we will be slain - we will become a sacrifice. People will say evil things about us and slay us with words and with demeaning attitudes. Those who proclaim truth and live it, have to be dead to every form of evil! This portrays our death to sin. These are people who are not led by the dictates of man, but by the still small voice of the Holy Spirit!

“And they cried out with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” (v.10)

Let's remember that this is the fifth seal - and five is the number of grace. Here we see people who have become a living sacrifice, yet it almost sounds as though they can hardly wait until God pours out His wrath on the evildoers. That does not sound Christ-like, does it? Yet we can identify with that, can't we? If this is our attitude it shows that we still need more grace worked into us! We may have a lot of grace in some areas but not in others. How we need to come into a full submission to Him and to His timing! However, what are the people under the altar really saying?

This scene does not take place in heaven. It portrays what takes place on earth when we proclaim the truth. The fact that these people are under the altar, yet crying out with a loud voice, tells us that they are a living sacrifice! **Romans 12:1** tells us that we are to present our bodies to Him as a living sacrifice.

In **Rev. 12:12** we read that there are three levels where people dwell: in the heavens (Christians who are living in the mind of Christ); on the earth (Christians who are still being ruled by their natural mind); and in the sea (the multitudes who have no knowledge of God). We need to understand that the carnal mind is always opposed to the spiritual mind! So the ones under the altar are the Christians who are living out of the mind of Christ, and they are being put to death (sacrificed) by the Christians who are still ruled by their carnal mind and by the multitudes who have no knowledge of God.

This was exemplified in the life of Jesus Christ. He lived truth and spoke truth, yet how the religious establishment hated Him! The brightness of His truth outshone their legalities. Their hate was only satisfied by the most inhuman death possible! Hate has no compassion. Similarly, all who speak truth will be hated. It has nothing to do with us; it is the Christ in us whom they hate.

“How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” The question is not “Will You?” but “When”. A profound truth is involved in this question. God must judge evil because He is good! His goodness requires justice! If God smiled at sin, He would not be holy and just. It is man’s misguided ego that makes him think he can get away with his sinful acts. Lies have become his truth!

Judgment is necessary so that humanity can be redeemed. God’s judgments are always redemptive. His judgments are based on truth; they are necessary, for otherwise humanity would not recognize the error of its ways. So the question is, *“How long, O Lord?”* How long will it be until humanity recognizes that the Lamb is truly the ruler? How long will it be until humanity recognizes that sin does not have the last word?

In the Old Testament’s account of King Saul’s activities, the beastly nature of humanity is exemplified by Doeg, the Edomite. After King Saul was told that the priests had helped David to escape, he ordered the soldiers to kill the priests. When they refused to do so, Doeg volunteered his services. He mercilessly killed 85 priests and butchered all who lived in the city of Nob, the city of the priests - women, children, infants, oxen, donkeys and sheep! Only one priest, Abiathar, escaped.

When David heard about this terrible tragedy, he wrote **Psalm 52**, and asked, *“Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man?”* He didn’t say, “God, why did you allow this to happen?” The thought uppermost in his mind was, “How does man expect to get away with all this wickedness? How can he be so foolish?” David knew God would judge him. *“Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,”* says the Lord. (**Rom. 12:19**) Knowing and believing this truth can save us from a lot of bitterness, resentment, and desire for revenge!

Newspapers, books, radio and television are filled with the frightening unrighteous deeds of our society and of our governments. And our hearts cry out, “How long, O Lord, until the world will know that the Lamb is reigning?” Knowing that vengeance belongs to the Lord, we can honestly pray, *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,”* and we can also appeal to God that righteousness and justice may prevail.

“And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also.” (v.11)

White robes, representing the righteousness of Jesus Christ, were given to all who were under the altar. The fact that they were under the altar means that they had already submitted to being sacrificed. Just as Jesus willingly gave His life to be

sacrificed, so should we! God has a plan, and everything is subject to that plan. When the time was fulfilled, God sent His Son, and when the time is fulfilled, the revelation of Christ's righteous reign will take place. This is the message the Lord is giving us.

“I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sack cloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.” (vv.12-14)

Six is the number of man. Man was formed on the sixth day; the seventh day was a day of rest. So the sixth day is a workday, but it brings us to the seventh day, the day of rest. The opening of the sixth seal sets off a great earthquake! Earthquakes bring change; there was an earthquake when Jesus died, and one when He was resurrected! These two earthquakes (two being the number of witness) were a witness that the old order was passing away and a new order was being established!

These shakings are necessary to loose us from our old order. The power that traditions have exerted over us has to be removed! All our bondage to the earthly realm has to be broken! We need to cast down every imagination and every thought that would keep us from being obedient to Christ!

After a great earthquake it was as though there was a sudden complete eclipse of the sun, the full moon turned into the color of blood, and the whole starry heavens caved in! Then the whole sky split apart, and it was rolled up like a scroll! What a monumental, overwhelming vision John saw! Obviously this is not literal. It just couldn't be! Many of the stars are much bigger than the earth, so how could they fall to the earth? How could any life survive such a cataclysmic event?

What does this catastrophic event symbolize? The sun, moon and stars give us our natural light, so they represent natural knowledge. Suddenly all confidence in man's natural thinking and ability caves in! The stars falling from heaven symbolize the fact that the trusted leaders have failed. They have fallen from their lofty positions! No one has the answer - the sun, the great luminary, has turned black! The moon looks like blood - the only light they have points to a bloody ending!

The stars fall *“as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind.”* Why this comparison? The fig tree symbolizes Israel, and Israel foreshadows the church. The unripe figs that are cast down by a mighty wind are the ones that do not come to maturity. God sends this wind so that a sifting can take place.

We believe this comparison is given so we will understand that this illustrates a spiritual condition. The church has been trying to produce spiritual fruit from natural

knowledge. This does not work. God sends a mighty wind and an earthquake to cast down to earth the fruit that will never mature because it does not have its source in the Spirit. Things happen so that our great religious and gifted church leaders fall from our heavens. Self-effort can never bring us true righteousness, neither are Christians promised freedom from sufferings. Christ did not teach material riches or escapism from suffering for Christians! This book is about overcomers!

These cataclysmic events are to teach us about spiritual realities! We all need to be loosed from our natural thinking! Often it takes some great disasters to cause us to see our need. Paul said that he counted all natural knowledge of spiritual realities as rubbish. He did not try to salvage what God says is worthless, and neither should we. Since humanity loves its traditions and routines, a great stirring needs to take place! Have you ever noticed how difficult it is to stop a tradition? For example, the Christmas tradition? People get angry and fight over traditions. In our spiritual growth we have to let go of our old traditions that are not in Christ! The soul may love the glitter and the excitement of these pleasure-filled traditions. It does not realize that catering to them stunts spiritual growth. So God sends us some earth-shaking experiences that we may grow and develop and bear good fruit.

“Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come; and who is able to stand?’” (vv.15-17)

Again, this is not a literal event, for if mountains and rocks would fall on people they would be killed. So let’s look at the message it is conveying. The fact that they want to hide from the presence of the One who sits on the throne, gives us the clue. Those who are hiding have a wrong image of God. After Adam sinned, his image of God changed. Formerly he had enjoyed the presence of God, but after he sinned, he hid from God. Adam was now afraid of God because his relationship with God had changed. Instead of repenting of his disobedience and crying out to God for mercy, he hid. Those who hide from God do not want to repent. Instead, they cry out to the mountains (world powers) and the rocks (the foundational beliefs of man) to help them.

The natural thinking of the church system has a distorted image of God. It describes Him as a monster who is out to get you, and if you do not obey Him perfectly, He will endlessly torture you in hell. They have not perceived nor received the message of His love - of a love so great that He gave His beloved Son to die for a humanity that hated Him! If they would know Him they would believe in Him, and they would not hide from Him!

People have various ways of hiding from God. Some become so engrossed in the things of this world that they do not have time to think about God. Others hide in the pleasures and works of this world; they hide in their humanity; they get buried in their jobs, sports, business, politics, homes, and in good works. Anything that will help them to either forget about God or enhance their own righteousness will do!

They are hiding from the wrath of the Lamb. Have you ever seen an angry lamb? The two things don't go together. The word WRATH is translated from the Greek word ORGE meaning desire or passion. The Lamb's passion and desire is that all might be saved! It is not His desire to put them into a physical burning fire - nor will He do it. The only fire He puts us in, is a spiritual fire that burns away the dross and impurities. He wants to save us and deliver us from all evil. All His judgments are redemptive in purpose!

"The great day of their wrath has come." Here we see a progression. Instead of a singular Lamb filled with passion, we see plurality. The great day of their passion has come - that is, the great day of the passion of the corporate Christ has come. That day is today! Day is light, and today is the day of repentance and reconciliation! Who can stand in that day? The dead cannot stand; only those who are alive in Christ can stand.

Let God give you a revelation of His work in you! All ties to the carnal mind have to be broken! If you don't want to repent, you will want to preserve self. You will be among those who are hiding in the caves - in the deep dark recesses of the carnal mind. Christ is the truth, and truth takes us out of all the lies and deception which have ruled us in the past! He is our redemption! Praise God for His wondrous passion to get us into life!

Chapter 7

“After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree.” (v.1)

By now we know that angels are messengers. John saw four angels, four corners and four winds. In the scriptures the number four symbolizes completeness - for example, *“the four corners of the earth”* has nothing to do with the shape of the earth; instead they symbolize the complete earth. Therefore this message must be very important for everyone!

The angels were holding back the four winds of the earth. Why must every wind of the earth be held back? Since this is a message wrapped in symbolism, these winds cannot refer to the wind that we feel when we go out on a blustery, stormy day. So what do the four winds of the earth typify?

The word **wind** comes from the Greek ANEMOS. Besides its literal meaning, it is used metaphorically in **Eph. 4:14** to denote various teachings. *“As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming.”* Doctrines that are formed in the mind are always against the Spirit because our natural mind cannot receive spiritual understanding. These teachings are designed to throw us off course and to bring instability into our lives. They do not come from God, for they are winds of the earth. Earth represents carnal or natural thinking.

Divine thinking comes from the Holy Spirit, and in **Acts 2** we read the Spirit came as *“a violent rushing wind.”* He leads us into all truth, and truth protects us from the lies inherent in the doctrinal winds of this earth. We are sealed with the Holy Spirit of truth, for truth is our protection.

“...no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree.” The sea represents the mass of unregenerate people. The earth is higher than the sea, so the earth represents people who believe in God but still retain their carnal thinking.

Trees are used in the scriptures to represent both knowledge and people. In the garden there was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and the tree of life. In **Psalms 1** David pictures the man who abides in the law of God as a tree planted by the waters. The wicked *“are like chaff which the wind drives away.”* Chaff has no roots, so it is easily swayed and blown about with every wind of doctrine.

“And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, ‘Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads.’” (vv. 2-3)

Into this heavenly drama comes another angel from the rising of the sun. This messenger comes from the Giver of light, so the message he brings has authority. Just as the sun brings light into this world, so Christ brings light into us. This book is about the unveiling of Christ to us and in us, and here we see a spiritual rising up of Christ in His people. This messenger declares that Christ’s bondservants have to be sealed on their foreheads before the seventh seal is broken.

A seal speaks of ownership. A seal was like a signature; it had the backing of the person’s whole character. In the East your signet ring was your credit card. This signature ring left an imprint, and that was as valid as your signature. If someone wanted to buy something and pick it up later, he would have his seal put on it. That was like a “sold” sign; it now had a new owner. Many slaves had the seal of their owner stamped on their foreheads. They were owned and they were sealed. It was the master’s responsibility to care for them, so there was security in it. There was also protection, because he would make sure that no one else would get you.

In this heavenly drama the bondservants of Christ are sealed with the seal of the living God! God claims ownership of this company of people, saying, *“You are Mine. I am going to look after you, feed you and protect you!”* Vouching for that seal is the complete essence of God! What is that seal? **Eph. 1:13** has the answer. *“... having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise.”* The Holy Spirit witnesses with our spirit that we are born of God.

There is no power greater than God’s power! Actually, He is the only power! Every other power comes to us in deception, so it is based on lies - and lies have no foundation. We are protected by the power of God through faith, and have been sealed by the Holy Spirit. (**1 Pe. 1:5; 2 Cor. 1:22**) Knowing this eradicates all fear of the power any enemy could exert over us! Being sealed on the forehead symbolizes that our thinking is protected. Bondservants are being protected from the wrong doctrines that flood the thinking of those who are dwelling on the earth and in the sea.

When people reject God and do not honor Him as God, He gives them over to their own ideas. Rejection of truth automatically causes participation in lies. The natural mind is filled with lies against God, so the only way to get out of our dilemma is to believe God’s revelation of Himself. If we reject that, we will become entrenched and institutionalized in our lies; we will become enslaved by every wind of doctrine!

Subjugation to our own lies breeds every kind of evil, and the consequences of this evil become a judgment against us. We know that God's judgments are always according to truth!

God wants us to know that nothing can happen to us unless He gives the okay! The scriptures give us many examples of this. The flood of water in Noah's time could not come until Methuselah (meaning spoiling of death), died. His name carried the meaning that when he died, the judgment of God would come. Isn't it interesting that he lived longer than any man has ever lived - nearly one thousand years! What a graphic picture of God's patience! After Methuselah died, the flood of waters was released. Another example is Israel's release from Egyptian bondage. They were released on the very day God had foretold! God's timing is always perfect! When the time was fulfilled, Jesus came!

“And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand were sealed.” (vv.4-8)

John heard a number; he didn't see the number. Numbers in this book are symbolic of a truth, not arithmetic. So here is a truth that is summed up in the term 144,000. It brings us back to the number 12, for $12 \times 12 = 144$. By now we know that 12 is the number of government, so 12×12 is the witness of God's government; it is a witness of God's government in earthen vessels. What an awesome thing for God to place His government in us, that we may be witnesses of the change His rule has produced in us!

And 10 is the perfection of number. We first count to 10, and at 10 we start all over again. Here we have $10 \times 10 \times 10 = 1000$ - 3 tens. 3 is the number of God, so this tells us that in His divine government there is perfection and completion. The number 144,000 is designed to give us a concept. It tells us that God has perfect control; He has His chosen mature sons (from the Greek *HUIOS*) to be the firstfruit of a tremendous harvest. These are sons who can hear the Spirit!

This is followed by a listing of those who were sealed. Who are the ones who were sealed? If they are Israel according to the flesh, then this is quite a messed-up list. Wherever there is a list of natural Israel in the Bible, it always begins with the

firstborn. So it should begin with Reuben because he was the firstborn. But it doesn't begin with Reuben; he is placed second. We also note that Ephraim is left out. That is almost like leaving Ontario out when the provinces of Canada are listed. Ephraim was a very important tribe, for Israel was often called Ephraim. It was almost synonymous with Israel, and it was left out! So was the tribe of Dan! Obviously, this is not a listing of natural Israel.

Now let's look at those who replaced the tribes that were excluded, for we still need a total of 12 tribes. Here the tribe of Levi is included. Levi did not receive an inheritance, for his was the priestly tribe, and God was his inheritance. So he was not listed among the twelve tribes. Next, we are surprised to find Joseph listed as a tribe. There was no tribe of Joseph. Joseph had two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, and these sons received his inheritance. In this listing is the tribe of Joseph and the tribe of his son Manasseh; Joseph is added and Ephraim is left out. If this is a list of the tribes of natural Israel, it is very confusing. Reuben is in the wrong place; Ephraim, the most important tribe next to Judah, is left out; so is Dan; the tribe of Levi is included; so also is Joseph, who wasn't a tribe.

How can we interpret this correctly? In **Romans 9** Paul carefully explains that there is a difference between natural Israel (according to the flesh) and spiritual Israel (according to the promise). All the differences that we have just pointed out show us that this is a spiritual company of people. To understand who this company is, we go back to **Genesis 29** and **30** where about thirty verses are devoted to describe the reason why the mothers gave their child that special name. Those names have a tremendous significance! **We need to understand that the events surrounding the birth of those boys were arranged by God, so that in the meaning of these names we would hear the whole gospel, and receive an insight into the nature of the children of God.**

In Jesus Christ we have the fulfillment of the Old Testament picture. Christ is now our salvation! The completeness of our salvation has to be described perfectly. This helps us to understand why one tribe has to be left out here and there, and another has to take its place. This has to be a correct picture, so only those who fit the picture can be in it.

The first on this list of tribes is the tribe of **Judah**. In the previous chapters we saw that Christ is the Lion who comes from the tribe of Judah. The firstborn of this company of people according to the promise, is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. The word Israel is important. It means "the prince that prevails with God". To prevail with God we have to be conquered by Him. Only those who are subject to Him can prevail with Him. So this is a company of those who have laid down their own will, and are submitted to His will. Their Lord is the Lion of the tribe of Judah!

Judah means “**praise**”; it is a company of people who are praising the Lord because they have been redeemed, not with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of the Lamb. (**1 Peter 1:18**) In the Old Testament, the parents of the firstborn had to pay redemption money to the Levites, because, in lieu of giving their firstborn to God, the entire tribe of Levi had been chosen to serve God. This tribe represented the firstborn of all the tribes of Israel. The idea of firstborn to an Israelite would be synonymous with the idea of being redeemed. Judah heads this company that has been redeemed with the precious blood of the Lamb!

The second name is **Reuben**. The name Reuben means “**Behold, a son!**” So this company represents the sons of God. In **Romans 8:14** we read, “*For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.*” They are people who hear the Spirit and follow Him! They do not follow the dictates of their emotions, nor do they follow strange doctrines.

The third one is called **Gad**. Gad means “**a great company**”. The Lion of the tribe of Judah is bringing a great company of many sons to glory. We often feel so alone in our desire for truth. It feels as though others are satisfied with their doctrines and traditions, and we alone are left. We feel like Elijah, who thought he was the only one left of those who followed the Lord. And God said, “*I still have 7000 that have not bowed the knee to Baal.*” Things are not what they seem to be; there is Gad - a great company, a great troop of people! God has His complete number of people; He has everything under control. We don't see this great company, but we receive the message that Gad represents!

Asher is the fourth tribe mentioned here. Asher means “**happy or joy-filled**”. This great company of sons praises God and is filled with unspeakable joy. “*In Your presence is fullness of joy.*” (**Ps. 16:11**) In the presence of the Lord there is joy forevermore! This joy cannot be obtained by seeking “fun” experiences. It is only found in Christ!

The fifth tribe named is **Naphtali**. Naphtali means “**to wrestle and overcome**”. One of the key words to the churches is “he who overcomes.” This is a company of overcomers! They overcome their carnal thinking. They overcome all that is represented by the beast, the dragon, the woman clothed in scarlet, and every false thing that is on the face of the earth.

The sixth tribe mentioned is **Manasseh**, Joseph's son. Manasseh means “**forgetting**”. Joseph had experienced a lot of grief. His brothers had sold him as a slave; later he was falsely accused and put in prison as a slave. Finally, after 13 years of misery, he became the ruler of Egypt, married an Egyptian woman, and Manasseh was born. He said, “*Finally I have forgotten all my troubles, and I have forgotten all the ill that*

was ever done to me.” Manasseh is placed in this list because these are people who have a gloriously short memory in regard to the misery and bondage they formerly endured. They have forgotten all the nasty, spiteful and unpleasant things that have been done to them! What a wonderful company of overcomers!

The seventh one is **Simeon**. Simeon means “**hearing**”. This is a company of people whose ears are open to hear what the Spirit is saying. Jesus said, “*My sheep hear My voice.*” Hearing and obeying the Spirit is the solution to all our problems - as we learned in chapters 2-3! This company of people has ears to hear what the Spirit is saying.

Hearing ears are associated with the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Although Jesus was born of the Spirit, He followed the Law until He was baptized in water, and the Holy Spirit came upon Him in the form of a dove. After that He was led by the Spirit, and only did what the Spirit showed Him to do. Before His baptism He did not do any miracles. The gifts of the Holy Spirit come with the Spirit. In the Corinthian church, however, the gifts were used by carnal Christians to glorify themselves. The result was jealousy and division. This emphasizes the importance of living out of the mind of Christ and of hearing the voice of the Spirit and obeying Him.

The eighth one is **Levi**. Levi means “**joined**”. These are people who are joined to the Lord. Jesus prayed, “*That they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us.*” What an awesome truth! **In the Holy Spirit we are joined to the Creator of the universe!** This glorious truth frees us from our old thinking - the thinking that we are still joined to the Adam man. **We have become one spirit with Christ so that we can be an expression of the Lamb on earth.**

The ninth tribe mentioned is **Issachar**. His name means “**a price was paid**”. It’s a company that has been redeemed with a price. Every member of this clan has been redeemed with the blood of Jesus Christ. He paid a price for our redemption - that is, our redemption cost Him a lot of suffering and pain, even death on the cross! It has absolutely nothing to do with Christ paying the devil some ransom money so we could be released from his grip - as is being taught by some Bible teachers.

The tenth tribe is **Zebulun**, which means “**a dwelling place**”. A dwelling place is more than a hotel or a resort area that is enjoyed for a short season. It is the place where we live. This company is the dwelling place of the Spirit of God. In **Eph. 2:22** we read, “*In whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.*” Peter also said, “*You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood...*” (1 Pe. 2:5) **Christ dwells in us, and we dwell in Him!**

The eleventh tribe mentioned is **Joseph**. Joseph means “**fruitful**”. Incidentally, Jacob referred to the meaning of Joseph’s name, when he blessed him. He said that Joseph

would be so fruitful that the boughs or branches of his tree would hang over the wall into his neighbor's yard. He was speaking prophetically. The fruitfulness would go over the wall to the Gentile land, and even the Gentiles would be included in this fruitfulness. So this company of people includes both Jews and Gentiles! They are people who have the Spirit of God, and the fruit of the Spirit is evidenced in their lives!

Number 12 is **Benjamin**. The name Benjamin is very interesting and very important. He was the second son of Rachel. Rachel was dearest to the heart of Jacob, and he wanted her to have children. She had Joseph, and at his birth she said, "May the Lord give me another son." But in giving birth to Benjamin, she died. In the agony and pain of childbirth, she named this child **Benoni**, meaning "**son of my deep sorrow**". However, Jacob would not accept that name, and changed the name to Benjamin, meaning "*son of my right hand*".

What a perfect picture of the Lord Jesus Christ! He is the Benoni Benjamin. He was first the Son of sorrow, and after His resurrection He became the Son of the Father's right hand. "*Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.*" (Acts 2:33) The fact that He has poured forth the Holy Spirit is the proof that He is the Son of the Father's right hand.

The Holy Spirit is the living guarantee within us that God owns us, and He will take care of His own property. In this world we walk by faith in the midst of economic struggles, natural disasters, injustices, etc. We don't understand all that God is doing, but we walk in the middle of it - unscathed! We feel the hurt and pain, but we know who rules! Our spirit remains whole, knowing that everything is under His control!

This great firstfruit company is described by these twelve names! They are sealed with the Holy Spirit! 144,000 is not a mathematical number; **it is the description of spiritual Israel** - the people of promise. They are a people of faith, and this company includes people from all nations and all walks of life! They are a people who are governed by God through the Holy Spirit. This company is perfect and complete.

Now we understand why **Dan** and Ephraim are not mentioned. Dan means "**judged**". The new creation man is not judged. All things are made new! Christ is the believer's righteousness, and His righteousness is perfect. It does not receive judgment. There is no condemnation in Christ. **Ephraim** means being "*fruitful in the land of my affliction*". We no longer belong to Egypt - the world. We have been transferred to the kingdom of God! We are living in a new kingdom, and are under a new government!

"After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count,

from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.'" (vv.9-10)

Picture this glorious scene. A vast multitude, beyond our imagination and comprehension, from every tribe and nation, all in white robes, waving palm branches and unitedly proclaiming the glory of God's salvation! What an awesome scene!

Here John saw an innumerable multitude before the throne. Notice that it is **before** the throne - not on the throne with the Lamb and the four living creatures and the elders. God has a place for every believer: those who are not on the throne reigning with Him are before the throne, praising, worshiping and serving Him!

This multitude is clothed in white robes. White comes from the Greek LEUKOS, and it carries with it the idea of brightness. The white robes symbolize the righteousness of Christ! They are a redeemed people! They have been delivered out of sin and death; they have received life and joy. They have not yet matured in Christ in all things, so they do not qualify to sit on the throne and rule with Him. But they have a place before the throne, praising and worshiping Him! The palm branches represent victory and worship. When Jesus rode victoriously into Jerusalem, the multitudes were waving palm branches and praising the Lord. He entered the city as the Son of David, the victorious King!

I believe this vast multitude represents the harvest, and the former represents the firstfruit company - the overcomers, the royal priesthood. In v.15 it states that this great multitude was before the throne, serving God in the temple. In the imagery of the temple service, there was the high priest (Aaron), then the priesthood (the sons of Aaron) and the Levites (the progeny of Levi who were not descendants of Aaron). The Levites helped the priests in the performance of their duties. This vast company is serving the Lord. (v.15)

According to current translations, they are saying, "*Salvation to our God,*" This is a strange saying, for our God does not need salvation; He is our salvation! Inaccurate translations give us wrong ideas. The text actually says, "*Our salvation is of God who sits on the throne and the Lamb.*" The word "to" has been inserted. God and the Lamb are one; they are both on the throne!

"And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen." (vv.11-12) The "*forever and ever*" should read "*into the ages of ages.*"

In chapters 4 and 5 we have already learned who the elders and the four living creatures are. So here we have a picture of what is going on around the throne. There is worship and praise! In the worship of God, nothing of self can enter in! That is why the Adam man cannot worship God, for he worships self. Only the new creation man can worship God. Jesus said, *“God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”* (Jn. 4:24) Whenever worship of God is corrupted by self and selfish desires, it is no longer true worship! To worship God we need to worship in spirit and in truth!

In **Matthew 7** we notice that prophets, workers of miracles and exorcists were denounced by Jesus because they wanted to enter the kingdom on the basis of their works. They drew attention to their works, and desired some of the credit even though they had done them in the Lord’s name. **Their works had not come out of an intimate relationship with the Lord.** Pride had entered in. The carnal mind is ever present to desire some honor! People can hide their inner desire for honor, but the eyes of the Spirit pierce every mask and all externalism!

In the throne room of God we recognize His government. He is the source of everything we have! He is our salvation, wisdom, righteousness, power and might! All honor, blessing and glory is His, and all praise belongs to Him! This is the worship He is worthy of!

“Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, ‘These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?’ I said to him, ‘My lord, you know.’ And he said to me, ‘These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them.’” (vv.13-15)

To make sure that John understands who these people are, and from where they have come, some questions are addressed to John. John simply answers, “You know, lord.” It was beyond John’s ability to explain anything! When God asks us some questions, they are not for Him to receive information; they are to get our attention so we will listen to His explanation. After God asked Job question after question, He had Job’s full attention, and Job recognized his true place in his relationship with God!

Those who are clothed in white robes have come out of great tribulation. The word “tribulation” comes from the Greek THLIPSIS, meaning “trouble, affliction or pressure”. Have you ever had some great trouble in your life? Our troubles and afflictions come in many forms. They can be physical, mental or spiritual. They may be the result of our unrighteous conduct, accidents, hatred, persecution, scorn, etc., or

they may result from the fire of the Holy Spirit consuming our dross. The important part is that these people are wearing robes of righteousness.

“They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” This statement puzzled me for many years. In my experience, blood left a stain on clothes - it certainly did not clean the garments! How could blood make them sparkling white? The explanation, that all things are possible with God, did not satisfy me. I put that in the same category as the explanation given a child that was not familiar with flat roofs, but only with steep slanted roofs. When it asked how David could walk on the roof of a house, it was told that nothing is impossible with God. There must be a better answer! And there is!

The correct translation of **Lev. 17:11** provides the clue. *“The soul is in the blood.”* Life is not in the blood; life is in the Spirit! The blood symbolizes the soul. Therefore the soul of Christ cleanses us from all sin. The soul is our sense of being. Christ’s sense of being was free from all sin. He only wanted to do what the Father showed Him to do; He delighted to do the will of the Father! As our sense of being takes on the same sense of being Christ had, we will be cleansed from all sin! We too will only desire to do the will of the Father! Obedience to the Father’s will cleanses us and keeps us!

“For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple!” In order to have the privilege of standing before the throne of God, they have to have their robes washed in the blood of the Lamb. This also qualifies them to serve God in the temple. The fact that they serve day and night tells us that there is light and darkness, so this cannot refer to life after physical death. It has to refer to our life here on earth.

They serve God in His temple. There are two Greek words, HIERON and NAOS, that are translated as “temple”. HIERON refers to a physical temple and NAOS to the temple of our body. “Or do you not know that your body is a temple (NAOS) of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God...?” (**1 Cor. 6:19**) In the book of Revelation the word NAOS is always used, so we know that it does not refer to a physical temple.

We now come to a concept that is difficult for most of us to grasp. When we hear the word “body” we naturally think of our body of flesh. But does the Holy Spirit dwell in flesh? After we are born again and are baptized into the body of Christ, we become members of His body. His body is a spiritual body, and we cannot visualize it because we have never seen it.

The word “body” does not always refer to a physical body; it can also be used to describe a mass, such as a body of water. Christ is the truth! He cannot dwell in

lies and deception. Since Christ is the truth, His body must also be a body of truth. When we are baptized into His body we are baptized into truth. Our spiritual life is a pilgrimage into truth - the Holy Spirit leading us, and revealing truth to us. To dwell in truth we have to dwell in Christ, and let the mind of Christ rule over the carnal mind. In **1 Cor. 2:16** we read that we have the mind of Christ.

The Holy Spirit dwells in the new man, that is, in the mind of Christ; He does not dwell in the old man, that is, in the carnal mind. He dwells in the Christ man. We are being built into a spiritual temple (NAOS), individually and corporately! Our service to God takes place in this temple.

“He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them.” This picture comes from the Old Testament. The cloud that covered the Israelites in their travel through the wilderness signified the presence of God. His abiding presence was like a canopy over them, and led and directed them in their travels. Today His presence dwells within us in the Holy Spirit. God wants us to be conscious of His glorious presence at all times! If we dwell in His presence we will be God-conscious instead of devil-conscious. His presence is our protection! Difficulties cannot remove His protection! When we dwell under the heavenly tabernacle or canopy that God has spread over us, our focus is on His sovereignty, and the fact that nothing can touch us without His divine permission! **Our spirit is preserved intact even when our physical body is destroyed!**

“They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.” (vv.16-17)

The Lamb in the midst of the throne will feed them! This does not refer to natural food like hamburgers and French fries. Our inner longing for righteousness, peace and joy, is constantly being satisfied because the Holy Spirit dwells within us, and He is our supply! If we look to people for our supply, we will be disappointed. Our supply comes to us in the Holy Spirit through faith! It does not come as a reward for any works of righteousness that we have done, but it is ours through faith alone! The Lamb says He will feed us! His food consists of truth and life! Let's feed and believe, and lead a healthy Christian life!

“Nor will the sun beat down on them.” Both light and heat come from the sun, and we need them to survive. However, He is speaking of a spiritual truth in this passage. When we have Christ, we have light! He has become our internal supply! We don't need external light (earthly philosophy) to guide us, because we have an internal light (Christ) to show us the way!

The cloud that covered Israel in the desert protected them from the heat of the sun, and symbolizes God's protection of us. Just as the cloud protected the Israelites from the heat that was too intense for them, so the Holy Spirit protects us. Heat is needed to refine silver and gold, and the fire of the Holy Spirit is needed in our lives to purify our walk. But God watches over us, and He won't allow that heat to destroy us. The fire of the Holy Spirit is always redemptive!

Why do we still need to be purified, for we are born of the Spirit? Everything that is born of the Spirit is pure and therefore does not need purification, but our walk needs to be purified. Paul spoke to this issue in **Romans 7**. He said, "*So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.*" Nothing good dwells in the carnal mind! Whenever we sin, we are being ruled by the carnal mind - not by the mind of Christ. The process by which we learn to be ruled by the mind of Christ, we call purification. This is a purification of our walk in Christ; it is not a purification of who we are in Christ. The new person that we are is completely righteous!

The Lamb is our shepherd! Since He is also the center of the throne, He is our government. He governs us from within; His righteous government can be trusted implicitly, and His shepherding is perfect! He leads us to springs of living water! He doesn't only have one spring - He has many springs! How does that fit our doctrine that Christ is the spring of living water? Since His words are life, everyone who speaks His words becomes a spring of living water. We praise God for all who have spoken words of life to us, for they have become springs of living water to us!

"God shall wipe every tear from their eyes." In **Rev. 5:4**, John wept because there was no one worthy to open the seals. His tears were wiped away when he recognized that there was the Lion of the tribe of Judah who was worthy! He could loose the seals and redeem us! When we recognize that God has accomplished our redemption, there is no longer a need to weep!

Weeping and crying are the result of extremely unhappy emotions; smiling and laughing are the result of happy emotions. So here is a promise that all unhappy emotions will be done away with! This is not speaking of literal tears. We can still have tears of joy, disappointment, pain, etc., in the natural. This is a description of a spiritual state. In the knowledge that God is our sufficiency in every crisis of our life, we will not panic. We will retain an inner calm and walk in peace and security!

Chapter 8

“When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.” (v.1)

Since this is a coded message we have to break the code to understand it. We know that the breaking of this seal does not take place in eternity or timelessness because this is still happening in the realm of time, for half an hour refers to time. In scriptural symbolism a fraction represents a short period of time.

Paul tells us that we are seated with Christ *“in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”* (Eph. 2:6) This is where we are when God reigns in us. Now a hush comes over us! In God’s presence the flesh is silent, for it has no place there. It is finished; it does not rail against the Spirit, for the flesh has been overcome! We are still, *“and know that He is God!”* We know that all His dealings with us are true and righteous, and His ways are far beyond our comprehension. The opening of this seal is to cause His children to experience Christ’s perfect redemption.

In this silence we stand in awe at the greatness of our Lord. We worship God, and feel an inner excitement and anticipation of God’s next move. In this complete peacefulness, we await God’s next revelation.

“And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.” (v.2) As this vision continues, the seventh seal is broken, and each of the seven angels receives a trumpet - seven angels, seven trumpets. By now we know that seven is a spiritual number. It’s the number of perfection.

To understand what the trumpets symbolize, we turn to the Old Testament. There we find the key that unlocks the trumpets for us. In the previous chapters we have already mentioned that the trumpet sounded at the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. (Ex. 19:16) It called all Israel to hear what God was saying. God’s words to us are always important, for they are absolutes. His words are truth, and if we do not heed them, we will remain in the lies and deception of the carnal mind.

In **Numbers 10:1-10** God instructed Moses about the use of trumpets. They were to be used for summoning the congregation, for sounding an alarm, for going to war, and for their appointed feasts to worship God! The reason: *“that you may be remembered before the LORD your God, and be saved from your enemies...and they shall be as a reminder of you before your God. I am the LORD your God.”* (vv.9b,10b) Similarly in **Numbers 29:1**, at the feast of the new year they were to blow the trumpets. They were called to repentance and worship by the sounding of trumpets.

In **Joshua 6** the children of Israel were commanded to blow the trumpets before their invasion of the city of Jericho. God's miraculous deliverance of the Israelites out of the hand of Pharaoh proclaimed the message of God's power and strength to all the nations. Jericho had been confronted by this message these many years, and they had consistently rejected it. When the trumpets blew, it was a warning to all the inhabitants of Jericho that judgment was about to fall on them. Again the trumpets were associated with the importance of God's words! They are truth, and if we do not heed them, they will judge us.

In **1 Kings 1:34** the trumpet sounded when Solomon was crowned king! Only a few people could witness the actual coronation. To let everyone know that a king had been crowned, the trumpet was blown, and he was proclaimed king! Even though the people couldn't see the coronation, the sound of the trumpet informed them that the king had been crowned.

All these elements are present in the blowing of the trumpets. It is the proclamation of God's word to us! The completeness of the Holy Spirit comes to us in seven manifestations. Here the completeness of His message comes to us in the sounding of the seven trumpets. They do not trumpet an end-time message; they trumpet a life-changing message! God blows His trumpets throughout all time. He announces that the King has been crowned. This has happened in the invisible realm, and is now being revealed by the sounding of the trumpets! God calls everyone to repent of his wrong thinking. "Stop in your tracks - the Lamb has been crowned King! Repent of your disobedience, obey Him and come and worship Him!"

Hearing the word of God always produces a change in us! We cannot hear His word and remain in our old thinking. If we remain in our traditional thinking, we are not hearing His word. People do wrong things because their ideas are wrong. Once they change their way of thinking, their lives will change. Many Christians are faithful church-going people, yet they never change because they are not hearing any words from Christ! They may modify their behavior in the presence of other Christians, but return to their old behavior when they are off duty. They only receive the message of the Bible in condemnation. They do not receive life because they refuse to come to Christ. **God's message to us is that we are to come out of our carnal thinking, for that thinking is death. Internal change comes as we live out of the mind of Christ!**

Humanity's rejection of the Lamb of God does not change God's plans. God sees the raging of the nations against Him, and laughs at the idea that man thinks he has power over Him! (**Ps. 2**) God has placed His Son on the throne, and it is in the best interest of every nation to come and submit to Him. Every area of rebellion within us has to come into submission to our King! In v.12 of this Psalm where it says, "*Do homage to the Son,*" it literally says, "*Kiss the Son*". We are advised to make our peace

with the Son - worship Him, acknowledge Him and agree with Him! It is to our advantage to repent of our rebellion and to come and worship the King!

“Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel’s hand.” (vv.3-4) A censer is a container for holding incense. This messenger was holding a golden censer or a divine censer, and much incense was given to him. The incense was given for the purpose of being offered to God.

Everything God gives us is ours only in stewardship, and has to be offered back to God if He so directs. For example, Abraham was given the promise of a son. After Abraham had waited twenty-five years for the fulfillment of that promise, Isaac was born! What rejoicing took place! Then a day came when God asked Abraham to offer Isaac back to God. His only son, his promised son was to die! **Abraham’s obedience had God’s promise as its foundation, and he believed that God had to resurrect Isaac in order to keep His promise.** In a similar way God may ask us to give the ministry He has given us, back to Him. We have to let it die. As we do that, it may look as though it is the end of our ministry. Even as Abraham believed God to raise Isaac from the dead, so we have to know that God is able to raise up the ministry He has given us to His greater glory.

The picture of the golden altar and the incense is taken from the service of the priests in the tabernacle of Moses. The golden altar, on which incense was burned, stood in front of the ark with the mercy seat and the cherubim, but it was separated from the ark by a veil. God dwelt in the midst of the Israelites in the holy of holies; this is where the ark and the mercy seat and the cherubim were, and they represented the throne of God. At the golden altar the priests would offer up prayers for the people. The burning of incense on the altar symbolized that these prayers were pleasing to God - they came with a sweet smell to His nostrils. God is pleased with intercessory prayer!

Here the prayers of all the saints (the royal priesthood) are on the altar. Just as Jesus intercedes for others, so we intercede for others. For those who are facing temptation, we pray that their faith will not fail; for those who hurt us, we pray, *“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do”*; for the sick, we pray for healing; for the ignorant and deceived, we pray that they might receive truth; for the spiritually blind, we pray that their eyes may be opened; for those who are dead in their trespasses and sins, we pray that they may receive life, and for the saints we pray that they may mature and come into the fullness of the knowledge of His love! These prayers are pleasing to the Father! The rising smoke of the burning incense indicated that the prayers were going to the Father.

The incense came out of the angel's hand. Hands are busy doing things, so they represent or symbolize our ministry. A true ministry has its source in God - and our prayer ministry also has to have its source in God. Anything that does not have its source in God has its source in self. Many of our prayers begin with pleas for the preservation of self, because usually our first response to a given situation comes out of the carnal mind. It often takes time until we come into rest, and see that God's will for us is the best will!

Living in the heavenly realm means living under the direction of the mind of Christ! The new creation man is not the old Adam man. The new creation man is completely new and has the mind of Christ! To help us understand this better, let's look at the life of a caterpillar. Before the caterpillar is transformed into a butterfly, it has the mind of a caterpillar. It never entertains the possibility of flying; it is completely earthbound. After it is transformed into a butterfly, it has a new mind. **It can now fly and live and move in a higher realm.** Similarly, we receive a new mind when we are born again, and we can live and move in the heavenly realm. Our old mind kept us earthbound. The earthly realm is made of dust, and the serpent feeds on dust and infiltrates that mind with lies and deception. The mind of Christ is higher; it is pure and undefiled! The serpent is earthbound, and therefore cannot infiltrate that mind.

“Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.” (v.5)

Fire for every sacrifice had to come from the bronze altar. When the tabernacle was completed, and offerings were presented to the Lord, *“fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the portions of fat on the altar.” (Lev. 9:24)* This fire had been kindled in heaven; thus it was a divine fire. This fire was to be kept burning continually. *“Fire shall be kept burning continually on the altar; it is not to go out.” (Lev. 6:13)*

The origin of this fire on the altar had nothing to do with man; it was completely from God. Fire that was started by man was called strange fire. If anyone offered with man-made fire, he was punished. Fire speaks of purification, and man is unable to purify himself. We cannot initiate our salvation; it is completely from God. There can be no mixture; self-effort cannot meet God's standard of purification. So we need to be refined or purified of all self-effort. What a hard lesson for us to learn! Man cannot save himself, neither can he purify himself.

This heavenly messenger takes the censer together with the prayers and incense, ignites the incense from the fire on the altar, and throws it to the earth. This results in peals of thunder, flashes of lightning and an earthquake! The prayers of saints are not in vain; they bring results!

Let's look at these results. Thunder and lightning are associated with the voice of God speaking to people. God's words to us always bring a challenge to change. Incorporated in change is repentance. We cannot change unless we repent of what we previously did. This change is to be embraced, for it is always for our good. However, humanity does not want to admit that it needs to change. It wants to be in charge; it loves its traditions and soulish pleasures! So God's words produce an earthquake in those who are living in their carnal thinking! For remember, the burning incense was thrown to the earth!

Have you ever had an upheaval in your thinking? We've had lots of them! It wasn't easy at the time, but how we thank God for them now! Our earth (carnal thinking) has to be shaken so we realize that it is not a safe place to rest. We need to live out of Christ's mind! To do that we have to ascend out of our old mind. *This is our ascension into Christ!*

"And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them." (v.6) What type of preparation would be needed to sound the trumpets? These angels are messengers who speak the life-giving word of God. They are God's people - a people who have ears to hear what the Spirit is saying, and in obedience proclaim what was given them. We know that there are consequences to each sound of the trumpet. Are we ready to accept the message, and change?

Moses needed many years of preparation before God called him to blow the trumpet in Egypt. His first attempt, through self-effort, was a dismal failure! What an earthquake with its many aftershocks that produced in him! God does not wave a magic wand over us before He sends us out to blow the trumpet. He takes us into His school and prepares us. Moses learned that God was able to do exactly what He purposed to do! He learned to follow directions - one step at a time!

Our training in obedience takes time. When God places a word within us, it remains in our spirit. The desire Moses had to liberate the Israelites came from God. It was there when he killed the Egyptian, but he had not yet learned to wait for God's direction and timing. There was so much to learn! It took another 40 years for this brilliant young man to be prepared to do the work that had been in his heart from early childhood! By the time God called him to blow the trumpet he was so disillusioned with self that he wanted someone else to do the work. But God had that work reserved for him! Moses learned to listen to God and to obey Him implicitly! We too have to become so disillusioned with self and self-effort, that we rely on God completely!

"And the first sounded, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the earth was burnt up, and a third of the trees was burnt up, and all the green grass was burnt up." (v.7)

This sounds pretty ominous, doesn't it? Here we see destruction. Let's look at this message and see what needs to be destroyed.

Hail comes as the result of the sounding of the first trumpet. Hail is frozen water, and water symbolizes a life-giving word. So hail represents a hard, life-giving word. Have you ever received a hard word that brought life-changing results because you suddenly saw that you couldn't follow a certain line of thinking any longer? Hail is not selective in what it falls on. It hits whatever is in its path.

This hard word comes in fire - the fire of the Holy Spirit. It is mixed with blood, and blood symbolizes the soul. These words are aimed at those soulish desires that look and feel good. The world says that if it looks good and feels good, do it. This makes it very difficult for us to believe that something that looks good is not good. Carnal desires only feel good for the moment - then they leave us with an inner void. All desires that do not have their source in God have to be removed. Only the desires that come from the Father are acceptable! It's our natural thinking of spiritual realities that needs to be destroyed. The earth, the food that the serpent feeds on, represents our natural thinking. God's goal is to do away with that thinking, for it is always against the Spirit.

This hail does not destroy everything. Only a third of the earth, trees and grass was burned up. God does many things in threes. Light comes to us via the sun, moon and stars; the tabernacle had three parts, and there were three major feasts the Israelites were to celebrate. The three encompassed the whole.

“And a third of the trees was burnt up.” The tree of the knowledge of good and evil tells us that trees typify the many philosophies of men. We know that this tree was rooted in disobedience, therefore any philosophy from this tree is deceptive; it is rooted in a lie. Wrong philosophies need to be burned up because they do not bring us life. The carnal mind says, “Choose the good from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and you'll make it into heaven. You can make yourself acceptable before God by choosing the good.” God does not agree with that theory. He says it's a matter of life and death - not a matter of good and evil. Good and evil are from the same forbidden tree of knowledge, so both are rooted in disobedience; both are in the death realm! **To receive life we have to eat of the tree of life! There is no life in any other tree!**

“And all the green grass was burnt up.” Grass is equated with temporal things. Isaiah said, *“All flesh is grass...surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.”* (Is. 40:6-8) Peter quoted from Isaiah when he said, *“All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord endures forever.”* (1 Pe. 1:24-25) All faith in temporal things has to be eradicated! All fleshly thinking has

to be eliminated! We can rejoice that God is in the process of eliminating it in us!

“And the second angel 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 creatures which were in the sea and had life, died; and a third of the ships were destroyed.” (vv.8-9) Here is an amazing thing! A burning mountain is cast into the sea! Instead of the sea quenching the fire, a third of the sea turns to blood. This unnatural phenomenon underlines the fact that this has to be seen symbolically.

Where do we find the key? Let’s turn to **Jeremiah 51:25-26**. There it says, *“Behold, I am against you, O destroying mountain, who destroys the whole earth,” declares the LORD, ‘and I will stretch out My hand against you, and roll you down from the crags, and I will make you a burnt out mountain. They will not take from you even a stone for a corner nor a stone for foundations, but you will be desolate forever,’ declares the LORD.”*

That mountain is Babylon - the religious thinking of the carnal mind. It is not surprising that religious thinking is symbolized by a mountain, because it is so difficult to eradicate. In **Mark 11:23** Jesus said, *“Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him.”* Jesus was speaking of the religious thinking of the natural mind.

Religious thinking is an integral part of our natural thinking. It is a part of the world system, and consists of “All that is of the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life.” These things do not come from the Father. To get rid of it requires a faith that leaves no room for doubt. **This faith is not a faith in faith, but a faith that is based on the very essence of God and His power to accomplish His will!** He tells us that those who are born of the Spirit are a new creation. God has promised that we will be conformed into Christ’s image. Functioning in the mind of Christ destroys the power the carnal mind has wielded over us.

“And a third of the sea became blood.” The sea symbolizes humanity. The troubled sea symbolizes lost humanity, and the sea of glass symbolizes a new transparent humanity that is at peace with God. **When God’s people cast off all carnal thinking, it will affect the rest of humanity!** *“So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.”* (Mal. 3:18) Unless Christians cast off their carnal thinking, there is no obvious difference between them and the world. When Christians live out of the mind of Christ it changes their attitude and their behavior. This infuriates some people and astonishes others!

All of us have to put off our old thinking and be *“renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.”* (Col. 3:10). After we become Christians, our old thinking remains alongside our new thinking. The mind still needs to be renewed or transformed to receive Christ’s thinking. We’re all familiar with the old saying, “He’s out of the army, but the army isn’t out of him.” We’re not of this world, but not all of the worldly thinking is out of us.

“And a third of the sea became blood, and a third of the creatures which were in the sea and had life died.” The Greek word PSUCHE that is used here, should read soul (not life). The blood represents the soul, for the soul is in the blood; life is in the Spirit. **Lev. 17:11** says that life is in the blood, but the correct translation reads, *“the soul is in the blood”*. Our soulish thinking has to die. This fire does away with a third of our old thinking - the thinking that has its roots in the systems of this world. Life is in the Spirit, and Jesus Christ is that life-giving Spirit. In order to come into life we have to come out of our carnal thinking, and receive Christ’s mind and His thinking. We still need more processing, but don’t worry, more angels and woes are coming.

“And a third of the ships were destroyed.” Ships are used in the world system of commerce, so they symbolize the things that are of great importance to us because they bring us wealth, honor and prestige. A third part of them is demolished. When God begins to speak into our life, our interest in material advantages is taken away, and new interests take their place. We no longer enjoy the things we used to enjoy!

“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 waters. The name of the star is called Wormwood; and a third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the waters, because they were made bitter.” (v.10-11) Notice that the star does not fall on all the rivers - only on one-third.

Stars bring light in the darkness of the night. We know that Jesus Christ is the Morning Star. He brings light and understanding into the darkness of our soul. But the star mentioned here is Wormwood, and it means bitter. Jeremiah said that the false prophets would be fed wormwood and made to drink poisonous water because they taught peace and prosperity when God called for repentance. Their teachings were false.

The star, called Wormwood, fell on the rivers and springs. Wormwood represents the philosophies that are formed in the carnal mind. These philosophies are poisonous, for they do not bring life. Ideas from the pit infiltrate all the philosophy that comes from the minds of men. These ideas may be clothed with beautiful words that appeal to man’s vanity and independence, but they are still poisonous. Beautiful descriptive

words cannot neutralize or counteract the poison. Just look at the magazines and novels displayed in bookstores and grocery stores, at the advertisements of movies, the lyrics of songs, etc., and you see that the waters that feed the souls of men consist of wormwood. They are bitter and deadly poisonous.

The water Christ gives us is not poisonous; it is living water! To the Samaritan woman Jesus said, *“Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.”* (Jn. 4:14) Obviously He was talking about something that she understood. Water quenches our thirst. We need to drink where our spirit is satisfied. The water Christ gives us is life-giving, and it symbolizes truth; poisonous water brings death, and it symbolizes the philosophies of men. Only truth can show us the error of our thinking!

Christ’s coming to earth was a bitter experience for Him because He had to leave the glory that He had with His Father, and experience rejection, loneliness and a cruel death on the cross. The bitter herbs that accompanied the Passover meal symbolized this. He came to bring us grace and truth! Truth reveals the wormwood that is always inherent in the philosophies of men. Truth is light, and it exposes the false.

When people recognize the truth and then reject it, they plunge into greater darkness. World systems don’t collapse by accident. **All the filthy, putrid streams that flow into the minds of men do not come by accident - they come by rejecting truth.** Those who reject truth are rejecting God. So God allows them to have what they crave, and their waters are made putrid and poisonous.

This is the worst judgment that can come to anyone, but it does not mean that God is casting them off forever. He wants them to see that their cravings do not bring peace and satisfaction. Once they recognize their need, they will be willing to come to the knowledge of the truth!

This star *“was burning as a torch”*. The light of a torch is very limited, so we know that the scope of this fire was limited. When God sends a fire, His purpose is to purify, yet here it brings bitterness. Therefore we see that bitterness is the processing that leads to purification. It is because God wants people to realize that drinking from the philosophies of men can never bring life. God wants people to wake up to their true need so they can be cleansed from their wrong thinking.

The fire of God always purifies. The mind of Christ purifies us and does away with the lies that bring us into depression and death. It does away with the lie that God is out to punish us, and that His judgments are there to give vent to His great wrath, etc. **How can God burn the greater percentage of all people for all eternity, yet be**

the Savior of the whole world? All of God's judgments are redemptive! It makes a big difference whether we receive His word in life or in condemnation! God wants everyone to accept His great salvation! The fire of God purifies our thinking so it comes into life, and becomes a spring of living water. It also purifies our ministry so it becomes a river without any wormwood in it.

We need to differentiate between bitterness that is poisonous, and bitterness that describes a difficult experience. The acceptance of truth can be a bitter experience for us. When truth is presented to us, our initial reaction may be one of anger. When we were first shown from the scriptures that Christ's obedience is greater than Adam's disobedience, we were filled with anger. We wanted to hold onto our old thinking and traditions. But the Holy Spirit kept on leading us into truth! **The joy and freedom the acceptance of truth brings, is worth more than all the rejection and persecution we receive from people when we depart from our traditions.** When we proclaim truth, we too will be rejected even as Christ was.

"The fourth angel sounded, and a third part of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars were struck, so that a third of them would be darkened and the day would not shine for a third of it, and the night in the same way." (v.12)

If we go back to Joseph's dream in **Genesis 37**, we notice that the sun, moon and stars bowed down to him. Jacob immediately interpreted this correctly by saying, *"Shall I and your mother and your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?"* In Joseph's dream they symbolized the entire family - the progenitors of Israel. The sun, moon and stars comprise the complete unit of natural light.

Light symbolizes understanding. Natural light comes from the sun, moon and stars. So here the natural understanding is darkened - not all of it, just one third. Darkness produces confusion - men can no longer see where they are going. This confusion comes from God. He wants people to realize the situation they are in. From our perspective, we wonder why people don't stop and realize the foolishness of their thinking. We wonder at the senseless philosophies that pour out of the mouths of leaders and of the educated. *"Professing to be wise, they became fools."* (Rom. 1:22) We all need the light of Jesus Christ to enlighten us! Without His light, our natural understanding is darkened.

Notice that each sound of the trumpet was directed at something that supports life. Man's life-support has to be taken away so that he sees his need of God. The plagues that came upon Egypt were directed at their life-support system. They depended on the Nile River, and God took their source of life, and turned it into death. That was the first plague that God sent them. Life had been smitten with God's plagues. God

smote the dust of the earth - the very earth on which they walked. He also called forth the locusts, and they ate up all that was green, and the Egyptians were left destitute. God was meeting them exactly where they had their sustenance of life.

“Then I looked, and I heard an eagle flying in midheaven” (actually, in the midst of heaven), *“saying with a loud voice, “Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!”* (v.13)

John saw and heard an eagle flying in the midst of heaven. Where is heaven? Is it a place “somewhere beyond the blue”? Since God dwells in heaven and He dwells in us, heaven must be within us. **Heaven is the place where God rules, and He rules us from within!** This eagle is not a big bird calling out to us. We must remember Christ is pictured as the eagle in the Gospel of John. So this is the voice of the Spirit calling out woes to those who dwell on the earth to those who dwell in the natural mind.

Three is the number of divine fullness, and to say something three times is to give it the greatest possible emphasis. Here woe is emphasized. Webster defines woe as, “great sorrow, grief and trouble.” These woes are directed at those who live according to their natural thinking. They are the ones who dwell on the earth, i.e., in their carnal mind. The carnal mind is infected by the serpent’s mind. In fact, when Adam ate of the forbidden fruit, he received the mind that is against the Spirit. Our dwelling place is a place of permanency. The woes are not directed at those who slip back into wrong thinking occasionally, but at those who dwell there.

We need to ascend out of that mind! This is only possible if we receive the mind of Christ! Christ had a mind that was rooted in faith! He looked beyond the visible realm and saw the invisible realm, and believed the invisible to be the reality! This is faith! We too need to see the Father who dwells in the invisible realm, and recognize that He alone has power and authority! He has given Christ a name that is above every other name! When we live out of the mind of Christ, we are living above the woes. The woes are directed toward those who are feeding on their own philosophies.

People can become Christians, yet remain in their natural concepts of spiritual realities. God is calling us out of that realm. The fifth, sixth and seventh trumpets are woes that facilitate this process by helping us to recognize our need.

Those who are seated with Christ in heavenly places are living above the thinking of the carnal earthy mind. They have come out of their carnality - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. They are living out of the mind of Christ - they are overcomers! It is wonderful to know that the fiery darts of the enemy cannot penetrate the mind of Christ, for it only receives truth!

The carnal mind cannot understand God's dealings with us! It always interprets every setback and difficulty as coming from Satan or punishment from God, or because God either doesn't care or doesn't have the power to help. It cannot perceive God's sovereignty, and that all trials and temptations are controlled by our heavenly Father. He has promised that no matter how great the temptation is, it will never supercede His faithfulness and grace! *"No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it."* (1 Cor. 10:13)

Just as Christ's sufferings had purpose, so our sufferings have purpose! Our Father has purposed that we will be conformed to Christ's image! This is the highest objective possible! Let's keep this in mind as we look at the remaining trumpet messages, and remember that God does not destroy anything that is worth keeping!

God's judgments against Egypt were to bring the Egyptians out of their idolatry. With each judgment He was showing them that He was greater than their gods. Each judgment was a trumpet of mercy - it was a call to repentance. But very few received the message, so they did not turn to serve the living God! Even the Israelites forgot so quickly, and murmured against God in the desert whenever they were deprived of their sustenance and suffered hunger, thirst, etc. We need so many reminders and experiences to rid us of our carnal thinking!

Chapter 9

“And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him.” (v.1)

What a strange happening! From the previous chapter we learned that the next three angels would be sounding messages of woe, and here is the first woe! Five is the number of grace, yet the fifth angel sounding the fifth trumpet is bringing a message of woe to those living on the earth. In symbolism, God is telling us that this message of woe is coming to us in a word of grace! When God shows us the sinfulness of our carnal nature we feel the woe; then He shows us His grace, and we come into joy!

After the fifth angel sounded the trumpet, a star fell from heaven, and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him. This star is not one of the stars we see in the sky, for if one of them fell to this earth, our earth would be completely destroyed. Who is this star? This star is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, the bright and morning star. He came down from heaven; He was crucified and resurrected; now He comes into our earth and changes us. In **Rev. 1:18** we see that the keys to death and to Hades were given to Christ, the living One! He also has the key of the bottomless pit.

Keys represent the authority to lock and unlock doors. The keys I hold in my hand have very limited authority - only the authority to open the doors to my house and my car. The one who holds the keys has the authority. In contrast to our very limited authority, Christ has received all authority! This includes the keys of death and of Hades and of the bottomless pit.

What does the bottomless pit symbolize? A bottomless pit has no bottom and therefore does not have any foundation. Neither do lies and deception! There is no limit or bottom to the lies that are fabricated in the carnal mind. Lies do not have foundation. So this bottomless pit is not in the center of the earth or in a far-away land, but it is actually our carnal mind, for there is no limit to its lies and depravity. Lies have no foundation so they are a bottomless pit. Christ has the key that opens our carnal mind. He is the truth, and only truth can expose the lie. It is truth that cleanses us from the lies we thought were truth.

How can a word of grace be a woe at the same time? How can there be grace in a word that brings grief and suffering? Jesus came to this earth that through His death and resurrection we could receive grace. *“For by grace you have been saved through faith.” (Eph. 2:8)* Grace does away with all works for righteousness, all our wrong

thinking that says we are in charge of our lives, and all our pride in intellectualism and philosophies. Grace pronounces a woe on all self-effort; it pronounces a woe on everything that is temporal.

In Christ, God gave us grace and truth. These eternal realities comprise the very essence of Christ, yet we are so slow to embrace them, because we cling so tenaciously to our lies and deceptions. Troubles and trials are necessary for us to understand the inability of lies to help us. Only truth can free us from our bondage to them!

“He opened the bottomless pit, and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit.” (v.2)

When Christ, in His love for us, reveals our bottomless pit of humanistic thinking to us, we begin to see it for what it truly is! He uses the key called truth and grace to do this. No other key could open the door of this bottomless pit!

People who have a wrong image of God think that He is a God of wrath and condemnation, so they clam up and hide their secret thoughts. Many are trying to hide from Him today, just like Adam and Eve did! Before they sinned they enjoyed God’s presence, but after they sinned their image of God changed. Because they thought God had become their enemy they hid from Him. They failed to realize that God had not changed and that He still loved them. They did not understand that God’s goal for them was their salvation!

The opening of this pit caused the air to be filled with smoke! Smoke obscures the light of the sun and our ability to see properly. Humanity’s ignorance of the essence of God can be compared to smoke, for it confuses the issues. Our natural mind does not know God, but it is very religious. Religiosity keeps us from seeing the light that Christ is! Our religiosity blames others for our problems, upholds its selfhood, and stubbornly refuses to acknowledge its need for a Savior.

Humanity’s antagonistic attitude and actions may cause us pain and heartaches, yet we have to see Christ and His ability above and beyond our problems. Our natural thinking focuses on the hurts and the difficulties, for it is the smoke that obscures the Christ! This symbolic language shows us that it is our natural mind that keeps us from seeing the reality that God is love and that He has the ability to accomplish His will. His love for truth and righteousness will use whatever is needed to free us from our wrong thinking, yet we see God’s “whatever” as woes.

Humanity not only puts great emphasis on intellectualism but also worships it. Man has made many innovative inventions, so he thinks he can control his own destiny and the destiny of others. However, these inventions came through the discovery of

the laws God had put into nature, and by applying these laws, technical and labor saving devices have been invented! But this intelligence is only on the natural plane; it has nothing to do with one's knowledge of God. Unless God opens our eyes, we cannot see spiritually. Man's ignorance of God clouds man's thinking. Instead of wanting God, the Giver of all gifts, humanity is satisfied with the gifts, and pompously continues in its worship of self.

“Then out of the smoke came locusts upon the earth, and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power. They were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. And they were not permitted to kill anyone, but to torment for five months; and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man. And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; and they will long to die, and death flees from them.” (vv.3-6)

Out of humanity's ignorance came a horde of locusts. When locusts land on a field of grain, etc., they land on the top of vegetation and begin to chomp away at it. So these locusts are the things that prey on the mind (the top realm in man) in order to destroy every vestige of spirituality God has placed there.

“Power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power.” Here we have a comparison. A scorpion's tail ends in a curved, poisonous sting. Its power is in its tail. Again we go to the Old Testament to understand this symbolism. In **Is. 9:15** we read, *“The head is the elder and honorable man, and the prophet who teaches falsehood is the tail.”* The man, who calls himself a prophet but teaches lies, is the tail.

There is a lot of false teaching coming out of the mouths of preachers today! Instead of life and death, we hear about heaven and hell; instead of a sovereign God, we are told that we have a free will that can overwrite the will of God; instead of spiritual understanding we are inundated with carnal teachings; instead of one God, we are told we have three Gods, namely, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit! These clever deceptions form the truth of carnal Christians. This power to deceive was given to the locusts! Deception is poisonous and it poisons our understanding.

Notice however that these locusts were under authority. They were given boundaries. They could not hurt the green grass and the trees. Now what kind of locust does not touch green? These locusts act contrary to all the instincts of the locusts we are familiar with. Neither are they like the locusts that plagued Egypt in the time of Moses. This tells us that they are bringing us a symbolic message. These locusts could only hurt those who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads! Not every man can be touched!

The locusts could not attack those who have the seal of God on their foreheads. The seal of God is the Holy Spirit - we are sealed with the Spirit of truth! When we function in truth, we function in the mind of Christ! Those who have the mind of Christ will recognize the lies, and will not be taken captive by them! They receive the promises of God by faith, and march on to victory! The Holy Spirit leads them into all truth! They know that God loves and treasures them! The locusts cannot feed on truth.

The locusts can only target those who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. They can only feed on the carnal or natural mind - the mind that is against the Spirit. They plant wrong ideas about God in our minds. Thoughts that say, "Get mad at God because He shouldn't let you suffer...God doesn't love me...I can take care of myself, I don't need God," are from the bottomless pit. Every time we accept a thought that is against the essence of who God is, we allow the locusts to prey upon our minds. As they feed, they destroy!

What a forceful message of God's power and authority! In the book of Job we also see that God put limitations and boundaries to the things Satan could do to Job. Who is in control, God or Satan? Many falsely think the devil has greater power than God, and that the bottomless pit of lies has greater power than truth. But lies have no foundation; they only have the power of deception. Truth has foundation, and when truth is received, deception has lost its power!

These locusts had to adhere to the instructions given them. They were not permitted to kill anyone, but they were given permission to torment people for five months. Five is the number of grace. God's grace is especially evident when we are being tested.

The Greek word translated as torment is BASANIZO. It is derived from BASANOS, which means a TOUCHSTONE. A touchstone is a black stone formerly used to test the purity of gold or silver by the streak left on it when it was rubbed with the metal. This tested the genuineness of that metal. Whatever did not meet the specifications would have to be removed and the metal had to be brought up to the quality of the standard. God's standard is complete redemption. Anything less than that has to be dealt with.

These locusts show us where we are living. All religious game playing has to end. Have you ever heard people say that they would rather die than continue living in their present circumstances? They do not want to live at their wits' end. They desire death, but death does not come to end their dilemma. They would rather die than humble themselves by admitting they are wrong. They would rather die than admit that they need Jesus Christ! The natural mind is so foolish and so arrogant! The grace of God allows us to come to the end of our rope, and then gives us the opportunity to repent!

“The appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle; and on their heads appeared to be crowns like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. They had hair like the hair of women, and their teeth were like the teeth of lions. They had breastplates like breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to battle. They have tails like scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt men for five months. They have as king over them, the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon.” (vv.7-11) The angel and king of the bottomless pit is called Apollyon, meaning Destroyer. Destruction is his very nature.

The description of these locusts is presenting a spiritual message, so let's focus on their message. John did not know how to describe the locusts, so he used images with which we are familiar. These strange locusts didn't look like locusts - they looked *“like horses prepared for battle.”* Various types of battles are described in the scriptures. The good fight is the fight of faith; the bad fight is the war against the Spirit.

These locusts, led by their destroyer king, were on the warpath against every thought that does not have its source in self! The images produced by the carnal mind are ready to battle against spiritual realities. Humanity is always prepared for a battle to keep its laws, ideas and traditions. It will not easily be pushed into oblivion. It fights for its self-engineered rights! If we think this battle is a pushover, we're sadly mistaken.

Their crowns were *“like gold”*. Gold symbolizes God's divine nature. But these crowns were not genuine gold - they just looked like gold. This symbolizes religious thinking. It looks good and it feels good, but it is not the good from the tree of life. It is the good that comes from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil - the tree that is rooted in disobedience! **Both the good and the evil of this tree are rooted in disobedience!**

They had hair *“like women”*. In **1 Cor. 11:15** it says, “But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her. For her hair is given to her for a covering.” Their hair was not the hair of women; they were counterfeit or imitation hair. They just looked as though they were real. The natural mind thinks that church affiliation and/or good works are its glory - their covering. It does not realize that self-works cannot bring life! Sometimes Christians say that certain non-Christians live more like Christians than Christians do. That is a sad indictment on people who call themselves Christians. Those who look like Christians, but are not rooted in Christ, are very good imitations! But our source is very important, for it determines our destination. **That which is rooted in death cannot bring us into life!**

They had teeth *“like the teeth of lions.”* The teeth of lions are strong and are able to bite, chew and destroy! These locusts, symbolizing our thought life, can do a very good job of destroying us!

They had breastplates *“like iron”*. In Ephesians 6 we are told to put on the breastplate of righteousness. The breastplates these locusts wear are not of righteousness but of iron. Iron symbolizes inflexibility. In **Revelation 3** it says that Christ will rule with a rod of iron. He will rule with the inflexible rod of truth, for truth cannot be bent. But the carnal man's righteousness is inflexible legalism. Woe to the one who tries to bend it! Legalism is completely devoid of grace! The religious mind is filled with rules and regulations. Follow the rules and all will speak well of you. If you don't, tongues will wag, and character assassination will follow. **The religious carnal mind knows nothing about following the leading of the Holy Spirit!**

Their wings sounded *“like the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to battle.”* The whirl of wings is produced by a lot of movement. There was so much movement that it sounded like horses rushing into battle. This symbolizes the vast amount of movement in the religious realm! Committees, programs, bake sales, marches, demonstrations, etc., - all for good causes! Their goal is to change the behavior of people and to make them favorably inclined toward the cause they are trumpeting. Sounds good, doesn't it? However, all this activity does not change people on the inside. God is in the business of changing people by giving them a new heart! He takes them out of their carnality, and places them into Christ! This produces an inner change that is expressed in their attitudes and actions.

We have already mentioned that the false prophet is the tail. False teaching is in the death realm, and *“The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.”* (1 Cor. 15:56) The law was given to show people that they could not reach God's standard of righteousness, and that they needed a Savior - and the grace of God gave us a Savior! He is Christ the Lord! When people repent of their pride and self-righteousness and come to Christ, the Father is always willing to receive them!

Apollyon, the destroyer, rules the carnal mind so it can only bring forth thoughts of destruction. By listening to our carnal thoughts we destroy ourselves, and this also has an effect on others. Entertaining thoughts of bitterness, resentment and rebellion has a negative effect on our health, shortens our life, and makes us disagreeable people to live with. When Adam and Eve obeyed the serpent, they received the serpent's deceptive mind. This mind has been passed on to us. Only in Christ can we be freed from it.

The following story, related to us by J. Preston Eby, is a wonderful illustration of someone who was freed from the carnal mind of hate. It's about a lawyer who was

called Wild Bill Cody (not his real name; his real name was an unpronounceable list of Polish syllables). This happened between 1939 and 1945. He had seen the Germans kill his wife and five children. The Germans refused to kill him because he spoke fluent German. As a lawyer he had seen what hate does to people's minds and bodies, so he decided to love and to forgive. This empowered him to live in a concentration camp for six years on a starvation diet, living in an airless and disease-ridden barrack as everyone else, but without any physical signs of illness, and no mental deterioration. He worked for people, counseled forgiveness, and became the one to whom everyone came for help! What a wonderful example of the power of love!

In contrast to the strength and encouragement that love brings, locusts always bring destruction. They devour and destroy. Poisonous thoughts have no place in the mind of Christ! Once we know the difference between the natural mind and the mind of Christ, we can discern the thoughts that don't come from the mind of Christ. **Destructive thoughts have their source in disobedience, and they have no place in those who have the seal of God on their foreheads!** We are protected or garrisoned by the power of God through faith! (1 Pe. 1:5) Jesus said that His sheep hear His voice. They will not follow a stranger - and that stranger is our own carnal thinking. That thinking is a stranger to God's kingdom thinking!

We have already seen that those who have the seal of God on their foreheads are the 144,000, and that includes all the overcomers of all time. **As children of God we can walk straight and tall and without fear in the midst of this invasion of locusts, because we have the seal of God on our foreheads.** God's thinking never receives religious thinking. Therefore we cannot be touched or harmed by these locusts. So says this vision.

"The first woe is past; behold, two woes are still coming after these things." (v.12) The woes are for those who are dwelling on earth, i.e. in their carnal thinking. Those dwelling in the earthly realm become food for serpents, for serpents feed on dust. These woes are not for the spiritual sons of God because they live in the heavenly realm, and serpents don't have access to that realm; they are confined to the dust realm! In Christ we receive the key (truth) that enables us to get out of the bottomless pit of lies, and ascend into the heavenlies!

"And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, 'Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.' And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they might kill a third of mankind." (vv.13-15)

This message is being sounded by the new humanity - the humanity that is in Christ. The voice John heard came from the four horns of the golden altar that stood in front of the mercy seat in the tabernacle. It was here that worship and intercession took place. Only the priesthood was allowed into the holy place. So this angelic voice is the voice of the overcomers - the royal priesthood of the New Covenant who speak in unison with Christ. Horns symbolize authority, and four symbolizes completeness or universality, and the golden altar symbolizes the divine nature of God. So this message comes with the complete authority of God!

Let's look at the content of this message. *"Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates."* Four signifies completeness, so all the angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates are to be released. For a better understanding, let's take a closer look at this river. It is first mentioned in **Genesis 2:14** as one of the four rivers that branched out of the river that flowed out of Eden. Smith's Dictionary of the Bible says that the Euphrates is the largest, the longest and by far the most important of the rivers of western Asia. It comes from the Armenian Mountains and flows into the Persian Gulf. The entire course is 1780 miles, and of this distance more than 1200 miles are navigable for boats.

This river is also mentioned in God's promise to Abram. The Lord said to Abram, *"To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates."* (Gen. 15:18) During the reigns of David and Solomon this promise was fulfilled, for it formed their boundary to the northeast. On the other side of the river Euphrates were Babylon and Assyria. So if these people wanted to invade Israel, they always had to cross the Euphrates first. In the minds of the Israelites, the river Euphrates was the barrier between them and those who wanted to destroy them, namely, the anti-Israel forces.

The word Euphrates is thought to be of Aryan origin, meaning "the good and abounding river". The abounding waters were a protection for Israel from the invasion of the enemy. Whenever the Euphrates dried up, the enemy could cross, and all the powers that hated God were released. In the scriptures water is associated with the life-giving word of God. Whenever it dries up in us, the anti-Christ forces of the carnal mind are released! In this passage, when the angels are released, the carnal mind that is in the old humanity is released to spew forth its lies and deceptions.

It is a well-known fact that the closer a lie resembles the truth, the easier it is to deceive people into believing the counterfeit. Bring forth a mixture, and the multitudes will believe you. This is happening in the organized church today. The language of the world is mixed with the language of the kingdom of God. **The world only has religiosity; it is devoid of the Spirit. The kingdom of God only has the Spirit; it is devoid of the world.**

We need to be purified of everything that is of this world - the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the boastful pride of life! Worldly thoughts, words and desires are very detrimental, for they kill. *“Life and death are in the power of the tongue.” (Prov. 18:21)* The tongue can speak words of life or words of death, depending on their source. Words that come from the Spirit are words of life; words that come from the carnal mind bring death.

“And the number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them.” (v.16) John did not see these armies; he heard the number. Young’s translation reads, *“and the number of the forces of the horsemen is two myriads of myriads.”* Myriads is an innumerable number, and the New American version translates it into two hundred million horses and horsemen. There are not that many horses on the face of the earth, so we know that we have to understand this spiritually.

“And this is how I saw in the vision the horses and those who sat on them: the riders had breastplates the color of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone; and the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone.” (v.17)

The riders had breastplates the colors of fire, hyacinth and brimstone. In this passage the word fire comes from the Greek PURINOS - the adjective form of fire. Fire purifies. Hyacinth, also called jacinth, can be any color from blue, bluish purple, to reddish orange. Brimstone is another word for sulphur - and it was used for purification. This gives us a picture of breastplates burning with a sulphurous fire mingled with the blue smoke that arises from burning sulphur. This fire purifies and corrects. Therefore we know that the purpose of these plagues is to purify and correct.

The heads of the horses looked “like the heads of lions.” They looked like lions’ heads, but they actually weren’t. The sight of a lion’s head creates fear in us because lions destroy and devour. In symbolism God is telling us that his discipline looks fearful to us. We dread it, for it usually comes in a hurtful way. God’s objective is to do away with all our wrong thinking - the thinking that we tenaciously cling to. Since we are so bonded to that thinking, God has to use drastic measures to cleanse us. We need to remember that all of God’s dealings with us are redemptive and prompted by His love.

“A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone, which proceeded out of their mouths. For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents and have heads; and with them they do harm.” (vv.18-19)

“A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues.” Not all of our wrong thinking is destroyed in one sweep. Many dealings of God are needed to rid us of our pride and lusts of the flesh.

And out of their mouths came fire, smoke and brimstone. Here we have the same combination of colors that were on the breastplates of the riders. What a strange picture! Sulphurous fire coming out of the mouths of horses! The power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails. These are very unique horses indeed!

Words come out of our mouths, and words are very powerful; they can bless people or they can poison them. God’s refining fire goes out to those who speak a double standard. **Jeremiah 9:8** describes this condition of the heart. *“Their tongue is a deadly arrow; it speaks deceit; with his mouth one speaks peace to his neighbor, but inwardly he sets an ambush for him.”*

This thought is also expressed in **James 3:8-10**. *“But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.”*

The human heart does not recognize the deception it is in, and that its own words are its judge. For example, if we tell others that it is wrong to tell lies, yet we lie, our declaration that it is wrong to tell lies, incriminates us. Therefore our words judge us, for they reveal that we are knowledgeable of what is right and what is wrong! Since we are so undiscerning, God has to send special circumstances into our lives to get our attention and be cleansed.

“For their tails are like serpents and have heads; and with them they do harm.” Notice the similarity between the horses and the locusts that had tails like scorpions. Again we quote from the Old Testament. **Is. 9:15-16** reads, *“The head is the elder and honorable man, and the prophet who teaches falsehood is the tail. For those who guide this people are leading them astray; and those who are guided by them are brought to confusion.”*

We have been taught many lies. Believing lies will always hurt us! Christ came to bring us truth, and only truth can free us from the lies and deception of the carnal mind! Believing lies about ourselves, and about who God is, brings us into bondage! They either bring us into a fantasy world of self-adulation or into a living hell of self-denunciation.

“The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk.” (v.20)

What a strange situation! Mankind is placed into two categories: those who are killed, and those who are unrepentant. So those who were killed were repentant, that is, their carnal thoughts were killed. Repentance requires a change in one's thinking. The purpose of the calamities that come into our lives is to change our mentality. Here we see that the sulphurous fire, symbolizing a cleansing fire, had achieved its purpose in those whose selfhood had been killed. They had been cleansed of their independence and reliance on their own ability. They had died to their selfhood. The plagues had achieved their purpose in them.

Those who were not killed by these plagues did not repent. This illustrates the stubbornness and rebellion that reside in the heart of the Adam man. Those who reside in the Adam man did not repent of the works of their hands. The "*works of their hands*" are the things they do. Whom do your hands serve? They either serve the interests of self or they serve God. The natural mind is a master at disguising self-interest by putting it in a religious garb. Only the works that come out of faith are pleasing to God! The age-old question, "How can we work the works of God?" is very familiar to us. In reply to this question Jesus said, "*This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.*" (Jn. 6:29) The works of God come out of life and bring life; all other works come out of death and end in death.

Since they would not repent, they continued in their worship of demons. They continued to make idols of gold, silver, brass, stone and wood - idols that had no life - dead idols! These idols symbolize the images created by the natural mind. They may look good, but they are unable to help us, for they are in the death realm - they cannot see or speak. We may think that we are free from all idolatry because we do not visibly bow to statues and worship them, but are we actually free from idolatry? Let's take a closer look at the imagery we have here.

Gold represents God's divinity. Since these idols are made by man, they represent an image of God that man has crafted by his own imagination. This idea of God is not based on God's revelation of Himself, but on man's idea of what he wants God to be like or what he thinks God is like. That is why Paul wrote that we have to destroy all speculations (images) and every lofty thing that is raised up against the knowledge of God. We need to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. (2 Cor. 10:5) **If we are worshiping an image of what we think God is like, instead of worshiping God according to His revelation of Himself, we are worshiping a man-made image of God.** It lacks foundation, so we know it comes from the bottomless pit!

Silver symbolizes redemption. Idols of silver typify man's ideas of redemption. This so-called redemption consists of self-effort, abiding by certain doctrines and keeping certain laws. It is a redemption that has evolved in man's fertile imagination, and

therefore it is unable to free people from their bondage to sin, yet it is being fostered and propagated by pagan religions and by the organized church. God's redemption is perfect, for it brings forgiveness and freedom from the Adam man - the man that sins.

Brass speaks of suffering and judgment, and idols of brass typify man's idea of suffering and judgment. Christ learned obedience by the things he suffered, but man thinks all suffering should be eliminated. Man considers all judgment as punishment. He cannot understand that true judgment is needed to recognize deception and to test the spirits. (1 John 4:1) Without the knowledge of the truth it is impossible to judge correctly. God's judgments consist of truth, and the truth frees us from the lies of the natural mind. God's judgments are redemptive, but humanity's idols of brass proclaim eternal agony!

Stone typifies foundation. Any doctrine, belief, creed or dogma that is not built on the revelation knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ is an idol of stone, for it has no foundation. Lies have no foundation; only truth has foundation. The natural mind is always against the Spirit of truth, and is unable to understand spiritual realities! Therefore it creates religious ideas that do not have foundation!

Wood represents humanity. We have to repent of all our ideas that do not agree with God's declaration of who we are! Comparing ourselves with others, thinking we are who others have proclaimed that we are, or seeing ourselves according to our experiences, successes and failures are invalid standards. If we cling to all the idols our mind has created, we won't receive revelation knowledge of the Christ! The story of the monkey who would not let go of the nuts to get its hand out of the jar in order to be freed, vividly illustrates how humanity holds onto its own ideas! In Eph. 1:17 Paul prayed, "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him." Hearing the Spirit brings us into truth!

"And they did not repent of their murders, nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts." (v.21) Repentance is so important! Repentance is a change of mind. **We have to repent of believing our own ideas, and believe what God says.** Cain did not repent of the jealousy that led him to murder his brother. In Cain's mind, his jealousy justified his actions. Had he believed God, he would have repented of his wrong attitude, and he would not have murdered his brother.

Nor did they repent of their sorceries. Sorcery is witchcraft. It comes from the Greek word, PHARMAKOA - the same word from which we get the English word pharmacy. According to Vines, this word mainly referred to the use of medicine, drugs, spells and poisoning. In Gal. 5:20, it is mentioned as being one of the many works of the flesh.

In the practice of sorcery, drugs are usually administered together with incantations and appeals to occult powers. In order to get people under the sorcerer's control and power, a lot of fanfare was, and still is, used to impress them with his mysterious powers. Is it possible that Christians still practice a type of sorcery? Do they sometimes draw attention to themselves in order to get people under their control when functioning in the gifts of the Spirit? Jesus referred to this in **Matt. 7:22-23**. *"Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'"* These people drew attention to themselves and their works because they wanted honor and control. This fanned their religious pride. They thought that by doing this they could earn their salvation.

Sorcery is associated with the worship of demon power, and has as its objective the gaining of power over people and that is manipulation. Many churches also use manipulation by teaching their members to strictly adhere to their regulations if they want to go to heaven. Their claim to perfect doctrine implies that if you leave them, you are bound straight for hell. God would be extremely unwise to put all His truth in one particular denomination. Truth is in the Holy Spirit - not in a church or denomination. We need to repent of every desire that seeks control. Christians are to be led by the Holy Spirit of truth! Placing oneself under the power of any other spirit is being anti-Christ.

"Nor of their immorality." They refused to repent of their immorality. Unfaithfulness to one's spouse is immorality. Did you know that the church is guilty of immorality? She is unfaithful to her head, the Lord Jesus Christ, for she has made a covenant with the law. By so doing, she has left the grace and mercy that is in Christ, and the law has become her head. This is adultery, and adultery is immorality.

"Nor of their thefts." They also refused to repent of their thefts. When a robbery occurs, someone suffers loss. The body of Christ has been robbed of many precious truths due to the faulty translation of the Bible, and by teaching that the traditions of men are truth. For example, we have been taught that it is wrong to "spiritualize the word". Jesus said that His words are spirit and are life, so how can we spiritualize something that is already spirit? The flesh is unable to receive spiritual realities. Therefore, if we do not receive His words as spiritual realities, we are receiving them on a lower level; by doing this we are actually "carnalizing" His words.

The reality of what we have in Christ has been stolen from us, for we have been told that it belongs to the future. If we relegate to the future what is actually ours today, we are living in poverty. We are like the man who framed his \$20,000 check, hung it on the wall, and lived in abject poverty! Unless we believe what God says is ours, we

live in spiritual poverty. Let's believe God and live in the fullness of the Spirit and the riches we have in Christ!

Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness. Let's repent of our unbelief, and become believers as exemplified by Abraham, our forefather of the faith! We could cite many more examples of how we have been robbed. Study your Bibles and notice how many past tense verbs we subconsciously relegate to the future. Notice also how people substitute heaven for life, and hell for death.

God is blowing the trumpet. The King has been crowned! Come and worship at His throne! If the stubborn, rebellious mind of man refuses to repent and bow to Him, more woes will follow. God's love is so great that He will not stop from working on our behalf!

Chapter 10

The symbolism of this short chapter imparts an important message to us!

“I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven, clothed with a cloud; and the rainbow was upon his head, and his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire.” (v.1)

Our eyes instantly focus on the strong angel. By now we know that an angel is a messenger - not a cherub with wings. The artists of this world have given us a wrong image of angels, and have led us to falsely believe that heavenly messengers need wings to travel from place to place. People have not noticed that there is a difference between cherubim and angels. In the scriptures, cherubim are pictured with wings, and their wings typify movement in the heavenly realm. The Greek word for angels is ANGELOS, and this word means messenger. It is the root word for evangelism and evangelical. These messengers can be spirit messengers or human messengers. But angels are never said to have wings, and are often called men in the scriptures. For example, the angels that visited Abraham were called men.

Who is this strong angel? The description of this angel gives us the clues we need to identify him. He was clothed with a cloud. There are many references in the scriptures that speak about the presence of God being manifested in a cloud. The presence of God in a cloud led the children of Israel in the desert. After Moses had finished building the tabernacle, a cloud covered it, and the glory of God filled it. The presence of God came in a cloud. In **Hebrews 11** we read about a cloud of witnesses. Jesus was received in a cloud when He was taken up after His resurrection. The cloud signified that this strong angel was clothed with the glory and presence of God!

“And the rainbow was upon his head.” In the book of Genesis we read that the rainbow was given as the sign of a covenant - the promise that God would not destroy this earth with water again! We are always thrilled with the beauty of a rainbow! This messenger came in the transcendent glory of one who keeps his promises! Only those who live out of the mind of Christ can be covenant or promise-keepers, for the carnal mind is full of lies and deceit. The rainbow on his head shows us that the covenant is in the highest realm and the highest realm is the mind of Christ. Paul tells us that we have the mind of Christ!

The glory of God is His goodness. When the glory of God shines through His sons, it shines forth in the colors of a rainbow, for we all portray His goodness differently and uniquely, yet each color has a beauty of its own, as it blends in and harmonizes with the others. Each color is needed to bring completeness. The beautiful colors of the rainbow superbly typify the goodness of God as it is displayed in the diversity of personalities and gifts in His body.

The faces of those who are in constant communion with the Lord radiate God's glory, even as the face of Moses shone after he had been with the Lord on the mountaintop. Imagine the glory of Christ's body when each member, in glorious submission to the Head, has been thinking Christ's thoughts and doing His will! These are the ones who sit with Christ on His throne! The light that emanates from them will draw those who are living in the earth realm and in the sea realm to the Lord!

“And his face was like the sun.” Imagine the dazzling brightness shining forth from this messenger! The face identifies a person. In **Revelation 1** the Son of Man is described as having a face shining like the sun. So this messenger is none other than the Son of Man the corporate body of Christ. The wonderful light emanates from Him because He is the light of the world, and Jesus said that we also are the light of the world! (**Matt. 5:14**) It is the light of His salvation that takes away our darkness! Saul of Tarsus, on his way to Damascus, encountered this light from heaven - a light so bright that his eyes were blinded! And he heard a voice saying, *‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’* To whom did this voice belong? In response to Saul's question, Jesus said, *“I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.”* **This is the light that brings conviction and repentance!**

“His feet were like pillars of fire.” In **Revelation 1** the Son of Man is also described as having feet of burnished bronze glowing like fire. Feet represent our walk or our lifestyle. Pillars are used as supports; they need to be load-tested to make sure they are fit to carry a heavy burden. Fire purifies. Do you get the picture? These feet represent the walk of the overcomers. Their lifestyle has been tested and purified so they can now be a blessing to others. They have ascended into the presence of God (not physically, but spiritually), and now come down to share His message and His glory with humanity. God's messengers first have to ascend into the heavenly realm to receive a message from God before they descend in order to bring it to humanity. All other messages originate in the human mind and lack the glory and purity of God. This strong angel is none other than the corporate Son of Man coming down from heaven - and heaven symbolizes God's government, and it is in the spiritual realm.

In this picture of the corporate Christ there is no description of the physical body.

Why? Because Christ Jesus will never appear as a natural man again! Those who want to see Christ have to see Him spiritually, and they also have to see Him in their brothers and sisters. No one can reveal Him in His entirety. It takes the whole body of Christ to reveal Him - that is, Christ the Head together with His body of overcomers.

“And he had in his hand a little book which was open. He placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land.” (v.2) The open book tells us that this is not a secret message, but one that is to be proclaimed! There are many secret societies in this world, and only the trusted ones are conducted into their secrets. God does not have secret societies; His message is to all and for all! Jesus said that He did nothing in secret!

“And he placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land.” The right foot, even as the right hand, symbolizes authority. The angel placed his right foot, the foot of authority, on the sea, and the sea symbolizes the multitudes that don't know God. Although they don't know it, they are under an authority that declares they too will receive the message that is in the open book!

His left foot was on the land - on the Christians that are still living in their natural carnal mind. In this vision the mighty angel proclaims that the carnal Christians too will be brought into a higher plane of living!

To Abraham God said, *“Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you.”* At that time the land was inhabited by various nations, but God told Abraham that it was his. He was to possess it, and walk in it wherever he pleased, for it belonged to him. It was his! This carries a powerful symbolic message. The land symbolizes the carnal mind, and the nations symbolize all the imaginations and lusting of that mind, for they are evil. Paul teaches us that all our imaginations need to be cast down. God's promise to Abraham declared freedom from the nations that were possessing the land, and God's promise to us is freedom from the domination of the carnal mind. Our walk in the Spirit puts all these wrong thoughts and desires under our feet - that is, we have victory over them! Whatever we walk on, belongs to us!

When Christ's body of called out ones reveals the nature of Christ by its lifestyle, actions and attitudes, the nations are placed under its feet. In **Eph. 1:22-23** we read, *“And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”* What a glorious assurance we have in the knowledge that He has put all things in subjection under His feet. Our natural mind views these feet as belonging to the Jesus of Nazareth who walked on this earth many years ago. But Paul is not speaking

of that Jesus. He is speaking of the spiritual Jesus, the Son of Man. He is head over the church - His body. Since feet belong to the body, they symbolize the walk of the believers, the overcomers! God wants us to know that we can walk in victory because He has put all that would exalt itself against God's authority, under the feet of the body of Christ. Let's live in this assurance!

This angel comes in the power and authority of the new covenant! This covenant proclaims that God is the Savior of the world! The fulfillment of this covenant does not depend on us, for He has made this covenant with Himself! He has reconciled the world to Himself! Accept this reconciliation and forget your warfare against God! Don't you know that your warfare has ended? In 1978 when we visited Guam, we learned that some Japanese soldiers were still in hiding and this was many years after the cessation of hostilities. The news that their warfare had ended had not reached them. **God wants us to know that He has reconciled us to Himself, and where there is reconciliation there can be no warfare.** This knowledge will end our warfare against God.

“And he cried out with a loud voice, as when a lion roars; and when he had cried out, the seven peals of thunder uttered their voices.” (v.3)

This loud voice is compared with the awesome authority contained in the roar of a lion. This is the voice of the Lion of the tribe of Judah! A strange phenomenon is taking place! The lion cries out! When did the Lion of the tribe of Judah cry out? The authority of the Lion in the Lamb of God on the cross cried out, *“Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.”* Hear this wonderful message! You and I are no longer guilty; we have been forgiven - every one of us! Let's receive our forgiveness, receive our reconciliation, receive our peace, and be reconciled to God! Let's quit striving against God! He has forgiven us!

“The seven peals of thunder uttered their voices.” By now we know that seven symbolizes divine completeness, and thunder represents God's words being released upon the earth. Here the completeness and all-inclusiveness of God's covenant is being revealed. In **1 Corinthians 2:9-10** Paul writes that the Spirit of God reveals the unseen realm to us. He reveals things that the eye cannot see, things that our ears haven't heard, and things that are beyond our imagination! This revelation is coming forth in the seven peals of thunder!

“When the seven peals of thunder had spoken, I was about to write; and I heard a voice from heaven saying, ‘Seal up the things which the seven peals of thunder have spoken, and do not write them.’” (v.4)

Here is a mystery, and our curiosity is aroused! The message in the open book was for everyone, but the message in the peals of thunder was not to be revealed at this

time. We'd like to know what this special message to John is all about! Why did God tell John that this part of the story was not to be made known? Why could John know it, but not anyone else?

John represents the overcomers, so this message is for the overcomers, and they are to receive it directly from the Spirit. They can hear the Spirit and can dialogue with the Spirit. The Spirit can show them the heart of God! But those who cannot hear the Spirit will not receive the Spirit's teaching, for it is sealed to them. Not everyone hears God's word at the same time. There is a first fruit, a harvest and a "roundup time" when everyone is gathered into the fold. This is a word for those who make up the body of Christ, but each one gets it individually and at different times.

The word of God has to become alive in us! Isn't it amazing how often we can hear the message of God's love and salvation, yet it hasn't become alive in us! We only hear it in our religious carnal mind, give mental assent to it, and think we know it all. However, a word received in the religious mind does not change us. It may stir up our zealotry and dead works, but we are not changed.

In **Matthew 16:16** Peter received the revelation that Jesus was the Christ, but he only received it in his carnal or natural mind. We know that anything received in the natural mind does not have keeping power, because even after that revelation Peter still denied Jesus Christ three times! Later, after he was baptized in the Spirit and received this word spiritually, he was no longer afraid of persecution! Now he proclaimed the message boldly! Anointed sermons have to be received by anointed ears; otherwise they will only be received in the religious mind. Not all sermons are anointed; some come in beautiful intellectual words, but they do not contain life! We need more than intellectualism; we need Christ!

Only Christ can make His words alive in us! The natural mind can only receive them in the letter of the law. When the Holy Spirit brings His illumination of the word to us, it changes us and brings us into joy! Repentance and change go hand in hand. Often we have a false idea of repentance, and associate it with remorse, weeping and crying. However, repentance is a positive experience, and implies a change for the better! Christ brings us His illumination, and it changes us into Christ's image!

"Then the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted up His right hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things in it, and the earth and the things in it, and the sea and the things in it, that there will be delay no longer, but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets." (vv. 5-7)

The angel raised his right hand to heaven. Hands are raised in worship, praise and

intercession. Authority is vested in this angel, and he swears by the Creator of all things that when the seventh angel sounds, there shall no longer be a delay in bringing about the fulfillment of what was spoken by the prophets. Then the mystery of God is finished.

“In the days when the seventh angel sounds.” The word translated as “days” means a period of time. Day also refers to light; the seventh angel is bringing a message of light and understanding! This message is being sounded today. We are always intrigued by mysteries; we want to solve them! God’s ways are a mystery to us for they are beyond our natural understanding. The open book tells us that God does not want it to remain a mystery to us.

God’s promises have to be understood spiritually. In the natural realm they remain a mystery to us, so we need clues to help us understand them spiritually. The prophets had proclaimed the coming of the Messiah, a release from all bondage, and the coming of a new day when there would be a new people and a new creation! But God’s people did not understand that this new creation is a spiritual one. Since people thought that the fulfillment of these promises would come in the natural realm, it remained a mystery to them.

This mystery was not solved until Paul came and boldly proclaimed, *“That I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”* (Col. 1:25b-27) This is the true spiritual fulfillment!

The formation of this new nation in Christ began when people from different parts of the world had gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, and the Holy Spirit was poured out. At that time they also received a new law - the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus! (**Romans 8:2a**) The mystery was finished, but it was still not understood. Even the leaders did not understand that Christ had come to be in us, and that the Spirit was actually the Lord, and that Christ was the beginning of a new spiritual generation in which there is neither Jew nor Gentile. All are one in Christ. Since Christ is in us, we no longer see Him as a physical being. Even today, many don’t understand the mystery of “Christ in you, the hope of glory”! However the angel has declared that the time is now, and the revelation of its meaning is entering the hearts of overcomers everywhere!

“Then the voice which I heard from heaven, I heard again speaking with me, and saying, ‘Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the land.’ So I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book. And he

said to me, 'Take it, and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.'" (vv.8-9)

What a surprise it must have been for John when he heard that he was to eat an open book! Have you ever tried eating a book? That pleasure is reserved for bookworms! What does the eating of this book symbolize? John was to take this wonderful message of a completed salvation into himself and digest it! Digested food can be assimilated and used by the body. It sustains and builds the body, making it strong and healthy. Spiritual food also has to be digested and assimilated in order to bring growth and strength to Christ's body!

Another surprise awaited John! In his mouth it was sweet as honey. Good news is always sweet! The Promised Land was described to the Israelites as a land of milk and honey. When we receive the revelation that Christ is our righteousness, our joy is complete! **We no longer have to work for righteousness, and we are freed from the guilt of failure!** What a tremendous relief!

But why should it turn bitter in the stomach? This symbolizes the bitterness and hurts that we experience from others as Christ's life is lived out through us. Let's look at the life of Jesus. He lived a life that revealed the nature of our invisible God! He did exactly what the Father wanted Him to do. He enjoyed perfect unity with the Father! He lived a life of intercession for a lost humanity! Did that make His life easy? No, it did not! He felt the rejection, the criticism, the loneliness, the scourging, the crown of thorns, the nails that pierced His hands and feet, and the agony of crucifixion just as we would! The bitterness in the stomach typifies these difficult experiences. When we speak the word of truth, it brings life to those who receive it, but those who reject truth will try to make life miserable for us. As we stand between heaven and earth as intercessors and mediators for a lost humanity, we too will experience the unbeliever's bitterness and anger against us.

Jesus endured the suffering *"for the joy that was set before Him."* He understood God's plan for His life. He knew that the sacrifice of Himself would bring total redemption for a lost humanity. He knew that the Father would not cause Him to suffer more than was necessary to bring about this great salvation.

Our confidence is also in the Father's plan for our life. Our joy of seeing resurrection life imparted to those who receive the word more than makes up for all the suffering we have to endure! God has promised that His word will not return void - that is, the word that He gives us to speak will accomplish His purpose. The Bible is not to be used as a means of beating people into submission and keeping them in legalism. This will not produce fruit, for there is no life in legalism. However, the word God gives us to speak is a living word, and it will accomplish what it was sent

to accomplish!

“I took the little book out of the angel’s hand and ate it, and in my mouth it was sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter.” (v.10) John was obedient, and he found the angel’s words to be true. We too will experience this when we are obedient to God’s word to us!

“And they said to me, ‘You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.’” (v.11) The great majority of people have a wrong idea of the meaning of the word prophecy. They think it only means foretelling what the future holds for us. It actually means to speak under the inspiration of God! This can apply to past, present or future events.

To prophesy to many peoples, nations, tongues and kings, means to bring them the anointed word of God! We tell them what God wants them to hear not what we would like to tell them or what they would like to hear. We are God’s messengers and as such we proclaim the message God has put into our heart. Some will accept it and others will be offended by it. The result is not up to us. Our part is to speak God’s message and leave the results up to God.

Chapter 11

In **Ps. 132:13-14** we read, *“For the LORD has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation. This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it.”* In this great outdoor movie John was shown that God’s resting-place requires preparation, because this place is in His people. He cannot rule in a people who are ruled by the natural mind, for that mind always strives against the Spirit. God can only rest where the flesh does not strive against Him. Our fleshly desires become inactive when the Holy Spirit rules within us, for then the carnal mind’s striving against God no longer rules us.

“Then there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, ‘Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it. Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months.’” (vv.1-2)

In this heavenly drama the scene now shifts to John and his participation in it. John symbolizes the overcomers. A measuring rod is used to make sure that the object measured has reached a given standard, and it determines where and how much correction is necessary. So it typifies judgment not condemnation. There is a big difference between the two terms. **Judgment** is a decision made by someone who is an authority on a matter or subject; **condemnation** is a declaration of guilt, censure or penalty.

It is interesting to note that the rod, the standard of measure, was given to John. Why? Because the judgment or assessment could not be according to man’s standard. The object measured had to be according to God’s standard because humanity is unable to make a correct judgment. That is the *“judge not”* that God declares to humanity, for humanity is not to judge from its own understanding. When people tell us not to judge, they are actually judging us; they are guilty of the very thing they tell us not to do. Man judges according to external appearances, but God judges according to the heart. Before we can make a righteous judgment we have to hear from God; the judgment has to be given to us!

John received instructions to measure the temple (NAOS). This Greek word is never used in reference to a physical temple. Jesus used the word NAOS when He said, *“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”* In this vision, the innermost part of the tabernacle of Moses symbolizes the spiritual temple in which Christ dwells. The outer court with its offerings and sacrifices and washings is excluded.

Measuring the temple can be compared to the visit of a building inspector. Everything has to measure up to a certain standard or to certain specifications; all has to fit the standard the building code has prescribed. John is given the measuring rod, the ruler or standard. God declares that we are His workmanship, so anything that is of self has to be eliminated. **Christ is the criterion by which we must be measured, for we have been predestined to be conformed to His image!**

The outer court is disqualified because it belongs to the Old Covenant. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of all the offerings and sacrifices and washings that were performed there. With the inauguration of the New Covenant, the old became obsolete.

This vision is telling us that the church is not as big as it looks, for the large outer court does not belong to the NAOS. God is only interested in the NAOS, that is, the sanctuary. A sanctuary is a place of rest, safety and peace, e.g. a bird sanctuary is a place of safety for birds. In symbolism we see that only those who are in the sanctuary are in a place of safety, peace and rest. There are many religious people who faithfully go to church, but they do not have a living relationship with God. They are religious, but they are not members of Christ's body. Religiosity is enthroned in the carnal mind.

Only those who are born of God are the real church; they are the NAOS. Paul asked the Corinthians, *“Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple (NAOS) of the living God; just as God said, ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’”* (1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16) (Young translates NAOS as “sanctuary”.) What an honor and privilege to be the dwelling place of God! In Christ we are being built and fitted together and growing into a holy temple, a dwelling place for God in the Spirit! (See Eph. 2:19-22) His dwelling place is in the Spirit - in the *“Christ in you.”*

In Old Testament days, God's presence dwelt in the holiest part of a physical tabernacle. After Christ rose from the dead and poured out His Spirit, a new spiritual sanctuary, not made with hands, was created; this is the new creation described in 2 Cor. 5:17. *“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature.”* This new sanctuary is within a people who have been vitally joined to the living Christ. Mark off the sanctuary - the world cannot touch that!

The outer court of the temple was much bigger than the sanctuary. This symbolizes the fact that many are called by the name of church, but they are not the real church. The world has invaded part of it. How can we tell whether someone is in the NAOS or not? Outward appearances are not reliable, so John was told to look at the golden altar where incense was constantly being burned, and to the worshipers around that

altar. This altar was in the sanctuary not in the outer court. Only the priesthood had access to the sanctuary. These worshipers had a living relationship of love that flowed between the worshiper's spirit and God. Relationship makes all the difference! The spirit of this company cannot be touched.

The incense symbolizes our prayers, and our prayers reflect our inmost thoughts. What are our prayers like? Do we pray for retribution or salvation for our enemies? Do we want God's blessings just for ourselves and for those who are like-minded, or are we willing to be the sacrifice that reveals the glory of God? Do we pray, "Father, don't let this sin go unpunished"? Or do we pray, "*Father forgive them for they don't know what they are doing*"? **Do we advise God, or do we submit ourselves to His will?**

God is concerned about the worshipers not about external appearance! Religiosity finds no room in the temple. Everything that smacks of traditions and creeds of men, and everything that is still in the realm of shadows, has to go! Only those who worship in spirit and in truth are true worshipers!

This is the message of the measuring rod. Let us pay attention to it! Everything has to fit the measure of the stature of Christ Jesus! Everything that is of the flesh has to go. When Jesus was on earth He drove out all that did not belong in the outer court. Here He is not concerned with the outer court. **Christ's sacrifice of Himself is the fulfillment of all the sacrifices and the washings, so the outer court is no longer needed.**

Let the Gentiles have it; they are still busy with their sacrifices and their works for righteousness! Religion is concerned with the outward - with self-worth, fame, honor, success, dress codes, eating habits, doctrines, keeping the laws of its organization, etc. All these masquerades have to be stripped away if we want to become true worshipers of God! **Everything outside the NAOS is flesh.**

The religious mind feels threatened by true worship and praise. King David's wife Michal felt threatened when David took off his kingly robe, and joyously and excitedly leaped and danced and praised God as he was bringing the ark to Jerusalem. When he got home that evening, waiting at the door with a look that could kill, was his wife Michal. She accused him of making a fool of himself and acting like a peasant. What suddenly threatened her? She could talk about God, but she couldn't worship and praise Him because the external appearance (flesh) was of prime importance to her.

The flesh cannot be brought up to God's standard because there is nothing good in the flesh. It does not belong to the NAOS; it belongs to the nations - to the imagination. All fleshly ideas come from man's imagination, and they have to be

destroyed. Paul tells us that *“we are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”* (2 Cor. 10:5)

David had worshiped, not as a king, for he had taken off his kingly robe, but as one who was in need of grace! There is no hierarchy in worship and praise! This causes the courtyard church to get uptight. The NAOS consists of people who worship God in spirit and in truth! They recognize their dependence on God and His grace! The NAOS is surrounded by the false, but it cannot be destroyed! It is measured off, i.e. it is being perfected!

Since we are His dwelling place, is it any wonder that His probes penetrate our innermost being? He is especially concerned with the altar and the worshipers. No sacrifices were made on the golden altar; only incense was burnt on it. Everything that was placed on this altar had to smell right to God. It had to fit in with His divine nature!

The NAOS cannot be destroyed, but there is a part that can be destroyed for a season. *“For they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months.”* Again, forty-two months or 3 and a half years is not a literal number. It is sending us a coded message. Jesus ministered under the anointing of the Holy Spirit for 3 and a half years, so this number refers to ministry. During our time of ministry on earth, those who live according to the flesh consider the spiritual realm to be of no significance. They not only look down on those who understand the spiritual message of the scriptures, but even persecute them. This is happening all the time.

In this vision God is giving us a message of encouragement! Even though your ministry can be touched, you cannot be touched! He is saying, “Don’t worry about the flesh. It doesn’t belong to you! You are a spiritual body, and I am concerned about what is in your inner being.”

“And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.” (vv.3-4)

Here the vision suddenly changes, and our attention is drawn to two witnesses, namely, two olive trees and two lampstands. The word authority is not in the Greek text - it has been inserted by the translators. Jesus Christ is saying that He will give us two witnesses.

Again we go to the scriptures for our interpretation. Why two witnesses? It says, *“In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.”* No testimony is valid until it has been confirmed in the mouth of at least two or three witnesses.

Two witnesses are a shorthand symbol for a perfect and complete testimony to truth. Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. He is truth personified. People search for truth and argue over doctrines in their search, but refuse to come to the One who is truth.

Ever since Jesus ascended into heaven there has been a witness of Him on this earth. Who are these witnesses? Jesus said to His disciples, "*You are My witnesses.*" Those who are enChristed are His witnesses; they have ears to hear what the Spirit is saying, so they speak under the anointing of the Spirit. Jesus also said that the scriptures bear witness of Him. (**Jn. 5:39**) To prophesy means to speak under the inspiration of God. God is giving us an idea, a message! To be a witness, we have to exemplify the nature of Christ in word and in action. This vision tells us that Christ's followers are a witness of the nature or essence of Christ. The world feels judged by this witness.

These witnesses will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days or 3 and 1/2 years, that is, they will speak under the inspiration of God during their time of ministry. They will be clothed in sackcloth, that is, in humility and grief. In the Old Testament we notice that sackcloth was worn during times of grief and repentance. The true church brings forth a witness of Christ in humility and repentance, and also grieves for those who do not accept the gospel message.

"These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord." Zechariah saw one lampstand, all of gold with a bowl on top of it. He also saw two olive trees - one on the right side of the bowl and the other on its left side. We already know that the seven-branched lampstand represents the church in its relationship to Christ in the Holy Spirit.

In the tabernacle there was only one lampstand. Why do we have two here? Two is a symbol for witness. God is emphasizing the witness of a church that is filled with the Holy Spirit, and that brings a message from God to the world.

Standing beside the lampstands, Zechariah saw two olive trees. (Zechariah 4) The two olive trees puzzled him, so he asked, "*What do the two olive trees that are beside the two golden pipes, which empty the golden oil from themselves on the right and on the left of the lampstand represent?*" He was told that these are "*the two anointed ones, who are standing by the Lord of all the earth.*" Notice that this witness is a valid witness, but its anointing is limited, for they "*empty the golden oil from themselves.*" Anything that can be emptied is limited. A ministry with a greater anointing is to follow.

The first mention of the olive tree is in **Genesis 8:11** where the dove brings back an olive leaf to Noah, and the last mention is in this verse. The olive tree grows on

the mountainside and on the seaside where there is not much soil, and where other trees will not bear fruit. It will yield heavily with a minimum of care and culture. Although only one olive flower in every 100 produces fruit, yet it is claimed that one tree can produce as much as 20 gallons of oil. To the westerner its olive-gray foliage is not very attractive, but to the man who is going to get an abundance of oil from it, it is very attractive!

Hosea declared, *“His beauty will be like the olive tree.”* (Hosea 14:6) This beauty is not an outward attractiveness, but the inward beauty that feeds the hungry with its fruit. David referred to himself as an olive tree in God’s house. (Ps. 52:8) Paul used the cultivated olive tree as an example of the true Israel of faith in Romans 11. Olive oil was used for food, anointing, fuel and medicine.

Here in John’s vision, the olive trees beside the lampstand represent the church or the sons of fresh oil, in its power and witness in the Holy Spirit! *“Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts.”* The witnesses speak in the power of the Holy Spirit! They symbolize the church that is able to stand in the midst of the world and speak with power. In its public witness the church stands before the world in repentance in contrast to a world that is very unrepentant. The world refuses to repent, even though it hears the trumpets. In the midst of that unrepentant world is a church whose very lifestyle and attitude demonstrate repentance. It has yielded to God and responded to Him. The oil of the Holy Spirit is empowering it. It is dependent upon the Lord, speaking forth on God’s behalf, but it is limited in the demonstration of God’s power!

“And if anyone desires to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies; so if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way.” (v.5) Why would anyone want to harm them? These witnesses are speaking truth, and truth is the fire that proceeds out of the mouths of these witnesses. The fire of truth purifies; it devours the lies. Those who do not want to let go of their lies, deceit and traditions, are tormented by truth, so they do their utmost to destroy the vessel that speaks truth. The inspired word of God purifies the church and convicts the sinner.

They *“must be killed in this way.”* What can be killed? We know that the flesh can die, but the spirit cannot die! In this symbolism we see that everything that is of the flesh has to be put to death, for it is always against the Spirit! This is not about doing away with people, but about getting the wickedness out of them! When the lies of our enemies are devoured by truth, we no longer have enemies. That is how our enemies are killed!

“These have the power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and

to smite the earth with every plague, as often as they desire.” (v.6) The witnesses have the power to order the sky to withhold rain, to turn water into blood, and to smite the earth with every plague, as often as they desire.

Elijah are also able to withhold the rain. Does that mean that one of them is Elijah? No, but it tells us that **as Elijah withheld rain, so the church can withhold the rain of the Holy Spirit.** By its teaching, the church has the power to hold people back or to restrict them from coming into the fullness of the Holy Spirit. When the church sets up boundaries by its teaching, it limits the spiritual development of its people. It gets them caught up in emotions instead of letting them feast on the living word. By doing this they are withholding the rain.

Moses stood against a government that hated him and his God. He was a testimony to truth in the midst of lies! Moses had the ability to turn water into blood, but that doesn't mean that the other witness is Moses. This is another way of looking at the water of the Holy Spirit. Elijah withheld water, and Moses turned water into blood. Water is necessary for life, but when the life-giving water is turned into blood it is put into the death realm. When the scriptures are taught according to the letter, they are brought into the death realm. Paul said that the letter kills. It keeps the hearers in the letter of the law - and that law always brings condemnation. In Christ we have a new law - the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus! **When condemnation and hell fire are preached, the water is being turned into blood instead of bringing people into a love relationship with God, it brings them into a fear relationship with Him.**

They can smite the earth with plagues. This word is used metaphorically of calamities. We need calamities to bring change into our life. Without pressures, trials and tribulation we won't be conformed to the image of Christ. Many Christians have a wrong image of God. They think He is out to punish them whenever they fail to be what they think they should be, or fail to do what they think they should do. God's goal is to change us, not to punish us! **We all need to understand that God's sovereign rule of love is in control of everything that happens to us!** All the chastening and the blessings help to mature us.

“When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.” (vv.7-8)

The Greek word for witness or testimony is MARTUREO. From it we get the word martyr. A martyr is one who gives his life for someone or for a cause.

The testimony of the witnesses had to be completed before the beast could make war with them and overcome them. This beast came out of the abyss, and in chapter 13:1 it came out of the sea, and the sea symbolizes humanity. The abyss and the sea both symbolize the thinking of the carnal mind - the mind that is against the Spirit. The natural mind wages war against the true understanding of spiritual realities. It brings in its cunningly devised fables, and people accept its lies as truth. **The witness of the church is killed when the spiritual understanding is exchanged for the natural.**

“And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.” (v. 8) What do Sodom and Egypt have to do with the death of the two witnesses? Sodom was known for its sexual perversion and its careless living, and Egypt was known for its great power. Its strong government kept God’s people in slavery. We are familiar with this story, but then a surprising statement follows! It says that this is where our Lord was crucified! Wasn’t Jesus crucified outside Jerusalem? Obviously He couldn’t be crucified in three different places.

As we look at the message this symbolism is conveying, we see that Sodom and Egypt are mystical names for Jerusalem, where our Lord was crucified. And what does Jerusalem stand for? Two Jerusalems are mentioned in the New Testament. One is the Jerusalem where they crucified Jesus and that is the Jerusalem in the Middle East today. The other Jerusalem is the heavenly Jerusalem that is described in chapter 21.

Jesus was crucified in the hearts of religious people long before He was put on the cross. The gospel of John repeatedly states that the leaders wanted to kill Jesus long before they had the opportunity to get Him crucified. These were religious leaders! They were people who knew the scriptures. So He was crucified in the heart of a religious community. Jesus was the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, but religion cannot understand that because it has to strive and work for its salvation.

Notice that Paul makes a distinction between natural Jerusalem and the Jerusalem above in **Galatians 4: 25-26**. The Jerusalem below refers to natural Jerusalem, (Sodom and Egypt). This is the Jerusalem where they crucified the Lord, and it symbolizes apostate religion. The Jerusalem above is the New Jerusalem, the holy city, and it is the true church that consists of worshipping believers.

Since the church (NAOS) is a testimony of the truth and power of God, it is always opposed and harassed by the combined forces of the outer court and the world. The true church cannot be killed, but its public witness can be put to death for a season. By whom? By **Sodom** in its symbolism of careless ease, its lusting for immorality and its disrespect for the poor, and by **Egypt** in its symbolism of a very strong and

controlling government that does not know God, and by **natural Jerusalem** in its symbolism of being the heart of apostate religion. These are one in their purpose of putting the witness of the church to death.

These lustful desires symbolized by Sodom, Egypt, and natural Jerusalem are described as the beast that comes out of the abyss. The abyss is an immeasurably deep pit - a bottomless pit, and it symbolizes the carnal mind because there is no bottom or end to its lies and deception. The beast comes out of this pit. When the carnal mind kills the testimony of the two witnesses (the church), all that is left is a form of godliness that denies the power of the gospel. This is the religiosity of the apostate church, and we are to turn away from it.

The church is still there, for no one can touch the NAOS, but its public witness to truth has been silenced. In Old Testament history we learn that Jezebel tried to silence the public witness of the true Israel, and Elijah thought he was the only remaining public witness. But the Lord said there were 7000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal. **No one could touch the NAOS!**

In the light of this, we can understand a lot of things that are happening in the world today. Even as the witness of the church has been silenced through the years, it is also being silenced today! In western countries the media is silencing the witness by character assassination, defamation and fear. People think it would be scary if a leader with morals would take leadership. Support for the Sodom mentality is growing by leaps and bounds. In communist countries the witness is silenced, but the church is growing. The NAOS cannot be touched! All the power of the prince of this world, in whatever form it comes whether as communism, dictatorship, democracy, religiosity, etc. - cannot touch the NAOS, the worshiping community! Only its public witness can be touched. We see it more clearly in some countries than in others.

The world and religion treat the church in the same way they treated Jesus! They slew Him. The greatest judgment that can ever come upon a country or city is the silencing of the true church. The dead bodies of the witnesses lying in the street or square are the evidence that the witness of the church has been silenced, and only the dead forms remain. **When the only speaking voice of God has been silenced, man has cut himself off from the witness that proclaims God's message of love and truth for a hurting world.**

"Those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations will look at their dead bodies for three and a half days, and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb. And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and celebrate; and they will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth." (vv.9-10)

Those who dwell on the earth (Christians who receive spiritual realities in their carnal minds) will not permit the dead bodies of the witnesses to be laid in a tomb. When the life of the witnesses is removed, all that remains is a lifeless form. Religion is a lifeless form consisting of legalism, rituals and traditions. Religion does not allow these forms to be buried. Those who dwell on the earth rejoice over the forms! The forms do not interfere with their way of living; they do not torment anyone, so they can keep the forms and rejoice in their religiosity!

These forms include the rules and regulations that dictate how religion is to be practiced. Jesus overstepped the boundaries of religion by eating with sinners and tax collectors, by healing people on the Sabbath and by calling God His Father. Therefore He was hated and resented by the religious hierarchy. Had He adhered to the accepted norms, He would not have been crucified. Individuals and organizations have their own accepted norms, and woe betide anyone who oversteps those boundaries!

“Because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.” The word that has been translated “tormented” should actually read touchstone. Do you know what a touchstone is? It is a black stone that was formerly used to test the purity or genuineness of silver or gold by the streak that was left on it when it was rubbed with the metal that was being tested. When lies are tested on the touchstone of truth, they are judged as being false and without value. Lovers of truth welcome this information, but lovers of self hate it. They want to remain in their forms, rituals and traditions! They are satisfied with their playground, their toys and entertainment.

“But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell upon those who were watching them.” (v.11)

The three and a half days compare with the three and a half years of Christ’s ministry, and typify the duration of a ministry. Since humanity is fascinated with religion, it will not change. The Babylonian system does not change; it has to be overcome by the same life that is in the body of Christ.

God deals with the church in the same way as He dealt with Jesus. Just like Christ’s life could not remain in death, so the life in His witnesses could not remain in the death realm! The witnesses were raised into life! **Wherever the church is persecuted, it continues to live in the mighty power of the resurrection!** Christ is our life, and He is also the life of the church! The glory of the resurrected Christ is in the resurrected church. Both Christ and His body receive the same treatment.

Things aren’t what they seem to be. The church seems to be embattled, mutilated, silenced and put underground but the NAOS, the sanctuary, is secure. To the surprise

of religion, the witness is revived! The power of God is revealed, and fear falls on those who witness this strange phenomenon! The power to change and overcome evil comes to the forefront. It suddenly stands up! No one can take away the life that we have in Christ! This realization shows us why this book is a blessing to all who read it.

“And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, ‘Come up here.’ Then they went up to heaven in the cloud, and their enemies watched them.” (v.12) This is not what is popularly called the rapture of the church. The word rapture is not mentioned in the Bible, nor does it mean a lifting away from this earth. It means to be enamored by something or someone. The rapture of the church theory came into being in the 1800’s. Through the writings of Lacunza, a Jesuit priest whose pen name was Rabbi Ben Ezra, this teaching was accepted and propagated by Edward Irving and J. N. Darby. Scofield incorporated it in his footnotes in the Scofield Bible, and it has become widely accepted. Escapism from suffering appeals to the natural mind!

God’s call to *“Come up here,”* is a call to all who are united with Him in the Spirit. God calls us to ascend to live in the heavenly realm - and to join the cloud of witnesses who are already living in this realm. **All who are living in the mind of Christ are in the spiritual realm.** A physical death does not have to take place before we reach this heavenly place. This is for now! Paul tells us that we are (present tense) seated with Christ in the heavenlies. To be in a heavenly place means that our understanding of spiritual truth comes from the Holy Spirit instead of our natural perspective.

“And their enemies watched them.” The enemies of truth cannot participate in this great event. They can only watch from the outside. They see the change that takes place in believers, but they cannot produce this change in themselves.

“And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.” (v.13)

“In that hour there was a great earthquake.” In the scriptures we notice that the thundering of God’s message to His people is often accompanied by an earthquake. When God’s voice thundered from Mount Sinai, there was an earthquake, and a new covenant of Law came into being. An earthquake took place when Jesus died, and another occurred when He was resurrected and a new covenant of life in Christ was inaugurated!

An earthquake brings upheaval. Our earthquakes produce upheavals in our thinking! We like to be in control of everything that happens to us. When situations that are beyond our control come into our life, struggles take place. Although we want to

remain in control, God wants us to know that He is in control! We need earthquakes to alert us to our wrong thinking; otherwise we won't learn to hear God!

“And a tenth of the city (singular) fell.” A tenth of which city? This is the city of apostate religion that has just been identified symbolically as Sodom, Egypt and natural Jerusalem. It is also known as Babylon - the city whose name means confusion. Here we have a message in symbolism. A tenth is known as the tithe or the firstfruit, and this means that there is a remnant that has not yielded to religious thinking.

“Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake.” In Elijah's time seven thousand were left who had not bowed their knee to Baal, so here seven thousand have not bowed to apostate religion. Seven thousand symbolizes God's perfect number, and here it symbolizes the fact that apostate religion was killed in them. This is wonderful!

“And the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.” The religious community was terrified! It recognized the work of God in these people, but since they did not want to submit themselves to God, it brought them into fear! They gave glory to God but they did not repent. God wants the glory that comes from a people who have a love relationship with Him and who have died to their love of self.

“The second woe is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly.” (v.14) The third woe comes on the heels of the second woe! These woes are sent to condition us and to make us strong. We need to know that God loves us, and therefore cannot be against us! This helps us to rise above the abuse that we can expect from the religious community and the world. Have you ever had a heart-rending experience, then another and another, and you wondered what you had done to deserve all that? These difficulties are not sent as a punishment, but as our fitness training!

“Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever’ (actually, “for the eons of the eons”).” (v.15) This scene in heaven again emphasizes the reign and authority of Christ!

With the announcement that the third woe is at the door, the seventh trumpet sounded (seven symbolizing divine completeness), and a loud triumphant cry broke forth in the spiritual realm! The joyous proclamation announcing the uninterrupted and unending reign of Christ erupted!

“The kingdom of the world has become ‘the kingdom’ of our Lord!” In the Bible, the second “the kingdom” is in italics, and that means it is not in the Greek manuscripts, but has been added by the translators. Some translations read “kingdoms,” but the NASV has corrected that mistake. There is only one kingdom of this world and only one kingdom of God!

The kingdom of this world already belongs to Christ. In **Hebrews 2:8** we read that all things are in subjection to Him. *“For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him.”* Christ reigns, and He will continue to reign until all things are subject to Him! He is Lord of everything that happens to us while we are living in this world!

“And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, ‘We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign.’” (vv.16-17)

As we have seen in chapter 4, the twenty-four elders personify the twenty-four courses of the priesthood, i.e., the entire royal priesthood that Peter describes in **1 Peter 2**. The elders sit on their thrones; they are not zealously running back and forth trying to please God by their own works. They know their place before God. This is a place of rest, for they are resting from their own works.

The elders (the priesthood) worship God in spirit and in truth! They know who their God is! They know that He is the Almighty God for He has the power to do whatever He pleases, and He only pleases to do what is right! He is the God who always is! He never changes; He always is the same as He always was. Therefore He can be trusted implicitly! He has always reigned, but His reign in His children began when the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost! He reigns in us through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. He has the power to reign!

The twenty-four elders are a wonderful, powerful example of the competence of God’s rule! From a selfish carnally-minded humanity they have become a spiritually-minded new humanity! They have overcome the desire to do their own will, and are now totally dedicated and delighted to do the Father’s will. For this reason they are overcomers and therefore privileged rulers with Christ!

While the elders are moved into an ecstasy of worship, the nations are enraged. *“And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to give their reward to Your bond-servants the prophets and to the saints and to those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth.”* (v.18)

The nations are against God and become enraged when we worship God! The nations symbolize the strongholds in the carnal or natural mind, and they war against God. Paul tells us that the flesh is always against the Spirit! Our lustful thoughts and imaginations are loathe to give up their supremacy and admit defeat! This triggers strong passion and renewed effort in their war against the rule of the Spirit.

“And Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged.” The Greek word THUMOS, translated wrath, expresses an inward feeling or passion. God’s passion for truth is aroused. It is God who causes us to become aware of the lies we have incorporated as truth. The time has come for all our lustful thoughts to be judged, for it is the old heart that is evil; it is filled with lies, revenge, bitterness, harshness and murder!

Thoughts form the basis for our actions. How do we judge our thoughts and emotions? **Receiving truth enables us to judge the thoughts that do not come from God.** Without truth it is impossible to make a correct judgment. Only the thoughts that come from God contain life; all other thoughts are in the death realm, and we need to judge them as being dead. Once we recognize that they are lies, we will no longer believe them nor listen to them. We need to acknowledge that thoughts from the carnal mind do not contain life, and are therefore dead.

Those who fear God’s name are rewarded with life and truth! In order to receive truth we need to be willing to leave the traditions that do not have their source in God, and be ready to accept persecution from the religious church. **As we walk in truth we will be rewarded with more truth!** We will see that obedience to God’s word brings joy and victory. Truth does away with the destruction the carnal mind has brought into being! It frees us from our bondage to sin, and brings glory to God!

“And the temple (NAOS) of God which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple, and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm.” (v.19)

God does not live in a temple made with hands, but in the new creation body He has created. This temple of God (which we are) has its residency in heaven - and heaven is the throne of God. His throne symbolizes the government of God. Jesus said that the kingdom of God (His government) is within us. We have been baptized into the body of Christ and His body is a body of truth! God dwells in truth! So our new body is a spiritual body of truth! All the lies and deception resident in our carnal mind have to be done away with through the teaching of the Holy Spirit.

After the temple was duly measured (judged) and approved, it is opened and an unveiling takes place. Now it becomes apparent what the new covenant has accomplished in us. **This is the covenant that God made with Himself, namely, that He would be responsible for our redemption!** The revelation of this covenant emphasizes and proves God’s ability to do what He has promised to do! He has covenanted to provide a salvation that changes us on the inside. The open temple reveals that He has kept His promise. His living presence abides in His sons! As Paul said, *“Christ in you, the hope of glory!”*

The opening of the NAOS is accompanied by five spectacular events. There were flashes of lightning, sounds, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm! "*Flashes of lightning*" send light into the darkness; they illumine our darkness! Have you ever noticed that our illumination of a certain truth comes to us suddenly? All at once our understanding is enlightened! It comes with the speed of lightning, and we see something we had not previously seen!

The "*sounds*" or voices are coming from an open temple. These voices do not bring confusion. Isaac was confused when he heard Jacob's voice coming from someone he supposed was Esau for the hands were like Esau's hands. The voice and the hands did not match! Far too often we have heard an unmatched message. Trying to match the work of the flesh with a spiritual voice brings confusion. The message and the messenger have to become one! Then the message will go forth in power!

"*Peals of thunder*" occur. God's messages to us are often accompanied by peals of thunder. Thunder is caused by the sudden expansion of air in the path of the power that is in the lightning. When the gospel is preached in the power of the Holy Spirit, noises will be heard! The enemy forces are aroused and religiosity will put up a fight!

The opening of the temple was also accompanied by "an earthquake." Earthquakes are very frightening! The earth shakes, and we feel our foundation is being taken away. Truth shakes our foundation of religious traditions and legalism. **We need an earthquake to roll away the stone that zealously guards the lifeless body of religious forms and rituals entombed in our carnal mind!** Once they are exposed, they can be discarded.

"*And a great hailstorm.*" The revelation of the new covenant is also accompanied by a great hailstorm! Hail sweeps away our refuge of lies! (**Isa. 28:17**) The presence of God reveals the areas that are in need of change! This seems like a hard message to us. Hailstones are pellets of frozen water - and water is needed for the preservation of life. When frozen water is thrown at us, it hurts. But these hard life-giving words are necessary to get our attention and to bring us into maturity. Without them we would continue in our sleep of complacency.

God's wonderful salvation, faithfulness and power are proclaimed by the life of His people! The life and the words have to match! **The temple in heaven is opened when the life of Christ is revealed in us.** The minister and the message have become one! **Our oneness with Christ is revealed when His love and forgiveness rule in us in the midst of rejection, pain, persecution, and difficulties!** May God's love radiate from us at all times!

Chapter 12

“A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; and she was with child; and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth.” (vv.1-2)

“A great sign appeared in heaven.” What an interesting phenomenon - a great sign in heaven! The heavenly realm symbolizes the spiritual realm, so it transcends the earthly realm. Our natural understanding can never ascend to the heavenly or spiritual understanding because it is always fighting it.

This supernatural sign in the heavenly or spiritual realm focuses on a woman who is clothed with the sun! In the scriptures the church is always referred to in the feminine gender. This is very clearly stated in **Ephesians 5:25-26**. *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her with the washing of water with the word.”* Thus we see that the woman represents the church. The woman or church is clothed with the sun.

Again we go to the Old Testament to receive illumination. In **Genesis 37** we read about Joseph’s dreams. Jacob didn’t have any trouble identifying the symbolic meaning of the sun, moon and stars - *“Shall I and your mother and your brothers bow down to you?”* The sun represented the father, the moon the mother, and the stars the sons. In symbolism we see that this woman is clothed with the Father God’s nature.

“And the moon is under her feet.” The moon represented the mother in Joseph’s dream, so the moon typifies a woman. Here we have two women - one woman having another woman under her feet. The two women represent two different churches - the true church and the Babylonian church. The Babylonian church is the false church that encompasses all the religious thinking of the carnal mind. This picture tells us that the true church has overcome all that religious thinking. She represents the overcoming church that will have nothing to do with the religious systems of man!

On her head is a crown of twelve stars! The head is the highest realm of every person. That is where our thinking takes place. The crown with the twelve stars tells us what is most important to this church; it tells us what this church is thinking about. Twelve symbolizes the government of God, and the stars represent the elders of the church. These leaders are under the government of God.

The church is in love with Christ, and her thoughts are focused on pleasing Him! Christ showers her with His love, and this love creates in her a desire to please Him and to fulfill His every desire. Our thoughts produce corresponding actions. This church is in the process of becoming one with the message she proclaims! **While she is still imperfect and in the process of being formed into the image of Christ, God looks at her and declares her to be beautiful and under His government!**

This woman has an intimate relationship with her husband for she is with child. A child is growing within her. In **Gal. 4:19** Paul said, *“My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you.”* This is not speaking of the birth of a baby, but of the birth of a mature son. Peter tells us that we have been born of an incorruptible seed. An incorruptible seed cannot bring forth anything that is corruptible! What a word of encouragement!

The church is producing a mature son, but the birth process is difficult! It involves a struggle for life by both mother and child. We have been so indoctrinated by religiosity that it is very difficult to get it out of our system. Our birth process to maturity is not complete until every vestige of the Babylonian church has been eradicated. In order to mature we have to come out of religiosity. This stirs up the religious mind in immature Christians, resulting in rejection and probable persecution from them.

How strong is our desire for acceptance? We may not realize how strong our desire for acceptance is, and how much we are willing to sacrifice for it. Do we desire the acceptance of people more than the acceptance of God? If we don't come out of the religious system, we'll remain in its norms and dogmas! No wonder we are exhorted to come out of everything that hinders our growth into maturity!

“And another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems.” (v.3) Now another sign appeared in the spirit realm, and John's attention was drawn to a great red dragon. This dragon is described as having seven heads and ten horns. Then in verse 9 he is identified as being the serpent of old, who is called the devil, and Satan who is the deceiver. These are not three entities; they are three names identifying the same entity.

The word red is translated from the Greek PURRHOS, meaning fiery red - the same word that is used in chapter 6. When this word is used in connection with our redemption, it signifies a purifying process that rids us of our fleshly thoughts, but when used in connection with the dragon or serpent, it signifies a process that works in the opposite direction. The dragon wants our nature to become like his nature, so he wants to do away with all our trust in God.

As we look at this seven-headed red monster with ten horns, let's remember that this description is encoded in symbolism. The seven heads speak of complete authority, and the ten horns of complete power. His power and authority are confined to the earthly realm for remember, the serpent is restricted to eating the dust of the earth!

Jesus told the religious Jews that they were of their father the devil. Why? Because they were receiving the devil's thoughts and lies. They received the lies that were in their carnal mind. When Adam ate the forbidden fruit, he received the devil's mind - the mind that is always against the Spirit!

The dragon's rule is confined to the carnal mind. There he rules humanity's thought processes! Humanity is in captivity to the rule of the dragon. To be freed from its rule we have to receive God's rule. To receive His rule we have to be put into the new man, the Christ Man, receive His thoughts, and be led by the mind of Christ!

“And on his head were seven diadems.” The word diadem comes from the Greek DIADEMA, and is derived from diadeo, which means to bind around. A diadem was a kingly ornament for the head. Among the Greeks and Romans it was the distinctive badge of royalty. There is a difference between a diadem and a crown. Crown comes from the Greek STEPHANOS, which denotes (a) a victor's crown or (b) a token of public honor for distinctive service. The dragon considers himself to be royalty, for he rules the carnal mind.

“And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven, and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child.” (v.4)

What a powerful tail! **Isaiah 9:15** tells us that the prophet who teaches falsehood is the tail. The dragon's tail represents the false prophets; they speak the words and ideas that are given them by the dragon. Through these lies the stars, sons or elders, are cast down to the earth to an earthy realm of thinking. The heavenly realm speaks of life, and the earthy realm denotes the death realm. So the dragon gets the elders to interpret the scriptures to the satisfaction of the self-life, and they pass these ideas on to their followers.

Let's look at some examples. The false prophets tell us that we need inner healing after we have become Christians. They say our problems are due to some hurts way back - even while we were in the womb. Instead of recognizing that the old man can never become righteous, they try to heal him. The scriptures tell us that in Adam all die, and in Christ all are made alive. Instead of teaching Christians to walk according to the Spirit, the false teachers teach them to walk in the zealotry of self-effort, and to blame others or the past for their failures.

Another popular lie that many Christians now believe is that God does not want His children to suffer. Yet Jesus Himself had to learn obedience by the things that He suffered. Suffering reveals the extent of our obedience, but it is not pleasant. The rapture theory that promises escape from the great tribulation period sounds inviting, but it is in complete opposition to God's teaching. God wants His children to be overcomers! They are to overcome the fears, bitterness, unforgiveness, etc., that the dragon tries to implant and nourish in them. **Revelation** chapters 2 and 3 repeatedly state that the promises are for the overcomers! We need to face the obstacles that are put in our pathway, and overcome them by faith! The process of overcoming builds Christ's nature in us, and therefore we need our trials and difficulties.

Why was the dragon standing before the woman? He wanted to intimidate her and fill her with fear by saying that he would devour her child. In other words, God could not protect her child. The dragon uses fear to manipulate and control and to fill our mind with doubt and confusion. The devil keeps on trying to topple our faith. Just because we were overcomers yesterday doesn't mean the devil will back off today. He kept trying to get Jesus to yield to the desires of the flesh to the very end, but he was never successful! Failures do not daunt the devil.

The birthing process activated the dragon. What does the birthing process symbolize? It typifies our birth out of our carnal, soulish thinking. Living out of the mind of Christ is the mark of maturity! When this occurs, the dragon loses control because the spiritual realm is beyond his reach! The soul includes our desires, our mind, our emotions - the basis for our whole sense of being. The dragon latches on to our soulish desires for comfort, ease, prosperity, control, health, power, pride, revenge, self-indulgence, etc. **When we are birthed out of the soul realm, the dragon has lost his point of contact.** Jesus said, *"For the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me."* (Jn. 14:30) Jesus was only listening to the Father, so the dragon or devil could not find a point of contact to connect Him with earthly desires!

Jesus was birthed as a Son at His baptism, and the Holy Spirit came on Him in the form of a dove, and a voice from heaven declared, *"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."* After His baptism, Jesus always followed the leading of the Spirit. Since He no longer followed the law, the religious hierarchy was enraged. Jesus was accused of eating with sinners, healing on the Sabbath, drinking too much wine, mingling with the wrong crowd, even calling God His Father! Similarly, we too will be targeted with accusations after we are birthed out of our natural thinking. The religious system cannot understand nor tolerate the spiritual mind.

Jesus received the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, but the disciples received the Holy Spirit in the form of tongues of fire. Why the difference? Jesus was pure and

holy; He did not need the refining fire! The Spirit came on Him in the gentleness of a dove. However we need the consuming fire of the Holy Spirit to purify us from all unholy thoughts and desires!

The dragon wanted to devour the male child, but he was unable to do so. All the dragon's tactics and accusations cannot vanquish the male child! The dragon cannot accomplish his desires! Sometimes it seems to us that he is victorious, but his victories are only temporary. He only wins some skirmishes but the victory belongs to the sons by the power of the Holy Spirit. God has promised that all things will be subjected to Him, and He is able to fulfill His promises and accomplish His desires!

“And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne.” (v.5) She gave birth to a son - HUIOS which means a mature son! This is a foreign concept to the natural mind. Birth actually speaks of the beginning or origin of something. For example, we speak of the birth of a nation or the birth of an idea. In this passage God refers to the church as giving birth to a mature son - one who has overcome the dictates of the self- life!

This male child or son is to rule the nations with a rod of iron! This sounds rather ominous, like the rule of an officious dictator, doesn't it? What does the rod of iron symbolize? Iron symbolizes something that is unbendable. What is unbendable in the spiritual realm? It's truth, isn't it? Truth cannot be changed, nor can it be bent, for then it would no longer be truth.

In **Rev. 2:26-27** we read, *“He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations and he shall rule them with a rod of iron.”* This passage identifies the overcomers with the male child! They are given authority to rule the nations. They have learned to rule the nations (imagination) within themselves, and are therefore ready to rule the nations that surround them.

As soon as this mature child comes into being, it is caught up to God and to His throne! The throne indicates authority to rule. This son becomes part of the royal priesthood and the twenty-four elders who sit on the throne with God. God's throne is not like the man-made thrones here on earth. Everything in God's domain lives; his life infiltrates and dominates everything! So His throne is a living throne! It is in every mature son of God, and every mature son is on the throne. **They are governed by the life of God, and they govern the nations by His life!**

This event has nothing to do with our physical death; it takes place in the spiritual unseen realm! **The spiritually mature Christians are not ruled by their circumstances; they rule over their circumstances!**

“Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.” (v.6) Young’s translation gives us some insight into this. It reads, *“that there they may nourish her – days a thousand, two hundred, sixty.”*

After the mature sons are birthed out of the church system, the woman flees into a wilderness - a place that has been prepared for her by God! There is not much food in the wilderness. Many years ago, God led the children of Israel into the wilderness - a place between the bondage of Egypt and the promised land; and fed them supernatural food. God did not forsake them even when they grumbled and complained. What an awesome picture of God’s unending love! God loves the church even though she still needs to mature. He has a place for her in the wilderness where she needs help to survive.

“They may nourish her.” “They” refers to the sons that have been birthed out of her! Those who have come into maturity must not despise the church that is still in a mixture of truth and religiosity. They must honor her and help her, for she gave them birth. God loves her and He knows how to bring her into maturity. The one thousand two hundred and sixty days (three and a half years) refer to her time of ministry - see chapter 11:3 for a more detailed explanation.

“And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war, and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.” (vv.7-9)

“There was war in heaven.” This is not a war that took place in prehistoric times. This war in heaven takes place in the spiritual realm within us. It is an ongoing battle with every situation that seeks to rob us of our peace. The kingdom of heaven is within us! The dragon, Satan or the serpent (these are three names for the rule that is against the Spirit) cannot rule the mind of Christ. The natural mind does not want to lose control, so it fights the thoughts that come from the mind of Christ! This battle takes place in our mind.

But the dragon and his angels or messengers are no match for Michael and his messengers! The Hebrew name Michael means “who is like God”. We know that Jesus Christ is the exact representation of the invisible God, so Michael symbolizes Jesus Christ. He and His messengers are fighting for us! He gives us words of encouragement and sends us messengers who help us along the way. The good news is that Christ, in union with us, always wins!

Satan is a deceiver. He presents his lies in a form that resembles truth in order to deceive us. But Christ is the truth, and truth reveals the lie! The dragon is thrown out of his usurped place of rulership when we believe the truth. In other words, he and his demonic host have lost their control over us, for they can only access and influence the natural mind. They can only feed on dust (the natural mind). Christians who are living in the earthy realm will continually be deceived. The new creation man believes what God says and lives out of the mind of Christ! The overcomer has no duality in him because he has overcome the thinking of the natural mind, and is now living in the mind of Christ.

“Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, ‘Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night.’” (v.10)

“NOW!” What a wonderful message is contained in this short word! Our salvation is for NOW! We don’t have to wait for our physical body to die before we can enjoy our salvation! We have been born again of an imperishable or incorruptible seed! We have been born of His Spirit, and are now a new creation! **Just as a newborn child has to mature before the nature of the father can be seen in him, so we have to mature spiritually for the nature of our heavenly Father to be seen in us.** When Christ is formed in us we come into maturity, and it reveals the authority we have in Christ!

Satan is an accuser! He accuses us of many inadequacies: of not having prayed enough, praised enough, given enough, loved enough, read the Bible enough and the list goes on! He even accuses us of having listened to him! To exonerate himself and us, he then blames our ancestors, our parents, our teachers, and others. If they had not done what they did, we wouldn’t have those problems.

Our salvation and deliverance from our bondage to Satan’s accusations and our carnal mind came in Christ’s crucifixion, resurrection and the outpouring of His Spirit! In Christ there is no condemnation! When Satan’s accusations come to us, we can joyfully say that they do not belong to us, for we are in Christ, the new man. His accusations only apply to the old man - the man who is dead in his trespasses and sins. The new man that we are in Christ has been freed from believing Satan’s lies! **When Christ rules in us, the accuser is knocked off this throne!**

“And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.” (v.11)

How do we overcome Satan's accusations?

1) By the blood of the Lamb! We know that the soul is in the blood; life is in the Spirit! Our soul is the seat of our mind, emotions and will, and they give us our sense of being. The blood of the Lamb symbolizes the soul of Christ. What sense of being did He have? He knew that God was His Father, and He only desired to do the Father's will! He did not have any sin-consciousness, any guilt, or any desire to do His own will! He lived in truth, and truth does not receive lies! We too will overcome Satan's accusations and temptations when we receive the sense of being Christ had! This is how we apply the blood of Christ!

2) By the word (LOGOS) of our testimony! We know that Jesus Christ is the Word, the LOGOS. We overcome every fiery dart of the enemy when Christ is our testimony! We do not overcome by our own efforts or by anything we have accomplished; **we overcome by relying on everything Christ has accomplished!**

3) By not loving our self-life, i.e., our soul. The word "life" should read "soul" from the Greek PSUCHE. We are not to love our soul, for it loves an easy, comfortable life and the pleasures of this world. Love for ease, honor, acceptance and recognition forms an attachment to this world and these things begin to possess us. **The love of self keeps us from receiving Christ's life. That love has to die.** *"Except a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it cannot bring forth fruit."* Often our feelings contradict what God is telling us to do. When we yield to our feelings, we love our soul too much; this keeps that love alive. Adam and Eve yielded to their feelings; the fruit looked good to them, so they disobeyed God. Humanity calls that making a wrong choice, but God calls that loving our soul too much! We are not letting that love die! This is the root cause of disobedience!

"For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea; because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time." (v.12)

"For this reason, rejoice." We can rejoice because in Christ our bondage to sin is broken! The accuser has been overcome! We don't need to grovel and cringe under all the accusations that the accuser levels at us! His power over us has been broken, and we must realize that it has been broken, and that under no circumstances do we want to restore it! We have reason for rejoicing! We can now be happy and in a good frame of mind! We're at peace with God!

Not everyone can participate in this rejoicing. It is only for those who dwell in the heavens, in the spiritual realm that is in Christ. Those who abide in Christ live in this realm. Christ is the anointing, the truth and the life! Abiding in Him means living in Him - in the truth and life that He is! **His life takes us out of death, and**

His truth takes us out of the lies and deception of the natural mind! Soulless emotions cannot rule those who live in the heavens for they have been freed from their bondage to self!

“Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time.” A woe is pronounced on those who live on the earth (in their carnal mind) and on those who live in the sea (in the ignorance of who God is). Why? Because they have not experienced the freedom that is ours in Christ. The devil is still free to inveigle them with his lies. Christ’s resurrection marked the devil’s downfall! It was bad news for the devil when Jesus Christ was given all authority in heaven and on earth! It filled him with wrath. The fact that there are now those who are dwelling in the heavens where he can’t get at them, emphasizes the actuality that his time is short. Once Christians realize the authority they have in Christ, the devil realizes that his time to hassle Christians is coming to an end!

The dragon’s evil and depraved mind now sought to take it out on the woman who had given birth to the male child. *“And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child.”* (v.13) Notice that his wrath was aimed at the woman, not at the earth and sea dwellers. He already had them where he wanted them. They already were entangled in his web of lies and suffering the results of their wrong beliefs. But he could still persecute the woman, the church.

The dragon cannot enter the Spirit realm, so he aims his attacks at the soul. Our new birth makes us a new spiritual being, and places us into the life-giving spiritual man. When we understand and function in who we are in Christ, the devil can’t touch us. But he can still attack our soul, i.e. on the level of our thinking, feelings and emotions. He knows all the tricks of his trade, and he’ll do everything he can to discourage us and get us into unbelief, choice and disobedience.

“But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.” (v.14) Again, the serpent’s efforts are foiled! The woman is given two wings for her protection and for her flight to the wilderness where a place has been prepared for her. The wilderness typifies the journey between the bondage of Egypt and the abundance of the Promised Land. The bareness of the wilderness cannot supply the necessary food for survival, so she needs supernatural help. Our dependence should always be on God, but when there is a natural abundance we tend to forget this. The wilderness makes us aware of our needs. God is faithful in supplying her needs during her 3½ years (symbolizing her time of ministry) in the wilderness. Her ministry there is to give birth to sons of God! These sons are birthed out of the church system, and are called the firstfruit.

God will bring in the harvest later on.

“From the presence of the serpent.” The Concordant Literal translation reads, *“from the face of the serpent.”* We identify people by their faces not by other body parts. The imagery here reveals that the church is protected from any identification with the serpent. So-called churches that identify with the serpent’s thinking have no part in God’s kingdom. God’s protection surrounds the church that does not want the serpent’s thinking, and He protects her even though she has her problems and many wrong ideas!

We can identify with that in our own lives. We see how His protection surrounded us during our growing up years when we viewed His dealings with us from our own wrong perspective. So many corrections were necessary! But His grace and patience endured and is still enduring!

“And the serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, so that he might cause her to be swept away with the flood. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth.” (vv.15-16)

“And the serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth.” The water came out of the serpent’s mouth and the source of our water is very important! If the source is unclean, the water will be unclean. Water is essential for the sustenance of life. God gives us the water of life, that is, He gives us life-giving words! The serpent does not have life, so he can only give us words that are in the death realm. His words are deadly poisonous and they contradict God’s words. The serpent’s deceitful words poured out like a rising river that overflows its banks! **His objective is to do away with the church, and tries to have her drown in his lies and lifeless philosophies.**

Accusations also comprise part of his technique. He accuses us of doing too little to merit salvation, of not being perfect, of not being zealous enough, etc. He tries to get us to doubt God’s promises, and tells us that a real tug-of-war is taking place between God and himself, and that he is sure to win. There is no end to his lies for they come from the bottomless pit!

This torrent of lifeless words is directed towards the natural mind. The earth (the natural mind) is open to receiving the devil’s words. Those who are still living according to their natural thinking, accept them. We too were guilty of that when we first became Christians and viewed the spiritual from a natural perspective. In fact many Christians never grow beyond this stage. Natural understanding of spiritual realities gives the serpent a point of contact from which he can harass them. Believing his lies brings us under his control. Receiving the water of life frees us from all his lies.

“And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.”(v.17)

The dragon was enraged with the woman because he couldn't touch her, for she had God's divine protection! Have you ever found yourself in a helpless situation and you were thwarted in your desire? Do you remember the rage you felt and the strong desire for revenge? I mean, before you were a Christian, of course!

The dragon vowed to make war with the woman's offspring. You see, that is all he could do - make war. He would make it difficult for them. If he couldn't win the war, he could get them entangled in warfare with him, and that would keep their minds occupied with fighting instead of resting in the finished work of Christ.

The dragon majors in attacking our identity in Christ. Once we realize that in Christ we are spiritual beings, the dragon has lost his point of contact on that level. But that does not deter him from attacking us on the soul level. He does this from within and from without! He tells us that we may be forgiven, but we are still sinners, and then he proceeds to point out all our failures, shortcomings and sins. He tells us to be more zealous, to try harder, to do more good works, etc. He tries to plant doubt in our mind regarding our salvation and God's ability to keep His promises.

Jesus Christ's greatest attacks from the religious hierarchy came in regard to His identity. He was not crucified because of His good works, but because He said that God was His Father! If we have God as our Father, it naturally follows that we are His children! God is spirit, so we are spiritual beings! It's awesome to realize that we have been fathered by God! God wants us to know this, but the dragon wants us to be ignorant of this wonderful truth! So he sets up roadblocks (doubts) within us, and makes sure we will be rejected and persecuted for our beliefs from those who accept the flood of words from the dragon.

Those who hold to the testimony of Jesus cannot be touched. God keeps them! They can be martyred, but just as Jesus cried out, *“Father forgive them, for they know not what they do,”* so they echo the same sentiment! Stephen's dying words were, “Lord do not hold this sin against them!” The undying love of those who are martyred proves that they truly are sons of God!

Chapter 13

The central purpose of this book is to bring us a revelation of Jesus Christ and His perfect redemption in all of humanity. Christ's redemption can only be perfect and complete when it has abolished all the works of the devil in every human being. A true revelation of Christ is based on the knowledge of the total redemption and restoration of all mankind. As long as we think His redemption is only for a fraction of humanity, our concept of Christ is marred and limited. The calamities and destruction that take place in us are necessary to rid us of everything that is not of Christ. The extent and magnitude of these calamities show us that Christ's redemption is thorough and complete, and encompasses all of humanity!

“And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore. Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten diadems, and on his heads were blasphemous names.” (v.1)

The sea is a picture of humanity, and the troubled sea is a picture of unregenerate humanity tossed to and fro by the storms of life. Out of humanity comes a beast. What does this beast symbolize? When Paul fought with beasts at Ephesus, he did not fight with four-footed beasts, but with religious people who were against his gospel - people who did not believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (**1 Cor. 15:32**) So this beast represents the unbelieving heart or nature of unregenerate or natural humanity.

Notice how this beast fits the description of the dragon in chapter 12:3. He also has ten horns and seven heads. But the dragon's diadems are on his heads, while the beast's diadems are on his horns. This description is encoded in symbolism. The ten-horned beast (ten symbolizing completeness, and the horns symbolizing power) with seven heads (seven symbolizing perfection) speaks of complete power and perfect authority in the beast realm. His power and authority are confined to the sea and earth realms — for he arises out of unregenerate humanity.

The close resemblance of the beast to the dragon shows that natural man's nature is aligned with the dragon's thinking. It is on par with religious thinking, for Jesus told the religious Jews that they were of their father the devil. (**Jn. 8:44**) Religiosity comes from the carnal mind, and that mind is always against the Spirit!

The dragon's rule is confined to the carnal mind; he rules humanity's thought processes by appealing to the lusts and desires of the carnal mind! This puts humanity

into captivity and under the rule of the dragon. To be freed from his rule we have to be put into the new man, the Christ man, and live out of the mind of Christ!

“And on his horns were ten diadems.” The word diadem comes from the Greek DIADEMA, and is derived from *diadeo*, which means **to bind around**. A diadem was a kingly ornament for the head. Among the Greeks and Romans it was the distinctive badge of royalty. There is a difference between a diadem and a crown. The word “crown” comes from the Greek STEPHANOS, and it denotes a victor’s crown or a token of public honor for distinctive service.

The beast claims royalty on the basis of his power. His power is rooted in the law. Humanity loves its laws – the laws it has created. It loves its doctrines together with their boundaries and limitations, its routines and its rituals. Laws give people power over others. They give people a standard according to which they can measure themselves with one another, and the ability to list their accomplishments, and to point fingers at the non-achievers. They enable people to establish blame. What a powerful religious way of heaping condemnation on non-conformists!

God’s way is completely different! He has given us the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus! His spirit is a spirit of love, life and truth! Love conquers hate, bitterness and resentments! His love has only one boundary and one limitation – it cannot love unrighteousness! God’s love for righteousness is so great that He gave His Son to die for a lost humanity! **In so doing, He made a way for unrighteous humanity to receive Christ’s righteousness.** His Spirit within us enables us to love even as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her! We also are to love and give ourselves for the church, and for those who do not know Christ in order that they may get to know Him!

The Holy Spirit gives us power to become witnesses of Jesus Christ! *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you; and you shall be My witnesses.”* (Acts 1:8) God gives us power to become His witnesses! It does not say that we are to witness **about** Him, but to **be** His witnesses. His power enables us to do His will, and when we do His will we are not doing our own will. Our authority to rule with Christ comes through and in our submission to Christ. It is a life-giving rule! In contrast to Christ’s rule, the rule of the beast brings fear, destruction and death. He forces his rule on people in order to dominate and tyrannize them. His power lies in his ability to deceive and to destroy.

“And on his heads were blasphemous names.” These blasphemous names reveal his contempt of God. Contempt speaks of superiority. So blasphemous names are names of exaltation, and they indicate what his nature is like. Natural man has a problem with submitting himself and his desires to God’s will. In fact, his ego is so strong and powerful that he exalts himself to a place where he is a god to himself.

Isaiah described man's aspirations in *chapter 14:13-14*. "*But you said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.'*" This is not a censure against Satan, for maggots and worms are not a covering for him. (v.11) This is a description of man's pride, and how he exalts himself over and against God.

Humanity's pride is very evident. It continually exalts its thinking above God's decrees. **Every act of disobedience to God's directives is man deifying himself by placing his thinking above God's commandments.** He believes that his ideas are superior to God's declarations, and he is very good at justifying his reasoning. Humanity raises its thinking above the clouds of heaven and makes itself its own god!

"And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority." (v.2) This exposure of the beastly character of natural man is a frightening depiction!

Let's look at the similarity of the beasts in Daniel's vision and the beast that John saw. Daniel saw four beasts coming up from the sea: the first looked like a lion, the second like a bear, the third like a leopard and the fourth beast was identified by its strength, its very large iron teeth and its ability to devour and destroy. (**Dan. 7:3-7**) These beasts represented government systems as well as negative or unspiritual aspects of this world's order. The lion was given a human mind and two feet to enable it to stand as a man. (v. 4) This indicates that the beast has reasoning power, thus giving us the false impression that it understands man's need and that it will benefit him. It rules through humanism and secularism. These ideas are against the rule of God.

The second beast, resembling a bear, was told to arise and devour much meat. This symbolized that its rule would bring oppression, religious persecution, war, etc. Unless you obey this government's decrees, you will be devoured. The third beast that looked like a leopard was given dominion. Its four heads indicate its greed for complete power, and this would include social, economic, political and theological dominance. The fourth beast's large iron teeth capture our attention! They were extremely strong, and they devoured and crushed, and whatever had not been destroyed was trampled down with its feet. This speaks of tyranny and cruelty!

It's interesting to notice that what Daniel saw in four beasts, John saw in one beast – but in a different order. Each beast represents a standard characteristic of the worldly lifestyle or bestial system. It is found in every stratum and avenue of society,

whether it is religious, political, economic or family-oriented. And it is always greedy for power, and it governs by force. The consequences for failing to comply are horrendous!

The beast John saw looked like a leopard. A leopard draws our attention to his many spots. It is quite obvious that the leopard does not represent the church of Jesus Christ, for His church is without spot and wrinkle! Spots remind us of flaws - this beast has flaws in his character! He may make a good first impression, but he does not have the character to back it up; he cannot be trusted!

This was a strange beast indeed! He looked like a leopard, but his feet were like a bear's feet. Feet symbolize a lifestyle, and a bear's feet represent a very cruel and fierce nature. This is the lifestyle of the world! The world has no compassion for those who are not like-minded. History reveals the ruthlessness, destructiveness and cruelty of human nature! This nature, embedded in religiosity, gave rise to the barbarous destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, and the Spanish Inquisition and the holocaust of the Jews - to give just a few examples.

This beast had the mouth of a lion. A lion's mouth causes us to think of very strong teeth - teeth that can tear, devour and destroy! Jesus said, "*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.*" (Jn. 10:10) **He steals our strength by telling us that God's promises are only for the future; he kills and destroys by his lies, thus keeping people from receiving the truth.** Jesus is the way, the truth and the life! He came to save us out of the lion's mouth by giving us His life! Whatever trait of the beast is portrayed in us, Christ can purge it out.

"And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority." The dragon can only do his work through people, and therefore wants to gain control over them. To get them under his control he dangles a carrot before their eyes by telling them that he will show them an easy way out of their difficulties. When people act according to the dragon's incentives and thought processes, the dragon gains power over them. The more they obey him, the more he controls them.

When Adam and Eve listened to the serpent and absorbed his false logic, they received his thinking. Their obedience to the beast gave him power over them and their offspring. The human race now has the dragon's thought processes. This gives humanity a deceived mind, false logic, selfhood and selfish actions. **Humanity can only be made free from its deception and selfhood by receiving the mind of Christ!**

"I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast; they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast, saying, 'Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?'" (vv.3-4)

“His fatal wound was healed.” Notice that this is past tense. It does not say that one of his heads will be wounded and will be healed. It was healed! We don’t wait for this to happen. Our curiosity is aroused and we wonder when this took place.

We need to remember that the beast represents unregenerate man’s nature. In other words, it represents the old Adam man’s nature. In Genesis 2 God said to Adam, *“But from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”* Adam listened to the serpent, disobeyed God, and received the mind of the beast. Now his deceived mind told him that God was his enemy, so he tried to hide from God. His disobedience became his death sentence; his mind no longer functioned in life, but in death. The mind that is set on the flesh cannot please God for it is hostile toward God. Adam’s mind had become hostile toward God! Although Adam did not die physically until 930 years later, **his ability to think God’s thoughts died.** To compensate for this lack, he became religious. He created his own religion and works to bring about his own salvation. This gave the impression that his deadly wound was healed. So humanity followed after the beast and worshiped the dragon. Humanity still worships its own thoughts and imaginations!

Man cannot relinquish his own thoughts and receive God’s thoughts because his own ideas seem so real and true to him! Although God’s thoughts are higher than our thoughts, we stubbornly resist them. Whenever we place our own thoughts above God’s thoughts, we worship our own thoughts. This is worshiping the dragon. We do not need a physical image of the dragon to be dragon worshipers. **Disobedience to the word of God is dragon worship!**

Humanity’s adulation of self is summarized in the words, *“Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?”* Man falsely thinks that he is in control and that he does not need God!

“And there was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies; and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him.” (v.5) Arrogant words involve self-exaltation. Man can never be the greatest, but in his own mind and in his own deductions he is. He may not admit it, but every act of disobedience to God proves this mindset. This great deception is the mark of the beast stamped indelibly on the forehead of man.

But notice that the beast’s authority is limited! It is limited to forty-two months or 3½ years. In **Rev. 11** we have already explained that 42 months symbolizes one’s time of ministry, and therefore it does not refer to an actual 3½ years; it is a picture or an idea. For example, **the beast’s time of ministry in each one of us ends at whatever time we receive Christ!** Christ takes us out of the old Adam man and puts us into

the new Christ man! **The beast has no authority over those who are in Christ, for the truth frees them from the lies of the beast and from their bondage to self.**

Due to their ignorance of the truth, many Christians live in a duality; they still think the dragon has power over them. **They do not understand that Christ, the truth, has made them free from their bondage to sin, and that through their new birth they are now spiritual beings.** Paul said, *“Nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.” (Rom. 7:18)* The lustings and the selfish desires of the flesh are the cause of sin in my members. The good news is that as spiritual beings we are no longer in the flesh. In **Romans 8:9** Paul said, *“However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you.”*

Our soul life is ruled either by the high realm of the Spirit or the low realm of the flesh. The soul is our sense of being, and our sense of being is formed by our circumstances, experiences, emotions, will and desires. **When the soul is ruled by the Spirit, we will do the things that please God; when it is ruled by the flesh, the sin in our members will take over.**

Even though we belong to Christ, a war still exists between the flesh and the Spirit. The flesh is always against the Spirit, and the Spirit is always against the flesh. The flesh does not want to hear the Spirit, nor is it able to hear the Spirit. This emphasizes the importance of being filled with the Holy Spirit. He can only rule within us when we have ears to hear Him and the desire to obey Him! Whenever we shut out the Holy Spirit, the flesh rises up to do its work – work that is always against the truth! We have the anointing of the Holy Spirit within us, but we must always have the willingness to listen to Him!

“And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, that is, those who dwell in heaven. It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him.” (vv.6-7)

How does he speak blasphemies against God? Every time he tells us that we cannot trust God, that God will not keep His promises, that we should look at our own track record for our salvation, that he is stronger than God, etc., he blasphemes God’s name! In fact, **every lie is a blasphemy against God!**

These blasphemies are the result of pride and unbelief. The blasphemies out of pride are more easily recognized than those that come out of unbelief, for the latter may even sound very religious and pious. When we emphasize our humility by belittling ourselves, we are actually belittling God’s workmanship, for we are His workmanship. **God says we are new creations in Christ, we are His children, we are born of the Spirit, and we have a high calling in Christ Jesus!** Humility is evident in our

willingness to receive the Spirit's teaching and correction, and to submit our will to God's will. Every disagreement with God is a blasphemy against His omniscience and righteousness. Unbelief in God's declarations is blasphemy!

In the midst of our so-called humility, we may still depend on our own resources and shrewdness instead of believing God. When our dependence on self fails, we promise ourselves to do better next time. **Instead of repenting of our lack of faith, we bewail our failures.** God has told us that without Him we can do nothing that pleases Him, but our pride and lack of faith do not let us submit to His word. Pride in self is blasphemy against our Maker!

That is why we need to humble ourselves. God hears the prayers of those who are humble in heart. The humble will not impose their ideas over and above God's word! They will hear the Spirit and adjust their lifestyle to fit God's directives! **Living in the life of the Spirit is living in the heavenlies.**

"It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them." In our minds this presents a problem. How can he make war against those who are seated with Christ in heavenly places when he is limited to the earth realm? Satan's power is limited to the carnal realm; he can only attack them when they are living carnally. However, we still wonder how can he overcome the saints when God says that we are kept by His power! Is the beast's power greater than God's keeping power?

Again we look at the life of Jesus! Did Satan win his war over Jesus? Satan could only exert his power over the physical life of Jesus. Even that power was given to him. He had no power over Christ's spiritual life! Christ remained firmly rooted in God's keeping power in the midst of the most horrendous suffering known to man! He knew the Holy Spirit was leading Him, and no amount of suffering could get Him off course! Satan can wield his power through earthly governments to win over the saints as far as their physical life is concerned. Governments can place restrictions on Christians, persecute them and throw them into prison, etc. It looks as though Satan has won, but his victory is limited to the physical! And even that power has to be given him. Jesus said to Pilate, *"You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above."* (John 19:11) The devil cannot take away our life in God, nor can he stop the fruitfulness of that life! **He could not thwart the purpose God had for Christ, and he cannot thwart God's purpose for our life!**

The beast's hate has no limits. He warred against Jesus, so why should we expect him to spare the saints! He can only overcome the saints when this power is given to him, for he cannot go beyond the limits that God sets for him. Jesus knew this, so He was confident in God's plan and authority even while He stood before Pilate. The beast can only have authority over tribes and nations when this power is given

him by God. Though it appears to be a victory, it is not. The devil thought he had won when Jesus was crucified, but the resurrection proved that it was actually Satan's defeat. The devil can never thwart God's plans!

“All who dwell on the earth will worship him, every one whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.” (v.8)

The names of the worshipers of the beast are not written in the book of life because they are dwelling in the death and darkness of their carnal mind. This is dwelling on earth. Earth dwellers live according to the dictates of the carnal mind. They worship the beast because they are blind to spiritual realities, and are not interested in truth. They are satisfied with their traditions and doctrines and intellectual understanding.

The natural mind finds it hard to understand that we can dwell in heaven while we are living on planet earth. It thinks that Christians have to die before they can go to heaven. It does not understand that heaven is a place where God rules, and that we can be under the rule of God while we are living on this earth.

Our submission to the teaching and leading of the Holy Spirit reveals that we are living in the spiritual realm - and that realm is higher than the earth realm. Paul said that we are seated with Christ in heavenly places. Those who dwell in heaven do not worship the beast, for they only worship Christ (truth). They understand that God is spirit, that His word is spirit, that His children are spiritual beings, and that obedience to His words is life! Their life is in Christ, and Christ is their life! They are abiding in Christ while they are on planet earth!

When was the Lamb slain? He was slain from the foundation of the world. We thought He was slain when the Jews and Gentiles crucified Him on the cross. Yet here it says that He was slain from the foundation of the world. To understand this, we have to look at the meaning of the Greek word KATABOLE, translated *foundation*; it literally means, “a casting down”. **When Adam disobeyed God, he cast down the government of God in his heart.** Instead of agreeing with God, he agreed with the serpent. In **Hebrews 11:11** this word is also used of Sarah when she received the ability to conceive. In order to conceive she had to cast down her unbelief.

After Adam and Eve sinned, God said to the serpent, *“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed.”* This tells us that there are two kinds of seed. Jesus Christ is the seed of the woman, and Adam became the seed of the serpent when he listened to the voice of the serpent and obeyed him. Adam knowingly disobeyed God, and thereby cast down God's government in his heart; in so doing, he conceived the serpent's seed. He now had a mind that was dead to spiritual realities and therefore it was against God!

“Every one whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb.” The book of the life of the Lamb is a description of the life that is in the Lamb. In biblical understanding, our name represents our nature. **To have our name written in this book, means that our nature has become one with the nature of the Lamb.** It is not a book that lists millions of names, but it is a revelation of the nature of the life of the Lamb. Everyone who has the life of Christ is in that book, for Christ is our life. A more detailed discussion follows in chapter 20.

“If anyone has an ear, let him hear.” (v.9) This is God’s method of calling our attention to the fact that a spiritual message can only be heard by spiritual ears. It cannot be understood by the natural mind. We are to understand that the words used have a symbolic meaning. In other words, we are to pay attention to the spiritual message encoded in these word pictures.

“If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints.” (v.10) Let’s look at the spiritual message God is giving us.

There are two kinds of captives: captives of self and captives of Christ. Captives of self are those who have been captured by the serpent. The serpent lured Adam and Eve into captivity with his lying and deceptive words, and thus brought all humanity into a bondage to him. Captives of the serpent are captives of the self-life. They are not free to live beyond the boundaries of self.

Being a captive of Christ is very different! There is no deception in Christ! His love and kindness overcome all our fears and doubts about His intention for us! His love persuades us to entrust ourselves to Him! His truth persuades us to believe everything He says about Himself and everything He says about us! This relationship is founded on truth and love! Knowing that His ways are higher than our ways, we follow Him and freely and willingly and joyfully become His bondslaves!

Our captivity to Christ frees us from our captivity to Satan. This is very upsetting to Satan, so he uses a smorgasbord of deceptive ideas to tempt us to obey him. He tells us to choose the lie that appeals to us! If we recognize one lie and resist it, he tempts us with another – just like he tempted Jesus in the wilderness. He tried to lure Jesus into sinning by appealing to His pride, and by offering Him a reward for obeying him. Satan promised to give Jesus the kingdoms of this world if He would worship him. In other words, Jesus could receive the kingdoms through worshipping the serpent instead of through dying a cruel death on the cross! Satan wants us to believe that we can get God’s promises the easy way, that is, through disobedience to God and obedience to himself, but God’s promises are only available to us through

believing and obeying Him. Satan always presents himself in a beautiful light. He gives us the idea that God is very hard on us, while he himself is very concerned about our welfare, and promises us an easy and happy life if we obey him. Satan wants our worship and tries to get it through deception.

Another very effective way of gaining control over people is by flattery. This draws people away from their dependence on Christ. For example, saying that faith is necessary only for those who are not gifted intellectually flatters the ego and consequently encourages them to believe in self instead of in God. Another example is the emphasis on choice. They say that we can become like God by making the right choices. Choice has its root in self, so it appeals to our pride. Those who feed on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil are always choosing. Those who get their sustenance from the tree of life do not choose, for there is no evil in God's life. Just as Christ only functioned in obedience to the Father's will, so His followers do the same.

Christians often need encouragement, especially when they are being reviled or spoken evil of. Instead of encouraging the Christ-life, we often encourage the self-life by blaming others, by looking for an easy solution, or by watering down or minimizing the results of disobedience. These ideas lure them back into Satan's control. Without realizing it, we have encouraged them to return to their bondage to self. Our eyes need to be fixed on Jesus at all times. We know that all his plans and ways for us are good, so we can trust His promise that all things work together for good to those who love Him!

Stephen is a good example for us. He was not distracted from his focus of trust in God when the council members furiously gnashed their teeth at him. In the midst of this fear-inducing situation, Stephen looked intently into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God! He was so full of the Holy Spirit that the matter of life or death was immaterial to him. He was convinced that God's purpose for his life was best.

"If anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed." This message is encoded in symbolism, and does not refer to physical death. Instead, it tells us that this sword is the two-edged sword of the Spirit - the word of God. How can people be killed by the word of God? In **2 Cor. 3:6** Paul said, *"Who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."* When the word of God is applied legalistically, it is used as a Bible club to beat people into submission to their ideas and doctrines. This brings condemnation and death. It takes away hope and joy, and brings people into the bondage of despair, despondency and death. Those who do this prove that they are still in their natural thinking; they have not come out of legalism and into grace - out of death and into life.

“With the sword he must be killed.” The same two-edged sword that was used to kill others now has to kill them, so they can be resurrected into life. It is the life that is in the word of God that kills our legalism and self-righteousness. Just like a grain of wheat has to die before it can come into life and be fruitful, so we have to die and come into life before we can be fruitful. This is not a physical death; it is a death to sin. It comes to us through the sword of the Spirit – the word of God. Condemnation and legalism show that we have not yet died to our natural thinking processes. The sword of the Spirit has to bring death to our natural thinking, so we can come into life. **When the word becomes life in us, we will minister life instead of death!**

“Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints.” The saints know that God’s words will never fail! God is true; He never lies! Circumstances may look dreadful at the moment, but the saints know that God’s word to them will not fail. This persuasion gives them perseverance in the face of the most horrendous trials in this life! *“For I am convinced (persuaded) that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Rom. 8:38-39) This knowledge gives us the encouragement to remain faithful and true in every circumstance of life.

“And I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb and he spoke as a dragon.” (v.11) John saw another beast arise which had great powers.

The first beast came out of the sea of unregenerate humanity, and the next one came out of the earth – out of carnal Christians. These Christians are living in the earthy realm where they only see spiritual realities in the natural seen realm. They think their soulish emotions are a sign of their spirituality, for they do not recognize their carnal condition.

The duality of this beast is recognized by the fact that his appearance did not match the words that came out of his mouth. He looked like a lamb but spoke as a dragon. This beast looks like a Christian, but he doesn’t speak and act like one; he is double-minded. In James we read that a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. Though he has the mind of Christ, he is being ruled by the carnal mind; he may call Jesus, “Lord Jesus,” but that lordship is always in question and under the control of his carnal thinking. So he chooses the direction he thinks he should take, and does what looks right in his own eyes. This demonstrates the lordship of self because self is in charge of its decisions. It thinks it knows what is best for itself! When we are under Christ’s lordship, we don’t choose, because choice is not obedience. **This persuasion causes us to willingly submit to His lordship, and have delight in doing His will!**

The beast looked **like** a lamb (he went to church and was engaged in religious activities), but he couldn't speak like a lamb because he had the heart of a beast. The mouth reveals what is in the heart. The sons (Gr. HUIOS - mature sons) of God have the heart and mind of Christ; they are united with Christ, and He is their life. They have no need to pretend they are something they are not. They have not been called to be actors; they have been called to be sons; they are His body, and therefore one with Him. There is no duality in Christ! In Christ we have union, not duality!

The beast spoke as a dragon. The voice of a dragon induces fear. The dragon intimidates both its subjects and its enemies. **The combination of the lamb and the dragon symbolizes the religious system that comes out of carnal Christians.** Religiosity tries to scare people into heaven. To escape this dreadful fate of eternal hellfire, people are told that they need to get some fire insurance, that is, they need to accept Christ as their Savior. Though their goal is right, the inducement to reach that goal does not agree with Paul who said, *“that the kindness of God leads you to repentance.”* The religious dragon spews out fear, condemnation and the threat of eternal fire if his laws, traditions and practices are not followed, but **God draws us by His love!**

“He exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed.” (v.12) How does the second beast exercise the power of the first beast? Just as the first beast worshiped his own thoughts, so this beast worships his own thoughts and ideas about God and righteousness. He firmly believes that his understanding of God and of the Bible can't possibly be wrong! **Instead of hearing the voice of the Spirit, he only hears the voice of his own understanding, thereby creating his own religious philosophies.**

The religious beast's authority does not come from Christ, but from his own intellectual persuasion. He does not follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, but establishes rules and regulations that attract people to his philosophy. He deceives people into believing that they can be made righteous and holy by their good works. This brings him many followers who are lured into a bondage and dependence on him. But his authority is limited to those who live on earth, that is, in their carnal mind. Those who live in the spiritual or heavenly realm are listening to the Spirit, so they are free from his influence.

“Whose fatal wound was healed.” It does not say that his fatal wound will be healed - it **was** healed. What is that fatal wound? When Adam sinned he received a fatal wound by losing his intimacy with God. To heal this wound he became religious and tried to become like God through his own works. The aprons of fig leaves that he fashioned, signifies righteousness by one's own works. Humanity continues to worship this beast of good works, and practices religiosity instead of godliness.

“He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men.” (v.13) Since these signs are not the work of the Holy Spirit, we know that deception is woven into their fabric. During the time of Moses, the magicians of Egypt pitted their magical arts against God’s power, but they could only copy God’s miracles up to a certain point. By their secret arts they cast down their staffs, and they became serpents, but Aaron’s staff was superior to their staffs, and swallowed them. The magicians could also turn water into blood and bring frogs onto the land of Egypt, but they could not turn the blood back into water, nor could they do away with the frogs. After these miracles they were unable to copy any further miracles God performed!

Here in John’s vision the beast could even make fire come down from heaven! Fire represents judgment that brings purification. The beast is an imitator; he tries to copy God’s power in judgment. For example, the fire that God rained on Sodom and Gomorrah was a judgment against their immoral living. The fire the beast brings down represents the punishments he establishes for those who disobey the requirements of his system. This establishes a better community than one in which everyone can do as he pleases. Everyone appreciates a good community, so the beast is applauded!

However, rules and regulations enforced by punishment bring great bondage. They cannot change the heart of man! Only Christ can do that! To have a truly good life we need to be born again. **We need to be taken out of our self-centeredness and be transformed into Christ-centeredness!**

“And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life. And there was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast might even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed.” (vv.14-15)

In this vision John saw that the beast which arose out of the sea, and the beast which came out of the earth, were one in purpose. The religiosity of the unregenerate is the same religiosity as that of the church system. They work together to cause *those who dwell on earth* (in their natural mind) to worship an image of the beast.

What does an image of the beast look like? An image is not the reality. People often try to promote a certain image of themselves in order to create credibility. The beast’s purpose is to make himself appear so desirable that people will be willing to worship him! So he veils his true self, and sets up an image of himself that portrays him as being very good and as one who is very interested in humanity’s welfare. He

does this by getting religious humanity, as well as the religious church, to have a wrong idea of God and Jesus Christ, so that the false image of the beast is worshiped instead of the true God.

This false image of God is the image of the beast, and it comes in many disguises. The image comes in the guise of a Christian God, a Pentecostal God, a Baptist God, a Jewish God, a Hindu God, a Muslim God, etc. His demands are many! Choose the good – and the good varies according to the doctrines of each god. This false image of God is the image of the beast!

In **Matthew 7:22-23** Jesus said, *“Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’”* **The declaration that “I never knew you” means that He never had an intimate relationship with them.** To our amazement, we see that miracles can be performed in the name of Jesus, even when there is no living relationship with Him. These works flow out of pride, and bear the image of the beast.

The Pharisees wanted Jesus to perform a sign that would prove to them that He was the Son of God. Jesus said, *“An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign.”* (*Matt. 12:39*) Generally we don’t associate people who demand or desire signs with being evil and adulterous. However, **their craving for signs reveals their unbelief – and unbelief is evil! People crave signs instead of relationship!** How often we have prayed, “God, please do this sign so people will believe that you are real!” If we want God to fulfill their craving, we are praying for a desire that was not initiated by God. Jesus resisted the people’s demand for signs; He only did the miracles the Father showed Him to do!

Signs are not the reality! They may or may not point to the reality, but they are not the reality. Do we want signs or do we want the reality? Are we satisfied with the excitement of signs, or do we want the maturity that comes with sonship? Jesus was the mature Son (HUIOS) of God! He knew who He was! Do we, God’s children, actually know who we are? We are who God says we are, but so often we don’t believe Him, because we believe what our natural mind is telling us.

Unbelief cannot worship God. It can adhere to the external forms of singing and praising God, but **true worship is more than singing and praising God; true worship is obedience!** If we do not obey God, we are not worshiping Him. If we obey our natural thinking and make our own decisions and choices, we are worshiping self; we are worshiping the image of the beast!

This image of the beast is appealing to our legalistic nature that demands punishment

for every failure to comply with the accepted norms. Satan demands worship, and demands that all who will not worship him must be killed! Satan proved that this was his objective when he tempted Jesus. Satan focuses on man's desire for an easy luxurious long life, and he promises this as a reward for man's worship of him! Jesus did not focus on long physical life; **His only desire was to do the will of the Father!** Any other desires will lead us astray!

In our country neither the government nor the church kills those who do not accept its doctrines, that is, those who do not agree with their way of thinking. They may be excommunicated, persecuted and verbally abused, or told that they are going to hell, but they are not killed physically. However, in many countries they do kill them!

“And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, and he provides that no one should be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name.” (vv.16-17)

In the NASV translation the word *causes* is in the present tense; in some translations it is in the past tense. But it is **not** in the future tense! It is not something new in the sense that it has not happened before.

The beast does not exclude anyone who dwells on earth (in his natural understanding) from receiving this mark. It is given to those in high positions and in low positions, to the rich and the poor, to the free and the slaves. **But it cannot be given to those who are in Christ, for they are dwelling in the heavenlies even while they are living on planet earth.** Everyone who does not have the mark or the number of his name will suffer dire consequences! Their physical bodies can be made to suffer, but their spirit cannot be touched adversely!

What kind of mark is put on their foreheads and hands? Some think it is a microchip, a social security number, or some other device that will identify them. Let's remember that this identification is not a new mark that is to be invented; this mark has been present ever since Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit!

The mark of the beast on the forehead is not a visible sign. Since our thinking takes place in our head, this mark symbolizes man's natural thinking of spiritual realities. When Adam and Eve obeyed the serpent, they received the mark of the beast on their forehead. This mark is not a physical 666 mark. The number 666 on the forehead represents the dragon's perverted understanding of God, and that thinking has been passed on to all of humanity through Adam and Eve's obedience to the serpent. The number 666 on the hand symbolizes the actions that have their source or origin in that thinking. Adam and Eve received the number 666 on their hands after they had accepted the serpent's suggestion and they took the fruit and ate it.

This action changed their whole relationship with God. They no longer enjoyed fellowship with God. They now viewed Him as their enemy, feared Him and hid from Him!!

A false image of God places the mark of the beast on our foreheads. God is not created by our imagination. He is spirit and He is invisible to the natural eye! Only He knows who He is. Therefore we can only get to know Him through revelation! This shows us the importance of listening to the Holy Spirit, for He leads us into all truth! **God has revealed Himself in Christ Jesus - not in the physical form of Jesus, but in His anointing!** Truth is an eternal reality; we cannot change it into a form that looks desirable to us. It cannot be bent or twisted. We have to be changed by the truth. Truth is the very essence of Christ!

The hand represents man's works. So the mark of the beast on the hand symbolizes the works that do not originate in God, but in the beast. For example, when Adam and Eve took the fruit and ate it, contrary to God's command, they received the mark of the beast on their hands. This act had its source in the serpent and was against the express will of God. By partaking of this fruit, Adam and Eve were trying to become like God by disobeying God. This never works!

All works that do not have their source in God carry the mark of the beast. All good works that are performed for the sake of glorifying self, or for purchasing our own righteousness, or for creating a certain image of self, place the mark of the beast on our hands.

"Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man, and his number is six hundred and sixty-six." (v.18) Do we desire wisdom, or are we satisfied with humanity's false deductions? The wisdom of God teaches us that man can never achieve perfection by his own effort. Man was made on the sixth day. A six can never become a seven – the number that symbolizes perfection - without outside help. No matter how many sixes are added to the six, the six can never reach the perfection symbolized by seven. **Humanity can never devise a method through which it can achieve its own salvation.** Man's methods do not have their source in God. Only when we come into the recognition of this important truth, will we come to Christ! This is wisdom; when we become wise, we will receive His wonderful salvation!

We praise God that He has provided a way that takes us out of our death in Adam (our imperfection) and joins us to the very life that God is and His life becomes our perfection.

Chapter 14

Both Paul and John received visions, and whatever they saw in the spirit, we also have to see in the spirit. For this reason Paul prayed, *“I pray that the eyes of your heart might be enlightened, so that we may know what is the hope of God’s calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.”* (Eph. 1:18). Understanding the symbolism gives us a greater appreciation for the wonderful salvation that is ours in Christ.

“And I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads.” (v. 1)

After John received illumination about the religious bestial system that rules the mind of natural man, he received illumination in regard to the spiritual man. He now saw the Lamb standing on Mt. Zion together with the 144,000! Of the three mountains in Jerusalem, Mt. Zion is the highest.

Mt. Zion came out of obscurity when David brought the ark to Jerusalem, and placed it in a tent on Mount Zion. As David followed the ark to its destination, he danced and leaped before the Lord, thereby bringing great joy into worship. After the ark had been placed in a tent specially prepared for that purpose, the glory of God filled the tent. Continual worship and praise were inaugurated, and from that time on the Psalms speak of the clapping of hands, the raising of hands, of dancing, and of prostrating oneself before the Lord.

Our worship of God involves our spirit, soul and body. Mount Zion represented this exultation of God and His glory. It had become more than a geographical location; it had become a sign word to describe a people and a way of life. It was a shorthand description of people living in God’s presence, rejoicing with a joy that cannot be contained - *“Joy unspeakable and full of glory,”* as Peter said. The church, in its perfection, is seen exulting in God on Mount Zion.

In the Hebrew language, the word “Zion” means **a dry place**. In this vision the 144,000 are standing with the Lamb on Mt. Zion - a dry place. The 144,000 were introduced to us in chapter 7. There we learned that these are people who are under God’s government, and whose nature was described by the meaning of the names of the various tribes. They are people who have been sealed on their foreheads with the Holy Spirit of God! The 144,000 represent both the church of the Old Testament and the New Testament; they represent the redeemed of all ages!

Why are they standing in a dry place? These victorious people have overcome the craving and the lusting of the flesh that resides in natural man by starving these cravings to death! As long as we feed and water them, they remain strong and healthy. In a dry place there is nothing to keep them alive! They are starved to death. The lust of the flesh has been dealt with! This great company of overcomers stands with the Lamb, and He more than fulfills all their desires! The fact that they are standing with the Lamb indicates that this is the corporate Christ! **This is Christ with His body of overcomers!**

In the previous chapter we saw that the beast worshipers had the number 666 on their foreheads. But the people that form this great company are not known by a number, but by their nature; **they have the name of the Lamb and the name of the Lamb's Father written on their foreheads.** In other words, they have the **mind** and the **nature** of Christ! In chapter 7 we learned that they carried the seal of God on their foreheads. A seal indicates ownership, and because they carried the seal of God, they couldn't be touched.

By now we understand that this mark is not a visible mark, but an indication of what is in their thought life. **Their own philosophies about God, their own assessment of who they are, and their own ambitions have been surrendered to God.** They have recognized that their own ideas are worthless. Their thought life now centers on God and His desires. They know who their Father is! They know that they are sons of God, and that the Holy Spirit is directing them. *"For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God."* (Rom. 8:14) They have been baptized into Christ's body of truth, and are building on a firm foundation. The power of God keeps them. They have the nature and life of God, and His Spirit leads them and fills their minds with truth! The name of the Father is planted in their heads.

"And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder, and the voice which I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps." (v.2)

John heard a voice from heaven. Where is heaven? Is it a far-away place - a place where Christians go after they die? Jesus said that heaven is God's throne (**Matt. 5:34**), and a throne symbolizes the authority of government. Jesus also said that the kingdom of heaven is within us. (**Luke 17:21**) So heaven is a spiritual place where God rules. **Those who are governed by God have heaven in their hearts.** Therefore, when John heard this voice, he heard it in his spirit.

It was *"like the sound of many waters."* Now where did we hear that before? Back in **Rev. 1:5** it says that Christ's voice was like the sound of many waters. This pictorial language beautifully portrays our union with Christ! Christ has brought all His

redeemed into a perfect oneness with Himself, so they speak as one with Christ! Just as in a close marriage relationship, husband and wife often respond with the same words because they have become one in their thinking, and we have become so united with Christ in His thinking, that we speak His words together with Him!

“And like the sound of loud thunder.” What a miracle has taken place! This is the corporate Christ speaking the message God is giving them. These are people who hear the voice of the Holy Spirit! If they couldn’t hear the Spirit, they would be divided in the message they were declaring. A message brought forth in the unity of the Spirit is very forceful, and commands our attention. It comes as the sound of thunder!

“And like the sound of harpists playing on their harps.” What a strange combination of sounds - rushing waters as musical thunder! Imagine the superb sound of a large group of professional harpists playing in beautiful harmony. Harps symbolize praise and worship! This is the spiritual sound of the 144,000 praising and worshipping God in wondrous harmony!

“And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth.” (v.3)

Only those who have been freed from the earth can sing this new song. To be freed from the earth means to be released from our carnal thinking for the earth symbolizes our natural understanding of spiritual realities. This song cannot be found in a hymnal. It is new in kind because it has not been birthed out of the carnal mind - out of religion or a philosophy of life.

This song flows out of the heart of those who have experienced the freedom and joy that is theirs in their union with Christ! They have been released from the bondage of their natural carnal thinking, and from within them a new song wells up. It is a song that only those who are united with Christ can sing, because it is a song of experience - not a song learned by rote, and composed of musical chords. **The whole of life has become a song unto God!** It is sung before the four living creatures who represent the complete life of Christ - just as the four gospels express His completeness. Those who are in Christ will also express that completeness.

They have been *“purchased from the earth”*. The word **purchased** comes from the Greek AGORAZO, and does not mean “to redeem,” as translated in the King James Version. This word was used in the business world, and implied buying and selling at the market place. To buy something indicates ownership. Belonging to Christ releases us from our bondage to self. Christ takes us out of our old humanity and puts us into a new humanity. We now demonstrate the nature of this new humanity.

We have been brought into a higher realm; we now reside with Christ in heavenly places even while we are living on planet earth. The 144,000 belong to God!

To whom was the purchase price paid? Many teach that it was paid to the devil. They say that the devil had humanity in his hands, and for humanity to be freed, he demanded the blood of Jesus. This teaching is against the teaching of the scriptures, for if Jesus had obeyed the devil, He would have sinned. They do not realize that the devil never received the legal deed for the ownership of humanity. God kept that! The devil only received his power over humanity by deception. The title deed did not belong to him. God gave His beloved Son for our redemption because He loved us. The devil wanted to foil God's plan by inciting people to kill Jesus; he didn't know that he was playing right into God's plan.

The purchase price was definitely not paid to Adam or to the devil. The price consisted of His sufferings. Jesus Christ had to leave His heavenly home and the glory He had with the Father. He had to take on the form of a servant, suffer rejection, loneliness, persecution, and the cruelest, humiliating and demeaning death that humanity could imagine or dream up, in order to take us out of our old humanity and place us into a new humanity. He had to undergo all this suffering, heartache and anguish to prove that He was dead to sin. Jesus humbled Himself and submitted Himself to this death because He knew it was His Father's will! **His total obedience demonstrated true and pure worship of God!** This was the purchase price He paid for our redemption.

Another false, yet prevalent idea states that Jesus paid the penalty for our sins, so we do not have to suffer eternally in hell. In other words, He suffered instead of us. What a false notion that is! What a limited salvation that would be! If Jesus only paid the penalty for our sins, heaven would be full of forgiven sinners. They would be forgiven, but they would still be sinners filled with evil and vile hearts. When an evil and corrupt man is forgiven and released from prison, he remains a sinner and a threat to humanity's welfare. His heart has not seen change and so his sinful life will continue. If heaven is filled with forgiven sinners, it will be as corrupt as the world in which we now live. If we are only forgiven sinners, Paul got it all wrong, for in his epistles to the various churches he always wrote to the saints.

The scriptures declare that Jesus died **for us**, **but nowhere do they say that He died instead of us**. And there is a big difference between these two statements! It says that we were crucified with Him! He died for us and as us so that we could be put into Christ, the new man! Not only are we forgiven, but we are also made alive by being born again of His Spirit! In Christ we are new creatures; old things have passed away; behold all things are made new! (2 Cor. 5:17)

The book of Revelation reveals that the Old Testament shadow of the tabernacle has become a reality. Here we see the fulfillment of the symbolism it contained. The throne of God is represented by the ark of the covenant that contained the ten commandments (symbolizing the Law), a container with manna (symbolizing the true bread from heaven or the bread of life) and the rod of Aaron that budded (the power to bring life out of death). The ark was covered with the mercy seat of pure gold (divine mercy and grace) and the cherubim (witnesses of God's presence). Together these represent the throne of God - the government and authority of God. The golden altar of incense standing in front of the ark, but on the other side of the veil, was the place where the priests would offer their daily prayers, praise and worship. And in the smoke of the burning incense they would arise to God as a sweet-smelling offering.

In the praise and worship of the complete body of Christ, represented by the 144,000, we see the fulfillment of the Old Testament shadow. Their praise is rising to God in the power of the Holy Spirit! They are singing a new song that only the redeemed can sing, for they have been purchased from the earth, and this means that they have been freed from their carnal thinking! They are united with Christ, and He is their life! As they worship and praise, they have become a living golden altar - gold symbolizing their new humanity and divine nature. The incense used in Old Testament worship is no longer needed, for the praise and prayers of His people are the incense! The shadow has become the reality!

The Lord can safely entrust these people to reign with Him in righteousness because they live in submission to the Spirit! Their thought processes are in line with God's thoughts! What a wonderful revelation of who we are in Christ, and how beautiful a life submitted to Him is!

Does this mean that we, who are submitted to God, walk in luxury and comfort all the time? No, we still have our trials and temptations, but now we know who is in charge! We know the sovereignty of God! We know that the problems we face are given for a purpose, and that we do not face them alone! Christ takes us through these problems! Sons of God will be tested and they will be persecuted! It's part of our growth process!

Though Job was the most righteous man of his day, he was tested beyond all of his contemporaries in order to bring him into a greater knowledge of God! Knowledge of God is more precious than any other knowledge, and worth more than all the suffering, trials and testing needed to acquire it! As we walk through these trials we need to keep a worshipful attitude. Hearing the Spirit and walking in obedience delivers us from all evil, and brings us into an experiential knowledge of the power of God!

“These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb. And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless.” (vv.4-5)

These 144,000 are identified by their chastity; they have not defiled themselves with women. Does this mean that a celibate is more spiritual than a married man? Many believe that this is the case. But this statement does not refer to those who have never had sex. The idea that an unmarried person is more spiritual and more liable to be blessed by God is founded on man's idea - not God's. We need to remember that this is a symbolic book, and again we go to the Old Testament to receive illumination. There we see Israel's relationship with God compared to that of a marriage relationship. Whenever Israel went after other gods, God accused them of playing the harlot. They had committed spiritual adultery.

This concept is carried into the New Testament. The husband is to love his wife even as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her. A union has taken place! In the Old Testament, Israel was female; in the New Testament, the church is female, and she is called the bride of Christ. Whenever the church goes after other gods, it commits adultery. This has nothing to do with a sex act as defined by Webster's dictionary. However, the natural is used to give us a picture of a spiritual concept.

In **Romans 7** Paul used the illustration of a married woman. If she joins herself to another man while her first husband is alive, she commits adultery. She is only free to remarry after her husband has died. After he is dead, she dare not go back to him, for then she would be having a sexual affair with a dead man. This act is called necromancy.

Our first husband was the Adam man. He was very demanding, and was constantly condemning us for every infraction or violation of the law. In Christ the Adam man died, thus releasing us from him and his tyranny, and therefore we are now free to marry Christ. If we go back to the Law for righteousness, we are having an affair with a dead man.

God is looking for people who are faithful to Him! He is faithful to us and we are to be faithful to Him. The overcomers have kept themselves chaste, that is, they have not committed spiritual adultery. They have not had an affair with other gods. They have realized their inability to perform works to obtain righteousness, and that they need Christ to be their righteousness and their sanctification!. **There can be no mixture of flesh and Spirit, for the two don't mix.**

“These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes.” They have committed themselves to follow the Lord unconditionally - no strings, no addenda, no ifs and

no butts are attached. The distinguishing feature of this company is that they follow the Lamb wherever He goes. The Lamb leads this company, and they follow Him, for they are His bondslaves, and they realize that the Lamb is their source and sustenance for every need and situation in life.

In chapter 7 we learned that they are sealed, and a seal indicates ownership. We are not our own because we have been bought with a price - with Christ's death to sin and His resurrection into life. In the light of God's mercy and finished work of salvation, we belong to Him. In submission to Him, we present our body as a living sacrifice. We no longer fulfill our natural desires, for they are contrary to His will. This is central to the Christian faith!

Overcomers know the voice of their Master, and are obedient to His directives. Before Jesus died, His disciples were called followers. After the Holy Spirit was poured out, they were no longer called followers, but believers. They did not make their own choices but lived by the obedience of faith. **Our choices have their source in the natural mind; submission to God's choosing has its source in the mind of Christ!** Jesus always submitted His will to the Father's will!

"These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb." They were purchased from among men as the first fruits, thereby indicating that the rest of humanity would be harvested later. In Israel, no man would harvest a crop until the first sheaf had been taken to the temple and offered to God. All who are united with Christ in the Holy Spirit are the first fruit together with Him. They are offered as a praise offering to God. They belong to Him! First fruits demonstrate what the harvest will be like, and also provide the evidence and assurance that a harvest will follow. The harvest is not ripe yet, but we wait expectantly for it because we have seen the first fruit.

"And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless." Where do lies originate? The first lie came from the serpent's mouth when he contradicted God by saying that disobedience would not bring death. Instead, Eve would become like God, knowing good and evil. The serpent intimated that she lacked knowledge, and that she needed to know good and evil to become like God. But in order to become like God we have to know truth, and only by knowing truth can we discern good and evil. The answer to her need lay in learning to know God.

Adam and Eve had everything they needed in the garden; they were not aware of any need until the serpent presented the lie to them. The serpent always gives us the idea that he provides whatever we lack, and that his provision for us is better than God's provision. He tells us that in order to become like God, we must follow his (the serpent's) instructions, and then we will be like God. This is the big lie! The

truth is that we are to be like God, and the desire to be like Him is good! This desire can only be fulfilled in obedience to our Father's directives and submission to His will!

If our desire to be like God is rooted in selfhood and disobedience our union with God is broken, and we create another god - a god that is opposed to the true God. Our desire for selfhood is very evident in many ways. We want to be unique and have God serve us. Have you ever noticed how much information and advice we give God when we pray? We often try to manipulate God by fasting and praying, and telling Him of this great opportunity to show His power. If His answer is not to our liking, we get angry with Him. We don't want to serve a God who doesn't serve us. Why? Because we want to be in the driver's seat so we can live a life of ease, comfort and prosperity. We think we know what is best for us, but we don't recognize our limitations. If we are in charge we are placing ourselves on the throne as God! This desire for selfhood has come to us through Adam and Eve.

If there are no lies in our mouth, we are speaking truth. Without desiring truth and being persuaded that truth is the only way to life and peace and joy, it is impossible for us to be freed from the lie. Our basic problem then is ignorance or non-acceptance of truth. If we don't accept truth, we are listening to the lie. Adam and Eve had the truth, for God had told them not to eat of that tree, but they did not believe God; instead they believed a different voice. Rather than worshiping God, they had communion with the serpent. This gave the serpent an opportunity to advertise his wares and receive credibility. So they believed him instead of God, and thus inadvertently worshiped the serpent. This shows us the importance of remaining in constant communion with God. **Giving mental assent to the truth and eyeing the lie will get us into trouble.** Our eyes need to be fixed on Jesus Christ at all times.

What are some of the lies that are commonly believed among Christians? Many think that Satan is a winner (after all, they think that most of humanity is destined for hell), and act as though he is almost as powerful as God, if not more so, and that man's choices can overrule God's sovereignty. They believe that God only loves them when they do good deeds, and that God is always spying on them and is ready to pounce on them with brutal punishment whenever they sin. The lie tells them that God does not have the ability to make all things work together for good in their lives, so they believe that. They believe that His justice demands punishment for every wrong committed, for they don't understand that His justice has provided a way that will free humanity from its sin and guilt. To think that Christ's obedience is powerful enough to undo all the bad effects of Adam's disobedience is utter nonsense to them.

Their confidence in traditional teaching causes them to believe that they are still sinners even after they have been born again. They think they are still in the old Adam man, and don't recognize that our new birth brings us into a new and higher realm. When asked to examine themselves, they examine the natural man instead of the new spiritual man that they actually are in Christ. They do not realize that the Greek word, DOKIMAZO, that is used in **1 Cor. 11:28**, means to examine with a view to approval. Even though the scriptures very plainly tell us that we are new creations in Christ, and that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ, many continue to believe the lie instead of rejoicing in God's great salvation and the faith He has given them! That is why they are fraught with worries and self-condemnation! Unbelief accepts the serpent's lies as truth.

Believing what God says about Himself, and what He says about who we are in Christ, delivers us from these lies. We are to realize that Christ is now our life, and that God is our Father and our provision! Whenever we put our thoughts over and above God's declarations, we put ourselves in the place of God. This is idolatry! When we believe God, we will live as He intends us to live. **Believing what God says will release us from our worries and bring us into a new freedom!**

In order to grow in faith we have to repent of having believed the lie - the source of our sins. If we only repent of our sins instead of the source of our sins, we will keep on sinning, for our sins are the result of having believed the lie! Jealousy, bitterness, pride, lying, murdering, etc., are merely the consequences of having believed the lie! We also have to repent of wanting to use God to accomplish our own desires for our own advantage and enhancement, for that is an attempt at usurping God's throne. The purpose of our requests should be to bring glory to God - not to self. Once we have implanted in our mind the idea that we can be like God in selfhood, we are capable of all kinds of sins. We need to recognize that Christ is the truth! Believing the truth does away with the lie and all its ugly consequences!

The overcomers are blameless because they believe God! They have repented from believing the great lie! The Spirit of truth has united them with truth! They have been put into the new man, Christ! All the sins they committed when they were in the Adam man no longer belong to them, because they are now in the new man! Accusations, rejection and persecution by those who are part of the religious system, do not change their standing with God. He declares them blameless, and blameless they are!

"And I saw another angel flying in mid-heaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; and he said with a loud voice, 'Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters.'" (vv. 6-7)

The eternal gospel of God's love and redemption is revealed to us by the many messengers God sends to call us to worship the only true and living God! The angel or messenger mentioned here is a corporate messenger, and he symbolizes the overcomers. It takes more than one messenger to preach to every nation and tribe. It would be impossible for one person to learn the many languages spoken by the various nations and tribes, and to preach the gospel to everyone! An age-abiding (from the Greek AION) gospel is preached to those who dwell on earth - to those who only understand the scriptures in their natural mind, and to those who have never before heard the good news we have in Christ!

This messenger is calling on people to recognize their Creator, and to worship and glorify Him because the hour of His judgment has come. O yes, we are all standing before the judgment seat of Christ! Does that make you cringe? Why? Is it because you fear His judgment? What does judgment actually mean? Many think that judgment means punishment. But does it mean punishment?

A judgment is a legal statement that declares what is right and what is wrong. It's like a plumb line. A plumb line reveals what is vertical or straight, and what needs correction. God's judgments are always correct because His plumb line is truth! His plumb line reveals the lie! God's judgment goes forth whenever truth is preached, because truth reveals the lie and judges the lie. Jesus said, *"This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light; for their deeds were evil."* When we recognize that our so-called truth is actually the lie, we need to repent of having believed the lie. This requires a change in our thinking. Those who love the darkness do not want to change, so they will fear this judgment; those who love the truth will welcome it and rejoice!

Judgment takes place continually: it is not reserved for the end times. Many think that at a given point in time, all people who have ever lived, will be assembled before the judgment seat of Christ, and all their sins will be made manifest. Can you imagine the length of that lineup, and the time it would take to reveal all the sins? That is a natural understanding, not a spiritual one. **Do you think God will reveal the sins He has forgiven and forgotten?** Jesus Christ, the truth and the light, has come, and everything that does not have its source in Him, is continually being exposed and judged as being wrong. Jesus said, *"He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."* (Jn. 3:18)

Contrary to what many believe, God is not in the business of punishing people. Often, when people reap the result of their evil ways, they think God is punishing them, but He is not. They are merely reaping what they have sown. But He does discipline us! His discipline is always redemptive in purpose! He loves us too much

to let us go on in our false concepts, so He trains and disciplines us! His chosen ones cannot get away with doing the same things others do. His love for righteousness is so great that He gave His Son to die for us and as us, that we too can receive His life of righteousness!

We are to worship our Creator not His creation. The trend to worship creation is growing. Worship of creation includes worship of self, for we are God's creation. Worship of God cannot take place without giving up our will in favor of God's higher and better will. Worship of creation fosters our own desires and ideas. Eventually it may even lead to a control by demonic forces. **Humanity wants oneness with creation instead of oneness with the Creator.**

Singing praises to God, raising hands, clapping hands and prostrating oneself before the Lord, may be an outward manifestation of an inner attitude of worship, but not necessarily. It may only be form. True worship consists of the acknowledgement that God is sovereign and that he has the right to lead and govern us! We cannot be angry with God, rebel against Him and worship Him at the same time. **Our obedience to His will is true worship!**

“And another angel, a second one, followed, saying, ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality.’” (v.8) Babylon is the Greek form of Babel, and throughout the Old Testament it was the symbol of confusion caused by ungodliness. Babylon represents the religious system. Babylon is fallen. This has already happened in the revelation of Jesus Christ! We don't need to be in confusion any longer because we have received the truth in Christ! Those who reject the truth will remain in confusion.

Babylon has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality. The nations are intoxicated with the passion for immorality. An intoxicated person does not think logically nor does he see correctly; he does not have wisdom. The immorality of the religious system consists of an adulterous relationship with many gods. It has cast aside the true God, and in so doing, it has cast out truth. It has made its own gods - gods it can control; gods that cater to fleshly desires! Religion leaves people without truth and with their lies and confusion!

“Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.’” (vv.9-11)

All those who worship the beast and his image already have the mark of the beast. This is not a mark made by man; it is the selfishness that is characteristic of the beast. The beast symbolizes the religiosity that resides in natural man. Religiosity is based on faith in the lie. Those who carry the mark of the beast on the forehead have not repented from believing the lie. The mark on the forehead is their religious thinking and their obsession with self; the mark on the hand is the works that issue out of that thinking. This mark can only be removed by repenting of their wrong thinking and receiving the truth that Christ is!

Wrong thinking needs to be corrected. Those who worship the beast will drink of the undiluted wine of the wrath of God. The Greek THUMOS translated wrath, actually means passion, and it expresses more the inward feeling. (Vine's Expository Dictionary) The Greek ORGE translated anger, expresses the more active emotion. It expresses desire (as a "reaching forth" or "excitement" of the mind) i.e. violent passion. The wrath or passion of God is poured out in full strength in the cup of His indignation. God's passion is for the correction of all wrong thinking!

The beast worshipers will be tormented. The word **tormented** comes from the Greek BASANIZO, the verb form of BASANOS, which means touchstone. A touchstone was used for testing the purity of metals. The beast worshipers will be tested for purity of truth, so that correction can take place. This picture symbolizes the testing that takes place for the correction of all wrong thinking, so that purity may result. The word **torment** is a mistranslation and gives us a wrong idea. Torment is unproductive, for nothing can be gained from it. **Testing is fruitful, and is necessary to show us the weaknesses and strengths in our lives so that correction and building can take place.**

The beast worshipers "*will be tormented (tested) with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels (messengers) and in the presence of the Lamb.*" Those who see this statement without understanding the truth that is being conveyed will get a very wrong picture of Christ and His messengers. They will see Christ and His messengers as cruel monsters who enjoy seeing all unbelievers writhing in anguish and pain. This is far from the truth!

Let's look at the spiritual meaning of the symbolism contained in these verses. The word fire produces an image of flames, heat and destruction. In the light of the scriptures we see that fire is the very essence of God, for He is a consuming fire. (**Heb. 12:29**) Furthermore, John the Baptist said that Jesus would baptize us with the Holy Spirit and fire. This is a spiritual fire that consumes all that is not eternal. All the rubbish has to go! If we continue to hold onto the things that need to be destroyed, the fire will become hotter. We need to let go of our selfhood - of the lie that authors sin.

The word brimstone comes from the Greek THEION. The places where lightning struck were called THEIA, and since lightning was thought to have a sulphurous smell, brimstone received the name THEION. Brimstone is another name for sulfur, and it was used in pagan purification rites. This helps us to understand that brimstone is a cleansing agent. Those who remain in their carnal thinking need cleansing, and this cleansing will take place.

This testing and cleansing takes place in the presence of the holy messengers and in the presence of the Lamb. Therefore we know that the Lamb is in charge of this process. He knows exactly what is needed to change us. Our pretense does not fool Him; He sees us as we truly are. As long as we stubbornly resist the change that God wants to bring into our lives, this spiritual fire will rage, and the cleansing process will continue. This takes place while we are living on planet earth.

The smoke of their torment (testing) rises up for the ages of the ages - "forever and ever" is a wrong translation. This does not take place in eternity, for in eternity there is no "day and night". An age contains time; it has a beginning and an ending. Eternity is timelessness. Smoke indicates that something is being consumed by fire. It tells us that something perishable is gradually being consumed by a burning process. Smoke clouds our vision, and keeps us from seeing things as they truly are. Once this process is complete, there will not be any smoke, and we will see clearly.

Fire brings cleansing. The Bubonic plague was terminated by the fire that swept over London. We need the fire of the Holy Spirit to purify us. This cleansing process is present in the life of every Christian in each generation, as long as there are ages.

Those who worship the beast and his image have no rest day and night. Embedded in them is the ravenous nature of a beast. A beast is ruled by its desire for self-preservation. This rule is also present in those who worship the beast and his image. As long as self rules us, we will be striving to fulfill the dictates of self, and that is a bottomless pit! There is no end to its cravings, for it always wants more and more. Rest is only present in the Lord. In Christ we can rest from our self-works. Our works flow out of Christ, and the peace of God fills our whole being!

"Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus." (v.12). The saints are not forgiven sinners; they are forgiven, but they are no longer sinners. Jesus made a distinction between the disciples and sinners. He said, *"And if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them."* (Lu. 6:32) And in Romans 5:8 we read, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." "While we were yet sinners," tells us that we no longer belong in that classification. Our new birth has brought us into a higher dimension into a spiritual

one! We are new creatures in Christ! We have His righteousness! Our natural mind tells us that as long as we commit wrong acts or think wrong thoughts, we are still sinners. Our spiritual mind knows that in order to get out of the sinner classification, we have to be taken out of the Adam man and placed into Christ, and receive His righteousness. Our righteousness does not depend on our works but on Christ's work. Notice also that the Epistles are written to saints!

It takes patient endurance to trust God in every situation! Saints keep the commandments of Jesus. Jesus said, *"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love."* Christ has given us a new commandment, and that is to love even as He loved us! He died and gave Himself for us! To continue in His love means that we continue to love even when we are rejected and persecuted and tortured! We give ourselves for others! This requires faith in Jesus Christ! What a high calling is ours in Him!

"And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, 'Write, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!'' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.'" (v.13) We already know that heaven is the place where God rules, and if He rules in us, heaven is in our hearts. So John heard a voice from within his spirit, giving him a message.

"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!" Our natural understanding says that these are the Christians who die and leave planet earth. But our spiritual understanding says that there is a deeper meaning involved. Jesus Christ is the life, so how can there be any death in Him? In Romans 6 Paul gives us the explanation. There we read that we have been united or planted in the likeness of Christ's death, and that the death Christ died, was a death to sin. Even so we are to consider ourselves dead to sin!

The old covenant did not contain any provision for this death because it can only be ours in Christ! So those who die to sin, have died in the Lord. Those who are dead to sin will bring forth works that flow out of life instead of out of self. Works that originate in self are dead works. As a grain of wheat has to die in order to become fruitful, so our selfhood has to die in Christ so we can become fruitful.

"So that they may rest from their labors." This is a complete rest from the labors that have their origin in self and are there to enhance self. This rest flows out of our death to sin. Out of that death springs new life, and out of that life spring, *"the works that accompany them."* These works have their source in Christ, and will therefore remain.

"Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud was one like a son of man, having a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand."

(v.14) What does the white cloud symbolize? We know that white symbolizes righteousness. We also know that the cloud which led the children of Israel in the wilderness, symbolized the presence of God. So here is the presence of God in all His righteousness.

Sitting on the cloud was one like a son of man. Jesus Christ is the second man, and He is a corporate man. God sees humanity as two men. Those who have not been made alive in Christ are still dead in Adam. **(1 Cor. 15:22) Therefore we are either dead in the corporate Adam or alive in the corporate Christ.** The one sitting on the cloud is identified as being the Christ with His body of believers. These have overcome their carnal thinking, for the golden crown on His head symbolizes divine thinking.

A sharp sickle was used for harvesting whatever grain was ripe and ready for harvesting. This sickle was in His hand. The hand symbolizes His works or ministry. This work is achieved through the use of its five fingers - the five-fold ministry of the church, namely, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, *“for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.”* (Eph. 4:11-12) These ministries are a gift to the church. Gifts are not earned - they are given. Gifts are to be appreciated and valued. God equips each one of us to be a blessing to others. Our life does not belong to us - it belongs to God. If it belonged to us it would be separated from God, and everything that is separated from Him is in death. **God wants each of us to be the person He has equipped us to be, and to do the works He has ordained for us! When we are content to do His will there will not be any jealousy or desire to do the works God has ordained for others.**

“And another angel came out of the temple, crying out with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, ‘Put in your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe.’ Then He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth; and the earth was reaped.” (v.15-16)

This messenger came out of the temple - not a physical temple (HIERON), but the spiritual temple (NAOS) - the temple of the Lord that our body is. We are the temple (NAOS) of the living God. This messenger came out of the spiritual realm that is within us.

He *“swung his sickle over the earth”*. In verse 4 of this chapter the first fruit had already been presented or offered to the Lord, so this is not the harvest of the first fruit. This is the harvest of the earth. In **Matt. 13:30** Jesus said, *“First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.”* **All the earthiness that is within us has to be burned up.** This reaping is presently taking place. Our carnal understanding of spiritual realities is the earth that has to

be reaped. It is time for it to be removed!

“And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle. Then another angel, the one who has power over fire, came out from the altar; and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, ‘Put in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, because her grapes are ripe.’” (vv.17-18)

The vision now shifts to another aspect of the harvest of the earth, namely, to the harvest of grapes from the vine of the earth. Here we have a messenger who has power over fire. The fire from the altar had been kindled by God, as we read in **Lev. 9:24**. This fire was to be kept burning continually. (**Lev. 6:13**) It was to be used for the burning of every sacrifice and offering. Fire symbolizes the judgment of everything that is unprofitable for the kingdom of God, and thus represents purification. This messenger knows exactly how much fire is needed for each desired result.

“So the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God. And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses’ bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles.” (vv.19-20) Two hundred miles should actually read sixteen hundred furlongs. Changing the distance into a modern measurement destroys the symbolism.

The sickle is used to gather the clusters from the vine of the earth. Life can only come from Christ; He is the vine in which we are to abide. Jesus said, *“I am the vine, you are the branches.”* These grapes were not fruit that came out of the life of Christ. These works came from Christians who relied on their own effort and performance for their sanctification and righteousness. Their natural thinking determined their understanding of truth. Thus their works were the product of their own ideas. The fruit looked like good fruit, but it did not come from the right source. The source of these works was self, for they came from the earth. These works come from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and are rooted in choice. These “so-called good ideas” that bring forth “good works,” were cast into the wine press of the wrath or passion of God.

The word wrath gives us the idea of great anger. However, the Greek word THUMOS, as we have already mentioned, means passion. God has a passion for seeing everyone operate in truth. So everything that is not truth is cast into the wine press where it is stomped on, pressured, etc., until the blood of the grapes pours out in great measure.

Blood symbolizes the soul. People often make the mistake of thinking that it symbolizes life because of the wrong translations of the word NEPHESH in the

Hebrew, and PSUCHE in the Greek. Both of these words mean SOUL. And the soul is our sense of being. This vision tells us that our earthy sense of being has to change. Our sense of being is not to be dependent on our emotions, situations and natural ideas. **It has to come from God, and then it will line up with His word!**

The wine press was trodden outside the city. Outside of which city? Outside of the heavenly Jerusalem. The heavenly Jerusalem is in the spiritual realm, and it is described in chapter 21. It has nothing to do with present-day Jerusalem. These verses are giving us a spiritual message, and telling us that everything that has its source in soulish, fleshly thinking has to be eradicated.

In the wine press the flesh and the juice are separated. Grapes are trodden on, squeezed, pressured and pushed around until the juice flows out. The flesh of the grapes remains in the wine trough. Since we are often unaware of the areas in which we still function according to the flesh, we need all kinds of trials and experiences to help us recognize them. These trials are not punishments; they provide opportunities for growth, maturation and discernment. They help us get rid of our wrong thinking. The flesh operates in the death realm, so it has to be separated from the spiritual.

It says that the blood came out from the wine press up to the horses' bridles. A horse's bridle is about 4-5 feet from the ground. And the blood covered a distance of 200 miles in modern measurement. This is impossible in the natural sense, for all the blood of all the people in the whole world could not fill this vast area. So we know God is revealing a truth to us in picture form. He is telling us something spiritual!

A bridle pictures control. By means of the bridle the rider tells the horse where it is to go. *"Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well."* (James 3:3) Here is a picture of the end result of our trials and testing. **Our mouth comes under the control of our Lord Jesus Christ!** James tells us that the tongue is the hardest thing to bring under control. *"It is a restless evil and full of deadly poison."* (James 3:8) *"If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well."* (v.2) The purpose of God's dealings with us is to bring us into maturity into the perfect man whose mouth is under Christ's authority! His power and authority are able to accomplish this, for **every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord!**

The blood came out for a distance of two hundred miles. This western measurement misses the whole point. The Greek says "1600 furlongs". We get 1600 by multiplying 4x4x10x10. Four symbolizes completeness, as in "the four corners of the earth." The second four emphasizes this completeness. Ten symbolizes trials as well as completion. We count to ten and then begin again with one (eleven). The second ten emphasizes this completion. So 1600 furlongs, in the symbolic language of

Revelation, tells us that our carnal thinking will be completely eradicated!

What a wonderful hope is ours in Christ! This vision encourages us to trust God to do His work in us! He is able to accomplish His purpose!

Chapter 15

“Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished.” (v.1)

This was the beginning of a new scene in John’s heavenly vision, and he marveled at its awesome splendor and greatness! The seven angels first caught his eyes. By now we know that seven is a divine number, and that it represents seven aspects of the matter under consideration. For example, there is only one Holy Spirit, yet we read of the seven spirits of God. The seven spirits represent seven aspects of the one Holy Spirit. In the language of Revelation, the seven angels or messengers bring seven plagues, each plague focusing on, or addressing one aspect of the problem. The seven plagues are seven aspects of one complete plague, and they will completely eradicate the problem. When the problem is eradicated, the wrath, or passion, of God is finished or completed.

“The wrath of God is finished.” Again, the Greek word used here for wrath is THUMOS, and it means passion. God has a passion for righteousness! His passion for righteousness is so great that all unrighteousness has to be removed! **The end result of these plagues is the removal of all unrighteousness in our thoughts and actions.** This is God’s passion for us! He said, *“Be holy even as I am holy.”*

The natural mind imagines that all these things will happen to humanity on a universal level at the same time. However this is not the way it works. These things happen to each of us individually and at different times in our spiritual growth and development.

“And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God.” (v.2)

What a magnificent, awesome sight! Imagine a sea of glass with fire of various hues of red, orange and yellow gracefully dancing in and out in perfect harmony. This gorgeous view is reflected in this enormous sea of aqua-colored glass! The sea represents humanity, and a sea of glass represents a humanity that is at peace with God! This humanity is in stark contrast to *“the wicked who are like the tossing sea, for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up refuse and mud.”* (Is. 57:20)

On the sea of glass stand the overcomers! They have triumphed over the beast (the natural mind); they have not received his image or the number of his name. His

name symbolizes his nature, and his nature is one of self-righteousness, self-effort and pride; self-effort can never attain God's righteousness. The thought life of the overcomers is not tainted by the beast nature. This triumph is due to the unfailing power of God! It has nothing to do with self-effort! All that is required is obedience, and even it has been granted to us by God, for we are His workmanship! When we recognize God's greatness we will truly worship and sing praises to our great and holy God!

Why then is the fire of purification for the righteous still needed? Let's look at the life of Abraham. In **Genesis 15** God declared him to be righteous because he believed God's promise to him. He believed that God would give him a son, and that his seed would be as the stars of the heavens. After this declaration of righteousness, we see that various cleansings still had to take place in his life before the son of promise could be born. Abram and Sarai were growing old, and Sarai was still barren. So they thought they had to help God keep His promise, and Ishmael, the wild donkey of a man, was born of Hagar, the Egyptian maid. **The flesh is ever ready to help God keep His promise!**

As a sign that flesh cannot inherit the promise, God gave Abram the covenant of circumcision. The removal of the foreskin signified the removal of all fleshly activity for righteousness. Abram's name, meaning high father, was now changed to Abraham, meaning father of a multitude, and Sarai's name, meaning my princess (that is, Abram's princess), was changed to Sarah, meaning princess for all the race. God put a little part of His name (h as in Elohim) into each of theirs. In symbolism God revealed that the new creation that we are in Christ, receives His name, meaning His nature.

Yet Abraham's faith needed further testing! In his journey, he came to Gerar. Then fear gripped him because he thought Abimelech would kill him in order to take his beautiful wife, Sarah, as his wife. Instead of believing that God was capable of keeping him safe (for the promise that he would have a son had not yet been fulfilled), he again tried to help God! He told Abimelech, king of Gerar, that Sarah was his sister. This was not the complete truth, for she was his wife and only his half-sister. She was very beautiful, and therefore Abimelech took her to be his wife. God intervened, and Sarah was restored to Abraham.

It was only after Abraham and Sarah were both dead to procreation that Isaac could be born! The time between the promise and its fulfillment is our testing and growing time. Although Isaac's birth did not end the fiery trials, it did provide Abraham with an insight into God's awesome power, and caused his faith to grow. Next, Ishmael, the son of the bondwoman, had to be cast out. Abraham loved Ishmael! How he hated to cast him out! But obedience to God's directive was of prime importance

to him! We also love our Ishmaels, our ministries for God done in self-effort, but we too have to learn obedience! Each test of obedience resulted in the growth of Abraham's faith. However, Abraham's biggest test came when God told him to offer up Isaac, the son of promise! With unwavering obedience Abraham set out to fulfill this mission! He believed that God would keep his promise and resurrect Isaac out of death!

Even as fiery trials assailed Abraham, so they attack us. God has declared us to be righteous, but we still need more testing for our faith to grow! The sea of glass was mixed with fire - fire that consumes everything that is corruptible. The overcomers stood victorious over the pressures to receive the nature and the number of the beast. They held the harps of God! These are not ordinary harps; they are divine harps that tell us that the overcomers are praising and worshiping God! Again we see God's marvelous grace! In the midst of our cleansing process we can praise and worship God!

“And they sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, ‘Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy; for all the nations will come and worship before You, for Your righteous acts have been revealed.’” (vv.3-4)

“And they sang the song of Moses.” This song of victory is found in **Exodus 15**. Pharaoh had stubbornly refused to let Israel go and worship God. In spite of all the plagues that had come upon the Egyptians, Pharaoh refused to submit to God's dealings. He refused to heed God's warnings! Only after the death of all the firstborn who were not protected by the blood of the sacrificial lamb, did he finally allow the Israelites to leave Egypt.

After they left, Pharaoh missed all the slave labor, and the enormity of his loss overwhelmed him. Like an insane maniac, he ordered his troops to overtake them and bring them back under his jurisdiction! God meant nothing to him. He didn't realize that God wasn't through with His judgments on Egypt. So he followed the Israelites to the Red Sea. There he tried to make use of God's provision for Israel. He saw the miracle; he saw the two walls of water; he saw the Israelites pass safely through the sea to the other side, but he didn't see the inherent danger present when men defy God. The Israelites were almost within his grasp! Into the dry path walled by seawater, he led his troops. Once they were all on the pathway in the sea, Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the waters came together, and Pharaoh and all of his troops drowned! God's judgment on Egypt was complete. Pharaoh's hardness of heart had caused him to turn a deaf ear to God's warnings. **Everyone who is at loggerheads with God will eventually find that God is greater than he is.**

This was the first time that God judged a nation. It was the first time that God proved to a nation that He is God, and that all their idols are powerless. He showed the Egyptians the consequences of unbelief and disobedience. Let us learn from their experiences. Since God is truth, every lie and deception has to be judged as being false. Only by judging the false as false, can we have a righteous government. God's judgments bring us truth, so why should we fear them? In **Isaiah 26:9** we read that when the earth experiences God's judgments the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. It is God's desire that everyone learns righteousness. Therefore we welcome God's judgments!

As Israel stood on the other side of the Red Sea, they saw the destruction of all who had defied God. They saw their dead bodies lying on the shore. **The victory had been accomplished by following God's directions!** No weapons had been used, and no warfare had taken place! What a miracle! Then Moses and the sons of Israel glorified God in a wonderful song of praise! As we read **Ex. 15**, we notice that it was God who did everything to bring about this great victory! Therefore He deserves all the glory!

God's love of truth and righteousness necessitates judgment on all lies, deception and unrighteousness. Do we rejoice when truth is proclaimed, or would we rather cling to our preconceived ideas? **His judgments take place because He is love - not because He is angry.** God is love and He never changes! Therefore everything He does has to come out of a heart of love! If He wouldn't step in and halt humanity's downward plunge, we would all be ruined! God is the Savior of the world! He is the absolute; He is the life! We are the ones who have to change. So let's not put our ideas above God's word, and think that we can get away with it. Let's join with Moses and all the overcomers in singing this beautiful song in our hearts!

Why is this a song of Moses and of the Lamb? **Just as the song of Moses is a song of total victory over the enemy, so Christ leads us in a song of total victory over sin and death!** The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the proof that life is stronger than death! In Him we have the victory!

This song of victory and triumph is also ours, for Egypt symbolizes the rule of this world. **Just as the Israelites had been in bondage to Egypt, so we have been in bondage to the rule of our carnal mind.** Only the blood (soul) of Jesus Christ and the power of His indwelling Spirit can liberate us! In the Old Covenant Israel was "*baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.*" (**1 Cor. 10:2**) In the New Covenant, our water baptism is a baptism into Christ's death to sin, and our baptism in the Holy Spirit is a baptism into the body of Christ.

"Righteous and true are Your ways." At present only the overcomers recognize that

all of God's ways are righteous and true. Many people still question God's ways, and many are angry with God. These are people who only have a carnal idea of God. Their idea of God is formed from their own thoughts and imaginations because they have not received revelation knowledge of who God is.

"King of the nations." Christ is King of the nations now! He is not the coming King; He is King! He is King of all the nations in the whole world, as well as of all the nations that war within us. No nation is excluded. He is King because God has declared Him King! His perfect obedience, even in the most horrendous circumstances, has given Him a name that is above every other name! Deceived humanity does not approve of His kingship. Its ignorance of truth causes them to seek a king whom they can control. God does not ask for their opinion. He has given us a King who rules righteously. At present we don't see most of humanity submitted to Him, but that time will come.

"Your righteous acts have been revealed." In what way have they been revealed? God's righteous acts have been revealed in the great salvation He has procured for us and for the whole world, and in the fact that He keeps His promises! He knew we could never become righteous in our own strength, so He did it all! God has not left us without a Savior! He is our provision!

Just as God did everything to bring the Israelites out of Egypt, so He has done everything to take us out of our Egypt (the Adam man) in order to bring us into the Promised Land (Christ Jesus). God always takes us out of something in order to bring us into something better! **He takes us out of our faith in the lie in order to bring us into faith in the truth.** God brought the plagues upon Egypt; He smote the firstborn; He divided the sea, and He brought it back together again in order to free the Israelites from Egypt's power over them! Only those who applied the blood were freed! By putting our trust in Jesus Christ, we are applying the blood of Jesus. **By receiving His soul, that is, His sense of being, we are freed from our carnal thinking, for that thinking causes us to sin.**

"After these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened." (v.5) Young's Literal Translation says that "the sanctuary of the tabernacle of the testimony" was opened. In the midst of these things that were happening, John saw the NAOS, the place where God dwells, opened. Whenever the Greek word NAOS is used, it refers to the temple of our body, not to a physical building (HIERON). In **1 Corinthians 6:19** we read that we are the temple (NAOS) of the Holy Spirit! This refers to the innermost part where God dwells in us. So John saw an open spiritual temple (NAOS) in heaven. Since Christ has *"raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus,"* (Eph. 2:6) our abode or place of residence is now in the heavenly places in Christ. This is where we now dwell!

The opening of this temple takes place in the spiritual realm. A closed door keeps us ignorant of what is beyond that door, but an open door is an invitation to enter into a new dimension - a dimension that was formerly closed to us. It enables us to gain access so we can discover the wonderful spiritual treasures that are there for us. **An open door in the spiritual temple signifies an open communication with God our Father so we can discover and enjoy the wealth of all that is ours in Him!** The veil to the throne room has been torn, and we now have access to intimate fellowship with our heavenly Father as His sons and daughters!

Our intimacy of fellowship with our Lord changes us, and we become witnesses of His nature. Jesus said to His disciples, *“You shall be My witnesses after the Holy Spirit has come upon you.”* After the disciples had received the Holy Spirit they were not the same people they used to be. **The Holy Spirit had changed them from a fearful, self-centered lot, to fearless, Christ-centered personalities!** Now their lives radiated Christ! In becoming partakers of the life of Christ, they became jubilant and triumphant witnesses of it.

God’s intervention in our lives brings change. The list of charges against us is wiped out because we are put into the new man! This change in our lives bears witness to the grace of God and His great salvation. **When our lives reveal the nature of Christ, the heavenly temple is opened, and we become an open book - open toward God, and open for others to see the Christ in us.**

“And the seven angels who had the seven plagues came out of the temple, clothed in linen, clean and bright, and girded around their chests with golden girdles.” (v.6) The seven messengers came out of the spiritual temple that we are. Seven symbolizes divine completeness. These messengers are clothed in clean and bright linen. We know that the priests could only enter the holy place in linen clothes. Linen does not absorb sweat, so this symbolizes the fact that self-effort (sweat) cannot enter the presence of God.

The golden girdles around their chests are synonymous with the breastplates in **Ephesians 6:14**. The breastplate represents the righteousness that is ours in Christ, for gold symbolizes divinity. This righteousness has nothing to do with our self-effort; if it did, it would be flawed - it would not be divine. The righteousness that is ours in Christ is perfect!

We cannot take credit for anything that God does in our lives! God does not share His glory with the carnal man, for that man lives in death. But He does share it with the spiritual man because he is born of God’s Spirit. He has God’s life, and God’s life has glory! Jesus said, *“The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one.”* (John 17:22)

“Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever.” (v.7) Four symbolizes universal completeness. We are familiar with the expression, “the four corners of the earth” to express completeness. So four living creatures represent the completeness of Christ’s life as seen in the four gospels. Matthew pictures Christ as King, Mark as servant, Luke as the Son of Man, and John as the Son of God. Out of Christ’s life within us, these golden divine bowls, filled with the passion of God, are given to us.

God has a passion for righteousness! God’s divine bowls cannot be filled with anything that is contrary to His nature. The word **wrath** gives us a wrong idea. It causes us to think of man’s uncontrollable anger. However, when we discover that this word should actually be translated **passion**, we get a different picture. God is passionately against all unrighteousness. Righteousness is always against unrighteousness! We need to be purified of everything that does not glorify God!

God puts situations and people in our lives to help us see the areas that need to be changed. We may be upset with these difficulties, but they are placed in our lives by the passion of God. He knows our needs, and He knows that affliction is necessary for our growth. **He also knows that the glory of His life in us for all eternity is worth much more than the short-term sorrow that is necessary to make it shine forth.**

“Forever and ever” is not a correct translation of the Greek word AION. It should read *“to the ages of the ages”*. Aion means an age, and an age has both a beginning and an ending. An age is not an eternity, for it does have an end. Extreme difficulties may sometimes seem endless, but they do end. Since eternity does not have a beginning or an ending, wouldn’t it be rather foolish to add an ‘ever’ to that which already has no ending? God is eternal, but He is also in our ages, for He has created them. God wants us to know that He is with us even in our difficult times!

“And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power; and no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.” (v.8)

It may be difficult for us to associate the glory of God with smoke, because we do not associate the glory of God with fire. God is a consuming fire, and incomplete combustion produces smoke. Here the glory of God is manifested by the consumption of everything in us that is not of Christ! Smoke is the evidence that not everything is consumed at once. The seven plagues of the seven angels first have to perform their duty before entrance is permitted.

The glory of God was often manifested in a cloud. It was a cloud that led the Israelites in the wilderness. After the tabernacle of Moses was finished, it was

covered with a cloud, and the tabernacle was filled with the glory of God, and no one could enter it! Even Moses was denied access because he represented the Law, and the Law has no place in the glory of God. All religious activity takes place by the administration of the law, for the law gives power to self-endeavor. This religious activity of the flesh cannot enter God's temple. In symbolism we see then, that the Law cannot enter the glory of God. So the purpose of the seven plagues is to rid us of all self-glorifying, self-government, self-importance and pride. They are to rid us of everything that is not of God!

The physical tabernacle of Moses foreshadows the spiritual temple that we see here. The Greek word HIERON speaks of a physical temple, and NAOS of the spiritual temple. When the spiritual temple (NAOS) is filled with the glory of God and His power, entrance is only permitted **after** the seven plagues of the seven angels are finished. When the seven plagues are finished, they have accomplished their duty of eradicating the authority of the flesh in us, for no flesh can enter the presence of God! We will no longer work for our righteousness by trying to keep the law! A clear understanding of the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit enables us to live and function in that grace!

Smoke forms a barrier. Just as it keeps us from entering a burning building, so God sets barriers in our lives to keep the flesh from trespassing onto holy ground. He stationed some cherubim with the flaming sword to guard the way to the tree of life after Adam and Eve had been driven out of the garden. Adam and Eve were not allowed to partake of the tree of life in the condition they were in. After their descent into spiritual death, their new mindset told them that God was now their enemy. Therefore they had to hide from Him. **The lie had become their truth, and lies cannot have fellowship with God.** The flaming sword was put at the entrance to the garden. This barrier was God's protection for Adam and Eve; it kept them from partaking of the tree of life in an unworthy state of being. This barrier is removed when we are put into Christ. **God wants us to have fellowship with Him, but the flesh is always against the Spirit, and the Spirit is against the flesh, so the flesh has to die before the intimacy of fellowship with God can take place.**

To gain entrance into this spiritual temple, the seven calamities have to be fulfilled or completed in our lives. These calamities do not come to everyone at the same time. They are made to measure for every Christian. The whole structure of God's habitation is composed of many individual stones, and the true church throughout the ages is the building fitly framed together. **Every individual has his/her own walk with the Lord, and God's processing in each of our lives varies according to God's purpose for each individual, as well as each individual's needs.** Each of us has to be purified to gain entrance into an intimate relationship with our Lord!

Let us praise God for His intervention in our lives, and trust the leading of the Holy Spirit at all times!

Chapter 16

As we look into the spiritual meaning of this chapter, we need to keep the purpose of this book in mind. It is to bring us a revelation of Jesus Christ and how He is revealed in His body! If we fail to see His love, majesty and power, we have not understood the message. Jesus Christ is love, and therefore everything He does comes out of a heart of love. This also applies to His bowls of wrath - correctly translated bowls of **passion**. They are motivated by pure love. **This message is not just an end-time message; it is for all times! It was just as applicable in the first century AD as it is now!**

“Then I heard a loud voice from the temple, saying to the seven angels, ‘Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.’” (v.1) This is a continuation of the vision we discussed in chapter 15. The seven angels are the same messengers who came out of the NAOS temple - the spiritual temple. They had received the golden (divine) bowls of the wrath (passion) of God. A loud voice indicates a voice of authority. This voice came to John spiritually in the same manner that the voice of the Holy Spirit speaks to us.

The angels are to pour out God’s passion into the earth. Some translations read *on the earth*, but the older NASV and the Concordant Literal, have correctly translated it **“into”**. Since we are made of the dust of the earth, we understand that these bowls of passion are poured into the lives of people!

As we continue reading we notice that there is a similarity of these plagues with the ones that came upon the land of Egypt in the time of Moses. The plagues that were against the gods of the Egyptians, afflicted the Egyptians - not the Israelites. As we seek to understand this message, we must keep in mind that these plagues are against our worldly thinking. They are to awaken in us a recognition of those areas in our lives that need changing.

“So the first angel went and poured out his bowl in the earth; and it became a loathsome and malignant sore on the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image.” (v.2) Just as the plagues that came upon the Egyptians were ordered by God, so these plagues are ordered by God. Notice that the devil is not involved in this. If he were, he would be working against his own kingdom. This is God’s work! He loves us so much that he does not want us to be polluted with carnal thinking. So God spoke a word, and it became a sore spot to them. He gave us the commandments, but when they are received in the carnal mind, they become sore spots to us.

The loathsome and malignant sores are vivid reminders of the impurities of carnal thinking. Malignancy is hard to cure, and even with the aid of modern medicine it usually leads to death. The thinking that carries the mark of the beast is in the death realm. Only those who worship the beast and his image are afflicted.

This message, coded in symbolism, is constantly going forth. The loathsome and malignant sores represent spiritual abnormalities that bring death. The message of this symbolism does not mean that all sickness is due to the judgment of God. We know that sickness came as the result of sin - if we disregard the laws God has given us, sickness will result. Immoral living is the cause of many diseases. But that is not the message of this symbolism. Neither is it our business to try to determine the cause of people's illnesses by our philosophies and judgments. The Holy Spirit knows what needs to be changed in each of us. This message cuts across the grain of people's natural legalistic thinking and their idea that God is always ready to punish people for their errors and omissions.

All those who do not understand the spiritual message of the Bible carry the mark of the beast. The Greek word for beast is THERION, and it means a wild beast; it has an untamed nature. This is God's description of the carnal nature that resides in the Adamic man. For example, King Nebuchadnezzar was given a beast's heart. (**Daniel 4:16**) Paul said that he fought with wild beasts in Ephesus. These beasts were not animals that roam the wilds; they were people who opposed him because they did not accept the gospel of Jesus Christ. Any thoughts about God that are devised by the mind of man carry the mark of the beast, and anything that is made to image these thoughts carries the mark of the beast.

All the speculations and imaginations of the natural mind have to be destroyed because they are against the true knowledge of God. These thoughts need to be taken "*captive to the obedience of Christ.*" (2 Cor. 10:5) Everyone who has not received revelation in the knowledge of Christ, is creating an image of God in the natural mind. Every image has to be thrown down so that true worship of God can take place.

"The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like that of a dead man; and every living thing in the sea died." (v.3) This bowl was poured into the sea of natural humanity. When Moses was sent to free the Israelites, he turned the water that was to give life to the Egyptians, into blood. The Egyptians were to understand that their belief system was in the death realm. They were drinking water that had its source in the god of their own creation. The god they worshiped could not change their sense of being. It had no power!

God wants us to know that everything in the natural realm is in death. A vivid

description of natural man is found in **Romans 3:9-18**. God said that there is none righteous, no not one. Everyone has sinned, and all fall short of the glory of God. But this is not to be a permanent condition. By the grace of God we can be justified in Christ! It is important to know our lost condition, for if we are blind to it, we won't receive His redemption!

“Then the third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of waters; and they became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters saying, `Righteous are You, who are and who were, O Holy One, because You judged these things; for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. They deserve it.” (vv. 4-6)

The third angel poured out his bowl into springs of water. Those who drink the water of life, drink from the one river that flows from the throne of God. Since this angel poured out his bowl into many rivers and springs of water, we know that they represent man's numerous philosophies. Therefore we know that these rivers and springs of waters represent man's numerous philosophies. Here we see God's judgment on all the philosophies that originate in the carnal or natural mind. They are all in the death realm. This world has many “great” philosophers, and humanity drinks their ideas, but none of them can bring life to their adherents. God wants us to drink of His water, for only His water can give us life!

“Righteous are You, who are and who were, O Holy One, because You judged these things.” The messenger of the waters declares God's judgments to be righteous! Our God never changes; He is always the same! His judgments are always righteous because they are truth! Since He never changes, His judgment on carnal thinking is continuous. He has already declared man's natural thinking about spiritual realities to be false. He always declares it to be false, full of lies and deception. The mindset that we have inherited from the devil is always being judged by God's life and His righteousness. **God's judgment is not only reserved for the future; it is constantly taking place.** Jesus said that there is no truth in man's mindset! We need to agree with Christ, and also judge our natural mindset to be void of truth, and therefore false!

“For they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink.” Those who live in their carnal thinking will persecute and kill those who can see spiritually. They pour out the blood of saints and prophets. Cain killed Abel, and the Jews and Gentiles crucified Jesus - and the list goes on! Unless they are stopped in their tracks, those who will not repent of their wrong attitude will continue to persecute the saints. God needs to show them that they are drinking water that comes from the wrong source. God turned the Nile River into blood, and this was to show the Egyptians that their god was not able to sustain life.

“They deserve it.” This sounds like the law, doesn’t it? We don’t see any grace in this statement. They have been killing the saints and the prophets, so let’s give them blood to drink! Notice however, that this statement comes from the mouth of Him who is righteous! It does not come out of a desire to get even, but out of love and a desire for them to change. It is a statement from Him who knows what their rebellion produces. Those who rebel against God will continue to drink in the philosophies of men and thus continue in their downward spiral into greater darkness. God wants to get their attention, and He does this by turning their water into blood.

“And I heard the altar saying, ‘Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments.’” (v. 7) We wonder where this voice came from, for we know that an altar cannot speak. In Chapter 6 we learned that there were souls under the brazen altar. This altar was in the outer court of the tabernacle, and on it animals were killed and sacrificed. These Christians had been slain or sacrificed because of their faith. Those who preach truth will become a sacrifice. People will say evil things about them and slay them with words and demeaning attitudes. They are laying down their lives, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, *“How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”* (6:10) The fact that these people are under the altar, yet crying out with a loud voice, tells us that they have presented their bodies to God as a **living** sacrifice. The voice from the altar encompasses all who have been, and are being sacrificed - all who give their bodies as a living sacrifice!

The emphatic agreement John had with these judgments showed his deep understanding of this situation because he too had experienced tribulation. Historical records state that he had even been boiled in oil! He was included in the number of those who had laid their lives on the altar of sacrifice! He understood that God is in control of every situation! Those who are being persecuted are satisfied with God’s judgments. His judgments are always perfect because He judges with truth and righteousness!

A judgment (KRISIS) primarily denotes a separation. In **Matthew 3**, John prophesied of Jesus saying, *“His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”* In threshing grain, a separation has to take place. The grain is garnered, but the chaff is burned. An unquenchable fire is one that cannot be extinguished until it has finished burning everything that is combustible. God’s judgments bring a separation between truth and the lie. He will continue this separation until all the lies have been eradicated.

“Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty.” This is our agreement with God! Our recognition of God’s truthfulness and sovereignty will change our lifestyle! It will keep us from

trying to solve our problems and helping God do His work! So often we hear people say, “Well, God it’s in Your hands.” As soon as they have said it, it’s back in their hands and they are filled with worry. Maybe we also find ourselves in that category. If we do, we need to receive a revelation of the greatness of our God and the beauty of His judgments! **Our agreement with God brings us into a oneness of purpose with Him and with His processing.**

“The fourth angel poured out his bowl upon the sun; and it was given to it to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues, and they did not repent, so as to give Him glory.”(vv.8-9)

This angel poured out his bowl upon the sun. The sun represents natural light or knowledge of spiritual things. When humanity walks in the light of its own knowledge, it will suffer the consequences of that deceptive knowledge. The world would not be in the mess it is in today if it would hear the voice of the Son of God. The purpose of fire is to refine or purify. Pharaoh walked in the light of his natural knowledge and refused to listen to the voice of God. Therefore he had to suffer from all the plagues that came upon Egypt. The plagues increased in severity, but he refused to repent. Living in rebellion against God blasphemes His name. Rebellion carries the message that we think we know better than God. **Obedience honors His name, for by it we acknowledge that He is right.**

“Men were scorched with fierce heat.” People flounder in their misery, but they do not see their need to change. Instead, they blame God or others for their misery. Instead of repenting, they live in the hell they have created. Instead of seeing what God wants to remove, they cling to their rubbish! Those who love truth will welcome the heat, even though the flesh cries out in pain!

Repentance brings glory to God. Only the humble can repent, for in repentance we admit that we are in the wrong; it also implies that we are willing to change the direction of our course. Pride breeds rebellion - rebellion against God and His authority. It cannot submit itself to God’s authority, and therefore God is against the proud. Rebellion **never** brings glory to authority. Our thinking has to come into conformity with God’s thinking, for He alone is truth! **Conformity with truth brings glory to God!**

“Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast; and his kingdom became darkened; and they gnawed their tongues because of pain, and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they did not repent of their deeds.”(vv. 10-11)

God’s passion is against the throne or government of the beast and that throne

is situated in our carnal thinking. God is against the beast's government in us. He wants that to be removed! The kingdom of the beast is one of darkness and ignorance. Ignorance causes pain. For example, when our one-year-old son saw his birthday candle, he wanted to put his finger in the flame. He wouldn't listen to our negatives, so we let him get his finger just hot enough to let him know that fire is hot. His ignorance of fire caused him pain. But he was a fast learner. After that we had no problem keeping his fingers out of the fire.

Unfortunately, not all of us are fast learners in regard to spiritual things. Our ignorance of God's great salvation causes us a lot of pain. Our own will is embedded in ignorance, yet our ignorance seems so logical and reasonable to us! We think we are in control, and that we must remain in control, even when we fumble around in the darkness of our human thinking. If we refuse to repent, and refuse to admit our ignorance and pride, we will blame God and others for our difficulties. This reveals the beast's government within us, and we will continue to do the things that bring pain and trouble to us and to those we love. We want to stop our bungling, but we can't. It's easier to blame God and others instead of recognizing our own need to repent.

Repentance is a bad word for those who are under the beast's government. Why should they repent when they are convinced that they are within their own rights? To repent means that they have to admit they were wrong! Heaven forbid! They would rather endure the pain of their rebellion, wrong choices and actions! "They gnawed their tongues because of the pain!" Have you ever bitten your tongue? That's painful! How foolish to try to drive out one pain by inflicting another! Their ignorance and pride are so great that they would rather endure pain than repent. They think it is more satisfying to blame God for their problems, so they blaspheme His name. This is worship of self; this is idolatry! God's passion is against a government that keeps its people in darkness, ignorance, lies and deception!

"The sixth angel poured out his bowl upon the great river, the Euphrates; and its water was dried up, so that the way would be prepared for the kings from the east."
(v.12)

The river Euphrates marked the boundary between Israel and Babylon. This river originates in Armenia, flows south, and empties into the Persian Gulf. Its name means **the good and abounding river**. The kings from the east would have to cross this river before they could invade Israel. The Euphrates River was an obstacle in their path to Israel, but when it dried up, it was easy for the kings to cross over! What a glorious opportunity for the anti-Israeli forces to attack Israel! The drying up of this river would lure the kings of Babylon (confusion) to go and battle against Israel (God's chosen people). We'll discuss the symbolism of this verse in connection with the following verses.

“And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs; for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.” (vv.13-14)

These verses bring us a vivid picture of the uncleanness of demonic spirits. They are compared to frogs, and frogs were included in the unclean animals that the Israelites were forbidden to eat. These demonic spirits came out of the mouth of the dragon (the mind of humanity), out of the mouth of the beast (the beastly nature of humanity), and out of the mouth of the false prophet (the religiosity that is in the natural mind). False prophets teach lies and deceit under the guise of truth. Demonic spirits are unclean, united in their utterance of lies, and void of the truth; therefore they need to be driven out! Only the acceptance of truth can do away with our wrong thinking.

In **Is. 9:14-15** we read, “So the Lord cuts off head and tail from Israel. The head is the elder and honorable man, and the prophet who teaches falsehood is the tail.” Elders and prophets were highly regarded leaders by the populace. But God says that He will cut them off! Pharisees were the elite religious leaders in the time of Jesus. They were men who knew the Old Testament scriptures forwards and backwards, yet they missed the truth of God’s message! They did not recognize that Jesus is the truth, so they led the people astray by their legalism and their religiosity. Religiosity is the trademark of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. They target everyone who does not accept their doctrines and views because they want complete control over everyone. The thing that surprises us is that they can work miracles, just as we were astonished when we read that the Egyptian magicians could work miracles, but we notice that their power was limited. These spirits control the mind of natural humanity.

Not all the miracles that claim to be done in the name of Jesus are actually done in His name. Jesus said, *“Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’”* (Matt. 7:22-23)

The demonic spirits that are in the mind of humanity go out *“to the kings of the whole inhabited earth to mobilize them for the battle of the day of God Almighty.”* (Concordant Literal) Their work is limited to those who live on earth (in their carnal mind) this includes those who are in the church but are still living in their carnal mind, as well as those who are of the world. Demonic spirits have no authority over those who are seated with Christ in heavenly places even while they are living on planet earth! The woes are for the inhabitants of the earth.

The purpose of these demons is to gather the kings (rulers) of the whole world together to war against God. This war takes place in our mind. Our big wars are fought within us - against those imaginations and speculations that form strongholds against the work of God in our lives. They create images that supplant God. If we yield to these imaginations, they become our rulers. They grow in strength until they think they can make war on God, and win. Paul told us to cast down every lofty thought that is against God! *“For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”* (2 Cor. 10:4-5) It's great to know that the demonic host cannot win the war!

“Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame.” (v.15) Christ's coming like a thief seems like a negative to us, yet Paul seems to be in agreement with this thought. In **1 Thessalonians 5:2** Paul writes, *“For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.”* Christ comes like a thief, and the day of the Lord comes as a thief. How does a thief come? He comes unexpectedly, and he takes whatever he wants. He does not ask our permission. Christ came to Saul of Tarsus (Paul), unexpectedly, and He took his religiosity and darkness away.

What does Christ want to take away from us? Since He wants to change our lives, He has to take away all the lies and deception that have been lurking in our darkness, and which we have accepted as truth. He comes to us unexpectedly, takes away our darkness, and exposes our wrong thinking. When our darkness is gone we can receive truth and understanding!

We may wonder how Christ can come as a thief when it also says that every eye will see Him. The carnal mind of man has caused us to believe that Christ only comes two times. This causes some problems. It is impossible to fit everything the scriptures say about His coming again, into one future coming, because they just don't fit together! A close look at the scriptures shows us that they do not speak of a second coming; they say He is coming **again**. Jesus came again in the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, for the scriptures declare that the Lord is the Spirit. (**2 Cor. 3:17**) He took up residence in the disciples at that time, and He comes again in the Holy Spirit to take up residence in us. He never leaves us nor forsakes us, so how does He come again? **He comes to us (to our awareness) in every new revelation we receive of Him!** He comes again in the overcomers, for they are expressions of the very nature of Christ - even as Jesus Christ was the exact representation of the invisible God! Jesus Christ came to show us the invisible nature of God, and now Christ comes in the overcomers to reveal His nature of life and love to the world.

“Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes.” Blessed is the one who does not go to sleep again after he has been awakened. Those who sleep are not conscious of their surroundings or of the darkness they are in. Here physical sleep is a picture of a spiritual condition that does not discern the difference between light and darkness - between truth and deception. We need to be awake to discern the difference.

Our garments are also spiritual. There are numerous references to garments of praise, humility, and righteousness in the scriptures. Righteousness, praise and humility portray an inward condition of our heart, and they determine our outward actions. These garments are lost when we fall back into legalism, pride and religiosity. As long as we excuse our wrong attitudes, we won't change, for excuses don't produce repentance. This emphasizes our need to walk in the Spirit continually.

“Lest he walk about naked and men see his shame.” Those who are blind are unable to see their nakedness. The Laodicean church in **Rev. 3:17** was blind, and therefore ignorant of its nakedness. In the scriptures, nakedness symbolizes an absence of truth and righteousness, and thus exposes our shame and guilt. When Christ clothes us with His righteousness, He takes away our shame and guilt. Our Christian prerogative is to help those who have exposed their own unrighteousness. When Noah got drunk and lay exposed in his tent, two of his sons walked in backwards and covered him. This illustrates a beautiful truth, showing us how to restore the wayward in the grace of God. We let them know that they are loved and that Christ's salvation is great enough to do away with every sin, and that repentance brings change. We do not initiate a gossip and slander campaign.

“And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon.” (v. 16) Armageddon is the city of Megiddo, and Har-Magedon is the hill. Megiddo was situated on the southern rim of the plain of Esdraelon, 6 miles from Mt. Carmel and 11 from Nazareth. It commanded an important pass, so it was the scene of many wars. It was famous for two great victories for the Israelites: of Deborah and Barak over Sisera, and of Gideon over the Midianites. It was also the scene of two great disasters: the death of Saul in his battle against the Philistines and the death of Josiah after he joined the king of Assyria against Pharaoh Necho, king of Egypt.

“And they gathered them together.” Who do **they** and **them** refer to? The word **they** refers to the seven messengers, and **them** refers to the unclean spirits. Since Har-Magedon represents a strategic military site where decisive battles were fought, it symbolizes a decisive battle between the vain imaginations that are resident in the carnal mind and the truth that is in the mind of Christ.

Common concerns, fears or desires, unite kings and nations, and lure them into battle. When the River Euphrates (the barrier between Israel and the king of Babylon) dried up, the removal of this barrier would entice the kings of the East to battle against Israel. Pharaoh was lured by his greed to try to recapture the Israelites, and this led to his own destruction. Even so certain events form a “come-on” for the unclean spirits, and they are lured out to do battle against the truth, and subsequently are vanquished.

The battle, popularly known as the battle of Armageddon, does not refer to the destruction of people. Jesus came to save people - not to destroy them. He came to destroy the works of the devil. (1 Jn. 3:8) These works originate in the thoughts of the natural carnal mind. The devil wants control, and does not give up easily in his fight against the truth. This important battle takes place in the mind. Since it is so strategically located, it is known as the battle of Armageddon. If the devil can control the mind, he has won the battle. How can we be victorious when we don't know who the enemy is, and the strategy he uses? God wants us to know that the devil only has power in deception, and that there is no truth in what he says, for he is a liar and the father of lies. God knows how to get our attention. **He puts circumstances in our lives to help us recognize our enemy. This is our God-given opportunity to overcome him.**

“Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl upon the air; and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, ‘It is done.’” (v.17) Why was the bowl poured upon the air? Because the air needed cleansing. Foul air displaces the good air and carries disease germs. We need oxygen for healthy living. This also applies to us spiritually. If we don't breathe in the words of Christ, we are breathing foul air (thoughts induced by the devil's mindset) and this affects our spiritual life. This shows that our air needs cleansing, and this bowl brings cleansing into our thought life.

This cleansing caused a voice from the spiritual temple (NAOS) within us to cry out loudly saying, ‘It is done.’ It came from the throne - from the very heart or center of our being. Every time truth triumphs over the lie, a song of victory floods our hearts and we cry out joyfully, “I'm done with that lie! I thought it was truth, but now I see it for what it really is. The lie is finished; it's vanquished!”

“And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder: and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be on the earth, so great an earthquake was it, and so mighty. The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe.” (vv.18-21)

“And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder: and there was a great earthquake.” God often makes His presence known by lightning, thunder and earthquakes. The Israelites experienced this when they stood at the foot of Mt. Sinai in preparation for receiving the Law. Spiritually speaking, the illumination of God’s word comes to us instantaneously, as a flash of lightning, and we joyfully cry out, “Now I understand.” Just as an earthquake changes the earth’s surface, so God’s words bring life-changing results! They are often accompanied by many after-shocks. The spiritual earthquakes God gives us also change our lives!

The illumination of God’s word takes us out of the lie and brings us into truth. It brings us out of Babylon (confusion). Because of the confusion of tongues that took place at Babel, Babylon symbolizes confusion in spiritual imagery. Jerusalem represents the city of God, and Babylon represents the religious system and community. Religiosity judges the external behavior of people according to its man-made laws, and persecutes those who do not adhere to its doctrines. Truth does away with confusion, and therefore upsets Babylon and brings about its fall.

“And the great city was split into three parts.” The illumination of truth divided Babylon into the following three parts: 1) Those who did not accept truth and therefore continued to live according to their own understanding and imaginations. 2) Those who received Christ Jesus but continued to depend on their own good works for their sanctification. Since they were only receiving spiritual truth in their natural mind, it did not bring about an internal change; it only changed their behavior for the benefit of being accepted. 3) Those who received Christ Jesus and recognized that His words are spirit and truth were receiving His words in their spiritual mind. This produced an internal change.

Our obedience to the voice of the Holy Spirit brings us into a higher realm into a heavenly realm. **To be seated with Christ means that we are resting from our self-effort and depending on the salvation Christ has achieved for us.** We no longer depend on good works for our sanctification. **Christ has become our righteousness and our sanctification, and the source of everything we do.** In order to live in the fullness of the heavenly realm, we need to be freed from everything that belongs to the earthly realm for no dust can enter that realm!

“Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.” Babylon was remembered before God! God has not forgotten about those who are in ignorance, confusion, and religiosity! He remembers the awful plight they are in. God’s love reaches out to every particle of our being! Every area that is not under His government has to fall!

“To give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.” This sounds very ominous!

However, a very literal translation of this reads, *“to give her the cup (drinking vessel) of the wine (revelation) of the wrath (passion) of his desire.”* Wine symbolizes revelation, and a cup symbolizes a measure. A measure of revelation shall be given to them. A revelation of what? A revelation of the passion of God’s desire! “Fierce wrath” is a wrong translation. Both Strong’s dictionary and Thayer’s Greek lexicon say that the Greek THUMOS means passion. According to the Oxford dictionary, ORGE means **an intense enthusiasm for something**. Strong’s dictionary describes it as a **desire (a reaching forth or excitement of the mind) i.e., violent passion**.

Babylon is to understand that its government has come to an end. This does not refer to the city of Babylon that has been lying in ruins for hundreds of years. This is not an end-time message. It would not make any sense to relegate to the future, events that happen to a city that is no more. So we know that Babylon symbolizes something spiritual. It represents our religiosity and the religious systems that evolve out of it. They are a counterfeit of the reality that is ours in Christ. Their good works are not Spirit-directed; they are humanity-oriented. But humanity does not know the difference. Because it is in darkness, it is content with its religiosity. **Religiosity is ever warring against the Christ in us, trying to displace Him!** God has to expose our religiosity so we can get rid of it!

“And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.” An island is an isolated piece of land, and a mountain is a high place - a stronghold. The revelation of Jesus Christ in us takes away our feelings of isolation; it also does away with our high places - our pride and our ego. **When we see Him as He is, we are overwhelmed with His love, mercy, grace and truth!** In stark contrast to God’s love, we see our selfishness, pride and vain belief in our lies. We cannot embrace this revelation without humbling ourselves and letting go of our lies and pride.

“And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds (one talent) each, came down from heaven upon men; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because it was extremely severe.” Hail is frozen water - water that has left its impurities and risen to a higher realm. Hail symbolizes a hard word from God. The weight of the hailstones (about one talent, approximately 75 pounds) tells us that it is very severe and very destructive. It will destroy everything that lies in its path.

This message in symbolism tells us that the pet theories of the religious systems will be destroyed. People love their traditions! Just as the Ephesians cried, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians,” so humanity and the Christians that live in the earthy realm cry out, “Great are our traditions and our beliefs.” Those who do not want to receive the destruction of their wrong thinking will be very angry with those who preach truth. They are so sure they are right that they will even blaspheme or speak contemptuously of God! **Pride does not want to surrender to anything, but in humility there is no place for pride.**

There is a story about a man who was very humble. Everyone recognized and admired this humble man. After some time the elders of that town thought his humility should be recognized and rewarded. So one day he was presented with an award for his humility. The man received his award and put it away. One day he decided to wear it. That day an angel came and took it away from him, for he no longer deserved it.

Revelation shows us the areas within us that hinder the revelation of Christ to the world. May God give us the ability to understand the symbolism contained in this book, and to see that all these things need to be worked out within us!

Chapter 17

The natural mind has knowledge but it does not have unlimited knowledge; nor does it have the wisdom to apply this knowledge correctly. It always opposes the Spirit, so it cannot receive spiritual knowledge! To correctly interpret this symbolism, as ever, we have to see it with the eyes of Christ and receive His wisdom. So let's continue to look at the pictures God has given us in the material realm to see what is taking place in the spiritual realm within us.

“Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, ‘Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality.’ And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns. The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality, and on her forehead a name was written, a 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 witnesses of Jesus. And when I saw her, I wondered greatly.” (vv.1-6)

In the midst of this vision, one of the seven angels suddenly came to John and invited him to observe the drama that was to take place. He was told that he would be shown the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters. Who is this harlot? How can she sit on many waters? Who are the kings with whom she has committed acts of immorality? Our mind is filled with so many questions!

In order to identify this woman, a name was written on her forehead. The writing on the forehead signifies the thinking that takes place within this woman. She is Babylon, the mother of harlots. The waters she sits on *“are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues.”* (v.15) This tells us that all humanity is controlled by her.

Let's look at the origin of the historical Babylon, the mother of harlots. For this information we'll glean some insights from biblical and ancient historical accounts. In **Genesis 10:8-10** we find that Nimrod established Babylon as the beginning of an empire that stretched into Nineveh and beyond. He was head of an authoritarian government, and he became famous for having provided a safe place for the people to live.

Ancient history tells us that Nimrod had a beautiful wife named Semiramus.

Externally she was exceedingly beautiful but internally she was full of deceit, and a harlot of the first order. After Nimrod's death she wanted his political power, so she used an unwanted pregnancy to her advantage by claiming that she had become pregnant without any human agency. When her son was born she claimed that he was Nimrod reborn. The promise of a coming Messiah in Gen. 3:15 was still fresh in the minds of the people, so they readily believed her brazen lie that claimed her son was the promised seed of the woman. She called him Tammuz and said he was the Messiah of the people. This made her the mother of God and the expression "mother of God" came into being. Now she was deified together with Nimrod, because Nimrod had come back to earth via her womb.

To further glorify herself she had many statues erected of herself with her child on her breast, and these were distributed all over Babylon. That symbol has gone throughout the world. Semiramis is known by many names. One of the popular ones is Venus. In Jeremiah's time she was worshiped as the queen of heaven. In Paul's time she was worshiped as Diana of the Ephesians. As Semiramis emerged into the foreground, she became known as the original mother of God, and Nimrod faded into insignificance.

Furthermore, she claimed that this birth had taken place on December 24th, and December 25th was instituted as Child Day. The celebration of this day goes back to at least 2000 BC. Shocking, isn't it, to find that the origin of our December 25th Christmas celebration dates back to this pagan custom! Although some names have changed, the celebration still feeds our selfish nature.

This is the historical setting of Babylon, and it shows us the origin and spread of a counterfeit and harlot religion. We may smugly reason that this part of the vision does not apply to us. Yet it does apply to us as well as to everyone else throughout the ages, for this counterfeit religion symbolizes what takes place in our natural thinking. We may not want to admit it, but within every natural man and woman lurks this desire to satisfy one's own lusting - the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. These things form a harlot religion, and need to be judged as such.

John was invited to see the judgment of the great harlot! A harlot is a prostitute; she is not a wife! A wife enjoys an intimate relationship with her husband within a covenant relationship, and she is faithful to him! However, a prostitute is engaged in sexual promiscuity, and is not faithful to one man. She desires intimacy with any man whom she can lure into paying the right price by making herself look appealing and enticing to him. Her desire for intimacy is without the framework of a covenant relationship.

This harlot is our carnal mind. It wants us to be faithful to our flesh - to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life. These things are not from the Father, but from this world! (**1 John 2:16**) Our natural mind is always tempting us to align ourselves with its illicit craving instead of being faithful to our husband, Christ Jesus.

The mind is very deceitful and therefore incapable of making right decisions! It is influenced by our desire for comfort, honor, beauty, wealth, power, happiness, excitement, and freedom from pain. We want to feed our pride and satisfy our emotions. The various situations we encounter will reveal our gut feelings and give us an opportunity to respond to these desires. This deceitful mind is present in every person in every nation! It has no respect for color or language. This harlot, our carnal mind, sits on peoples, multitudes, nations and tongues.

The Bible does not tell us that we have a free will, but Babylon tells us that we do. If we indeed had a free will, we could not be influenced by any situation that causes fear, pain or torment. Neither could we be influenced by greedy, selfish desires for money, honor, power and control. However we know that we are influenced, and therefore we know that the idea of having a free will is a lie! We know we have a will, but we do **not** have a **free** will. Paul tells us that, *“the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.”* (Gal. 5:17) A free will would enable us to do whatever we purpose to do - we'd even be able to keep our New Year's resolutions! But Paul tells us that we **cannot** do the things that we please because the flesh is against the Spirit. Paul doubly emphasizes this in **Romans 6:16** by telling us that we are slaves. We are slaves to the one whom we obey; we are either slaves to sin, resulting in death, or slaves of obedience, resulting in righteousness. Slaves are not free to do their own will. (See also verses 17-22)

“With whom the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality.” Historically, Semiramis is the mother and the originator of every idolatrous religion in the world. She corrupted kings and nations, for she appealed to their fleshly appetites. She substituted religion for the worship of the true God. We see this in every nation throughout the world! Religion appeals to the lust of the flesh. Feasting, power, greed for money, sex with its many perversions - all appeal to the fleshly desires! “Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we may die,” is a well-known slogan! History reveals that this lusting for money is present in every type of religion. This historical harlotry symbolizes humanity's unfaithfulness to God.

Who are the internal kings of the earth? They are the strongholds in our thought life; they act as kings by ruling our thoughts. They try to keep us from being

faithful to our husband, our Lord Jesus Christ. As long as we blame others for our unfaithfulness, we won't realize that the reason for our unfaithfulness is due to the lustful desires of our natural mind. Once we see these strongholds for what they are, the harlot is exposed. This enables us to repent and to be released from her dominance, and be freed from her power over us!

Our harlotry takes place by the worship of material and mental images. These images are created by humanity's natural concept of God and by its natural concept of spiritual realities. These idols are created in the natural mind. Instead of worshipping the one true God, it worships its own image of God. We can only receive a true image of God by revelation, for our God is invisible to the natural eye. Without revelation, the mind busily imagines a God that is like itself, having the same passions that are resident in natural humanity. It has created many grotesque images of God. Some of these images portray a God who will burn most of humanity in hell for all eternity, one whose grace is tied to our last breath, and one who only loves those who are always obedient. Paul told us that all the imaginations that are against the true knowledge of God, have to be cast down. Since we cannot see the invisible God, He has to reveal Himself to us. Those who have not received revelation from God will worship their own images, and indulge the flesh. Thus they commit their harlotries.

They *“were made drunk with the wine of her immorality.”* An intoxicated person cannot think properly and loses his inhibitions. He does things he would not do when sober. Immorality comes easily! The earth dwellers rejoice in soulish exhibitions in their worship of their own ideas of God. God wants us to worship His true essence; everything else is immorality. Worshiping the false earthy ideas of who He is, is not a true worship of God. We need to leave our earthy ideas, and let the mind of Christ teach us who He is. **Living according to His thoughts takes us out of the earthy realm. This is how we ascend into the heavenlies to be seated with Christ.**

“And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast.” In chapter 1 we noticed that John was in the Spirit when he received this vision. It's interesting to note that John was carried away in the Spirit two times. The first time he was taken into the wilderness, and there, in the deadness and dryness of the desert, he was shown the harlot (the mother of false religions); the second time, in **Revelation 21:10**, he was taken to a high mountain, and there, in the glory of the high mountain, he was shown the New Jerusalem (the bride of Christ), coming down out of heaven from God. In both instances he was carried away in the Spirit to receive spiritual revelation.

“And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having

seven heads and ten horns.” In the Spirit John was taken into a barren place. The domain of this woman does not have life. It is a dry, infertile place! Only God’s life is fruitful! Religiosity cannot bring life. It is like a corpse, dressed up and painted up to look beautiful and alive, but it is void of life.

In the wilderness there was nothing to distract John from focusing on the woman who was sitting on a scarlet beast. In **Isaiah 1:18** the word **scarlet** is used to describe the color of our sins. “Though your sins be as scarlet, they will be as white as snow.” Scarlet is the color of our sinful nature. **This woman is riding on the back of humanity’s sinful nature.** This is the same beast that we met in chapter **13:1**, and he is identified with the dragon in **12:3**. The seven heads, ten horns and the blasphemous names link them together, and show that they are one and the same being in different forms.

“The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls.” Purple symbolizes royalty and wealth, while scarlet symbolizes sin. She is **not** wearing white robes of righteousness. Instead, she is wearing purple and scarlet - she is clothed as the queen of sin! But this fact is camouflaged by her adornment of gold (divinity) and precious stones (wealth) and pearls (salvation). **She wants us to believe that even though she has a sin nature (scarlet), she can bring salvation.** This message is symbolized by her adornment of gold, precious stones and pearls. Her intention is to mislead us.

“Having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality.” The hand represents her works. A gold cup full of abominations, idolatry and immorality tells us that she tries to make her abominations appear good. They are done in the name of the Lord. Jesus told the Pharisees that they cleaned the outside of their cup, but the inside was full of robbery and self-indulgence. They were like whitewashed tombs, outwardly righteous, but inwardly full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Religiosity looks very attractive on the outside, but it has no life. Its outward show disguises her deadness, but death cannot beget life.

We cannot divorce ourselves from the spirit of the Pharisees. Unless the Lord has done a deep cleansing within us, we too have filled our golden cups with self-effort - and that is an abomination to our God. Our natural mind is not any better than that of the worst criminal; we may not have done the same deeds, but it is only the grace of God that has kept us. **Our corruption was hidden in a gold-plated cup of religiosity.** We need to repent of our wrong thinking, and receive the thinking of Christ as revealed in the scriptures by the Holy Spirit.

“And on her forehead a name was written, a mystery, ‘BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.’”

The forehead symbolizes the mind. It belongs to the soul - and our soul is our sense of being. In the symbolism of the scriptures the name always reflects the nature of the person. The carnal mind has a mysterious nature. The word mystery comes from the Greek MYSTERION, meaning to close the eyes, or to withhold knowledge. It is something that is unexplained, unknown, or kept secret. In a mystery religion only the initiated could receive this mysterious knowledge in a step by step process. No one could ever know it all. There were always more mysteries to be discovered.

This woman is the mother of harlots and abominations. A woman is not a mother until she has birthed an offspring. Every type of harlotry and every kind of abomination is birthed out of her! Who is she? She is the soul of natural humanity, and out of her these false mystery religions are birthed!

False religions take on many different forms, but all cater to the lusts of the flesh. Some contain hideous perversions of sex, and these are usually accompanied by the celebration of great feasts, while others are very subtle in their false worship. However, all are greedy for money! The ornate temples, the statues, the pictures, the priestly robes, etc., are evidence of the unbelievable wealth and affluence of apostate religion! Kings and rulers attached themselves to it because it brought them riches and power. This greed for money comes from within - from the selfishness and confusion that is in the human soul.

The acceptance of religion by the masses, as an alternative to true Christianity, is in evidence everywhere. **Humanity wants to indulge itself in its desires rather than submit its desires to truth.** Just as Semiramis rode on the back of political Nimrod, so churches and religions ride on the backs of their own political systems. In **1 John 2:16** we read, *“For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.”* These lusts dwell in the soul of humanity. We need the word of God, the double-edged sword of the Spirit to bring a separation between the soul and the spirit.

Religions come under different brand names and guises, but they all come out of humanity, and at the very heart of each one is the woman called Babylon. They feed the ego and a worship of self; they build a reliance on their own good works and a trust in their own doctrines. This is the religiosity that is resident in the natural mind. Those who are captivated by religiosity are very sure that they are right; if anyone dares to speak otherwise, he will be called by whatever derogatory words are in their vocabulary.

The woman was drunk with the blood of saints and of the witnesses of Jesus. Wherever this woman went, a trail of blood followed. Under whatever name she happened to be operating, she destroyed the true followers of Jesus. Other religions

don't have to be destroyed, for they are all her offspring. But the witnesses of Jesus do not belong to her family, so she wants them out of her way. If she cannot openly get them out of her way, she tries to do it through corruption. **She corrupted the Israel of the Old Testament, but she cannot corrupt the true Israel, the witnesses of Jesus, for they are kept by the power of God! The Son of God has freed us from the harlot's power.** The woman is enraged by her lack of power over the true church; she thinks death will eliminate the saints, for she doesn't know that they cannot be eliminated. The testimony of each triumphant death births more saints!

“And the angel said to me, ‘Why do you wonder? 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.’” (v.7) This beast is identified with the dragon in chapter 12:3 and the beast in chapter 13:1. He has seven heads and ten horns. This beast is the religiosity that resides in the human soul.

“The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come.” (v.8)

What an unusual beast! It *“is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction.”* This unusual beast symbolizes religiosity; it is embedded in our old nature. We all had religiosity before we became a new creation in Christ, but it was taken away when we received our new nature. **When Christ becomes our life, religiosity is forced out of the abyss of our carnal thinking to its destruction!** Every thought is taken captive to the obedience of Christ. We begin to see the sovereignty of Christ our Lord! We trust God to see us through our difficulties. Instead of blaming the devil for all our problems, we now know that we need difficulties in order to grow spiritually!

Those who live on earth (in the natural idea of spiritual realities) will be surprised at the Christians who do not blame the devil for all the evil in their lives, and who do not rely on their good works for their salvation, and who are not judgmental toward others. **Religiosity trusts in self; Christianity trusts in Christ.**

“Whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world.” The word **foundation** has been translated from the Greek KATABOLE, and it means **to cast down**. When Adam and Eve sinned they cast down God's government in their lives by casting down the word God had given them. The book of life is not like the books we see in our present-day libraries. Paul informed us that we are the epistles - the books upon which God writes. Those who accept God's government in their lives have their names written in the book of life of the Lamb.

“Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while.” (vv.9-10) **The natural mind has knowledge but it does not have wisdom.** Christ has become our wisdom! (1Cor. 1:30) To correctly interpret this we have to see with the eyes of Christ. We need to receive His wisdom!

This is not a physical woman, for no physical woman could sit on seven mountains and on many waters. This is a picture that has to be interpreted symbolically. This woman sits on seven heads (kingdoms) and these seven heads are seven mountains. By now we know that the number seven symbolizes completeness and here it encompasses the complete worldly thinking of humanity. She also sits on many waters, and these waters “are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues.”

“And they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while.” (v.10) I believe that Jesus taught on this concept when He spoke to the Samaritan woman and said, *“You have had five husbands and the husband you now have is not your husband.”* (John 4:18) In symbolism we see that without Christ we are married to all kinds of doctrines, but none of them is our true husband. They lead us astray and do not give us true fulfillment. All our human concepts have to go! The true bridegroom, as yet a stranger to the Samaritan woman, was gently teaching her, that the man she was now living with was not the answer to her need. She had an intimate relationship with six (the number symbolizing humanity in its religiosity), and none of them could satisfy. She needed the seventh (divine completion), the true bridegroom. Only He can fill humanity’s need!

“The beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction.” How intriguing! What is the Spirit telling us? The beast, our human nature with all its religiosity, was and is no longer. Christ takes away all our religiosity! This is the good news of the gospel! The number eight symbolizes a new beginning. We have seven days in a week, and the eighth day is the beginning of a new week. **In Christ we have a new beginning - a new humanity; the old humanity goes to destruction.** Christ is the firstborn of a new humanity, and we are the first fruit of this new humanity.

“And the ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour. These have one purpose and they give their power and authority to the beast.” (vv.12-13)

Horns are used to protect self-interests and to exercise power over others. So here is a description of a powerful image that rules the mind. We know this is not a permanent

rule, for its power and authority are limited to one hour. These horns represent the ideas that rule as kings in our minds, and their authority is rooted in the law (the number ten symbolizing the complete law), and it gives power to religiosity.

It is so difficult to get the law out of our system and to let truth and grace rule instead of unforgiveness and revenge! We want “fairness” but we don’t really know what that means. We could not survive if God would deal with us in fairness and give us what we deserve. In fact, we would be way beyond our depth on the debt side if God would deal with us ‘fairly’! We are all in need of His mercy and grace. How thankful we can be that God has a plan, and according to His plan He will remove every desire in us that wants to exercise control and use the law to gain power and authority over others. All our carnality has to go!

The kings *“have one purpose,”* and that is to overcome the Lamb. How can this be accomplished? They recognize that separately they are too weak to accomplish the job, but they think they can be victorious if they work in unity. Everything that is against the Spirit, that is, the flesh together with the law, unites to overcome the Lamb. Our natural thinking wants to remain in the driver’s seat and therefore it opposes the Spirit.

Our rights are very important to us, especially when we think we have been wronged. It is so easy to rely on the witness of the flesh and the law as they strongly proclaim their arguments that our rights have been violated. They argue that we have every reason to be rebellious and angry - even angry with God! A temper tantrum within us takes place, and we hear ourselves screaming, “This isn’t fair.” The law and the flesh produce many uprisings within us!

“These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful.” (v.14) What an encouraging word! Notice the oneness of the Lord with His chosen ones. We are united with Christ, and He fights our battles for us. Since He is Lord, He is able to win every battle and carry out His will. His chosen ones remain faithful to Him. They have realized their inability to free themselves from their bondage to the flesh and the law, for their bondage to self-activity is like strong glue that won’t release them. Step by step the Lord brings His chosen ones to see that Christ has done it all! We rest from all self-activity as we put our trust in Christ and what He has accomplished for us! To be overcomers we have to be in agreement with Christ! **Our agreement with Christ makes us overcomers!**

“And he said to me, ‘The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues.’” (v.15) The harlot (religiosity) is sitting on or in all humanity.

“And the ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire.” (v.16) The power and the authority of the human nature together with the flesh, will hate the confusion, demands and restraints that religiosity brings with it, and they will make her desolate and naked by casting off the yoke that religiosity has imposed on them. To *“eat her flesh”* should not be taken literally. Symbolically it means that they will tear up her demands upon them and destroy (burn) them.

“For God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled. The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth.” (vv.17-18)

Isn't it amazing how God puts ideas into the hearts of non-Christians to do His will? We hear preachers say that God can't lead us unless we give Him our consent, for God is such a gentleman that He always respects our will! Is God trying to impress us with His politeness or with His truthfulness, rightness and power? God got wicked Pharaoh to fulfill His will, and He never asked his permission! God surprised Paul when he was on his way to Damascus to persecute the Christians there, and He didn't ask Paul's permission either! Yet when Paul was mercilessly persecuting the Christians, who would have guessed that he was a vessel set apart for the Lord even from his mother's womb? **God has the power and ability to put ideas into the minds of the disobedient as well as the obedient to perform His will!**

The common purpose of the ten kings is to give their kingdom to the beast. A kingdom denotes government. They may think this will be a permanent arrangement, but God has ordained that it will only be temporary, and He has a specific reason for it. It can only survive until the words of God are fulfilled! So the reason for that united kingdom is to bring about its complete downfall!

By now we know that the beast is the carnal mind with all its religiosity. The ten kings are all the strongholds that produce our self-righteous indignation. These strongholds are supported by the law and the law refuses to let grace enter into the picture. How we hate to give up or relinquish our legal rights! We have surely experienced that. For example, one summer we ordered an anti-virus package for our computer system from a certain company and sent them a Royal Bank U.S. Money Order. Since we did not hear from them and did not receive the software, we emailed them to find the reason for the delay. They disclaimed having received the money even after we faxed the evidence from the bank to them that the money order had been received and cashed. That's when our self-righteous nature rose up in us! Only after God's words convicted us of our pride and lack of acknowledging God's sovereignty, did His peace again flood our hearts.

The beast nature rules in us until we submit to God's words by obeying them. God's words are fulfilled in us when we submit to His desires. Only then can the peace of God flood our hearts. Christ's rule in us brings about the downfall of the beast nature with its powerful horns (our selfhood with all its selfish desires), as well as the rule of the kings of the earth (the strongholds in our mind that are against God) and whatever else is of this earth. The woman, Babylon, can only reign over the kings of the earth. Christ brings us into the heavenly realm! She has no jurisdiction over those who are seated with Christ in heavenly places!

Chapter 18

“After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory. And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird.’”(vv.1-2)

In the midst of all these happenings John saw another messenger - one with great authority - coming down from heaven. Since this messenger had great authority, it follows that his message was of the utmost importance! **The authority of this messenger was merged with the glory of his awesome message!** This angel brought illumination to the darkness of the earth (the religious carnal mind). What a startling impact it has upon the human race! Who is this mighty angel or messenger who has such great authority, and whose glory can illuminate the earth? He is none other than the Christ, for only He can cause the downfall of Babylon!

“Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!” Natural Babylon was situated in the land of Shinar (**Gen.10:10**), present-day southern Iraq. The present site is marked by the ruin-mounds of Babili, about 60 miles south of Baghdad, and covers several square miles. The Euphrates River runs by its ruins. The Akkadian name, Babili or Babilani, means “gate of gods”.

Babylon is fallen! A mighty angel has declared it! This declaration does not refer to the physical Babylon that once reigned in present-day Iraq - its ruins declare its demise. **This declaration refers to Babylon - the counterfeit religion that masquerades in sheep’s clothing to deceive the ignorant.** In times past we also received her lies, and substituted them for the truth, but she received her deathblow when Christ (the truth) came, exposed those lies, and judged them to be false! The old Adam man, namely our sin nature, was crucified with Christ. But death could not hold Christ, and He rose triumphantly! His resurrection declared the fall of Babylon, and His life in us continues to declare it!

Although Babylon is fallen, only those who know and believe the truth, experience the result of her fall, and live in freedom from her lies. Only Christ can take us out of the bondage of religiosity and the resulting self-glorification or self-debasement. Christ brings us into His righteousness, wisdom and sanctification! He is the truth, and He frees us from all the lies of our former belief system!

Where do we still find Babylon in the world today? *“She has become a dwelling*

place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird.” A prison is a house of bondage, for it takes away our freedom. What are some of the things that take away our freedom to do God’s will, and the resulting loss of inner peace? It is not difficult to pinpoint certain addictions such as alcohol and drugs, and uncontrolled appetites for food, pleasures, pornography and sex, that put people into prison. But we hate to admit that there are subtle inner feelings and attitudes, like anger, guilt, revenge, bitterness, unfairness, pride, greed, fear, unworthiness, jealousy and unforgiveness, that also bring people into the prison house. These unclean thoughts are produced by unclean spirits. Only the Spirit of Christ can free us from all the evils of the prison house, and make us free to do His will!

Birds symbolize our imaginations. How we need to guard against those vain imaginations! The natural mind imagines God to be completely different than He is. Since He alone knows who He really is, He has to reveal Himself to us if we are to know Him in truth. We can also easily imagine ourselves to be different than we really are. It is not difficult to entertain a false impression of our own importance or lack of importance. And how often haven’t we imagined wrong motives for the actions of others! Maybe a friend fails to greet us, and immediately our imagination dreams up reasons why he doesn’t love us any more. Then we become enslaved by those imaginations. Time passes, and finally we discover that the reason for his inattention was a particularly difficult problem that he had to deal with that day. Or we were upset because we didn’t get a wedding invitation. Maybe it was sent, but it was lost in the mail. We need to cast down our vain imaginations, for they will enslave us!

“We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.” (2 Cor. 10:5) A speculation is an imagination, and a lofty thought is an imagination. These things are produced in the mind, and need to be destroyed, for they are not in submission to Christ. It is of vital importance that we cast down our imaginations that are against the knowledge of God! Every thought that comes to mind that is against the nature of God needs to be cast down. **Every thought that doubts the promises of God is evil and a vain imagination! So is every thought that accuses God of wrongdoing! Every thought has to come into obedience to Christ!**

“For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality.” (v.3) Rotherham’s translation reads, *“Because by reason of the wine of the wrath (passion) of her lewdness have all the nations fallen, and the kings of the earth with her did commit*

lewdness, and the merchants of the earth by reason of the power of her wantonness, waxed rich.”

How the merchants of this earth become rich because of their association with religion is easily understood. However, this descriptive language paints a vivid picture in the natural realm to describe an internal condition for this book is all about what is going on within us. These nations represent the thoughts of the natural mind that oppose the true knowledge of God, for they war against God, against His nature and against His commandments. This is immorality, and no one’s mind is exempt. We have all participated in the lustful passion of her immorality.

Drinking of her wine (revelation) means we have received her understanding and the passion for her lewdness and unfaithfulness. This is shocking news, isn’t it? When have we done that? The list could be long, but suffice it to say that **whenever we promote substitutions such as: works for faith, choice for submission and obedience, heaven for life, hell for death, we have been drinking of her wine.**

“And the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her.” This has happened in the natural realm as well as in the spiritual realm. The kings in our earth are our strong fleshly lusts, for we love them and are ruled by them when we are not yielded to the Holy Spirit. They rule our natural desires and cause them to develop into lusts. They have had some form of spiritual intercourse with Babylon, the mystery religion.

“And the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality.” The merchants have benefited from the religious system. How would they sustain their profits if there were no Christmas and Easter celebrations with all the accompanying traditions? In oriental countries they have their own religious customs and celebrations, and the wealth of their merchants is a direct result of keeping people bound to their customs and traditions.

How does this apply to us inwardly? Jesus began His ministry by stopping the merchandising that was occurring on the temple premises. This pictures the need for stopping the merchandising that takes place within us. It consists of accumulating wealth by making our service for God available for money. Passion for wealth, honor, pride and power over people is its driving force. The wealth that accrues from its association with religious Babylon brings self-satisfaction in its self-effort and achievements. The natural mind enjoys honor and power over people. A thorough cleansing has to take place!

“I heard another voice from heaven, saying, ‘Come out of her, my people, so that you may not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues; for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.’” (vv.4-5)

A voice from the spirit realm tells us to come out of Babylon (religiosity). If we live in Babylon we will participate in her sins, and receive her calamities. What do her sins consist of? Don't they center on self-reliance, selfhood and self-righteous deeds to make us acceptable to God? Religiosity also encourages soulish pleasures. Coming out of Babylon has nothing to do with being raptured out of a bad situation. **It's coming out of the rule of the self-oriented soul and receiving the rule of the Spirit.** The Spirit's rule takes us into the heavenly places, and under His rule we will not suffer any spiritual calamities or breakdowns.

Babylon has taken the spiritual meaning out of the scriptures, and has put everything into the natural realm. Jesus said that His words are spirit and life. Spiritual words have to be understood spiritually! Lowering them into the natural realm puts them into the death realm. **It keeps Christ wrapped in a veil of flesh, and the flesh prevents us from seeing Him spiritually.** By doing this, the scriptures are corrupted.

“For her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.” Religiosity (also Babylon's sin) began with Adam and Eve when they took fig leaves (religiosity; self effort) to make aprons to cover their nakedness (not clothed in robes of righteousness). Her sins being piled up as high as heaven is symbolized by an interesting thing that happened at the time the Israelites were to pass over the Jordan (signifying death) into the Promised Land. To form a pathway across the riverbed, the priests, carrying the ark (the presence of God) had to step into the Jordan. This caused the water that was flowing down to stop flowing, thus forming a high wall of water all the way to the city called Adam. (**Joshua 3:16**) Symbolically this is telling us that all the sins that had piled up since Adam were washed away by the presence of the Lord, and the Israelites could walk on dry ground to the other side! The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ took care of all sin including Adam's sin!

“Pay her back even as she has paid, and give back to her double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her. To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously (or luxuriously), to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, ‘I sit as a queen and I am not a widow, and will never see mourning.’” (vv.6-7)

These verses tell us that this woman is in trouble. There is a backlash to all sensuous living. Her religiosity has to pass a test. The word **torment** should actually read **touchstone**, and we know that a touchstone tests metals to validate their worthiness; it checks the quality of the gold in the stone that is being tested. All things have to be tested or judged by truth, and this woman and her deeds do not pass the test. She has glorified herself, and has caused us to look to self instead of to Christ.

All our carnal ideas have to be taken out of us. Give her back double of all that she

has done to those who have listened to her advice and have pursued the things of the flesh. Ask them and they will tell you that, even while they were listening to her, they hated the results. At first the goal that was presented to them appeared desirable and worthwhile, but when it was within their grasp, they were disappointed, for it left them with a feeling of emptiness, futility and heartaches! After they had attained riches, they recognized that riches did not bring joy and satisfaction, so they hated the riches even while they craved for more. Though a prostitute may hate her prostitution, and a thief may hate his thievery, yet they continue to indulge in them. Focusing on the natural never brings satisfaction; there is always a craving for more.

This woman does not have a husband, and denies ever having had one, for she is not a widow. She sits as a queen in her domain. The kingdom of God does not have a queen, so we know which kingdom she is in. She has a very positive confession, namely, that she will not see mourning. She believes that her positive confession will keep her from ever feeling badly about anything. She is in denial of her true condition. She thinks she is in control, and that she can speak her future into existence. Job's friends had the same idea when they said that "*You will also decree a thing, and it will be established for you.*" (Job 22:28) So God told Job to pray for them because they did not speak the truth.

Since this woman denies having a husband, she is doing whatever is pleasing in her own sight. She loves control and will therefore not commit herself to a marriage relationship. She wants to do whatever she likes without commitment and without submission to a husband. She thinks she is not accountable to anyone. Her reference to being a queen tells us that she is also exercising power over others.

Every natural thing has its counterpart in the spiritual realm. This woman symbolizes the soul (our sense of being that is influenced by our emotions, situations, etc.), that loves the desires of the flesh. It loves being in control; submission to authority is obnoxious to her. We see this desire to please self both in ourselves and in those around us. God's ways do not seem right to us because they conflict with our desire for selfhood and pleasure. We would rather do the things that feel right in our own eyes. However, when there is no husband, no love, no relationship, the deeds of the flesh will flourish. Fruit-bearing cannot take place, for there is no life. In **Isaiah 5** God pronounces a woe on those who are wise in their own eyes, and clever in their own sight!

The relationship of the soul to the authority of the Holy Spirit (Christ) is of utmost importance! When the soul is obedient to the Spirit, a fruitful walk in the Spirit occurs. If our soul is not hearing the Spirit, we will only produce the deeds of the flesh. Life is in the spirit not in the soul! Our new birth brings us into a relationship with Christ. This is a relationship of love, and it grows in intimacy and unity in

thought and deed. Our ignorance of spiritual realities causes us to be completely dependent on Christ. If we do not recognize this fact, and disobey His leading, we will have many problems. Christ loves us, and in response to His love we learn that obedience and submission to Him will result in the joy of beautiful intimacy, relationship and fruit.

“For this reason in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong.” (v.8) Day is light, and when light comes to us, we begin to see ourselves as we really are. Darkness keeps us from seeing our true state. Our calamities are attention-getters.

The word *“pestilence”* can be used in two ways. It is generally thought of as an epidemic of a fatal contagious disease, but it can also be used as meaning “a harmful doctrine.” (Webster’s Dictionary) These harmful doctrines can only be recognized when truth is present. It is very difficult for us to give up our pet theories and dogmas. For example, the church puts so much stock in the Christmas celebration even though it has its roots in paganism! Can you imagine the mourning that would take place if it would be uprooted, **and Christ would be celebrated, not like He was when He was born, but as He is NOW?** The soul wants the hype and the pageantry; it does not want truth.

Our soul needs to be cleansed of all Babylon’s thinking! God brings calamities and misfortunes on us for a reason. We need to be stopped in our tracks when our thinking is in the death realm, and difficulties have a way of causing us to raise our eyes upward and call on God to help us. God wants to give us life and truth. He does not want us to be destroyed by the lies that have become our truth. He is a consuming fire that cleanses us by consuming all our dross. **God is not out to destroy our soul; He only destroys the lies and the impurities.**

No one relishes a famine. We have all seen pictures of children who are malnourished. Lack of proper food and nourishment brings debilitation and death. However, this famine is not a dearth of physical food but of spiritual food. Lack of spiritual food produces abnormalities in the soul realm. **There is no lack of spiritual food for those who are seated with Christ in the heavenlies.**

Those who are living in the earthly realm cannot receive the truth of spiritual realities for they are spiritually discerned. The natural, carnal mind brings them into an earthy realm. This leads to many erroneous ideas and dogmas that cannot satisfy spiritual hunger. Yet the fear of leaving their comfort zone of religiosity keeps many locked in the bondage of their traditions until the plagues appear. The lies that are proclaimed in the name of the gospel do not satisfy, so a hunger for truth

is produced in the hearers. **Only truth can satisfy the hungry soul and free it from plagues, pestilence, mourning and famine.**

“For the Lord God who judges her is strong.” Our God is able to do what He sets out to do! Truth judges all things. A judgment is a statement that declares what is right so we can discern what is wrong. It is not a proclamation of future punishment or a condition of torment. Only when the truth is known, can a righteous judgment take place. Our Lord God knows the truth about all of us, so we can safely trust Him to judge correctly. His judgment is always **redemptive**, for we need truth in order to eliminate the lies that have led us in the wrong direction. This is God’s way of getting us to see that we need to be freed from our carnal thinking and **come into agreement with His thinking!**

“And the kings of the earth, who committed acts of immorality and lived sensuously with her, will weep and lament over her when they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, ‘Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come.’” (vv.9-10)

The judgment of God has fallen on humanity’s religiosity, and the kings of the earth weep and lament over the fall of Babylon! This does not refer to the fall of the historic Babylon, for that Babylon was taken in B.C. 539 by Cyrus, as Jeremiah had prophesied. With this conquest, its decay commenced, and finally it became desolate - a place uninhabited. (**Jer. 51**) Symbolically, Babylon represents our religious nature. The kings of the earth are the strongholds that we cling to in our religious nature. They rule our actions. They commit acts of immorality because they do not submit themselves to Christ’s rule. **Their immorality consists of aligning themselves with the natural ideas that are against God, approving them, and then having an intimate relationship with them!**

God dwells in our spirit, and He searches our soul and pronounces judgment against all unrighteousness. The soul realm is ruled by either the Spirit of God or by our own natural desires, and needs to be cleansed of all our thoughts and ideas that consist of religiosity. It is very difficult to leave our pet theories and philosophies, but everything needs to be tested. The flesh cannot rule in God’s kingdom because it always lusts against the Spirit! The strongholds in our religious nature weep and lament when they cannot have their way.

“When they see the smoke of her burning.” Smoke accompanies burning, and often alerts us to danger. Fire can be both destructive and beneficial. This fire is an internal spiritual burning that does away with the carnal nature. Trials and testings are needed to show us that faith in self cannot produce a righteousness that meets God’s standard. It is difficult to accept this truth if our trust is in self. Our Father

is not satisfied with a partial deliverance from selfhood. Selfhood expresses itself in religious rituals and traditions and works that are intended, or falsely expected, to produce righteousness! All this has to be done away with! As the individual members of Christ's body are cleansed, the church is cleansed.

“Standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment.” The Greek word for **torment** is **touchstone**. We know that a touchstone tests the value of certain metals. This symbolism tells us that there is a fear of being tested. A test reveals what a student knows; it also reveals the areas that still need to be brought up to standard. Students who are well prepared do not fear the test, but those who have frittered away their time, are fearful. It takes a great desire for truth to be willing to endure the testing that will reveal the lies that we thought were truth. It also takes a great love for truth to accept truth when it is revealed to us, for we know that religious Babylon will ignore, reject and persecute those who do not agree with her.

“Saying, ‘Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come.’ The earth cries, *“Woe!”* but the heavens rejoice when religiosity is judged. **One hour** represents a short time. It is not a sixty-minute hour.

“And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, because no one buys their cargoes any more.” (v.11) The relationship that the merchants had with this woman was to their material advantage. It enabled and expedited the sale of their cargoes. Merchants need to sell their wares if they want to become rich. These merchants are the leaders who proclaim their ideas of salvation etc., for a price. They become rich by selling their products. However, when people learn to know their living Savior, and who they are in Christ, they lose their religiosity, because truth reveals the lies that are embedded in religiosity. When their religiosity is gone, they refuse to buy the wares (lies and deception) of the merchants. This robs the merchants of their profit, and causes them to weep and mourn.

“Cargoes of gold and silver and precious stones and pearls and fine linen and purple and silk and scarlet, and every kind of citron wood and every article of ivory and every article made from very costly wood and bronze and iron and marble, and cinnamon and spice and incense and perfume and frankincense and wine and olive oil and fine flour and wheat and cattle and sheep, and cargoes of horses and chariots and slaves and human lives.” (v.12-13)

This is a very descriptive and itemized list of the cargoes they merchandise. It includes everything from gold and silver to slaves. The merchants are suddenly out of business because the judgment of God has fallen on this harlot called Babylon. Those who have received truth won't buy her lies. They won't buy the counterfeit, the external copy of a genuine spiritual experience.

The merchants were dealing with heavenly, spiritual realities that had been lowered to an earthy, carnal level. They taught that these could be bought for money or obtained by good works. This was big business, but it was not pleasing to God!

To understand this spiritually we have to look at the symbolic meaning of these items. Gold represents the divinity of God; silver symbolizes our redemption; precious stones our riches and gifts in the Holy Spirit; pearls symbolize suffering; fine linen and purple and silk symbolize our priestly and kingly garments of righteousness and royalty; scarlet represents our sinful nature; citron wood is good wood, so it represents the good humanity; articles of ivory are articles of beauty; articles made of costly wood symbolize the first fruit; brass speaks of judgment; iron symbolizes inflexibility. Religiosity embodies the inflexibility of the law, and woe betide anyone who does not adhere to its codes. In Christ we have the inflexibility of truth, for it cannot be changed, altered or bent. Any compromise changes the truth into a lie. Marble speaks of kingdom beauty!

Verse 13 begins with fragrant spices and incense and perfume - the things that smell good to God. They refer to our worship and prayers. Wine symbolizes revelation; olive oil speaks of our anointing; fine flour is pure, for it does not contain any lumps, and wheat contains nourishment. Cattle and sheep and horses and chariots and slaves and human lives are symbolic of riches and power.

The merchants were selling these wares. They were merchandising these precious spiritual truths, and in the process they were corrupting them by bringing them down to the natural level. They were bringing people into the slavery of the law. **God's way is different; He freely gives us spiritual truth, and He wants us to freely pass it on.**

"The fruit you long for has gone from you, and all things that were luxurious and splendid have passed away from you, and men will no longer find them." (v.14) Those who have received truth no longer desire the things they formerly longed for. They formerly lusted for the things of this world; they wanted a luxurious life, and power over others. **But once we feed on the bread of life, we are satisfied, and the former things pass away.**

"The merchants of these things, who became rich from her, will stand at a distance because of the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, she who was clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls; for in one hour such great wealth has been laid waste!' And every shipmaster and every passenger and sailor, and as many as make their living by the sea, stood at a distance, and were crying out as they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, 'What city is like the great city?'" (vv.15-18)

In the Roman world, commerce and trading were done by sea. Much of their communication also depended on sea travel. The merchants, shipmasters, sailors, and passengers all belong in the same category, for they all deal with natural humanity. Jesus often used the natural to explain a spiritual principle. If we only remain with the natural understanding we won't hear what God is telling us. When the Spirit of God illumines our minds, the natural ideas of salvation and righteousness and giftings are put away. Those who still function in the natural ideas will become very upset because they can't control and enslave us any longer! This affects their money-maker account, for they were using religion to make money. No wonder they grieve over the loss of their profits! The ships were made of wood (symbolizing humanity) and they sailed on the sea of unregenerate humanity. The carnal mind is religious, and it uses whatever it can to enslave us.

Babylon represents religiosity. Babylon was a great city. Herodotus said that the circumference of this city was 480 furlongs, or a circuit of 56 miles. Two walls surrounded this city. The outer wall was 11 feet wide and the inner wall was twenty-one feet thick, and reinforced with towers at 60-foot intervals. Since it was built on the Euphrates River, they also had a good irrigation system to water the gardens and fields within the city. Therefore it was thought that this city was impenetrable and impregnable. Yet the city was captured in 539 B.C. by Cyrus, a Persian king. Our religious mind also seems inaccessible, but Christ, the truth, can overcome it!

Those who live in the soul realm, stand at a distance for fear of her torment (testing). Why? Because they know that they have had an intimate relationship with religion (religiosity), and that they have used Babylon to become rich. They have not been ruled by Christ, and have never had an intimate relationship with Him. This makes them feel guilty and condemned, and they fear the outcome of the test. **Those who know that they have been born from above have no reason to fear, for Christ has become their righteousness.**

God is a consuming fire; His fire consumes our religiosity. The religious church system is horrified when it sees the evidence (the smoke of their burning) of the decline of religiosity. Just as the Ephesians cried, "*Great is Diana of the Ephesians*", so the false church cries out, "Great is the source of our revenue!"

"And they threw dust on their heads and were crying out, weeping and mourning, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had ships at sea became rich by her wealth, for in one hour she has been laid waste.'" (v.19)

What a fitting description of the religious mind! It desires wealth, and it doesn't mind what tactics it uses in order to amass that wealth. History reveals that a great many religious leaders, and even pastors, have fallen prey to their passion for money

and sex. The desire for money and sex are the great pitfalls of religiosity.

Only when the Holy Spirit illumines us with His light, and changes us from within, are these desires taken away. Instead of material wealth we now want spiritual wealth! The love of God that is poured into our hearts makes us want **to give instead of to get.** In one hour, that is, within a short time, the old desires are eradicated when Christ becomes our Lord! However, the world is always beckoning us to partake of its so-called delights, and care must be taken that we are not lured back into the religious mold.

“Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her.” (v. 20) Let’s notice what God calls His people! He calls them saints, apostles and prophets - heavenly beings! This clarion call to rejoice is spoken to those who are in their physical bodies, and living in time. **Since God calls us saints, do we have the right to contradict Him and call ourselves sinners?** Sinners have not been born from above. Our new birth gives us a new identity, and transfers us out of the kingdom of this world, and brings us into a new kingdom - the kingdom of heaven where God rules!

Our rejoicing takes place *“because God has pronounced judgment for you against her.”* The Concordant Literal reads, *“God judges by passing your sentence upon her.”* We are told that a literal translation of the Greek says, “God has chosen the decision.” God has chosen us, and He has chosen the decision. The decision He has chosen isn’t going against us; it’s going against her, and the word “her” refers to Babylon, the great city that symbolizes religiosity! This is good news! **We don’t have to judge anyone. We just agree with God’s judgment and rely on Him to perform it!**

“And a strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, ‘So will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will not be found any longer.’” (v.21) At the time this was written natural Babylon had already been destroyed, so we know this does not refer to the Babylon that existed in Iraq many years ago.

Babylon means “the gateway to the gods”. Babylon’s many gods bring contradictory messages, so they bring confusion to the soul. In the scriptures Babylon always symbolizes confusion because of the confusion of language that occurred there. Babylon leads us away from the one true God. God unites us with Himself, thus bringing us peace. **In order to live in continual peace, the Babylon within our soul has to be thrown down.**

A powerful messenger can do the job! This messenger is Jesus Christ! Babylon is thrown down, and disappears under the water as quickly as a big millstone would disappear when thrown into the sea. All we would see is a great big splash and it

would be gone! **We don't concentrate on the splash, but on the joy that enters the soul when the counterfeit is cast down!**

“And the sound of harpists and musicians and flute-players and trumpeters will not be heard in you any longer; and no craftsman of any craft will be found in you any longer; and the sound of a mill will not be heard in you any longer; and the light of a lamp will not shine in you any longer; and the voice of the bridegroom and bride will not be heard in you any longer; for your merchants were the great men of the earth, because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery.” (vv. 22-23)

The soul that is ruled by the flesh (Babylon) can only produce the things that are in opposition to the Spirit, and these appeal to the base appetites of the flesh. She indulges in, and feeds on: her type of music, crafts, art, religion, affluence, luxury, riches, trade, commerce, entertainment, sports and sex. God is left out of all these things! Babylon takes all the beautiful things in life and desecrates them. She uses them to decorate her shrine of selfishness! Then she calls out and bids us come and worship at her shrine.

In the name of art a woman's body is exploited. Venus, the beautiful lady with no arms, is found in art galleries and art museums. The image is beautiful, but it originated in Babylon - and God is not in it! Music, crafts and art are distorted in order to make them appeal to humanity's lust for self-gratification and self-worship.

The things that will no longer be, refer to the things that, under Babylon's rule, existed in the lower soul realm. They will be cast out of the lower realm that feeds our selfishness, lust, and ideas. It doesn't mean that they will not exist but they will not exist in us. **This brings glory to God, for we are transformed by the renewing of our minds, and lifted up into a heavenly, spiritual realm.**

All the beautiful things in life need to be cleansed of all duality! This can only take place when the Spirit rules. Our crafts, music, worship and desires have to be lifted out of Babylon's dominion and placed under the Spirit's rule. The sound of a mill will not be heard grinding out a distortion of the scriptures. God's words are life-giving, but when they are ground out on the soul level, they produce death. When Babylon is cast down, the Christ will feed us!

The devil masquerades as an angel of light, for he always tries to present his lies as truth. Jesus Christ is the true light of the world! **He is not a container of light, but He is the substance of light.** He comes to us from above, and illuminates our darkness. **His light does away with the counterfeit light of the soul that we thought was the true light.** All counterfeits have to be thrown down!

“The voice of the bridegroom and bride will not be heard in you any longer.” This may

shock us because they represent something beautiful to us. But the bridegroom and bride in Babylon (confusion) represent a wrong alliance. They represent the alliance that the soul has with the flesh before we become Christians. This fleshly union is broken when Christ becomes our true bridegroom. Only then can we recognize the counterfeit, and become willing to cast Babylon out of every area in our lives. Often we are not even aware how it has invaded the beautiful things God has given us until the Spirit pinpoints our need for cleansing. Here God is saying that all our commitment to, and reliance on self, will be taken away. We will no longer be married to the flesh and function under its dominion. Christ frees us from our bondage to the flesh!

“For your merchants were the great men of the earth”; they were not heavenly men. These are men of great reputation. In times past we idolized the great men of the earth. We wanted their wares, and they promised great things if we followed them. Following people creates problems. Don’t listen to the empty promises of the politicians. “Follow me,” they promise, “and I’ll take care of you. You’ll have better roads, lower taxes and better jobs.” They renege on their promises, conditions worsen, and the national debt increases.

The merchandising spirits within us are willing to sell truth for honor, acceptance and comfortable living. Gifted people, instead of Christ, are put in our show window. This causes us to idolize them, and to blindly follow their teaching. When people are idolized, it breeds a dependence on them and their wares (messages). So their wares are sold for money, honor, and/or services. This merchandising takes place in the religious Babylon society as well as within us. God does not want us to idolize people. He wants us to love truth to the extent that we are willing to leave our preconceived ideas, dogmas and traditions, and be taught by the Holy Spirit. We can buy truth from Christ without money! Christ is the only One we are to follow! He keeps His promises and will not deceive us nor disappoint us!

“Because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery.” Sorcery is witchcraft. According to Webster, sorcery is the use of a supposed evil supernatural power over people and their affairs. This word is actually derived from the Greek PHARMAKIA. It primarily signified the use of medicine, drugs, spells, and even poisoning. These drugs were usually administered with the accompaniment of incantations, charms, etc., designed to impress the victim with the mystical and magical powers of the sorcerer. Sorcery produces changes in the mind, and opens the mind to more deception.

All the nations have been deceived by Babylon’s sorcery. There are no exceptions. We have all inherited this mindset from Adam. Only Christ can deliver us from this great predicament!

“And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth.” (v.24) Why? Because she is motivated by selfishness! She craves luxury and sensual gratification! She hates everyone that would keep her from getting what she wants. She hates everyone who makes her feel guilty by word or example. The words and witness of prophets and saints interfere with her lifestyle. In order to do away with their witness, she has to kill the witnesses.

The desire for riches and possessions has caused many to worship at her shrine. That desire does not come from God; it belongs to the world system. We are in the world, but we are not part of that world system. If we have been drawn into that system, we need to get out of it! **Do we possess our possessions, or do our possessions possess us?** If they are taken away from us, will we agree with Job who said, *“The Lord gives and the Lord takes away; blessed is the name of the Lord”*?

The flesh and the Spirit have nothing in common! **The flesh is motivated by greed, and the Spirit is motivated by love.** The two can never join hands and work together in unison! Love abides forever, but the world and all that is in it shall pass away. **Babylon has to pass away in us!** This book gives us the assurance that it will be thrown down, and we will be completely free of her!

History proves that religiosity is filled with the blood of martyrs! But Babylon's kingdom is not forever. It is founded on deception, and deception is a negative, even as darkness is a negative. Just as light does away with darkness, so truth does away with deception! **The truth frees us from the worship of self, so we can worship the true and living God!**

The world and all that is in it shall pass away, and it has to pass away in us. All our possessions and talents are only ours in stewardship. Only when we realize this, are we free to do the will of God. The things of this world are for a season; they produce a big blaze and a lot of noise, but they end in ashes. **The things of God endure forever!**

Chapter 19

“After these things I heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, ‘Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God; because His judgments are true and righteous; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and He has avenged the blood of His bondservants on her.’” (vv.1-2)

In the previous chapter we saw the fall of Babylon - the harlot that rides on the back of our carnal nature. All our carnality and religiosity have been judged. This judgment is to our advantage, for it has to take place so that we can get rid of all that is not truth. **God loves us so much that He will not let us continue to live in the lies and deception of Babylon!** God is concerned about the things that are taking place in us internally! Our internal condition will determine our attitude and actions.

The Greek word META, translated ‘after’, really means ‘**in the midst of**’. In the midst of everything that John was being shown in his spirit, he heard the voice of a great multitude. This is not a progressive prophecy of the future. These visions reveal the purging that has to take place in us to change us into the likeness of Christ!

In this scene we are introduced to the corporate Christ. The scriptures speak of two men. In Adam (the first man) all die, and in Christ (the second man) all are made alive. (1Corinthians 15:22, 45-49) Since there are only two men, it follows that everyone is either in the first man (Adam) or in the second man (Christ). It is impossible to have any man between the first man and the second man, therefore these two men have to be corporate men. So Christ is not an individual being; He is the corporate Christ; He is the head, and we are members of His body. This great multitude that speaks with one voice, is the voice of the corporate Christ!

There is great rejoicing in the throne room of heaven! An ecstasy of worship and praise wells up within the overcomers because the truth has freed them from every fetter that bound them to the god of self - the great harlot! It has freed them from the world system! What an awesome God we have! Nothing can withstand His mighty power! *“Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God!”*

“Because His judgments are true and righteous; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality.” This judgment against the great harlot has been taking place throughout the years. How is this judgment taking place? The great harlot represents a condition of the natural heart, so this judgment has to take place in us - in our earth - and it will continue to take place in every

generation. God is concerned with our internal life. All the thoughts and ideas that are not in line with the essence of God have to be judged as being unrighteous and immoral. God's standard is truth and righteousness, and His truth and righteousness judge all lies as being false, and uncover all the guises and subterfuges of unrighteousness to reveal their true nature.

"He has judged the great harlot." A harlot does not seek intimacy in commitment. Her intimacy is based on selfish motives. **Everything she does has its source in self.** The natural mind is centered on self, and worships self. It makes alliances with the flesh on many levels. However, there is no selfishness in God. **Everything He does has its source in love; intimacy with Him is united with commitment!** God has already judged this great idolater, and **we need to agree with His judgment.**

Idolatry of self has corrupted the world. This idolatry manifests itself in people's demand for "their rights" as they cry out, "I want my rights even if it infringes on the rights of others." Selfishness infringes on the freedom of others. Desire for riches and power infringes on the rights of the poor. The list goes on and on! Self has no compassion except for self. It devises many costumes designed to hide its hideous nature, but underneath those beautiful designer clothes, the serpent of self lies camouflaged in religiosity.

Idolatry of self has also corrupted the church and has produced or created organizations. It debases the scriptures by taking words that are spirit and life, and placing them into the lower realm of carnality and death. To elevate self, many false interpretations of the scriptures have taken place. Many substitutions have been, and are being propagated. Self-effort in the keeping of the laws of each respective organization is substituted for the righteousness of Christ. Self-effort is substituted for grace, for they say that people deserve eternal life because they believed, and unbelievers deserve eternal hell-fire because they did not believe. A few of the more popular substitutions are: escapism instead of overcoming, heaven instead of life, hell instead of death, choice instead of belief and obedience of faith, and financial prosperity instead of spiritual prosperity.

No one is exempt from Babylon's corruption. *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..For God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all."* (Rom. 3:23: 11:32) **Just as no one is excluded from disobedience, so no one is exempt or excluded from God's mercy!** This is the good news of the gospel! It is not difficult for us to believe that all have sinned and that all have been disobedient. However, we find it difficult to believe that God will show mercy to ALL who have been disobedient!

"He has avenged the blood of His bondservants on her." The blood of Christ's

bondservants who refused to bow to the beast, is avenged! How is it avenged? It is avenged by the destruction of the oppressive world system - the system that Babylon propagates and delights in. This system is anti-God and anti-Christ. The destruction of this system brings freedom and causes our hearts to overflow with gratitude!

“And a second time they said, ‘Hallelujah! Her smoke rises up forever and ever.’” (v.3) The correct rendering of the Greek “to the AIONS of the AIONS”, is “to the ages of the ages” - not “forever and ever”. Logically speaking, it is impossible to add an **ever** to that which already is **forever**.

The corporate Christ, the new humanity in Christ, is not exclaiming “Hallelujah” with embarrassment, but in an ecstasy of worship! God has judged the world system. Hallelujah! This causes great rejoicing!

Many Christians feel embarrassed, and wince at the thought of God’s judgments, and it seems preposterous to them that this even causes joy in heaven. How can a loving God cause the world system to go up in smoke? Yet the teaching that God will burn forever all unbelieving humanity, causing it to suffer in great agony without any hope of release, does not seem to faze them. How illogical our thoughts can be when we are faced with traditional teaching! Yet traditional teachings are accepted with complete disregard for their content and origin. In fact, many do not even realize that a great number of their religious concepts come from paganism - from Babylon!

Everything perishable, that is, every thought and deed that is rooted in self, needs to be burned away because it does not submit itself to the reign of God. Smoke is the evidence that something is burning. Let’s remember that it’s the **worldly religious system in us** that is being eradicated - not we ourselves. **Once we realize that the gracious intent of this burning is to produce the image of Christ in us, we will not fear God’s righteous judgments; instead, we will look forward to them.**

The world system is rotten to the core! There is no truth in it; it is full of lies, selfishness, greed, immorality, fear and depravity! God’s righteousness demands the judgment of all unrighteousness. His anger and passion against ungodliness and unrighteousness are components of His goodness! In order to establish a righteous government, all unrighteousness has to be judged. Truth always judges lies, and righteousness always judges unrighteousness. Restoration cannot take place without this judgment!

Truth reveals error, and in so doing, judges error. Truth can never accept error, for if it did, it would no longer be truth. Jesus came into the world to bring us truth. The very nature of our God brings judgment on all carnal thinking - the root of evil. Since God is truth, we can safely worship Him!

In **2 Thess. 2:10** we read that those who perish *“did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.”* We need to take pleasure in truth even as God does. Without the love of truth we will not be willing to leave our old soulish traditions and ideas that are not according to truth. The very nature of truth makes it the aggressive enemy of error - and error is evil! That is why all error has to be judged to be error. This judgment is for our good!

Jesus Christ came to save the world - not to punish sinners. The doctrine of hell, as taught by present-day Christianity, is gross error. God does not delight in punishing sinners. **His delight is in getting them out of the Adam man that causes them to sin, and placing them into the Christ man - the new man of truth - in whom there is no sin!** This is the goodness of God!

Our new birth gives us God's DNA. In Christ we receive God's essence, but that does not make us equal with God. He always remains the source! Christ is our hope, and our union with His life gives us His nature! Teachings that are either beyond or below the boundaries of scripture, are lacking in truth. Worshiping false images and ideas of God are the idolatries and harlotries that are committed by God's people.

“Her smoke rises up forever and ever.” The correct translation reads, *“to the ages of the ages.”* Smoke only rises up as long as there is something perishable - something that can be destroyed by burning. Once everything perishable is destroyed, smoke ceases to be. God is a consuming fire, and His fire is consuming all that is not eternal! The destruction of evil continues through the ages until *“Christ is all and in all.”* Fire reveals that which cannot be destroyed.

We need to understand that neither the punishment of sin, nor the forgiveness of sin, changes the sinner; he remains a sinner as long as he remains in the Adam man, and sinners are not admitted into the kingdom of heaven! *“In Adam all die.”* That is why we need to be born again and be placed into Christ.

There is no such thing as a born-again sinner. If there were, being born again would be meaningless. Our new birth takes us out of the Adam man and places us into the Christ man. God in His goodness and righteousness gave us Christ! He is the new man! In Him we become a new creation! **Our new birth takes us out of Adam, in whom there is no righteousness, and puts us into Christ, in whom there is no sin!** *“In Christ all are made alive.”* We are taken out of Adam whose priesthood is one of sin and death, and put into Christ in whom we have a new priesthood - one that brings life and righteousness!

This new priesthood is mirrored in the twenty-four elders. *“And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne saying, ‘Amen. Hallelujah!’”* (v.4) The twenty-four elders represent the

royal priesthood in its total ministry - for in the Old Testament the priesthood was divided into twenty-four courses. The priesthood is under God's government - twelve representing or symbolizing the government of God. Two twelves are a witness to God's government.

Four symbolizes completeness. Just as the four gospels reveal the four aspects of the complete living Christ, so the four living creatures represent the complete Christ man. Some translations read "beast" instead of "living creatures" - and that is a mistranslation of the Greek ZOON that is used here. The Greek ZOON means A LIVING BEING; the Greek THERION denotes a wild beast. **The four living beings symbolize the completeness of the Christ in us!** Do we still identify with the sinner and wretch that we were in the old Adam man, or do we identify with the saint that we are in Christ? Let's remember that the epistles were written to saints. When we understand our union with Christ, we won't live in defeat, depression and despair. We'll walk in the victory that is ours in Christ and shout, Amen. Hallelujah!

Our agreement with Christ brings us victory!

The righteous judgment of the great harlot brings a revelation of the greatness of the wonderful salvation God has procured for us in Christ! This gives rise to the highest adoration and worship recorded in the book of Revelation! Christ's reign in us does away with all lies, deception and error! It does away with Babylon, the false religion, the whore, and all the corruption, evil and immorality it produces.

"And a voice came from the throne, saying, 'Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great.' And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.'" (vv.5-6)

This voice came from the throne of God. Where is God's throne? God's throne symbolizes His government, power and authority. We need His government in our hearts to do away with all our self-will, for it continually opposes God. God's throne needs to be established in our hearts so our salvation can be actualized and we can reign with Christ. The manifestation of the Christ in us will reveal God's ability to do away with evil, and to bring to fruition His purpose on earth! The truth will unquestionably judge all that is associated with the world system.

Many waters symbolize many people; as all the believers of all ages joined in their praise to God, it grew in gigantic proportions! The sound of mighty peals of thunder identifies God as the source of our illumination! Without His voice thundering in our hearts we'll never believe that God truly reigns! After we finally wake up to this wondrous truth, our voices will also join the mighty throng singing, *"Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns."*

Handel's Messiah was inspired by this worship, and the great Hallelujah Chorus was born! Remembering that four signifies completeness, we note that there are four "Hallelujahs" in this passage, namely: *"Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God. Hallelujah! Her smoke rises up to the ages of the ages. Amen. Hallelujah. Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns."*

The reason for this great jubilation is the knowledge that God is the author of our salvation. He has the power to perform it, and His power carries with it the glory of performance! The Almighty reigns! Nothing, absolutely nothing can hinder His great salvation! Therefore we join our voices to this mighty throng of "Hallelujah" singers in the worship of our awesome God.

"Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." (v. 7) As we look at this marriage, let's forget about the traditions humanity has added to this holy union called marriage. Every concept, every picture of Revelation has its source in the scriptures. This is also true of the expression "bride". Paul used it to explain the mysterious relationship of the church to Christ in **Eph. 5:22-32**. Christ is the groom, and the church is the bride. So let's go back to the first marriage, and look at the symbolism we have there.

Adam and Eve - the first groom and the first bride - teach us what God means when He talks about the bride. God formed Adam's bride from Adam's side. After God had taken Eve out of the side of Adam, He presented her to Adam and said, "Here's your wife." Adam delightedly responded by saying, *"This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh."* In other words, her bones were really his bones, and her flesh was really his flesh. Adam was saying that the one standing before him was really he himself in another form. This becomes plainer in the Hebrew language. Adam called himself "Ish" - meaning self - a rational person. Adam had named all the animals, but he was different, and therefore he called himself "Ish". When he saw Eve, he called her "Isha". In English we say "man" and "woman". Adam couldn't fellowship with the animals, but before him was an "Ish" in another form of himself - Isha - with whom he could communicate! That was the very first marriage, and that is the biblical understanding of the word "bride".

The way Eve came into being is important. Adam was put to sleep, and God sculptured a woman from the rib that came out of Adam's side. Adam had to sleep in order that Eve could come into being. Jesus equated sleep with death. There is a two-fold purpose for the death of Jesus Christ. He died to sin in order to redeem us from our sins, and in order for the church, His bride, to come into being! Out of His side came water and blood. Blood speaks of the remission of sin, and water speaks of life - the life-giving Holy Spirit. The church came out of the side of Jesus, and when His Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, the church was born.

The true church is not a human organization; it is an organism, a relationship; **it is Christ's life in another form!** That is why we have to be born from above. Jesus is the eternal "Ish", and He looks at us and calls us "Isha"! His life is within us. That is the only way we can be presented to God. Malcolm Smith so aptly said, "Only that which is of Adam could be presented to Adam for a wife, and only that which is of God can be presented to Christ as His bride." Our good deeds for righteousness that flow out of the pride of the Adamic nature are an abomination to Him. God rewards the good deeds that flow out of His nature in us. Just as Jesus only did the things that the Father showed Him to do, so we must only do the things the Father shows us to do.

God said that the two shall become one. Adam and Eve were two, yet they were one flesh. **Christ and His bride are two, yet they are one spirit.** Christ is IN us but we are not Christ. We have His life, and His life unites us with Him, but He ever remains the head - the source! The church is alive with the life of Christ Jesus! He has come again in another form. The bride of Christ is formed out of the essence of Christ's being. We are not bone of His bone, for spirit does not have bone, but **we are essence of His essence, and spirit of His Spirit!** That is the understanding we are to receive by the expression, "the bride of Christ".

Gladness and rejoicing can take place NOW, because this union has taken place in those who are in love with Him and follow Him wherever He goes! We don't have to wait for some time in the distant future of many millenniums or for a rapture into the sky. It takes place when "*His bride has made herself ready.*" The bride has prepared herself. How has she prepared herself? She has fallen in love with Him; she has developed a relationship with Him; she listens to His voice and enjoys making Him happy. Her thoughts and interests no longer are wrapped around self. Instead, they center on her lover and his desires! His love permeates her thoughts and actions, and is a constant strength to her!

Intimacy with our lover fulfills the desire and need of our inmost being! It changes us. Intimacy reveals what is in the heart. Our intimacy with Christ reveals His great love for us as well as His true essence or being! This causes us to recognize the areas in our life that are not according to His nature. The revelation of His love overcomes the fear of becoming aware of our inadequacies and the areas in which we need to change. We recognize that there is nothing more important than intimacy with our lover!

In Hebrew custom, the engagement of a couple was as binding as the marriage. The book of Revelation can be compared to the time between the engagement and the marriage supper. In the beginning of the book we see the relationship of Christ with the church, and then we see Christ going forth to prepare the bride. This preparation requires the cleansing of all our fleshly thinking and desires! In this chapter we come to the marriage supper.

J. Preston Eby so aptly explains that the Song of Solomon is a story that Solomon told about himself in the days when he was walking away from the Lord. To us, it beautifully illustrates the relationship between Christ and the church - His bride, and the temptations the bride has to overcome to remain true to her lover. In this book, Solomon, the great king in Jerusalem, goes out to the villages to look for more women to take back to his palace. Among them is a shepherdess who has a lover, so she doesn't want to go with him. Solomon woos her with perfumes, jewelry and fine clothing, but all she wants is the man she truly loves. She tells all the women of Jerusalem about the one she loves - the shepherd who pastures the flock in the gardens. Solomon lavishes her with all his riches, and all she does is rave about her beloved. And then there are visits to the palace by the beloved. Finally Solomon gives up, and lets her go back to her lover. In the last chapter she is leaning on her beloved. **Here is a demonstration of love that cannot be quenched, and that riches cannot buy!**

In symbolism we see that the church's engagement period with her Lord Jesus Christ is compared to the shepherdess and her engagement to the shepherd. During this time the tempter (Solomon) comes to tempt her with riches and flattery to entice her away from her lover! The church is being attacked on every hand, inside and outside, to forsake her love for Christ. However, the true church can only say, "*If you would only learn to know my beloved, you would understand.*" **When the church, the bride, is ready, and her love conquers all the allurements of fleshly desire, the lavish marriage feast is celebrated with great joy!**

The bride's preparation took time. The emphasis here is not on the length of time but on the readiness of the bride. In Queen Esther's time this process took 12 months, and twelve symbolizes God's divine government. Before she went to meet the king, she was given special clothes to wear. Esther only took with her the things given to her by her eunuch. There is a special significance in this, for we can only take with us that which is given us by the Holy Spirit!

"It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints." (v.8) These clothes were given her! She did not shop for them, nor did she design and sew them for herself. In the symbolism of this book it tells us that she did not make herself righteous. She prepared herself to receive her bridegroom, and He gave her His clothes of righteousness!

She was clothed in fine linen. Linen had to be worn by the priests, and God had a reason for this regulation. Linen symbolizes the absence of self-effort because linen does not absorb sweat. (Eze. 44:18) The works of the priests were not to be done through self-effort, for self-effort would produce sweat. This symbolism tells us that the works of the bride (the church) did not come out of self-effort. Righteous acts

have their source in Christ and are not performed out of self-effort, so absorption of sweat is unnecessary.

“Then he said to me, ‘Write, “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, These are true words of God.” (v.9) A marriage supper includes the bride and groom and their families and friends. In Matthew 22 Jesus taught on this subject. He compared the kingdom of heaven to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. The invitation to come to the dinner went out to the good, and even to the evil. The wedding hall had to be filled with guests! The guests consisted of all who responded to the invitation. According to the custom of that time, the guests were given wedding clothes when they arrived. When the king spotted a guest who was not wearing the wedding clothes that were provided for the occasion, but was wearing his own clothes (his own righteousness), he was thrown out. He did not belong!

The symbolism of the wedding clothes teaches us that no one can participate in the wedding feast on the basis of his own works of righteousness. Everyone has to receive his righteousness from Christ. We cannot earn our righteousness! Those who come on the basis of their own achievements are thrown into outer darkness. Outer darkness means greater darkness and greater ignorance! If we reject truth, we will receive more error! Outer darkness has nothing to do with being thrown into hell.

The marriage supper of the Lamb is an ongoing event. It began after Pentecost, and it continues to all generations as people receive the righteousness of Christ! The food consists of truth, and the wine symbolizes the revelation knowledge of who Christ is! Jesus said, *“I am the bread of life. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life.”* (Jn. 6:35; 54) He is the bread that has come down from heaven. How we need that heavenly truth! **The revelation of Jesus Christ is actually the unveiling of His true being.** It is an uncovering of the knowledge that is in God! This is not new knowledge, for it has been in Christ all the time, but it is new to us. What a feast Christ has set before us!

“And he said to me, these are the words of God.” This messenger was sent by God and was given the words that he should speak. We know that God sent His Son into the world, and He only spoke the words God gave Him to speak. This messenger was none other than Jesus Christ.

“Then I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, ‘Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” (v.10) John was speaking to an angel who was a fellow servant of his. How can Jesus be a fellow servant of ours? We marvel at His identification with us! Sonship does not exclude us from being

servants, nor did it exclude Christ from being a servant. In our relationship to God our Father, we are both sons and servants. **As sons we know our relationship to Him, and commune with Him on that level. As servants, we do His bidding and become servants in our relationship to others.** This has nothing to do with being servants of the law. Jesus washed the feet of His disciples and told us to follow His example. **The Son came as a servant, but communed with God as a Son.**

But why was John not to worship Jesus? Jesus is the name of the Son of God in His earthly existence. Everyone, both Jew and Gentile could call Him by that name. But only those who are filled with the Holy Spirit can call Him Lord Jesus Christ. The word “Christ” means “anointed”. Our worship has to take place in spirit and in truth. This eliminates all worship of heroes in the physical sense. It also excludes the worship of the physical Jesus - the Jesus who walked the dusty roads in Palestine. In **2 Cor. 5:16** Paul said that we no longer know Jesus according to the flesh. Jesus was a physical man, but now He is with the Father in spirit form. If He were still in physical form, He couldn't dwell in each believer!

Many Christians do not understand this, so they still worship a physical image of Jesus. This image is their idol. They want to walk in the physical footsteps of Jesus, and they are waiting for the return of a physical Jesus. We need to understand that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven. Jesus Christ is no longer flesh and blood; He is spirit!

Jesus understood that the scriptures were a testimony or witness of Him. (Jn. 5:39) The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. Many think that prophecy deals only with the future. But prophecy is actually a spoken, inspired word from God, dealing with either the future or the present. We see this in the prophecies of the Old Testament. The prophets dealt with Israel's situation as it was at that time, as well as with future events.

Jesus obeyed every word that came from God, and those who hold to God's words are His brethren. He is the first born of many brethren. Jesus, in His identification with humanity, is our older brother. In His identification with God, He is the Word of God! **We do not worship Jesus in His identification with humanity.** True worship of God can only take place in spirit and in truth! We need to cast down all the images of the carnal mind. This includes the image of a fleshly Jesus, for flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven.

“And I saw heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He judges and wages war.” (v.11)

“And I saw heaven opened.” This book relates many things concerning heaven, and we know that heaven is the spirit realm where Christ rules. So the spirit realm was

opened to John. Previously he had heard voices from heaven, he had seen angels coming from heaven, he had seen a door opened in heaven, and the temple opened in heaven. Now he caught a glimpse of greater glory. **What a glory is ours when our eyes are opened to see that His righteousness has become our righteousness, and that we are clothed with a white garment that has been given to us!** We did not have to work to obtain it!

When heaven was opened to John, he saw a white horse and its rider. The color white always denotes purity and righteousness - the righteousness that is in Christ. The rider is identified by His name - Faithful and True! Only Christ can be called Faithful and True! When heaven is opened to us, we too will see Him who is Faithful and True.

We may be surprised that He comes to make war. The Greek word for war is POLEMEO, from which we get the English word, polemics, meaning the art or practice of disputation. Since Christ is truth, He will never be satisfied until we know truth! He will dispute with us as long as we harbor lies as our truth. He is a faithful God! His faithfulness keeps Him from leaving us even when we go astray, ever ready to bring us back into His fold! He strives with us until we are brought into truth, that Christ may be revealed in us!

“His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself.” (v.12) In **Revelation 1:14** we first see Christ identified with eyes that are a flame of fire. This fire penetrates all our masks of piety and external behavior. He sees our unbelief. His eyes have to burn away all our lies, deception and unbelief - everything that keeps us from seeing how great His all-encompassing salvation is! **He also sees the new creation man that we are in Him.**

“On His head are many diadems.” As we have previously explained, a diadem was a kingly ornament bound around the head. Among the Greeks and Romans it was the distinctive badge of royalty, and Diocletian was the first Roman Emperor to wear it constantly. It symbolized rulership. Christ comes into our lives as the true ruler of all our thoughts!

“He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself.” The Greek word for “name” is ONOMA, and it includes everything a person is - character, power, excellence, rank, majesty, and personal attributes. In **Revelation 2** we read that we are also given a name that no one knows except he who receives it. **This new name is a new nature.** Christ’s nature is so wonderful that humanity can never fathom it. Christ alone knows the depth of love and righteousness within Himself. His nature can only be made known to us by revelation. **1 Corinthians 2:10** reads,

“For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.”

From Paul we learn that Christ is the head of the church, and the church is His body. So the church belongs to Christ, and forms an integral part of His being, but in a different form. The description of Christ and His body includes all that are in Christ. Christ is a corporate man even as Adam is a corporate man. *“As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive.”* (1Cor. 15:22) **All who are in Adam receive Adam’s nature, and all who are in Christ receive Christ’s nature.** What an awesome truth! This wonderful and all-encompassing salvation is made known to us by the revelation of His name. To know it experientially, we have to face trials and temptations, and see His great deliverance!

“He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called the Word of God.” (v.13) A natural understanding of wearing a robe dipped in blood is quite offensive and distasteful, so let’s look at the spiritual significance. We already understand that the soul is in the blood, and that the reference in **Leviticus 17:11** should read, “the soul is in the blood.” “Life” is a wrong translation of the Hebrew NEPHESH. The soul is our sense of being. Our soul can receive its sense of being either from the natural mind or from the spiritual mind - the mind of Christ. The soul of Christ is without blemish. Christ never yielded to the natural instincts, for they are opposed to the Spirit’s teaching. He is the Word of God (the Logos of God). We know that our words come out of our thoughts - out of that which fills our heart. Jesus said, *“For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.”* (Matt. 12:34) **Since Christ is the Word, He came out of the heart of God as a verbal expression of what was in God’s heart.** Everything in Christ’s heart is good! In this vision He is identified as one who is perfect and true and without blemish in all that He is and does. In His perfection He became the perfect sacrifice. His robe dipped in blood is a reminder of the cross where we see the climax of His death to sin!

“And the armies that are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses.” (v.14) Heavenly armies move in the spirit realm. They are clothed with white, clean linen garments - that is, with the purity of Christ’s righteousness. Their works have their source in God.

“They were following the Lamb.” Who are the ones that follow the Lamb wherever He goes? In **Rev. 14:1-5** we find the answer. They are the 144,000 who stand on Mt. Zion. That number symbolizes all who are governed by God. They are the first fruits to God and to the Lamb, and are described in symbolic language. They have the Father’s name written on their foreheads, that is, they have the mind of Christ. They have been purchased from the earth (from their old way of carnal thinking). They have not been defiled with women (they have not received the philosophies

perpetrated by humanity). They have kept themselves chaste (they have not committed spiritual adultery). And in their mouth no lie was found (they only spoke the truth that is in Christ). These are the ones who *“follow the Lamb wherever He goes.”*

A follower cannot have his own agenda. He has to set it aside and follow his leader wherever he goes. To follow Christ we too have to set aside our own ideas, plans and goals, and accept Christ’s agenda and His roadmap for getting us to our destination. His goal for us is extremely high, namely, to be changed into His likeness in every facet of our being - but His process seems strange to us. Therefore we have to trust Him in the way He is leading us. He has promised to lead us in paths of righteousness, and we are assured that He watches over His word to perform it!

How does this affect our lives? It simply means that we let the Holy Spirit lead us in everything we do! The religious Babylonian system tries to make God fit into humanity’s plans instead of humanity fitting into God’s plan. As followers of Christ, we do not do things according to what seems good in our own eyes. We follow the Spirit’s leading in all our relationships, whether at home, at our jobs, at play, at church, or wherever we are. Everything is submitted to God for His direction! God’s nature is to shine forth even when we are treated unfairly. If we are in the position of leadership in church, we are willing to change direction if the Spirit so leads. We willingly fit into God’s plans, and His leading is filled with surprises!

“And from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may smite the nations; and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and he treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.” (v.15)

A natural conception of this verse gives us the ridiculous picture of a sharp sword in the mouth of our Lord, striking and killing all people who oppose Him because He is so angry with them. Their obedience is motivated by fear - fear of this angry God. Nothing could be farther from the truth!

“And from His mouth comes a sharp sword.” **Hebrews 4:12** states that *“The word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”* Christ’s words are spirit and life. Since they are spiritual words, they can only be understood spiritually. They cannot be understood by the mind of the flesh. Christ’s words are directed to our spirit, and when we receive them spiritually, they bring about a change in us! The soul is in obedience to either the flesh or the spirit. When the spirit begins to reign over the soul, dramatic changes take place, because the flesh has lost its control over us. In this way Christ smites the nations (the fleshly strongholds that reside in us and need

to be evicted) with His words! His words of love and His accomplished redemption put to death the antagonism and hate that were directed toward Him! **Christ takes the wickedness out of people and fills them with His love!** This does away with His enemies.

“He will rule them with a rod of iron.” His rule is inflexible; He does not make deals to get people to agree with Him, nor does He compromise in any way to make truth more palatable to them. Jesus loved the rich young ruler who was not willing to sell all that he had in order to follow Him. Jesus did not try to negotiate a lesser amount with him to entice him to follow Him. He did not say 80% or 50% would do as well. It had to be 100%! He will not deviate from His standard, for His standard is **truth**.

Truth cannot be changed, nor can it be polluted! That is why a rod of iron symbolizes truth. Christ always rules in truth and righteousness! Knowing this gives us great cause for rejoicing! Seeing all the corruption in the natural mind and in worldly governments brings sadness to our hearts. Christ’s reign of truth in us does away with the corruption in our own hearts. Only after this has taken place are we fit to reign with Him. When it comes to the things of God, we too have to be uncompromising in all our ways with anything that is not truth.

The temptation to compromise is greater when the disagreement comes from someone who has authority over us or from a spouse or dear friend. We cannot be respecters of persons! Whatever God has spoken to us has to be obeyed!

“He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.” The first thing we notice is that it is Christ who treads the winepress. The purpose of treading grapes is to break the flesh of the grapes so the juice can flow out. From this juice, wine can be made and enjoyed. Wine symbolizes divine revelation. **Our flesh has to be broken and crushed because of its rule over us, so that we can receive divine revelation of the Christ in us.** Since Christ is in charge of this procedure, we can trust Him to do a good job! We cannot escape this process because we are all in need of it!

The *“fierce wrath of God”* sounds very ominous! Again, we have to go to the Greek to discover the real meaning. **Fierce** is translated from the Greek THUMOS, meaning passion. **Wrath** is translated from the Greek ORGE meaning the strongest of passions. So God’s strongest passionate desire consists of breaking our flesh so that we can receive divine revelation of the Christ! Only then will we show forth the Christ in our lives. **Our flesh has to be crushed in order for the new wine to flow out of us and into others.**

“And on His robe and on His thigh, He has a name written ‘KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.’” (v.16) This title is written in reverse order in chapter 17:14 where the Lamb is called *“Lord of lords and King of kings”*. Why was His title

written on His robe and on His thigh? In biblical symbolism a robe signifies the very essence or being of the one wearing it.

The Lamb's robe was dipped in blood, and the blood reminds us of the cross. The Lamb also reminds us of sacrifice. What a vivid reminder of Christ's intense suffering! By humbling Himself, He overcame every obstacle and the greatest humiliation that humanity could inflict on Him. In the midst of the most horrendous suffering known to humanity, He remained obedient to God! Because of His implicit obedience in all His affliction and suffering, *"God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name."* (Phil. 2:9) His high position of *"KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS"*, written on His robe, came at a great cost! Therefore He is worthy to carry this title and authority! Christ did not grasp for this honor and authority, for it states that it was given to Him by God!

It was also written on His thigh. The thigh represents procreation. This tells us that everyone who is born of His spirit in every generation will also be an overcomer! In **1 Peter 1:23** we read that we have been born of incorruptible seed. This seed cannot produce anything perishable. **The Christ in the believers overcomes all that is perishable and corruptible.**

Overcoming all that is perishable is a process. The Christ in us has come into maturity. In **Gal. 4:19** Paul said, *"My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you."* Paul called the ones who had received Christ under his ministry, "his children". Children have to be cared for. So we too have a responsibility to care for those who are immature, and help them come into maturity!

"Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, 'Come, assemble for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great.'" (vv.17-18)

"And I saw an angel standing in the sun" Who is this angel messenger that can stand and endure the heat and light of the sun? It has to be someone in whom there is nothing perishable. Anything perishable would be burned! This can be none other than the Christ, the Light-giver! The Christ in us has an important message for us!

The angel messenger is calling the flesh-eating birds to assemble for the great supper of God! A natural understanding of this is quite grotesque! It gives us a picture of a God who enjoys seeing people eaten. Nothing can be farther from the truth! Birds represent our thoughts and imaginations. The thoughts in our natural mind are against God, for the natural mind cannot know God, nor can it

understand Him. These thoughts can only be eradicated by thoughts that exalt and glorify God! **Thoughts that are in agreement with God will destroy all our fleshly thoughts.**

This verse is actually a message of hope, for it tells us that all our fleshly thinking will be done away with. The flesh that is eaten is not the flesh of the physical bodies of kings and commanders and mighty men; instead, it refers to our fleshly lusts and desires. These fleshly lusts and desires are so strong and all-inclusive that they are symbolized by kings, commanders, mighty men, horses and their riders, free men and slaves, small and great. All carnality has to go! This can only occur when the mind of Christ is in control.

The lusts of the flesh make their appearance in a multitudinous variety of evil and religious guises. One victory does not ensure the next victory. For this reason, submission to the mind of Christ is a constant must. When this process is complete, the lusts of the flesh will no longer appeal to us! As someone so aptly said, **“It is not about getting rid of all the evil people in this world, but of getting rid of all the evil in us!”** **When all the fleshly lusts and ideas have been destroyed in us, the Christ will shine forth through us in all His glory.**

When do we dine with God? The great supper of God consists of feeding on truth! We can only receive true knowledge of God by revelation! Paul prayed that God might give us *“a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him,”* (Ephesians 1:17) As we are obedient to the truth, *“we are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”* (2 Cor. 10:5) This is dining with God!

“And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat upon the horse, and against His army.” (v. 19)

The beast represents our carnal nature. *“I saw the beast.”* Seeing the beast implies recognition of the beast. We recognize that our carnal nature is a beastly one. It is aligned with the kings of the earth. They belong to the earthly realm and are unable to leave that realm. Therefore they can never ascend into the heavenly realm. They rule our natural desires, attitudes and actions. These are embedded in self, and self is fascinated with the recognition and advancement of self by its own good works. These form the foundation of its religion, for each religion has a list of its own demands that have to be met in order to rise to a higher rank. However it can never bring anyone into a spiritual realm, for that realm is unattainable by works.

Religiosity is at war with *“Him who sat upon the horse, and against His army.”* Religiosity is always against Christ. It is also directed against those who radiate forth

His nature. The war against religiosity takes place internally and externally. It takes place within us, for the natural mind keeps hurling its thoughts of religious works and piety at us. But it is also directed toward us from religious Christians. They will persecute spiritual Christians just like Ishmael, the son of fleshly effort, persecuted Isaac, the son of promise.

“And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown also into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone.” (v. 20)

The beast and the false prophet work together, for they are one; they are two manifestations of the same entity. Their goal is deception. The beast is the beast nature within us. Who is the false prophet? He is the prophet who utters lies. He too is within us! Have you ever received a word from the Lord, and the moment you received it, another voice came to you and told you to disregard it? It told you that bad things would happen if you followed that voice, and that it would be better for you to ignore it. That voice, my friend, is the false prophet within you. He tells you to follow signs that point to self-effort, ease, false wonders and magical miracles. **He makes disobedience look desirable!** There are also many false prophets in this world, but here we are concerned with what is going on within us!

The false prophet cannot deceive those who are led by the Holy Spirit. He can only deceive those who have received the mark of the beast - the 666 number that symbolizes carnal thinking! Those who trust their own wisdom and reasoning power carry that number. Worship of the beast is actually a worship of self.

The false prophet performed signs. When Moses went to Pharaoh to perform the signs God had given him, Pharaoh’s magicians could also perform them up to a certain degree. But God’s power was greater and the rod of Moses swallowed the serpents of the magicians! If God has told us to do something we don’t want to do, we often ask for a sign to confirm His instructions. By doubting God’s word we open ourselves up to the sign the false prophet performs. A sign points toward the direction of a place; it is not the place; it just tells us where we must go to find our goal. If we do not want to obey God, we can make signs for ourselves that point to the direction in which we desire to go.

To make this clearer, let’s look at the story of a man who wanted to lose weight. On his way to work he always passed a bakery. To flee the temptation of stopping in, he took a different route to work. This worked well for awhile, but one day he was overcome with a craving for sweets, so he took his former route and prayed, “God if you want me to have some sweets, give me a parking place right in front

of the bakery.” Later, he arrived at work with a dozen doughnuts and a cheesecake. His coworkers were amazed and asked him why he had bought them. “Oh,” he said, “I prayed that if God wanted me to have some sweets that He would give me a parking place in front of the bakery - and on the eighth round it was there!” We too can self-fulfill our signs. Jesus told the Jews that they were putting their faith in the scriptures instead of coming to Him. **Our faith is not to be in signs and wonders, but in Christ!**

“These two were thrown also into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone.” The lake of fire burns with brimstone. Brimstone is another name for sulfur. In the Old Testament sulfur was used in the sacrifices for purification. This was its only use. Within us we find a duality. We have the mind of Christ, but our natural mind still wants to rule us. Since it is ruled by the lies of the beast and the false prophet, we dare not listen to them. When the beast and the false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire, they are consumed by the fire of God, for He is a consuming fire. This takes place within us. We all need to be purified of religiosity and the lies and deceptions in which we formerly walked, and from the traditions that are in the death realm. **God’s fire consumes our beastly nature and all our religiosity!**

“And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.” (v.21) The sword of the Spirit that comes out of the mouth of God, kills everything that is not of God. Notice that no battle takes place. When God speaks, it is done! All we need to do is to wear the armor of God (truth), stand firm, and watch the salvation of the Lord!

The lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life do not belong to the mind of Christ. Pride and lust dwell in our imagination of who we think we are. Birds symbolize our imaginations. These imaginations have to be cast down! This takes place when the word of God takes root in us! The sword of the Spirit cuts off all our fleshly desires. What a glorious promise! We can trust God to deliver us from all that is not of Him!

Chapter 20

“Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.” (vv.1-3)

This graphic picture of the dragon (Satan, the devil, or the crafty serpent) being bound, is not to be understood in a physical, literal way. How can a physical chain bind a spirit? That is a physical impossibility! Therefore we have to look at a spiritual chain. What spiritual chain can bind Satan? Again, we have to look at this symbolically to receive the message it is conveying.

In this scene John saw an angel coming down from heaven. Usually we think of heaven as being up in a physical sense, but we must also think of it as being up in a spiritual sense. This messenger must be the Lord Jesus Christ, for in Chapter 1:18 we see that He has the keys of death and of Hades, and here He also has the key of the abyss, and He carries these keys in His own right. He received them after He had *“disarmed the rulers and authorities.”* (Col. 2:15) His public display of the disarmed rulers and authorities proved His triumph over them. John saw this messenger descending from a higher realm to a lower realm, carrying the key of the abyss.

The word “abyss” comes from the Greek PHREAR. It is of uncertain derivation. The Complete Word Study Dictionary says, “It is a hole in the ground, for holding water or for other purposes, i.e. a cistern or a well, figuratively, an abyss (as a prison).” The adjective “bottomless” and the other references to the abyss in **Rev. 9:1-2; 11:7; 17:8** reveal that this is not a well for holding water. Instead, it is a prison in which evil powers are confined and out of which they can at times be released.

An abyss is a gulf or chasm. A bottomless abyss would be too deep for measurement. In Semitic symbolism it signifies a condition where there is no bottom. There is no ground (foundation) to stand on. In **Genesis 3:14**, the serpent of old was given ground to move on, and dust to eat. This ground was taken away from him when he was thrown into the bottomless pit. This happened to the serpent in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The serpent now has no base for his activity in the life of the new creation man. His foundation is gone, for the new creation in Christ is a spiritual man. There is no dust in him on which the serpent can feed.

Where do we find this abyss? It exists in the natural carnal mind. There is no bottom to all the evil it can dream up. Furthermore, evil has no foundation, for it is not truth; it comes out of lies and deception. Lies are not reality; only truth is reality. Truth reveals the fact that lies have no ground or foundation.

Christ has the ability to do away with our satanic thinking by giving us His mind! The key symbolizes His authority to open and close the door to the abyss, and the chain symbolizes His ability to bring something into captivity. In verse 2 as well as in Chapter **12:9**, we learn that the dragon is another name for the serpent that lured Eve into disobedience. Notice the various names that describe the dragon. He is called the serpent of old (crafty, creeping), the devil (slanderer) and Satan (adversary).

Genesis 3:1 tells us that *“the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field.”* The word crafty means subtly deceitful, sly, cunning and artful! Therefore the serpent is a very dangerous enemy. Since our mind has received the serpent’s thinking, it is craftier than any beast of the field! Eve fell for this crafty serpent because she conversed with him, listened to his lies, and then sidestepped what God had said.

Jesus, on the other hand, didn’t enter into a debate with Satan to prove him wrong on technicalities, but **withstood him by declaring what God had said!** If we try to prove Satan wrong on technicalities, we enter into a conversation with him, and this gives him an opportunity to lure us into his way of thinking. Jesus knew that whatever God said, settled the issue, so He just spoke the words of the One who is truth and has all authority! He proved His sonship **by His obedience to His Father God!** We do well to follow Christ’s example!

The devil needs a body in order to do his evil work. If he can influence and control man’s thinking, he has a body that will do his evil work. Man’s carnal thinking is Satan’s base of operation. This base is removed when we are born again and receive the mind of Christ.” Jesus said, *“...for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me.” (Jn. 14:30)* In Christ’s mind there was no ground for Satan (the devil) to feed on, and therefore he had no base of operation. The devil could not get Jesus to believe the deception he had so cunningly devised. **Christ’s mind would not receive anything that did not come from God!** He only received truth!

Only the death and resurrection of Christ has the power to do away with the devil’s thinking in us. Our new birth gives us a new nature and transforms our mind. This enables us to submit to Christ’s authority so that our thinking becomes one with His thinking. Our obedience to the voice of the Holy Spirit shows that the serpent has lost his ground. He can no longer influence and control our imaginations. The works of the devil are destroyed by our obedience to truth! The mind of Christ chains him and throws him into the bottomless pit! Only the death and resurrection of Jesus

could make this possible. Our new birth gives us the mind of Christ, and enables us to live out of His mind of truth, causing the devil to be bound in us.

“And bound him for a thousand years.” This sentence, taken in the natural understanding, has brought forth the idea that Satan will be bound physically, and thrown into the abyss for a literal thousand years. They say that during this time Christ will not have any opposition from Satan, so Christ can reign supreme together with the overcomers. This introduces the idea that Christ is not strong enough to reign supreme when there is opposition, i.e. in the midst of His enemies. In other words, we have a weak Christ and a strong Satan. They say this will be an idyllic time in the history of humanity. These 1000 years are called the millennium by them because, in the secular world, 1000 years are called a millennium. However, the word “millennium” is not found in the Bible. In spite of this fact, people have made a doctrine out of it. You may have heard of pre-millennialists, post-millennialists and a-millennialists.

A pre-millennialist is one who believes that Jesus Christ will come and set up a physical kingdom in Jerusalem, and reinstate the temple and its sacrifices for 1000 years. During this time the devil is bound, so Christ has no opposition. The physical nation of Israel will be top dog in the world. That is a position held by probably the majority of evangelicals, and was put forward very clearly in “The Late Great Planet Earth” by Hal Lindsey. We do not see this as being biblical for many reasons. It implies that Christ’s sacrifice is not effective enough to do away with sin, that Christ’s reign is a natural physical reign instead of a spiritual internal one, and that the devil is able to prevent Christ from reigning in the midst of His enemies.

The post-millennialist believes that the kingdom of Jesus Christ will gradually get stronger and stronger, until the whole earth comes under His rule for 1000 years. This idea is not very popular today.

An a-millennialist is one who does not believe there will ever be a millennium, but that the number 1000 is symbolic even as the other numbers in the book of Revelation are. Being an a-millennialist guarantees that one will not be accepted by most Christians. It is considered a cause for total rejection. People feel so strongly about the fallacy of this belief, that they may even ban a pastor from the pulpit because of this.

In the past, God dealt with natural Israel. God proved that natural man is unable to keep His commandments. Today God is dealing with spiritual Israel - the true Israel, the descendants of Abraham according to faith! We do not believe that natural Israel will ever again hold a favored position with God. There is no difference between the Jews and Gentiles. Since all have sinned, all have to come to God through faith in

Christ! God has always dealt with a people of faith - first in the promised Messiah, and now in the Messiah who has come. They are the people who have been born supernaturally, even as Isaac was! While Israel was carrying the prophecies for the coming Messiah, and waiting for Him, they were the chosen people. After He had come and finished His work of redemption, the chosen people, the Israel of God, are those who have faith in the Messiah who has come.

So natural Israel is placed alongside all the other nations in the world today. Israel's future lies in receiving her Messiah, and becoming part **of the church** of Jesus Christ, where all are one in Christ - whether Jew or Gentile! (**Gal. 3:26-29**) If God's plans would include a temple to be rebuilt in Jerusalem, and have the sacrifices reinstated, it would invalidate the sacrifice of Jesus. Therefore we cannot subscribe to that. **Having put away sacrifices, God will not reinstate them.**

Back to the number 1000. Thus far we have seen that all the numbers in these visions are symbolical, so why should 1000 be any different? One thousand is ten cubed or $10 \times 10 \times 10$ - and ten is the number of completion. Ten cubed is total completion. This period of completion began when, by His resurrection, Jesus proved His victory over the devil. Christ's resurrection rolled away the stone that had sealed the tomb of our mind. Ignorance and unbelief still seal the minds of the unsaved. **Completion begins in us when we are born again, and ends in us when we are fully surrendered to God. It is the fulfillment of God's plan and purpose for us!**

"And he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him." The dragon was cast back into the mind of the old humanity. The dragon cannot exist in the new humanity. He can only deceive where he is allowed to exist; he cannot deceive where he is not present. When the light of Jesus Christ shines into our hearts, the dragon is exposed and expelled, for he cannot live in light. His exposure causes him to lose his power, for his deception only works in darkness.

"So that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a season." The nations symbolize our imaginations. A wrong understanding exists here because the Greek word META is translated "after." It actually means "in the midst of" - not "after". In the midst, or during the time that we are brought to completion, Satan is released for a short time. Why? So our faith can be tested! A testing time always involves faith. Abraham's faith was tested when he had to wait 25 years for the promise of a son by Sarah to materialize. During our waiting time for God's promise to be fulfilled, the enemy tries to tear down our faith. God always seems to wait with His provision until we have exhausted all self-effort, and the situation seems absolutely hopeless!

This testing time gives Satan an opportunity to tempt us with his lies. He has a

smorgasbord of substitutions for obedience. For example, he tells us that a shortcut will bring us to our goal easier and faster than obedience, and that God's way is too hard. If that doesn't work, he tries to plant doubt in our mind as to God's ability, His love, and His ways. Satan tells us his ways are better and easier, and that he is really for us. Why not obey him and try a little self-effort? Why not substitute choice for obedience? His subtle lies about God are aimed at destroying our faith in God and His promises. His arrows are aimed at cracking our shield of faith, thus providing an opening for his lies to permeate and rule our thinking. He wants us to take our eyes off Christ and His ability! We need this testing, for how can we be overcomers if there is nothing to overcome? James tells us that we should count it all joy when we encounter various trials. Why? **Because the testing of our faith produces endurance, resulting in perfection and completion, and lacking in nothing!**

“Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” (v.4)

John saw thrones, and people sitting on those thrones. Not everyone has the authority to sit on a throne. This authority is reserved for rulers - for kings! In the Old Testament we see that God had planned to rule His people through the priesthood. However, the people rejected God's rule, and instead, wanted a king so they could be like other nations. **They preferred a pagan government to a divine government; they preferred a physical throne to an invisible throne in the heavenlies.**

A throne typifies authority and judgment. A judgment is a statement that declares what is true; it is not a penalty. It may be a favorable judgment or an unfavorable judgment. If it is an unfavorable judgment, a penalty that is consistent with the verdict may be imposed. Everything that does not measure up to God's standard is a lie. We need truth to dissipate the lies we thought were truth. We need God's judgments, for we cannot trust our own; in fact, it is impossible for the natural man to judge rightly without having truth as a standard. Humanity's inability to judge Jesus Christ correctly is a graphic example of its poor judgment. It judged Him to be an impostor, so it crucified Him.

Only God can see and know the intent of the heart, and make a true judgment. Christ brings us the revelation of truth. Those who are in Christ, and can hear what the Spirit is saying, can judge correctly. They can then tell others what this judgment is. For this reason judgment was **given** to those who sat on the thrones. His judgments are always good and right! Isaiah tells us that the people will learn righteousness when they experience God's judgments. (**Is. 26:9**)

Furthermore, John saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus Christ. We know that many believers have been beheaded physically because of their faith in Jesus Christ. Not all overcomers have been beheaded physically, yet here they are identified as people who have lost their heads because of their testimony of Jesus. Heads are very important for many functions, and identification is one of them. How can we identify a body that has no head? Modern technology makes this possible in the physical realm, but not in the spiritual realm.

In symbolism John is telling us that these people have lost their old identity. Our old identity was in our Adamic nature. We worshiped our own thoughts and ideas. That is the worship of the beast. The only thoughts that are true are the thoughts that come from the mind of Christ. In Christ we are new creations with a new mind and a new identity. *“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” (2 Cor. 5:17)* Being in Christ does away with our old identity; it does away with trying to improve our old identity through self-effort and dreams of grandeur. Christ has taken our wrong identity away, and given us a new identity.

Our new identity is a present possession! It is not an identity that we will receive after our physical death and resurrection. Paul tells us that when we were dead in our transgressions and the uncircumcision of our flesh, Christ made us alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions. Since we have been made alive after we were dead, we have been resurrected into life - the life of Christ. We need Christ's life to be in agreement with Him and then we can reign with Him! In the light of the New Testament it is obvious that those who reign with Christ are the overcomers.

Those who are a testimony of Jesus have a mind that is free of beastly thinking. We know that their thinking is not subject to the rule of the beast because the number 666, the number of man, symbolizing carnality, is not on their foreheads. The number 666 on the foreheads of unbelievers is not a visible number; it is not a microchip placed under the skin; it is not a number that has been placed on the forehead or on the hand by man. In keeping with this vision it is a symbolic number, signifying man's unregenerate heart condition. Those who do not have this number are free of beastly thinking. Those who are in Christ refuse to bow to the lies of the false prophet! Religious Babylon or the worldly church system, does not accept those who have their identity in Christ.

Neither is the number 666 on the hands of the overcomers. The hand symbolizes works or ministry. A ministry that has its source in the philosophies of the human mind carries the number 666, and is characterized by great zealotry and endless programs and activities. So often Christians think that their relationship with God

consists of pleasing Him with their works instead of with their love. God is not interested in works that produce and promote self-righteousness. We all need to know that God loves us and desires a relationship of love with each of us. Our works will then flow out of this relationship.

And they *“reigned with Christ for a thousand years.”* A thousand years represent the completion of a period of time - not necessarily what we call a thousand years. Since Christ’s reign is a spiritual reign, His judgment and authority must also be understood to be spiritual. As we have already mentioned, the word “with” is translated from the Greek META and it means “in the midst of.” They are reigning in the midst of Christ. Christ is the head, and we, corporately, are the body. In His body each individual member is to show or represent the nature of Christ. Just as Jesus Christ was the exact representation of the invisible God, so we are now to be an exact representation of the invisible Christ; just as He reigned over sin, so we are to reign over sin together with Him. God’s discipline in us is changing us into the image of Christ.

“The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection.” (v.5) We have already mentioned that the dead are those who are still in their trespasses and sins, for they have not received the life of Christ. God has a time for all those who are dead in their trespasses to come to life, but the thousand years have to be completed first. The thousand years represent the time in which God picks the first fruit. God has an appointed time for everything! After God has picked the first fruit, the rest of the dead will be brought to life.

“This is the first resurrection.” The word “first” is translated from the Greek PROTOS, meaning the foremost in time, place, or importance; it is the first thing or being of its kind. It is the original; an original pattern or model; prototype. This prototype resurrection has been going on ever since Jesus Christ’s resurrection. To understand the meaning of this resurrection we need to search the scriptures for further illumination.

In **Ephesians 2:5-6** it states that *“even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ* (by grace you have been saved), *and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”* **Romans 6** also states, that as we have been baptized into Christ’s death, we have also been raised into His life. (vv. 3-4) Since we have been made alive with Christ, we are seated in the heavenlies at the right hand of God. The first resurrection takes place in our spirit. *“Having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.”* (**Col. 2:12**) Being raised into life in Christ is the first resurrection. In baptism, we are baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit of Christ indwells us.

Jesus said, *“I am the resurrection.”* Resurrection is Jesus Christ; it is not a one-time historical event. Since Christ is in us, we have His life and His mind. This new mentality has produced a resurrection into life! This first resurrection is continually taking place until we have been totally changed into His nature. The number, one thousand years, represents this total change - the completeness of Christ’s resurrection in us.

“Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.” (v. 6)

The second death does not refer to a physical death. Those who refuse to receive the life of Christ reside in death, and they will have to undergo another death before they can be freed from the death that is in them. In the last verses of this chapter we learn that the second death is the lake of fire, and it is for all who have not received the life of Christ. By now we know that this fire is a spiritual fire that consumes the carnal nature. The lake of fire brings an end to the carnal nature. Those who have a part in the first resurrection have already judged the carnal nature to be deceitful, and have already received the mind of Christ. They already have life. Death has no power over those who have been resurrected into life, for God’s life now resides in them!

“They will be priests of God and of Christ.” “They” refers to those who have part in the first resurrection. In **1 Peter 2:9** it says, *“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”*

What a privileged people we are! We have been called *“out of darkness into His marvelous light!”* No longer are we who we used to be! Instead of being under Satan’s rule, we have become a people of God’s own possession and members of His royal priesthood! This is the high calling we have in Christ! Priests are concerned with the things of God. They are intercessors, praying that the people will hear and obey God. Overcomers join Christ in His intercession for people - for Christ *“always lives to make intercession for them.”* Just as Christ intercedes for us, so we also need to intercede for the lost. We pray that they may be raised out of their carnal mind and come into truth.

Overcomers rule under the leadership of Christ. Christ is in the midst of them and they are in the midst of Him! Possessing His life brings us into union with Him! Overcomers do not rule in their own right or might. Everything they do and say has its source in Christ! Since there was nothing in Christ that Satan could latch onto, there is no point of contact for Satan in those whose source is Christ. Therefore they

can reign with Christ over the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. (1 John 2:16)

“When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore.” (vv. 7-8)

At the beginning of this chapter we learned that Christ has bound Satan in the lives of overcomers. A captive Satan is not free to do his work unless he is released. However he is not bound in the lives of unbelievers and in carnal Christians, so in them he is free to stir up great hatred against the saints. The mind and imaginations of unbelievers will receive the lies the devil feeds them - not that they need much help and they will gather together to destroy the saints.

“Gog and Magog.” What do they symbolize? The name Gog means mountain, and a mountain symbolizes a strong ruler or a great difficulty. In **1 Chron. 5:3-4** we learn that Gog was a Reubenite. In **Genesis 10:2**, Magog appears as the second son of Japheth. The name Magog means the region of Gog. This is corroborated in **Ezekiel 38:2**, where Magog refers to a country or people of which Gog was the prince of Rosh. He headed up a very strong military alliance that was well equipped with cavalry and the weapons of that day. In **Ezekiel chapters 38-39** we see that God gathered this great multitude of people together. The people thought they were assembled for the express purpose of destroying Israel. However, God had a different purpose, namely, that the invaders were to be destroyed. Through the power of God, those who opposed Israel were crushed, thus letting everyone know that God is the Lord!

Symbolically, Gog and Magog represent all who are against the true Israel of God whether they come from the ranks of outright unbelievers or from legalistic Christians. (Reuben was Jacob’s first son by Leah, the wife that was his by legal determination. So Reuben and his progeny represent legalistic Christians.) This truth is portrayed in symbolism, when Ishmael, the son of self-effort, persecuted Isaac, the son of promise. We can easily understand that unbelievers would be against believers, but it is hard to understand that legalistic believers can be against believers who are listening to the Spirit. However, legalism keeps people from appropriating the promises of God; it keeps them bound to laws and doctrines, thus causing them to feel the need to produce their own righteousness. Spiritual believers do not fit into the mold of legalism, nor can legalism control them. Legalists are against all those whom they cannot control.

Those who are against believers are listening to the lies of the devil. The devil is void of truth, so he can only dish out lies, and his lies produce fear in those who listen

to him. No wonder Peter declared that *“the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”* (1 Peter 5:8) That sounds pretty ominous and frightening until we remember that a roaring lion is not on the kill. It’s the silent lion, the one that stealthily creeps up on its prey, that is out to kill. The lion that roars at night scares everything in the forest out of its wits. The devil gains power over people by instilling fear through deception, thus gaining dominion and control over them. He devours them by taking away their true identity and by keeping them from believing the truth. When we resist him by declaring the truth, he has lost his power, and he flees from us.

Wherever the light of the gospel goes, it does away with the darkness that is holding the people in bondage to the devil’s lies. Missionaries relate story after story how people have been set free from their former addictions and demonic power. In North America we don’t see people being freed from their bondage as much, because they still desire to cling to their traditions and deceptions. **We expect pagans to turn from the error in which they have been trained, but Christians are not willing to turn from the error in which they have been trained.**

Simeon prophesied over the baby Jesus in **Luke 2:32**, and said that Jesus would be a light of revelation to the Gentiles! The light of Christ brings freedom from the darkness that marks and characterizes the devil’s domain. When the light of Christ comes into our heart, it takes away the darkness that is in us.

“And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven, and devoured them.” (v.9) This great multitude of peoples are united in purpose, and therefore have gathered together to do away with the people of faith. Their determination to exterminate the people of faith does not present a problem to God. They do not realize that God is using this situation to do away with Israel’s enemies. So let’s look at the way God has done this in the past and see how it symbolizes this spiritually.

In the book of Exodus we see how Egypt’s controlling power over the Israelites was completely destroyed. After Israel’s release from Egypt they were free to worship God. But Pharaoh suddenly realized that he had lost all his slave laborers. Like a raving maniac he chased after them together with his mighty warriors, horses and chariots! Israel was in a dilemma! On each side of them was a mountain, before them stretched the sea, and behind them was Pharaoh with his great army. Israel did not see any way of escape! They were afraid because they did not understand that this would result in a great deliverance for them! Only Moses understood this! God completely freed them from their Egyptian bondage by causing the Red Sea waters to flow over and engulf the entire Egyptian army. The ruling power that had subjugated the Israelites was destroyed! What a beautiful picture of the complete destruction of the carnal mind’s rule in our lives!

God's ways usually surprise us! He surely surprised Saul of Tarsus when he was on his way to Damascus to persecute the Christians and throw them into prison. God sent His fire, and Saul became a Christian - he became one of them. Have you ever set out to prove someone wrong, and in the process you became convinced or persuaded that you were in the wrong? This has been our experience. We came from a denomination where we were taught that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is not for today. When we visited a camp where they taught otherwise, we were determined to prove them wrong. After a careful study of the scriptures, we became convinced that we had not been taught correctly. Instead of proving them wrong, God sent His fire, consumed our wrong thinking, and baptized us in the Holy Spirit! So God sends His fire to consume our wrong thinking.

“And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city.” The beloved city is another name for Jerusalem (the habitation of peace). After David transferred his residence to the fortified city of Jerusalem, he called it the city of David; it was also called the city of God. Since this city was built on Mt. Zion, it eventually was also known as Zion. The presence of the ark of God in that city gave Jerusalem spiritual significance as the place of worship and praise. With the transfer of the ark to Mt. Moriah, the temple area was also called Zion. Eventually the inhabitants were also called Zion.

In the New Testament we read about the old Jerusalem and the new Jerusalem. In **Galatians 4** we learn that Hagar represents the covenant made at Mt. Sinai (slavery). Therefore she represents the present Jerusalem, and she is in slavery with her children. (v.25) Sarah represents the new covenant (the Jerusalem above) because she brings freedom to her children. (v. 26) The new Jerusalem is symbolized by various names of the old Jerusalem, such as Mt. Zion, the city of David, the beloved city, as well as the city that is above, the heavenly Jerusalem, and the bride of Christ. It also tells us that even as Ishmael persecuted Isaac, so those who are born according to the flesh persecute those who are born according to the Spirit.

Because of the 2,200-foot elevation of Mount Zion, the road to Jerusalem was called an ascent. Enemy troops had to travel upwards to encompass the city. The great multitude described in this verse is traveling up the mountain, bent on overcoming spiritual Israel, oblivious of the fact that it was God who had gathered together all the enemies of the true believers, in order to destroy them! Our God is a consuming fire, and He consumes all our dross (our wrong thinking).

Revelation has a way of showing us how thorough God is in His cleansing process, and how everything that is not of Him has to be destroyed! The judgment against the Adam man, the man who brought sin into the world, was accomplished on the cross, and this judgment now has to be actualized in us. This is the power of the

gospel! This is the mandate Paul received from God. Paul was sent to the Gentiles in order *“to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.”* (Acts 26:18) The light of the gospel of Christ causes the devil to lose his power to deceive the nations (imagination) that dwell in us.

The Father has promised His Son that He will give Him the nations as His inheritance and the very ends of the earth as His possession (**Ps. 2:8**), and He has the authority, power and resources to keep His promises! Man rises up against God, but nothing can stop God’s promise from becoming actuality! When God sends His consuming fire, it will always accomplish its refining purpose.

Most Christians are more interested in having Christ set up His kingdom in the present physical Jerusalem and reign over all the peoples from there, than in being freed from all their carnal thinking. They do not understand that Christ’s kingdom is a spiritual rule that takes place within us. Although all of us would like to be freed from the injustices and difficulties others inflict on us, this cannot take place without God’s cleansing fire. Christ’s kingdom is not in the seen realm; it is within us, so everything that does not belong to His kingdom has to be judged as being false, and discarded. Those who are subject to the rule of Christ overcome the world, **for His rule overcomes their carnal thinking.**

A look at the life of Christ reveals that His rule on earth consisted of an internal rule. **He ruled over His own will by delighting to do the will of the Father!** He listened to the Holy Spirit; He never did anything on His own initiative. We too have to flow in the Spirit. When we are in agreement with Christ, we are rejecting the devil’s accusations and temptations, and we are ruling with Christ over the thoughts of the carnal mind. **In delighting to do God’s will, we are reigning with Christ.**

Reigning with Christ includes participation in the work He is doing, and **intercession is one facet of His work.** In **Hebrews 7:25** we read that Christ ever lives to make intercession for those who draw near to God through Him. As we intercede and pray for people, and ask God to bring His kingdom into their earth, we are joining Christ in His work of intercession. We want God’s will to be actualized in us as well as in others.

“And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever (actually, for the aeons of the aeons - ages of the ages).” (v.10) The “ages of the ages” is not forever, for ages belong to the realm of time.

A literal interpretation of the lake of fire pictures a scene filled with horror and

terrible suffering that never ends. Many equate the lake of fire as being synonymous with hell, even though it clearly states that hell (Hades) will be thrown into the lake of fire. (v.20). The faulty translation of the Greek words HADES (a dark unseen realm, grave, a place for the departed dead) and AION (age) has created a mental image of a fire that will burn forever whatever is thrown into it. The Concordant Literal Translation has correctly translated “*forever and ever*” as “the eons of the eons”.

People think they can compare this fire with the burning bush that Moses saw - a bush that burned, yet was not destroyed. Therefore people think that this lake of fire will burn forever without destroying that which is thrown into it. Let’s remember that the burning bush **was not hurt** by the fire. Nothing was even singed! It did not suffer from the fire. Therefore this illustration does not apply to the lake of fire, for the lake of fire consumes everything that is not of God - everything that is corruptible. After it has consumed everything that is combustible, the fire ceases.

The devil is a slanderer - he tells us lies about God, about ourselves and about others. He wants us to have a false image of God in order to exalt himself and to destroy our faith in God. He continually accuses us of wrongdoing, so that our eyes are focused on self-effort instead of the righteousness that is ours in Christ. He also lists the sins of others so that we blame them for our shortcomings. His purpose is to ruin everyone’s reputation but his own. We need to be careful that we do not adopt his methods.

Here the devil is thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone. The word “brimstone” comes from the Greek THEION, meaning sulfur. Sulfur was added to every sacrifice for purification. So this is a fire that purifies. This lake is not burning with a literal fire, but with a spiritual fire! These literal pictures are to give us spiritual knowledge, and the lake of fire is no exception to this rule.

The beast and the false prophet are also in this fire. The beast represents our carnality, and the false prophet represents religiosity. The religiosity that is within those who have not been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ, depends on self-effort and obedience to the rules and regulations that have been imposed on them by their particular brand of religion for their righteousness. Disobedience to the false prophet’s orders brings prophecies of doom and gloom to them. He loudly proclaims that God’s ways are too hard, and that his ways will bring them to the same goal by an easier route. Religiosity desires self-fulfillment, and its ears are deaf to God’s voice. The cleansing fire of the Holy Spirit has dealt with the beast and this religious impostor in the lives of true believers.

Here we see that the beast and the false prophet are being tormented in this fire. The

word “tormented” should actually read “touchstone”. A touchstone is used to reveal the quality or purity of a metal. We need a touchstone to reveal our beastly nature and our religiosity. The beast and the false prophet are devoid of truth; they lack purity of thought and action, and always oppose the truth.

In **Hebrews 12:29** we read that God is a consuming fire. So the lake of fire is a lake burning with the consuming fire of truth, for God is truth! Truth reveals and consumes every lie the carnal mind can conjure up! After God’s consuming lake of fire has consumed all lies, the glory and victory of truth will reign forever!

Those who have been baptized in the Holy Spirit and fire, willingly receive the consuming of their carnality and religiosity, even though the process is difficult, and they rejoice when they are freed from it. These are not thrown into the lake of fire.

The ministry of the touchstone is to bring a revelation to corrupt humanity of its corruption. This is not an easy task! Those who refuse to hear the voice of the Spirit will be thrown into the lake of fire - into situations that are so difficult that they will be forced to admit that they need help, and that their philosophies and dogmas are useless. It may take a long period of testing - even to the ages of the ages - for them to admit their stubbornness and pride. But the lake of fire faithfully burns and burns until all carnality and religiosity are burned away. God’s consuming fire burns in the first fruit of every generation until every vestige of carnality and religiosity is burned away, and it will do the same in ALL who make up the harvest and the gleanings, until ALL is subjected to Jesus Christ! **Eventually ALL will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father!**

“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them.” (v. 11)

The things John saw in the spirit are truly amazing! He saw a great white throne, he saw the dead, he saw the books being opened, and he saw the dead and death and Hades being thrown into the lake of fire. He knew that all these scenes had a spiritual significance.

Let’s look at the spiritual significance they have for us. These vivid pictures are to give us an understanding of what is taking place within us. A natural understanding of this scene pictures a numberless multitude of people from the time of Adam to the time of the coming of Christ standing in line, waiting for their turn to be exposed and judged. Court proceedings require witnesses, arguments, evidence, and a judge. Can you imagine how many millenniums it would take to judge each individual sin of an untold number of billions and billions of people? Yet this is the myth created by the carnal mind. It cannot understand the symbols God uses to bring us spiritual understanding.

A throne is a place of authority. A king sits on his throne to govern, to rule and to judge. We know that God's kingdom rule is within us. Therefore His throne must also be within us. If Christ is our Lord, it follows that He is ruling us from His throne that is within us! It is a great throne because no other throne can compare with it. Only after the believers have overcome the world that is within them, can they reign with Christ over the nations. In **1 Cor. 6:2** Paul asks the question, "*Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world?*" When the overcomers are ruling with Christ, the throne becomes a many-membered throne.

It is a white throne. White symbolizes purity and light. Only a perfect knowledge of truth and righteousness can bring perfect judgment. It is pure, and its purity reveals all sin - even the secret sins. No corruption is tolerated! This seat of authority does not accept bribes, nor does it make deals.

"From whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them." The earth symbolizes the earthy part of us, that is, our carnal nature. We have all received the old Adamic nature; we have all borne the image of the earthy. When the brightness of Christ's light and truth floods our hearts, our earth, which is our carnality, has to flee. There is no place for carnality in the presence of Christ (the truth)!

Our heaven also flees away. In the scriptures, "heaven" is usually used in the plural. The translators have not been accurate in their translation, so we get the impression of one heaven. When we look out on a starry night, we call that expanse heaven. Paul said that he was caught up into the third heaven. Christ ascended far above all the heavens. (**Eph. 4:10**) So there are many heavens.

To most people heaven is a physical place of elevation and perfection. It is the place they want to go after they die. Instead of desiring the life of God, they desire stately mansions, luxurious living and idyllic circumstances. The most idyllic circumstance to many is when they can have their own way. These earthy ideas of heaven have to flee when the glorious presence of God fills the heart. Since preachers often substitute heaven for life, it is not surprising that these concepts are so prevalent.

The scriptural and true heaven is the invisible place where God dwells and rules by His Spirit. God rules His children from within their very being. Therefore heaven is within those who are ruled by His Spirit. God's rule is higher than the rule of self. **When the Spirit within us reveals spiritual things to us, the heavens are opened to us.** When heaven was opened to John, he saw a spiritual dimension. There are many spiritual dimensions, so there are many heavens and levels where we can experience the life of God. In our upward walk with God we have many spiritual experiences.

It is wonderful to know God in His heavens. Each heaven speaks of a sphere of

life, a plane of relationship and a level of experience in the Spirit. In Ephesians 1 it says that we are seated with Christ in heavenly places. There are various levels of authority that we have in Christ. **Our level of faith, love and obedience determines the heaven in which we are living, for they reveal our intimacy of relationship with Christ, and establish the authority we have in Christ.**

All carnal ideas have to vanish in the light and brightness of God's righteous rule! The brightness of His light exposes all the deceitfulness of the human heart. It exposes the man of sin - the natural man - for he exalts his ideas over and above the truth that God is. God's brightness exposes the traditions and rituals and all the things that we substitute for a relationship with God; there is no longer a place for them, for they are all being destroyed when God's brightness illuminates us! This is an ongoing and a progressive process in the life of every believer.

“And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which are written in the books, according to their deeds.” (v. 12)

What an awesome scene! Before the throne stretched a huge expanse filled with dead people - both the great and the small. We generally call a place filled with dead people a cemetery. However this was not the usual cemetery. Instead of buried bodies and gravestones giving them identity, all the dead were standing up!

Obviously this has to be a spiritual scene. Who are the dead? The Spirit declares that *“the mind set on the flesh is death. As for you, you were dead in your trespasses and sins.”* (Rom. 8:6; Eph. 2:1) This deadness is a description of the mind that is not focused on Christ and is not submitted to Him. How do we come out of this deadness? Paul gives us the answer in Eph. 5:14: *“Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”* To come into life, we first have to be awakened; then we have to rise from the dead. Rising from the dead is called resurrection. Jesus Christ is the resurrection! Receiving His life brings us into resurrection. We also call this being born again! *“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).”* (Eph. 2:4-5) (Emphasis ours.) Standing before the throne are the dead, namely, all who are dead in their transgressions, and therefore fleshly or carnally minded.

“And books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life.” Two kinds of books are opened. Since the second book is identified as the book of life, the first set of books cannot be books of life. Anything that does not belong to the realm of life belongs to the realm of death. An open book symbolizes that it is ready to be read and have its contents disclosed.

John perceived that each person is an epistle - an open book. Paul also perceived this. He said, "*You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men.*" (2 Cor.3: 2) Since the first set of books reveals the lives of those who are living in the death realm, they must be living according to the law - those who hold to the observance of the law for their deliverance, sanctification and righteousness. These live by "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not". The more laws they keep, the more righteous they think they are. But the law only brings condemnation because no one can keep the whole law. **The law was not given in order to give us life, but to show us what sin is, and to lead us to Christ. (Rom. 5:20)**

So the first set of books reveals the deadness of the deeds of the carnal mind. Everything that does not flow out of life has to be judged as being in the death realm. So this judgment is against the carnal mind and the deeds that it propagates. In **Gal. 5:19-21** some of these deeds are listed. "*Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these.*" "*Things like these*" include religiosity and its works for righteousness.

But another book was opened - the book of life! This book is a revelation of Christ and His love, grace and mercy! **Life does not depend on our performance but on our union with His life.** A fruit-bearing branch has to be united with the source of its life. Jesus said, "*I am the vine, you are the branches.*" (John 15:5) Life bears fruit, and this fruit feeds others! The life of believers reveals the Christ within them, so they are living epistles.

Therefore, we have to remember that these events occur internally and that they do not refer to a one-time judgment that takes place after our physical death at the end of time. Our sins are not shouted from the rooftops. This is not an external judgment, but one that takes place within us daily.

The opening of the book of life brings a revelation of life. This revelation forms the basis for judging everything that is in the death realm. The first book reveals what is in the death realm, and the second book, the book of life, declares judgment on everything that is in the death realm. Jesus Christ said, "*I am the way, the truth and the life.*" It is His life and truth that reveal the lies and deception of the impostor, and judge him. The truth reveals the counterfeit, and the counterfeit is recognized as being worthless. In order to be changed into the image of Christ, all the deadness of the carnal mind has to be overcome by the mind of Christ. The message of love and life accompanies this judgment. God's judgments are always redemptive! As someone has said, "**He judges the worthless in order to give us the priceless!**"

Christ's ministry is one of righteousness - not of condemnation. His standard of righteousness does not accept man-made standards, doctrines and traditions. His love reached out to the publicans and sinners; it included everyone. *"For God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him."* (John 3:17) God's goal is to save the world, and in order to achieve this purpose, all fleshly activity has to be judged as being worthless.

Judgment is an important subject in the scriptures. Our natural reaction to judgment is fear because we do not understand its importance. Paul exclaimed, *"How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!"* (Rom. 11:33) God's judgments were even beyond Paul's understanding! However, righteous judgment is needed for righteous living, and God has appointed Jesus Christ to judge the world in righteousness. (Acts 17:31) The light of Christ reveals the hidden thoughts of unforgiveness, bitterness, anger, revenge, etc. His judgments give us the revelation of what is in the life realm and what is in the death realm. **When Christ comes to rule in us, His truth and light constantly judges our carnal thinking.**

The cunning adversary has deceived Christians into fearing God's righteous judgments. The dominant religious thought is that fear will influence and motivate people to do good deeds, and that good deeds will change them into being good people. Many evangelists use fear tactics in an effort to get people into the kingdom of God. The misunderstanding of the word "judgment" plus an awareness of frequent failures causes Christians to dread God's judgments instead of welcoming them. They think of judgment as punishment, and that this judgment will take place at the end of time. They do not realize that God's day is always. We need God's judgments **now**, so we can live a life of righteousness now. They free us from the unforgiveness, hate and bitterness resident in our carnal nature, and bring us the blessings of love, mercy and grace.

God's judgments are first and foremost internal, ongoing, and always redemptive. How could they be redemptive if they were only reserved for the future, and we could not benefit from them? God does not judge us in order to destroy us! He opens our book to deliver us! Since Jesus said that He did not come for the righteous, but for the unrighteous, our eyes have to be opened to our unrighteousness and corruption so we can realize our need of deliverance. Therefore we can thank God when He exposes our need! God is faithful, and He will not terminate His judgments until all the lust of our flesh, our pride and our love for this world have been dealt with. **His goal is for each of us to be conformed to the image of His glorious Son! This is the high calling that is ours in Christ Jesus.**

Our lives are open books for others to read. Paul said, *"You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; being manifested that you are a letter of*

Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.” (2 Cor. 3: 2-3) When Christians reveal the nature of the Christ within them, their lives will judge those who walk in carnality. *“For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.” (2 Cor. 2:15)* **The Christ in us is the Spirit of the living God, and His life in us is an open book, holding forth the Word of Life to all who come under the sphere of our influence.**

“And the dead were judged from the things which are written in the books, according to their deeds.” We either belong to the category of those who are alive in Christ, or to those who are dead in their trespasses and sins. God’s judgments are based on the source of our actions. The source reveals whether our actions come out of obedience to God or out of obedience to our selfish desires. Just as an earthly king’s judgment and rule proceed from his throne, so God’s judgment and rule proceed from His throne. **Since God resides in us and rules us from within, His throne must also be within us.** These judgments do not determine whether or not we go to be with the Lord after we die physically. Instead, they determine what needs to be placed into the cleansing and refining fire! God uses judgment as a tool in His redemptive and restorative processes. The natural understanding thinks it is the end, but God uses it as a means to transform us into His image.

Judgment has to take place in every believer. Even though we have the mind of Christ, the thoughts of the carnal mind reside alongside our true mind, and they always have to be judged as being in the death realm. Our thoughts precede our deeds. Our actions, aims and endeavors need to be judged and cleansed from all forms of selfish desires. Wrong actions will follow thoughts of unforgiveness, bitterness and jealousy; therefore they need to be judged. Difficult situations reveal both our strengths and weaknesses, and show us the areas in which we need to change.

James declared that faith without works is dead, and in **Hebrews 11:6** it says that without faith it is impossible to please God! Therefore our works have to flow out of faith. Works that are produced by self-effort are dead works, and therefore do not qualify for a reward or an inheritance. This truth is foreshadowed in the Old Testament by the birth of Abraham’s son Ishmael. Ishmael was produced by self-effort, so he did not receive an inheritance. The inheritance was reserved for Isaac, the son of promise, for he was born according to the promise of God, and not of self-effort.

“And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds.” (v.13)

The sea represents all unregenerate humanity, for at one time we were all dead in our sins and transgressions. It is only in Christ that we can be made alive! The natural mind is hostile toward God, and therefore cannot receive the life of God. **Rom. 8:6** says, *“The mind set on the flesh is death.”* We have to agree with God’s judgment of the carnal mind. Judgment brings knowledge. When the Spirit of God brings true knowledge to the ignorant, the sea has to give up its dead.

Hades, the realm of the departed dead, also has to give up its dead. For the meaning of Hades I would like to quote the explanation of J. Preston Eby. “The word HADES is a Greek word most often translated “hell”. Concerning the literal meaning of the word HADES there can be no doubt. It comes from the Greek A(I)DES. The “a” is a prefix which is equivalent to our “un”, and the stem “-id” means perceive. Thus we have UN-PERCEIVE or imperceptible; the unseen. That is Hades the unseen world, the unknown realm. Our English word hell is derived from an Anglo-Saxon word, “hillan” or “helan”, meaning a cavern, anciently denoting a concealed or UNSEEN place. In parts of England men still say, “I plan to hell my potatoes,” meaning to bury them in a hole or pit, that is, in a covered place, out of sight. And in the old days a young couple seeking to be alone, sought a hell, a place where they could make love without being seen by prying eyes.”

The popular understanding of hell as being a literal agonizing, torturing, burning fire that never accomplishes a change in the nature of that which is being burned, comes from paganism. The pagan idea of hell prompted the usage of “everlasting fire” in many of our translations of the Bible. In fact, in order to have an everlasting fire, there would need to be an everlasting evil. If evil would continue forever, we would have absolute evil, and it would infringe on God’s absolute goodness. Absolute evil and absolute good cannot coexist forever. However we know that God is absolutely good, so we know that evil cannot exist forever. Therefore there cannot be an everlasting fire. **No wonder the Greek New Testament never uses ‘everlasting’ and ‘fire’ in combination.**

So let’s look at v. 13 again, and insert the meaning of the symbolism. *“And the sea (that is, all unregenerate humanity) gave up the dead which were in it, and death (i.e., the carnal mind) and Hades (i.e., the place of the departed dead), gave up the dead which were in them.”* Every realm has to give up its dead. This includes the business, intellectual, scientific, political, as well as the religious realm. Every death realm has to give up its ignorance, darkness and superstitions. All has to be brought to the light so that it can be dealt with.

Can you see what this is telling us? It is giving us the message that the grave, darkness and the flesh, are not as powerful as we thought they were. All these realms have to release their dead! *“The last enemy that will be abolished is death.”* (1 Cor.

15:26) The obedience of Jesus Christ is greater than the disobedience of Adam! It overcomes the death we had in Adam, and brings us into life!

“And they were judged every one of them according to their deeds.” Jesus said, *“You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits.”* (Matt. 7:16-20)

The fruit reveals its source. Good fruit has its source in life, and it will also bring forth life. The deeds of the flesh do not have their source in life, and therefore are unable to bring forth life. Only the deeds that have their source in death (the flesh) need to be cast into the fire.

The truth is that fire always changes the nature of what is being burned; it destroys the old nature. For example, when wood is burned, it is changed into gases and ashes. The old nature of the wood has disappeared. When metals are subjected to extreme heat, a refining or separation from their impurities takes place. When we are subjected to God's refining fire, we are separated from our old nature.

“Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” (vv. 14-15)

We have been so inundated with traditional thinking that it is difficult for us to see what the scriptures are actually revealing. Natural understanding of this verse causes us to see God in the wrong light. It causes us to see God as a monster who unmercifully subjects all unbelievers to an eternity of torture. The scriptures do not say that, but the traditional church teaching implies that. Since the scriptures do speak of “unquenchable fire”, we assume that this fire will always exist. But that is not the case, **for unquenchable fire simply means that it cannot be extinguished until it has accomplished its purpose.** It is not an everlasting fire. Jeremiah 17:27 says that God will kindle a fire in the gates of Jerusalem and it will devour its palaces, and it shall not be quenched. **This fire is not burning today, since it has accomplished its purpose, and therefore it is no longer needed.**

Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire - this is a forced entry. Although they did not desire it, nor choose it, they were forced to endure it. Humanity's first death took place when Adam sinned. His death was our death. The scriptures tell us that we were all dead in our trespasses and sins. The second death is the lake of fire - the fire of God that consumes our carnal nature with its wrong desires and lusting for the things of the world.

Those who have their names written in the book of life are not thrown into the lake of fire. Why? Because the Holy Spirit has already done His refining work in them! John the Baptist prophesied that Jesus would baptize us with the Holy Spirit and fire. The purpose of this fire is to cleanse each believer from all carnal or fleshly thinking. Therefore believers can welcome the work of God's consuming and refining fire. **They recognize that His fire is necessary to consume all their dross, and to change them into the image of Christ. Everything corruptible has to be consumed.**

The process of our death to sin works in all who have been baptized with the Holy Spirit and fire. In **Romans 6:10-11** we read that the death Christ died, He died to sin. **Even so we are to consider ourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.** *"Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?"* (v.3) We have been baptized into His death to sin. **God's consuming fire brings us into this death experientially, and transforms us into Christ's likeness and nature.**

Christ's only desire was to please the Father! Even as Jesus was dead to all sinful desires, so we have to die to all the allurements of sin and self-exaltation. **The ruler of this world didn't find any love of self in Christ's life, so he could not connect with Him.** For this to be actualized in us, all our love for the things of this world needs to be destroyed. **Life overcomes death, and in God's marvelous dealings, life also produces a death to sin in us, so that we who have life, are not cast into this lake.**

Only those who do not have life are thrown into the lake of fire. This fire hurts pride, self-esteem, lustful desires and everything the world cherishes. God wants everyone to come into life, and He will do whatever it takes to get prideful man to recognize his need to change. **God's purpose and methods are always redemptive! God's consuming fire burns until He has accomplished His purpose in everyone. The lake of fire is not the end. It is only the means to get even the vilest sinner to see his need to receive Christ.**

Paul wrote, *"For He has put all things in subjection under His feet, so that God may be all in all."* (1 Cor. 15:27,28) At present we do not see that, but it will come into being - it will be actualized. God's promises are sure, and He is able to accomplish His goal. The lake of fire is part of the process to accomplish this goal!

Chapter 21

Spiritual things are more readily grasped when illustrations are provided from the seen realm. This explains why we need to understand the symbols used in the book of Revelation, for they are shadows of the reality. **The significance and beauty of symbols lies in the fact that they illumine the eyes of spiritually-minded people, while at the same time, they hide truth from the carnally-minded.** Different representations of truth are seen in the various symbols, and they reveal the purpose of God for, and in, His people.

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.” (vv.1-2)

What a contrast between the beginning of this chapter and the ending of the previous chapter! After John saw the lake of fire, he saw a new heaven and a new earth. Before we can see the new heaven and the new earth, the lake of fire has to cleanse us of all our carnality!

The true perspective and understanding of the new heaven, the new earth and the new Jerusalem fill us with awe and great joy. The natural mind finds it difficult to understand that a city can symbolize the bride of Christ, and that the temple is not a physical building. So we need to let the Spirit of God show us the spiritual realities of these symbols. Only then will we realize that the holy city is the bride of Christ in her perfection.

John saw a new heaven and a new earth. The Greek word KAINOS, translated NEW, does not mean new in time, or recent, “but new as to form or quality, of a different nature from what is contrasted as old.” (Vines) Something new is not something that has been remodeled, nor is it a mixture of the old and the new. It is completely new!

This was not the heaven John was used to seeing when he looked up into space; neither was it the heaven man’s imagination has concocted! How exciting it must have been for John to see a new heaven - not a physical heaven, but a spiritual heaven and earth! This brought him into a new dimension, for this heaven and earth symbolize the nature of the new creation man created in Christ!

This new earth is characterized by the absence of a sea. Throughout this book the sea

has symbolized the restless turbulent nations that have no knowledge of God. We saw that the beast came out of the sea, and that the sea contained the living dead - the mass of humanity that is dead in its sins and trespasses. **(20:13) The absence of a sea indicates that there is no place for the old humanity in our new earth.**

Heaven speaks of a dimension that is higher than the earth. Our traditions and imaginations have created a heaven that is an idyllic place in a far away abode above the visible sky. **But in Matthew 5:34 Jesus said that heaven is the throne of God. A throne represents government and authority. So heaven is God's government and authority! To experience heaven we have to be governed by God!**

Our mind is the highest place within us. Our first heaven is our carnal mind for it dictates and governs our thoughts and actions. Our first earth consists of the dust that the serpent feeds on - the lust of the eyes and the lust of the flesh and the boastful pride of life. In order to get out of its jurisdiction and control we have to receive the mind of Christ by becoming a new creation in Christ. In **1 Corinthians 2:16** Paul says that Christ has given us His mind. His mind delights in doing the will of God, and is totally submitted to the government of God. **So the mind of Christ is our new heaven.** A new heaven is not a mixture of the old and the new. Everything has become new! Peter refers to this new heaven and new earth, saying, *"But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells."* (2 Pe. 3:13) **Christ has given us His mind of righteousness.** As we learn to live out of the mind of Christ, our new earth will shine forth. Christ's righteousness does away with all the old humanity, so there is no more sea!

"For the first heaven and the first earth passed away." The Greek word PROTOS is translated "first", and it means before or opposite to the last; foremost (in time, place of importance.) (Vines) Our first heaven and earth were all important to us before we knew Christ. Self was on the throne, and self caters to self. Our understanding of spiritual realities was in the natural realm, and lies had become our truth. When the new heaven and earth become ours, the old heaven and earth are left behind.

After *"the first heaven and the first earth passed away"*, John saw the new Jerusalem coming down from God. The new Jerusalem is a city, and cities are populated with people. The new Jerusalem is not populated with the same people that populated the old Jerusalem. There is a big difference between the two cities. In **Galatians 4:21-31** we learn that the two Jerusalems are two covenants. The present-day Jerusalem represents the old covenant of law, and it keeps its children in bondage; the new Jerusalem represents the new covenant of *"the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus,"* and it sets us *"free from the law of sin and of death."* (Rom. 8:2) Therefore the inhabitants of the new Jerusalem are freed from their bondage to sin. This pictures

the bride of Christ! John was receiving a vision of the bride of Christ as she is in her perfection.

This city comes down out of heaven from God where it originated. It is not built on this earth, raptured up, and then brought down again. It comes out of heaven. Jesus said that He was a man from heaven. The source of His being came from above - and so does ours! We are born of the Spirit, and therefore we have a heavenly nature. Since this city has been prepared in heaven (the spiritual realm), the inhabitants of this city have not chosen to live there; rather they have been chosen and prepared by God to become inhabitants of this city. Their thinking has been changed from independent to corporate thinking. **In corporateness they see that their uniqueness adds beauty and true greatness to the whole.**

She has been made ready as a bride adorned for her husband! This is the hour of preparation. In the previous chapters we have seen the cleansing that was needed to prepare the bride — to bring her to this glorious state. The Greek word for **adorned** is KOSMEO, and primarily means **to arrange, to put in order**. Our English word, **cosmetics**, is derived from it. The noun form, KOSMOS, which means a **harmonious arrangement**, is often mistranslated as **world** in our Bible. Here we see that the adornment of the bride depicts her harmonious relationship with Christ.

The bride is now fully prepared and matured, qualified and glorified as Christ's wife upon His throne. By right of marriage she takes His name, which symbolizes His nature. She is the complement of Christ and has joint-ownership of all His possessions, and co-dominion over all His realms. **By marriage she is joint-heir with the King of kings!**

During our lifetime we build with gold, silver, and precious jewels, or with wood, hay, and stubble. These elements and substances refer to the outer expression of our inner being. The hay, wood and stubble represent the works of religiosity - like keeping the law, regulations, precepts and traditions. Fire (pressure) reveals the source and quality of our works, and causes them to become either a precious jewel or a heap of ashes. Works that are not destroyed by fire have their source in life, and **are an expression of Christ's life within us**. These works will remain.

The bride's adornment consists of the heavenly nature of the Bridegroom lover. The processing of God has burned away everything that did not have its source in life. Earth's pressures did not deter the bride from following the Lord. Therefore she is arrayed with all manner of precious jewels. There can be no restoration of creation, no demonstration of the kingdom and no manifestation of the sons of God apart from the bride.

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, `Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them.” (v.3)

A loud voice came from the throne. The throne represents God’s authority and rule, and He rules us from within. Therefore this loud voice came from the Spirit realm within him. John received a message that came with the authority of God Himself! This message was almost too good to be true! **It declared that God’s dwelling place is now in His people!**

In the old covenant God dwelt in the holy of holies in the tabernacle that Moses raised up in the wilderness. This was the innermost part and it was situated beyond the court and the holy place. In this vision the Holy Spirit witnessed to John that this city, the new Jerusalem, corresponds in symbol to the most inward realm of the tabernacle of Moses - a realm in which there was no corruption! The manna in the ark remained fresh, so it did not need replacement; neither did it need any natural light as in the court, nor any artificial light as in the holy place, for its light was the glory of God - the Shekinah glory!

“Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and God Himself will be among them.” The word **among**, from the Greek META, means “in the midst of.” God’s dwelling place is now in the midst of humanity; He dwells **in** His people! This too was symbolized in the Old Testament by the tabernacle of Moses. All the tribes of Israel were camped around it! The natural can only typify the spiritual to a certain degree. Christ now tabernacles in the midst of His people; but He is also in them. He dwells in our spirit, and leads and directs us! He is our light and our glory! God’s plan for us is so much greater than we can ever imagine!

“And He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.” (v.4)

“And He will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” Since we cannot envision life on earth without tears, we immediately say that this applies to life after we have died. If we look at these things and apply them to the physical body, we won’t understand them any more than Nicodemus could understand that we must be born again. How can we believe that this is for now when we see so much suffering, sadness and sin every day? We join Nicodemus in asking, *“How can these things be?”* In looking for the answer to this question, let’s remember that this voice came from the Spirit realm, and therefore has to be understood spiritually.

In our earthly journey we experience difficult situations that cause an upheaval in our emotions. Tears are present because of sorrow, difficulties, heartaches, etc. God

has promised to wipe away those tears. This means that even in the most difficult situations our tears will be wiped away, because in Christ we have been delivered from the hopelessness of a situation. **In the midst of every trying situation we can walk in peace and serenity because we know that Christ is working something out that is beyond our comprehension.**

The tears of a Christian sparkle with triumph. As **1 Thess. 4** puts it, *“We sorrow not as others, who have no hope.”* We sorrow, but not as others. There is triumph in our tears! When an unsaved loved one dies, we sorrow, but not as others. We have the hope and blessed assurance that the message of salvation will be brought to him at a future time, and that he will accept it, even though he must first pass through great affliction. Therefore we do not sorrow as others sorrow who have no hope.

“There will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain.” This death does not refer to our physical body; it is speaking of spiritual things. Jesus said, *“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes on Me shall never die.”* He did not say that we have to first die physically before we receive the resurrection. Without Christ we were already dead! **Believing in Him resurrects us out of our death and gives us His life!** Those who believe in Him have already received the life of God! There is no death in His life. Sadness, pain, tears and death cannot dwell in His presence! These things do not reside in His glory! **In His presence there is joy forevermore! The Shekinah glory in us takes away all darkness and everything related to darkness!** This is not only for the future — it is also for now!

We continue to live in the eternal life that we have in Christ even when the newspaper carries our obituary and says that we have died. There’s no such thing as death for a Christian except the death to sin. And that death brings us into life! If we live in the reality of what is declared in this book, we will live in joy unspeakable and full of glory. It is glorious to cease all our carnal thinking and to live in the truth that Christ is. Physical death frees us from the mortality and limitations of this body, and therefore we can welcome it.

“The first things have passed away.” The natural is first - it is the prototype. The natural was not meant to remain, for it does not have immortality. **Christ takes us out of our old Adamic nature and gives us His nature!** We have been taken out of Adam, the first man, and have been placed into Christ, the second man! Paul wrote that we are a new creation in Christ. *“The old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”* (2 Cor. 5:17) It says that we **are** new — not that we will become new some day. We cannot relegate this to the future; this is past tense. We have been *“sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance...”* (Eph. 1:13b-14a) A pledge is a down payment - there is more to come. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we receive more of what we already have

in Christ. **A pledge is a little bit of a lot more; it is multiplied over and over again into infinity.**

‘And He who sits on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’ And He said, ‘Write, for these words are faithful and true.’” (v.5) These words come with great authority, for they come from the One who sits on the throne! When the Holy Spirit speaks to us, He gives us the words that are in the mind of Christ! We can always trust the Holy Spirit, for His words are faithful and true!

From the throne comes the promise that *“He makes all things new.”* **He takes us out of mortality and puts us into immortality; He takes away the desires of the flesh and gives us His desires. He gives us a new spirit — the Spirit of Christ; He gives us a new mind — the mind of Christ; He gives us a new body — the body of truth and light that Christ is. In Christ everything becomes new!**

“Then He said to me, ‘It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost.’” (v.6) The speaker identifies Himself as the Alpha and the Omega — the first and the last letter of the Greek alphabet. In other words, He is the whole alphabet! Now why would He describe Himself in this way?

Christ is our communication with God; He is the Word made flesh! The letters of the alphabet represent every sound needed for every word that is used for communication. With this description Christ is saying that He is everything we need to receive and express spiritual knowledge: wisdom, understanding, directives and emotions! All our needs are fulfilled in Christ! He truly is our Salvation and Provision!

Only He can give us the water of life from the spring of salvation! But in order to avail ourselves of this water, we have to be thirsty. I’ll never forget the time when my three-year-old baby brother was deathly sick because of complications of an appendectomy. He was not allowed to have water, and he was so thirsty! It was so pitiful to see him! Finally the doctor said that he would die anyway, so we could fulfill his desire for water. The little guy eagerly drank almost a full pitcher of water! This deluge of water undid the knot in his bowels, and he lived! It’s the thirsty land that drinks in the water!

Those who are thirsty for truth will eagerly drink the life-giving words of our Lord Jesus Christ! The self-satisfied, smug and traditionally oriented people will be content with the non-changing clanging of the old doctrines, rituals and traditions in which there is no life. They are unaware of their true condition, but God knows how to create in us a desire for more of Him! An earthquake or two will shatter their smugness, and their ears will be opened to hear Christ’s invitation to come and drink

of the water of life and it is given freely. Money cannot buy it; neither can we work for it. It is free of any cost to us. However the cost to God was great! He gave His only begotten Son to die for us that we might live! The cost was also great for Christ. He endured humiliation, rejection, and untold suffering, even death on the cross, that He might give us His life! Christ desires the oneness that can only be ours in Him!

“He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.” (v-7)! We cannot be overcomers without having difficulties and problems to overcome. We cannot run away from our problems. Our carnal thinking is our biggest problem, and difficulties reveal whether we are living out of the natural mind or out of the mind of Christ. The overcomer conquers the self-centered nature within him. The promise to the overcomer is that he will inherit these things — the things that are mentioned in the preceding verses.

An inheritance comes to us on the basis of relationship. A servant receives gifts and rewards, but a son receives an inheritance! An inheritance includes everything the father owns. In the Holy Spirit we receive life, light, love and truth - the very nature and life of Christ! Walking or living in truth takes us out of our old self-centered living, and brings us into spiritual maturity — into the fullness of Christ! Since God is our Father, we know that we are children of God by birth. **This gives us the exalted privilege of maturing into sons who express the Father’s nature and then reveal it to the world.**

“But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons, and sorcerers and adulterers and all liars, their part will be the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” (v. 8)

Here we have a list of those who are driven by their own lusts and desires, and therefore need God’s divine correction and purification. The first on the list are the **cowardly**. The Macmillian Dictionary says, “A cowardly person is not brave enough to fight or do something difficult or dangerous that they should do.” These are people who do not know their God. In **Daniel 11:32** we read, *“But the people who know their God will display strength and take action.”* They do not have the faith to be obedient when it’s hard. Cowardliness is a result of unbelief and does not come from God. His Spirit is one of power and love and discipline.

The **unbelieving** do not believe what God says about Himself and what He says about us, so they are actually accusing Him of being a liar. They do not believe that God is full of mercy and grace and love. Instead of believing who God says He is, they believe their own idea of God. **Their rejection of grace and mercy keeps them in their traditional laws, and every infraction of the law brings condemnation.**

Those who do not believe in Jesus Christ are judged because they refuse to receive the light.

The **abominable** are vile and disgusting and detestable. Nothing beautiful can be found in them because they are void of love and inner beauty. **Murderers** are full of hate, and they lack discipline. They reject God's sovereignty, and in unleashed anger they kill others in order to appease their own wrath. Instead of being filled with the love of God, they are filled with hate.

Immoral people do not have morals. They lack standards and do not conform to God's principles of right and wrong. They are lewd, unchaste, and obscene. This speaks of the natural man pursuing his own lustful desires and seeking selfish gratification. He will not submit to any standards but clings to his own selfish desires. We can only come to God in humility.

The word **sorcerer** comes from the Greek word PHARMACIA. A sorcerer is a manipulator of the mind. Our mind can be manipulated by drugs and by false teaching of various sorts. Only the Holy Spirit can guide us into all truth! God is warning us not to believe every wind of doctrine and all the old man-made traditions. All our thoughts, beliefs and desires have to be put under the scrutiny of the Holy Spirit. Many speakers use fear and illogical statements to manipulate the minds of their hearers. The devil even quoted scripture in his effort to manipulate the mind of Jesus to obey him. Scripture quoted by an evil spirit will always have a wrong application. All who try to dominate by manipulating people's minds need to be cleansed.

Idolaters worship idols, and an idol is an image of a god used as an object of worship. Idolatry is the worship or ardent devotion or admiration of anything that takes the place of God. True worship cannot occur without a submission to the object of our worship. In many countries objects that portray man's idea of God are seen openly in public buildings and in homes. Each god has its own demands, and obedience to those demands is expected to bring blessings. Disobedience brings a curse. In America the idolatry is more subtle for it takes place in the unseen realm. Self with its lustful desires is worshiped, and God is left out of the picture. All idolatry has to be done away!

Liars do not tell the truth. The devil is a liar and "**does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies**" (Jn. 8:44) Liars exhibit the nature of the devil. To do away with this nature, liars need to be put into the lake of fire.

God's purpose for the lake that burns with fire and brimstone is to rid humanity of everything that is not of God! We have already explained that brimstone is

another name for sulfur, and sulfur was used in the offerings for purification. All unrighteousness is the result of carnal thinking, and God's consuming fire does away with all that thinking! Those who do not receive Christ as their Savior will be subjected to fiery trials and difficulties in order for them to recognize the error of their ways, and their inability to save themselves. They need to recognize that lies have become their truth, and that they can only receive truth by receiving Christ as their Savior.

The teaching that God will cast people into a hell of fire, and torture them for all eternity is a misrepresentation of God's love, grace and mercy, and places limitations on His atonement. In **Col. 1:20** we read, *"And through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven."* Since God says that He will reconcile ALL things to Himself, it follows that there are no exceptions! God is a consuming fire, and this fire will not be quenched until everything that is not of Himself is consumed!

"Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, 'Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.'" (v. 9) The angel or messenger that had the seven bowls full of the plagues, was the same messenger that showed John the bride of the Lamb. This is of great significance! The Lord wants us to understand that the difficulties, pressures and cleansings we are experiencing are necessary to bring forth the beauty of the bride! We tend to blame all our difficulties on the devil. We fail to see the blessings that come from our trials, and that we need them in order to mature. Without them we could not be overcomers!

The angel invited John to see the bride, the wife of the Lamb. What an interesting and exciting invitation! The Lamb has a bride, and the bride is also the wife. This is exemplified in Eastern culture where a betrothed woman, a bride, is also called a wife. Yet we may wonder why she is the wife of the Lamb, instead of to Christ? We know that the Lamb does not refer to a young sheep, but to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The word "Lamb" emphasizes the sacrificial death of Jesus, and gives understanding to the meaning of love. **Ephesians 5:25** says that husbands should love their wives even as *"Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her."* **It is only through His death and resurrection, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit that the bride can become one with Him. The term, "the bride of Christ," emphasizes the oneness that is ours in the anointing.**

Why did the angel invite John to a higher level in order for him to see the bride? John could not see the bride with his natural understanding, so he had to leave that understanding and get onto a higher level. The angel's invitation to "Come

here,” is also our invitation to leave our natural understanding of spiritual realities. Our natural understanding sees symbols as realities, and whatever it does not see or understand is relegated to the future. For example, it believes that heaven is the place we go to after we die, and that it consists of beautiful mansions and physical streets of gold; it also believes that the lake of fire is a physical fire that burns forever. It thinks that keeping external forms and rituals, such as calling certain days holy, and observing the accepted norms and traditions incorporated in religion are their sanctification.

Living in the letter is living in death. To get to a higher plane we have to receive revelation of what is happening spiritually. **Revelation knowledge of Jesus Christ lets us see His very essence. It takes us beyond the darkness and death of the natural mind, and causes us to see the spiritual realm and all the goodies God has for us there.** It shows us the true nature of things!

“And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God.” (vv.10-11a)

Imagine the excitement John must have felt as he was instantly relocated through space, and suddenly found himself standing on the top of a mountain! To his utter amazement he saw a magnificent and extraordinary city coming down out of heaven from God. This city was not built on earth. Everything in this city was formed in heaven, for it came down from God and was invested with His government and His authority!

This heavenly Jerusalem, is not a literal city; it is a city that symbolizes the bride or wife of the Lamb! It brings us a wonderful message of the church in her perfection - the church triumphant, without spot or wrinkle! The different parts of the city are all symbolic of spiritual realities, and should not be taken literally. They reveal the spiritual attributes present in the bride of Christ. We need to understand that the body of Christ is the temple of God - the place God inhabits in the Spirit - and that every stone of that temple is a living son of God.

We cannot have a city without people. The word, “new” tells us that this Jerusalem symbolizes a people who differ from those in the “old” Jerusalem. The present Jerusalem in Palestine is *“in slavery with her children.”* (Gal. 4:25) She is the same in essence as the old Jerusalem that crucified Jesus and stoned the prophets; she is not a holy city. She still clings to her laws. The people still live under the guilt and condemnation that every infraction of the law brings. The new Jerusalem is different. It symbolizes a spiritual people who have been born from above. They have received the life and nature of Jesus Christ! The glory of this city cannot be imparted to the

Adam man because he is anti-Christ and anti-God. It can only be imparted to the new creation humanity.

The new Jerusalem has the glory of God. **The earthly glory of nations consists of power, control and material wealth, but God's glory is His goodness! (Exodus 33:19)** God is completely good; everything He is, is good! He is truth, love, light and righteousness, and His righteousness opposes all unrighteousness. He has all wisdom and all knowledge, and all power! He is completely just, and His attributes are all good! These attributes are the essence of His very being, and are inherently His life, even as the different colors of the rainbow inherently are the rainbow. The emanation of all that He is, is His glory! **Our transformation takes place because of His life in us. The more we participate in His life, the more of His goodness will flow out through us!** The city John saw was the perfected church, the bride of Christ without spot or wrinkle!

“Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper.” (v.11) The jasper stone, as we know it, is an opaque stone. However, the ancient jaspis probably included chrysoprase. Chrysos means gold, plus prason, leek, a light-green quartz. It is the ancient name of a golden-green precious stone, to which was attributed the facility to shine in the dark. Here the brilliance, the cost and the transparency of the bride are emphasized.

This city, symbolizing the bride of Christ, is sending forth a brilliant light. Jesus said, *“You are the light of the world.”* (Matt. 5:14) We may not realize the light that is emanating from us as we do the will of God. These pictures reveal what is going on in the spiritual realm. The bride of Christ has come into perfect light. Light and truth are synonymous in the scriptures. She has come into truth and there is no impurity or lie in truth. If truth could be corrupted, it would no longer be truth. The carnality of the old mind with its lies and deception has no place in her. **She is living in her new mind - the mind of Christ! Obedience to Christ is her only desire!**

Our walk in truth is a costly business. **We cannot maintain a self-life and walk in truth.** All selfish ambition and desires, all bitterness and unforgiveness and all selfish motives have to die. Everything that fans the ego has to die. But out of this death, life springs forth — a life that flows out of the knowledge of being sons of God. This is a life of humility, service, submission and obedience to Christ!

Walking in truth brings transparency. The walk and the talk are in agreement. Truth brings clear discernment between the letter and the spirit. It sees the difference between life and death; between natural understanding and spiritual understanding; between the outer forms of religion and a relationship with God! **Truth is the very essence of God's being.**

God's glory shines out from the new Jerusalem, the bride of Christ. No shadows can dwell in this light! When light comes from a specific object, like the sun or a lamp, anything that stands in its way will produce a shadow. However, this brilliance is the light of Christ Himself, and He fills all things. Since no lie or deception dwells in Him, nothing can obscure that light. His light within us takes away all our wrong thinking; it takes away all the lies and deception of the carnal mind!

The City Walls

Next we have a description of the walls of this city. *"It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are those of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel...And he measured its wall, 72 yards,"* (literally 144 cubits) *"according to human measurements, which are also angelic measurements. The material of the wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass."* (vv. 12,17-18)

A literal interpretation of the purpose of this wall does not satisfy us. If this city were in heaven, why would it need walls? What would be the purpose of a literal wall? What kind of enemies do we have there? Physical enemies, such as jet planes loaded with bombs or missiles carrying warheads? They couldn't reach that altitude. Or are the walls to protect its citizens from stepping off the edge and falling down? This wall is not for physical protection, like the wall that surrounded ancient Jerusalem. Instead, it symbolizes the defense that God's salvation and government brings us against sin. **It symbolizes Christ's strength within us.** He is our defense against every enemy of the spiritual life.

In the light of the Old Testament we see the beauty of this symbolism. There we read, *"Violence will not be heard again in your land, nor devastation or destruction within your borders; but you will call your walls salvation, and your gates praise... 'For I,' declares the LORD, 'will be a wall of fire around her, and I will be the glory in her midst'...The name of the LORD is a strong tower; (literally: a walled place); the righteous runs into it and is safe."* (Isaiah 60:18; Zech. 2:5; Prov. 18:10) So the wall of this city symbolizes our **salvation!**

God's salvation is our protection from all evil! The physical evil that we are called upon to endure cannot harm our salvation! Christ's life within us is our strength, for Christ is our salvation! **His life in us overcomes our wrong thinking and thus overcomes sin; it defeats Satan, dispels darkness and conquers death.** This is the eternal salvation we have in Christ Jesus!

The wall has a measurement. The modern translation of 72 yards does not portray

the intended symbolism. The original version of 144 cubits consists of two twelves (12x12) - 12 is the number of God's government, and 2 is the number of witness. So the wall is a witness of God's government in our lives. The height of the wall is only important in the symbolism of its number. Changing these numbers into modern measurements does away with the symbolism, and invalidates the intent of the vision. In this vision we find the number twelve occurring over and over again. **This signifies the importance of God's government in our lives. Living in self-government is sin.**

Notice that the 144 cubits, according to human measurements, are the same as angelic measurements. Embedded in this statement lies the awesome truth that God's government does not change; it is the same for us as it is for angels! This emphasizes the fact that even while we are in our earthly bodies we are governed by truth. Our standard of truth must be the same standard Christ had, for He is the truth, and there is no corruption in truth! Truth demonstrates our unity with Christ!

Walls also speak of separation and safety. Throughout this book there is a recurring theme, namely, that the devil cannot get inside the true church. The church needs to hear this! The government of God is our salvation and protection! The devil cannot touch the company of people who worship God in the holy of holies. Not only do they worship God in the holy of holies, but in Christ they have become the holy of holies - the temple of God where God dwells!

The book of Revelation cites numerous examples showing that the devil cannot touch God's people. In chapter 7 the 144,000 were sealed off - they couldn't be touched. Then in chapter 11 John was given a measuring rod to measure the temple of God and those who worship in it. The outer court that looks like the church but isn't, consists of forms and rituals; it has been given over to the Gentiles. The true church is not influenced by forms, rituals and traditions because it has been measured off or separated from the world! This protection is also emphasized in chapters 12-14 where we read about the glorious woman who was protected when the devil tried to get her. We also notice that the 144,000 remained protected while the beast was being worshiped, and people were receiving the mark of the beast. "Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mt. Zion, and with Him 144,000." **Living in obedience under God's government is our protection in the midst of all satanic attacks.**

The garden of Eden didn't have the protection that the new Jerusalem had. Adam and Eve were ignorant of the disaster that a rule of choice between good and evil would bring, so they could be enticed to try the attractive rule of another government - the government of self. The inhabitants of the new Jerusalem know the value of remaining in God's government. This causes faith to rise up in them, so they don't

revert to the old rule. It keeps us safe, for we *“are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”* (1 Peter 1:5) The very power of God protects us from receiving the lies of Satan. In **1 John 5:18** it says, *“and the evil one does not touch him.”*

The symbolism is very plain - the walls symbolize our salvation, and the double emphasis of the number 12 is a strong reminder that we are under God's government. Living under His government is our protection! **We can rest securely in the fact that any power that would ever come against us, must first of all come against the power of God.** And He has all power! Nothing can overcome His power! **God has made Himself personally responsible to keep us. What a tremendous protection!**

The Lord is our shepherd! A shepherd, especially in the East, made himself responsible for the life of the sheep. If one of his sheep would be attacked by a lion, the shepherd would rather die than let the lion get away with it. **Christ Jesus is the great Shepherd who is personally responsible for keeping His church!** This wall of salvation has nothing to do with so-called coverings, elderships, headships, fellowships, rules, regulations, laws or doctrines. There is no safety in them - if there were, we wouldn't see so much division, so many church splits, disgraced ministries, and fellowships falling apart. Our salvation reflects the glory of God and His keeping power!

If we slip out of God's government, and accept the government of our carnal mind, we'll encounter the serpent. Sometimes the serpent is camouflaged as a lamb so we won't recognize him, and sometimes as a roaring lion in order to paralyze us through fear! In whatever form he comes, he either instills fear or gives us an alternative to God's rule. He makes the alternative look attractive, easy and desirable. However, we must not veer from our submission to God's government, for only then will we be safe! There is no danger for those who are in Christ. **We watch and pray that we remain in the faith; the keeping power belongs to Christ.**

The walls are walls of exclusion as well as of safety. Everything that defiles is excluded. *“And nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.”* (v.27) Nothing can come into this city but that which is filled with the life of Christ - everything else must be excluded. Those who inhabit this glorious realm are separated from the filth of Babylon and the fleshpots of Egypt. They abide in union with Christ. They live out of His glorious mind and are transformed into His wonderful likeness! Inside is the glory of God. Let's enjoy the glory of God in our everyday living, and come into *“the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.”* (Eph. 4:13) **Dwelling within the walls of His salvation brings us into the perfection of Christ!**

The Gates

Now let's examine the twelve gates or entrances to this city. *“and at the gates 12 angels; and names were written on them, which are the names of the 12 tribes of the sons of Israel. There were three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west...And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl...In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed.”* (vv. 12-13; 21; 25)

The number of gates corresponds to the number of tribes, and there was an entrance for each tribe. During Israel's wilderness wanderings each tribe had a special place assigned where it had to camp in relation to the tabernacle. Again we see how the Old Testament symbols are fulfilled in the life we have in Christ. Twelve symbolizes the government of God, and four signifies completeness. An entrance into God's government is provided for every direction from which the city may be approached.

There were twelve angels and twelve gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel. These are not the children of Jacob, the conniver, the supplanter, the cheater. After Jacob wrestled with the angel, his name was changed to Israel, meaning the prince that prevails with God. Therefore this does not refer to the natural descendants of Jacob, but to **spiritual Israel — to those who prevail with God**. God is dealing with the Israel of faith. The flesh cannot enter the kingdom of God. The meaning of the names of the twelve sons of Israel describes the people of God. Only those who fit that description can become the bride of Christ.

We need to be careful that we do not confuse symbolism with reality. Symbolism consists of using an object (the outward and physical) to represent or point to something abstract or spiritual. This helps us to understand that the physical tabernacle of Moses points to God's heavenly tabernacle. Things pertaining to the tabernacle of God are not of the earth, i.e. earthy. They belong to the new creation - not to the old.

The names of the 12 tribes of Israel (twelve again signifying God's government) are very meaningful to us because their meaning brings us a description of the life of God's people. They show us that it is possible to overcome and be victorious in this life here on earth. So let's look at these names and receive spiritual understanding.

The first son was REUBEN. His name means, **“Behold a son.”** God is perfecting the spirit of sonship in His children. According to Galatians 4, sons have the mark of maturity, for they reign over the servants (the Law). The sons reign under God's government and authority.

SIMEON means “**Hearing.**” God’s children have ears to **hear** what the Spirit is saying. Jesus said, “*My sheep hear My voice.*” (*Jn. 10:27*) And in **Rev. 2:7** it says, “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*” Faith comes by **hearing** the Word of Christ. (**Rom. 10:17**) There is a big difference between **reading** the scriptures and **hearing** the Spirit! When the scriptures are interpreted by the natural mind, the spiritual meaning is lost, for the natural mind is always against the Spirit. God’s children have ears to hear the voice of the Spirit, and are admonished to use them; they are to believe and obey His voice.

The tribe of LEVI was the priestly tribe. It was not counted among the 12 tribes that received an earthly inheritance, because God was its provision. The name Levi means **unity** or **joined**. Jesus said, “*I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.*” (*John 15:5*) A branch that is severed from the vine dies; even so, we can only live and bear fruit when we are united with Christ. “*But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him.*” (*1 Cor. 6:17*) **The believer has been joined to the Lord, and Christ has become his life!**

JUDAH means **praise**. God’s people are filled with praise for the great salvation that God has brought about in Christ! They are not complainers, nor do they worry and always expect the worst because they know they can trust their Father God in every situation!

DAN means a **judge**. The citizens of this city have received Christ. They have accepted God’s judgment on their life in Adam, and have received truth and light. Without truth it is impossible to discern or judge the deceptions and lies of the devil. Without truth it is impossible to judge correctly! Truth gives them (and us) the ability to rightly judge between truth and error.

ZEBULON means a **dwelling place** - a place to dwell. We have a dwelling place with God. “*In whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.*” (*Eph. 2:22*) A dwelling place speaks of permanence! It is not a hotel or a guest house. We are residents — not guests! Since Christ is our dwelling place, dining with Him is a normal part of our life. We are always with Him, and in Him we have our being! **If we do not dwell in our dwelling place, we are not possessing our possession.**

ISSACHAR means a **price was paid**. We have been redeemed with a price - with the blood of Jesus! To whom was the price paid? Some Christians teach that it was paid to the devil, and the devil named the price - but that would be ridiculous! Nothing could be farther from the truth! That idea implies that Jesus had to obey the devil in order to redeem us - and obeying the devil is always sin.

What was the cost of our redemption? **It cost Jesus Christ His glory with the Father and the humiliation of being lowered into an identity with sinful humanity.** In order to redeem us He had to lower Himself into an identity with sinful humanity. As a result, He received false accusations and rejection by His own people; He had to endure a lot of spiritual and physical suffering, even the excruciating pain, shame and humiliation of death on a cross! This was the price He paid for our salvation and redemption in His obedience and submission to the will of God!

GAD means a **troop** or a **great company**. This company does not consist of only a few people. It is a great company to whom the heavens have been opened. Christ has become their wisdom so they can now understand the true nature of spiritual realities. Without a doubt this is an important prerequisite for being a part of this great city!

ASHER means **happy**. *“The joy of the Lord is our strength.” (Nehemiah 8:10)* This is more than the soulish joy worked up by singing and clapping for fifteen or thirty minutes. It is more than the bubbly excitement over God’s financial blessings. It is that deep, confident, abiding joy of the spirit which is undisturbed by anything that happens in the outer world of appearances. **This is the kingdom attitude that is unmoved and unshaken by events; it is a fundamental quality that admits us into the inner calm and stability of the Christ!**

NAPHTALI means **wrestling**. Rachel said, *“With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and I have indeed prevailed.” (Gen. 30:8)* This symbolizes victory or overcoming in spiritual warfare. *“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high (heavenly, spiritual) places.” (Eph. 6:12 KJV)* Our battle is against the lies and deception that fight and oppose truth! **This company of people has overcome the carnal mind, and is now living in the mind of Christ!**

Jacob’s first son by Rachel was Joseph, and his name means **increase**. Joseph received a double blessing in that his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim were each counted as a tribe. MANASSEH means **forgetfulness**. When Manasseh was born, Joseph said, *“God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.” (Gen. 41:51)* We are people who have a gloriously short memory that ends at the cross. We have forgotten the misery and affliction that we have suffered at the hands of others. This forgetfulness brings forth a ministry of reconciliation, mercy, forgiveness and blessing! God said, *“For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.” (Heb. 8:12)* **Even as God does not remember our sins, so we do not remember the sins others have committed against us!** Joseph named the second son EPHRAIM, *“For”*, he said, *“God has made me fruitful in the land of my*

affliction.” (*Gen. 41:52*) Fruitfulness in the lives of Christians takes place while they are dwelling on earth and are being afflicted. Their walk is in the Spirit (the new Jerusalem), and the fruit of the Spirit is evident in them.

BENJAMIN means **son of my right hand**. Rachel named him Benoni, meaning son of my sorrow, but Jacob wouldn’t accept that. Out of Rachel’s sorrow came Benjamin, the son of Jacob’s right hand. **Christ was first the Son of sorrow, and out of that sorrow He was raised to the Father’s right hand!** (*Acts 2:33*) In Christ we are raised up to share that exalted position with Him!

These names describe the nature of those who live within these gates. This is the true Israel - **the Israel of faith - those who have prevailed with God and are now submitted to Christ**. These names bring us the revelation that **all the foregoing characteristics must be thoroughly established in our experiences before we are qualified to share the dominion of His throne, and be a part of the government of God’s kingdom!**

What a blessing to recognize that these gates are not literal gates, and that they do not symbolize the entry of sinners into the kingdom. They are entrances into the **presence** of God. They portray those precious truths that we have learned in our intimate fellowship with God, and the experiences we have had by which we grow and mature spiritually. **This city symbolizes the life of Christians living out of the mind of Christ - they are the bride of Christ!** King David asked, *“Who may ascend to the hill of the Lord?”* The answer: *“He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood.”* (*Ps. 24:3*) **This is the new creation man, for the righteousness of Christ is his righteousness!**

Followers of Christ have been given an awesome mandate. In **John 20:21** Jesus revealed His new assignment for His disciples, by saying, *“Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you!”* Jesus was sent as the exact representation of the Father, and to be the way to God. **In the same way that the Father sent Jesus to be His ambassador, so Jesus sends us to be His ambassadors!** We are to be the exact representation of Jesus Christ on this earth and reveal Christ’s nature to the world! Just as Christ overcame the world by gladly doing the will of God, even when the road was rough and the pain was almost unbearable, so we also need to overcome! **As ambassadors of Christ we realize that we are to be a gateway into the presence of God by having and revealing Christ’s nature of love, forgiveness, grace and mercy.** Let’s embrace this truth, for it brings a wonderful blessing together with its responsibility!

In the symbolism of the number 12 it is evident that only those who have received the government of God can enter this city. Everything in this city is under God’s

government. Only the redeemed walk there. Nothing that defiles or is unclean, nothing of the world, nothing of the flesh, and nothing of the devil can enter this wonderful relationship with the Lord. We know that no one can receive salvation except by Jesus Christ, and that no one can come into the presence of the Father but by Jesus Christ. The twelve tribes could only enter the holy of holies symbolically by having their names on the breastplate of the high priest. **However, in Christ we can enter the very presence of the Father, and His presence becomes our home - our abiding place!**

To enjoy the government of God we need to be submitted to Him and follow the leading of the Spirit. **Our love for God will bring with it a hatred for the desires of the flesh and the things of this world. God's desires become our desires, and His wrath becomes our wrath because His nature has become our nature!** Our life is hidden with Christ in God!

In **Isaiah 60** we read that the gates are called praise. Praise comes from people - not from stone walls or pearly gates. Since twelve is the number of divine government, God's dominion in our lives through the Holy Spirit brings forth the praise by which He is glorified. Praise consists of more than singing and speaking words of thanksgiving; it is a life that glorifies God by our attitudes and actions! **Just as Christ's life glorified God because He delighted to do the will of God, so we glorify God by doing His will!** When we are led by the Holy Spirit we will be in harmony with the purpose of God, and we will reveal the nature of God.

We enter this city through gates of pearl. Each gate is one great pearl! The gates are not made of pearl; each of the gates IS **one pearl!** Jesus compared the kingdom of God to a merchant who sought fine pearls. When he found one pearl of great value, he sold all that he had, and bought it. (**Matt. 13:45-46**) We may think that we are the merchant, and we have to sell all that we have to obtain Christ - the pearl of great price. But what can we sell when we are still dead in our trespasses and sins? Can our darkness, corruption and lies buy Christ? We have nothing of value to give in exchange! We have to look for a merchant who has something to give!

Since this merchant does not symbolize the natural man, he has to symbolize Jesus Christ. It is He who left His glory with the Father, came to us in the likeness of sinful flesh, made Himself of no reputation and became obedient to death, even death on the cross! Why? That He might obtain a bride - and the true church is the bride! Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her *"so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless."* (*Eph. 5:26-27*) What an awesome truth!

Christ parted with all that He had to get that pearl. The church is the pearl of great price! Notice what it says in *Acts 20:28*. "*Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which He purchased with his own blood.*" **Christ gave Himself for her, so that she could be presented to Him in perfection and completeness!** She is the bride adorned for her husband!

Pearls are not ordinary gems. Other precious stones are made of minerals by pressure and heat, but genuine pearls are the result of the accidental entry of a grain of sand or a parasite into the pearl oyster. This becomes an irritant within the oyster. It immediately begins a healing response to the irritation, and secretes a fluid, called nacre, to coat the foreign substance. It covers all the rough edges and provides temporary relief. But each time the substance hardens, it again causes pain. So another layer of nacre (mother of pearl) is added. The calcareous concretion that forms around that object eventually becomes a beautiful, lustrous pearl! It is formed out of pain. And for people to obtain that pearl, the creature has to die!

It is not by chance that God made the pearl to illustrate the entrance into the presence of God. A pearl is the only gem made by a living process due to suffering, and the only one that comes from the sea. The sea symbolizes the sea of humanity that does not know God and therefore cannot rest. **Christ's suffering and death came from the sea of humanity, and it has formed a beautiful gem!** Because of the great salvation He fashioned and worked out for us, the church, the bride of Christ, is coming into glory! His salvation is the only way into the presence of God! Every entrance is a pearl. The government of God has decreed that there is no other way!

An unblemished pearl is one of the most ancient symbols of perfection, and was among the most precious of gems. It has tremendous worth! The value of a pearl measuring more than an inch in diameter is fabulous. The world's largest natural pearl found anywhere (recorded by Guinness) turned up in a giant killer clam off the coast of the Philippine Islands. It weighed a little more than 14 pounds. The pearl is baroque (irregular) in shape, a little bigger than a man's head, and was valued at \$4,080,000 some years ago. Just think of the value of each pearl that forms the entrance to the new Jerusalem! Twelve matched pearls! This is beyond our imagination!

A worldly evaluation of pearls reads that in ancient times pearls were regarded as a symbol of perfection. This came about because of their pure color - predominantly white with some rose, pinks, lavenders, delicate purples, greens and tones of gold. Their appearance was also regarded as softer, more feminine, than that of mineral gems such as diamonds and emeralds. Because they are softer and vulnerable to scratches, pearls need gentle treatment.

Isn't it remarkable that long ago the Holy Spirit used the pearl as a symbol of entrance into this glorious city! The bride of the Lamb is prepared and perfected through suffering to be beautiful and glorious. Individually, it portrays the transformation that takes place in us through the sanctifying work of the Spirit. Corporately, the feminine qualities of God are formed in a people who are united to Him.

The pearl illustrates how God uses our sufferings to produce something beautiful! **As we partake of God's grace to ease the pain, it becomes our pearly nacre; Christ's nature is being formed in us, and we become a beautiful lustrous pearl!** It has been pointed out that pearls can be found anywhere in the world, even in waters that are somewhat shallow, but the best quality pearls are those which were formed in the **depths** of the sea - in the **deep** work of God in our lives! A pearl is one of His wonders in the deep.

Does God want us to suffer? Was it God's will for Christ to suffer? We know that a pearl cannot be produced without suffering in the oyster. In **Heb. 5:8** we read that Jesus *'learned obedience by the things which He suffered'* The Greek word in this passage is PASCHO, which means to experience a sensation or impression." Heb. 2:10 says that Jesus was made perfect through suffering. Here the Greek word PTHEMA is used, and it means something undergone, like hardship or pain. All the experiences that Jesus had, perfected Him because He remained obedient to the will of God. The depth of His obedience to the will of God was revealed by the most horrendous sufferings He endured. His absolute obedience qualified Him to receive a name that is above every name! (**Phil. 2:9**)

God's will for us is that we become conformed to the image of Christ! Sufferings are necessary for this to take place! The difficult experiences of life correspond to the irritants that invade the oyster! The sufferings in themselves do not produce the beauty, but our drawing upon God's grace and His divine life of love, builds layer upon layer of pearl-like beauty in us. The grace of God is present for us to deal with suffering and tribulation in obedience to His will. These sufferings are nothing in comparison to *"the glory that is to be revealed in us."* (**Romans 8:18**) The beauty of His nature and character is being formed in us!

It is interesting to note that this symbolism can be applied both to Jesus Christ and to the church. All the beauty and glory comes to us by faith in Christ! Jesus declared that we are one with Him even as He is one with the Father! The life of Christ in us transforms us into His likeness!

The City

“The one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, and its gates and its wall. And the city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles (actually, 12,000 stadia; and a stadion was approximately 600 ft.); its length and width and height are equal.” (vv.15-16)

A **gold** rod was given to him to measure the city. Again we note the beautiful symbolism! Gold, total divine purity, is the standard of measurement. Everything is measured according to Christ who is the truth! No lie can enter in! No unbelieving and immoral person, no sorcerers and idolaters can enter in.

The translation of 12,000 stadia into 1500 miles does away with the symbolism. Again, the length is not important, but the number is. We are back to 12, the number of divine government, and 10 cubed - the number of completion - a completion, therefore nothing more can be added. Again, the number 12,000 signifies that the new Jerusalem is completely governed by God. There is no room for fleshly thinking and self-effort; only the will of God is done here! This is the church in the glory of God - delighting to do the will of God even as Christ did!

It is interesting to note that the only other cube found in the Bible is the holy of holies in the tabernacle of Moses. So we know that it symbolizes this city and that the new Jerusalem is the fulfillment of the holy of holies. How amazing to see that it symbolizes the church in her perfection! She is the expression of perfection and fullness that can only be ours in God. **What an awesome revelation to find that the holy of holies finds its fulfillment in the bride of the Lamb!**

The holy of holies represented the dwelling place of God and now the church is His dwelling place. Verse 3 plainly states: *“Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them.”* In **1 Cor. 6:19** Paul tells us that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. He dwells in our spirit, in the innermost part of us.

Israel could only enter the innermost part of the temple in the high priest as he carried the name of each tribe on his breast. Only in our High Priest, Jesus Christ, can we enter the New Jerusalem - the very presence of God! The holy of holies is no longer a geographical location. It is in fact a company of people in whom the glory of God dwells. The new Jerusalem, the perfect cube, the bride of Christ, is the ultimate holy of holies!

The veil between the holy of holies and the holy place had cherubim woven into it, symbolically guarding the way into the holy of holies. This symbolism dates back to

the garden of Eden. After man had sinned, cherubim guarded the way to the tree of life. The cherubim were to make sure that no one could make his way to the tree of life by self-effort. Only by passing through the flaming sword could he get there. **When Jesus died, this veil was torn from the top to the bottom, signifying that the way into the holy of holies is now open to all who are in Christ!**

God has provided a way into the holiest through faith in Christ. The way to the tree of life is now wide open - not by self-effort but by faith in the finished work of Christ. **Not only can we enter the holy of holies, but we can actually become the holy of holies!**

The Foundation Stones

“And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb...The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation stone was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoptase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst.” (vv.14;19-20)

Notice that the gates have the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, and the twelve foundation stones have the names of the twelve apostles inscribed on them. The stones of this city are all **living** stones. In **Eph. 2:20** we read that believers have Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone in their foundation. *“Having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the chief cornerstone.”* A cornerstone was laid in such a way that it gave strength to the two walls to which it was connected. The chief cornerstone denotes the most important stone - the one according to which the rest of the building was fashioned.

Since Christ Jesus is the chief cornerstone of this city, He is foundational to everything we are and do! He is our life, He is our righteousness, He is all that we are! He is the foundation and support of all that we are and of all that is raised up in our lives. He is our victory in all the difficulties, trials and challenges of everyday living! He is *“the Apostle and High Priest of our confession!”* (*Heb. 3:1*)

The church is built upon twelve foundations. These 12 foundations are laid one upon the other, giving perfect and full support to the whole structure. Again, the number 12 symbolizes the government of God, so His government is foundational in everything we do. Jesus only did what the Father showed Him to do, and we only do what the Spirit shows us to do. Obedience to the Spirit keeps us in truth. Our experiences, ministries, and characteristics have to be in harmony with truth.

Notice that these foundations are adorned with every kind of precious stone, thus

showing how priceless this foundation is! Costly gems would be wasted if they were put in an unseen realm. John saw the foundation, so it was not under the earth, but under a heavenly city - the new Jerusalem, the bride of Christ. The foundations are visible!

The brilliancy of jewels catches the eye. They do not have light in themselves, but they send forth the light that strikes them. The light that seems to be coming from them is an optical illusion, because no jewel possesses light within itself. So it is with the saints of God. The gifts and graces in which we function have been conferred on us. Apart from Christ we are nothing - even as the brilliance of the jewel darkens and dies when removed from the light.

Although we may not be familiar with all the jewels mentioned, we can visualize the beauty to some extent from those we do know. We see the cool green of the emerald, the heavenly blue of the sapphire, the variously colored chalcedony with its wax-like appearance, the green or yellow hues of the chrysolite, the yellow of the topaz, the reddish orange of the jacinth, and the regal purple of an amethyst! **They all reflect the same light in gloriously different hues, none detracting from the other, but all complementing and enhancing the beauty of the whole.**

These stones symbolize the various gifts and qualities of God that are exemplified in His people. They illustrate the beauty that He has formed in them. Just as the different stones reflect light differently, His people reflect the light of Jesus Christ differently. Each one adds to the beauty and glory of the whole. Each one of us experiences God's grace in a unique way, and it shines through us in a distinctive manner! This variety and individuality brings greater glory to God, and shows His infinite wisdom and ability! **We all express the image of God differently, and we are all being perfected in His image!**

“_and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.” Apostleship is associated with new things. The apostles proclaimed the new order, the new covenant that Christ brought us. They established churches and went to places that had not been reached with the gospel. Paul built where no other man had built. A true apostolic ministry does not rest on traditions - observing customs and rituals instituted by human organization. So the foundation of this city speaks of newness - the newness that we have in Christ. It does away with the old covenant completely!

In contrast to Moses who brought in a new order that depended upon self-effort, the apostles brought in a new order that **did not** depend upon self-effort - **it rested on the finished work of Jesus Christ!** He is the Apostle of our confession! The apostles established this new order of grace and truth in Christ!

The Street

“...and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.” (v.21) The Greek word, PLATEIA, means a wide open place, a broad way or open square, an open place where two streets meet. The Concordant Literal translation reflects this concept, for it reads, *“and the square of the city is gold.”* In oriental countries an open square is the center for community activities, such as marketing, trading, public gatherings, etc. These centers can be used for either good or evil intent.

Those who think they will walk on literal streets of gold have no idea of the wonderful truth God is revealing in this symbolic city. They do not realize that our spiritual dwelling place is in Christ, and that the spiritual man does not need streets of gold and beautiful physical mansions. Our attraction to natural gold and grandeur reveals our carnality. God uses these symbols to present spiritual realities to us.

The square of this city is of gold, clear as translucent glass. In the scriptures gold symbolizes the divine nature of God - and His nature cannot be tarnished or corrupted. A square symbolizes our interaction with others; it is a place of fellowship, business transactions, unity and relaxation. Our walk in the Spirit is compared to the center or square that is made of pure gold - according to the pure nature of Christ. All our activities, including all our business dealings, all our interactions with others, and all our times of leisure, mirror the nature of God. Everything is in Christ!

The fact that the square of this city consists of pure gold reveals that our walk in God’s government is according to His nature. It is one of truth and love - in perfect purity and perfect holiness! Living in God’s divine government frees us from the reign of our carnal mind and from the limitations and darkness of natural thinking with its self-centeredness, hatred, bitterness, evil, and desire for revenge.

Living in this heavenly city is for **now!** We have been raised up with Christ; we have been seated with Him in the heavenly places. This is our placement in Christ Jesus! (Eph. 2:6) Read Eph. 4:17-32 and Col. 3:1-17 to discover what this walk is all about! Basically it is **a walk in perfect love! Coming into the awareness and knowledge of the greatness of Christ’s perfect love fills us up to the fullness of God, for He is love!** (Eph. 3:19)

The Light Of This City

“I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.” (v. 22) In the old Jerusalem the temple was the central part of the city. In this vision of the new Jerusalem, John was surprised that it lacked a temple! The Lord God, the

Almighty, and the Lamb are its temple, for the light of this city is spiritual; it cannot be seen with our natural eyes. The whole city, the perfect cube, is filled with the same glory of God that filled the holy of holies in the tabernacle!

Natural light only illumines a certain area; whenever an object stands in its way, shadows and darkness remain. However, in this city the Lord God and the Lamb are the light of it, and they fill everything with light, for God is omnipresent. So there is no darkness and no shadow anywhere!

“And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb.” (v.23) The sun and the moon symbolize natural light or knowledge. In the bright light of spiritual knowledge we recognize that natural understanding is darkness. This is the meaning of *“The sun will be turned into darkness.”* (Acts 2:20) Natural light or knowledge calls this a literal city, and names it heaven. It cannot understand that this is a spiritual city that symbolizes the nature of the bride of Christ! **God wants us to see that natural understanding of spiritual realities has no place in this city. The true church functions in the light and revelation that God gives her!**

The light of the new Jerusalem is the glory of God. His glory is His goodness, and His goodness is the sum total of everything He is and everything that He does! His glory never diminishes; it is always the same! Natural light is darkness compared with His brilliance! Just as jewels reflect light in glorious brilliance, so we reflect God’s glory as we receive His nature! This enables His glory to shine forth through us!

“And the nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. And in the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed; and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it.” (vv.24-26)

“The nations will walk by its light!” In Psalm 2:8 it says, *“Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession.”* This promise will surely come to pass! All who walk by the light of God, walk in His righteousness. Nothing unclean can enter this city! Only the glory that comes from Christ can enter it! So we see that these nations **have been conquered by God!** This is their glory and honor! They are no longer walking in rebellion and in the darkness of the carnal mind - the darkness in which we all walked at one time! The light and truth of God have revealed the lie, and we are now walking in truth. Walking in light is walking in truth!

This city cannot be compared to the garden of Eden, for it is on a higher plane; it is not of this earth. The serpent was able to enter the garden and find minds that were willing to receive its lies and deception. This resulted in spiritual death for Adam

and Eve, expulsion from the garden, and later, physical death. However, the bride of Christ cannot be corrupted, for she has been born of an incorruptible seed, and that seed will not receive any lies and deception.

God's day is always. He is light, and there is no darkness in Him! His day is eternal; it does not begin when time ends. Eternity has no beginning and no end. God's day runs parallel to our time of day and night. To enter His eternal day we have to be born of the Spirit and receive His life - the life that has no beginning and no end. For example, when an electrical appliance is switched on, it makes use of the electricity that was already present. When we are born again, we receive **the life that has always been and always will be!**

The Lamb's Book Of Life

"And nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life." (v. 27) Death, corruption, lying, deceitfulness, uncleanness and abominations are not allowed to enter this city. In other words, the natural man - the man of sin - cannot enter. The only credential for entering this city is that our name is written in the Lamb's book of life! How can we get our names registered in this book?

This is not a book like the ones we find in the libraries of today, for they were unknown at the time John received this vision. Paul explained that we are the epistles upon which God writes. What do you suppose God wrote on Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God? God testified of Him on the Mount of Transfiguration, saying, *"This is My beloved Son, listen to Him."* (Mk. 9:7) As we listen to Him, we hear Him say, *"I am the way, the truth and the life. I am the resurrection. I am the door. I am the good shepherd. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life."* (Jn. 14:6; 11:25; 10:9,11; 6:63) This tells us who Christ is; it describes His nature. He is a life-giving spirit; He is truth and life! The name, "Lamb", identifies Him as the one supreme sacrifice through whom all can receive life.

Throughout this vision we have seen that the word "name" does not refer to an earthly identification of the human family we belong to; it does not refer to names like John or Mary Smith. The word "name" refers to our nature. Overcomers receive a new name (**Rev. 2:17**), for they have received a new nature - one that has been formed by life, and therefore corresponds to the nature of Christ. **So we see that the one criterion for becoming citizens of this city is that they have the nature of Christ!**

The Lamb's book of life is a description of the nature that is the product of life. In

order to have that nature, we must first receive the life of the Lamb through faith in the Lamb's death and resurrection. **Christ's life in us produces His nature in us.** He is the way, the gate or the entrance into the presence of God! All the citizens of this city have the life of the Lamb, that is, they have all received the Lamb's life, and His life in them has built His nature in them. Christ brings us into total submission to God's government and into the very glory of God! In our union with Christ, we enter the presence of God, and we also become the way or the gate into the presence of God for others.

We are always amazed at the way Jesus emphasized our oneness with Him, and His joy in this identification. Here are a few quotes to illustrate this precious truth. *"In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you...If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him...They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world...That they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us...As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."* (John 14:20,23; 17:16,21; 20:21) **As the Father sent Christ to be the exact representation of His invisible being, so Christ sends us to be an exact representation of His invisible being!**

In summing up, we have seen that the gates of pearl symbolize Jesus Christ in His humiliation, death and resurrection, as well as those who have learned obedience to Christ through their sufferings. Corporately, they are the bride of the Lamb! She lives in intimate union with her bridegroom, and He finds His delight in His bride! She gives Him the love and intimacy that He desires! She has the capacity to fulfill His desire for love, companionship and fellowship. **The Lamb, the bridegroom, has given His life for her that she would flow with Him in love, devotion, fellowship and purpose.** What a high calling is ours in union with the Lamb and His purpose for us, and for the reconciliation of all humanity! (Col. 1:20)

We have been impressed with the description of the bride of Christ, and the portrayal of the beauty that is produced and manifested by God's government in His people. In **Matthew 5:34** Jesus said that heaven is the throne of God. The throne of God represents God's government, and God governs us from within. **So heaven is not a far-away place in the sky, but a life that is submitted to the will of God!** God is resident within His people, and Christ in God is the source and essence of this government. Those who are governed by God have heaven in their hearts. Oh what glory is ours in Christ!

Chapter 22

In this vision we have seen that the new Jerusalem is not a natural city with its hustle and bustle of expectant bargain hunters and shrewd businessmen advertising their wares; neither does it have the sound and smell of endless traffic. Its symbolism is much more beautiful in its portrayal of the **inner life** of believers, the overcomers, the perfected church, the bride of Christ.

The Bible teaches very plainly that we have already come to the new Jerusalem. Therefore this vision is for now. In **Hebrews 12:22-23** we read, *“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect.”* It’s so amazing to see all that is connected with the heavenly Jerusalem! It is a city because of the number of its inhabitants. The citizens of the new Jerusalem are the spirits of the righteous made perfect - the true church. It can also be said that they form the new Jerusalem.

The River of Life

“Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb.” (v.1) This river is called the river of the water of life because of its life-giving properties. It is not like the rivers on earth that have been polluted. The remarkable thing about this river is that man is unable to pollute it because its source is in God, and it remains in God. **It is the outflowing of His life, and it is the foundation for His government, for it flows from the throne of God.**

His throne is not a golden seat on a great raised platform in a distant heaven. Jesus said that heaven is the throne of God. (**Matt. 5:34**) A throne represents the dominion and the authority of government, and the throne of God represents God’s dominion, government and authority. His authority is unlimited and universal, but at present it is especially evident in the life of the believer. Unbelievers reject His government and authority, but eventually they too will become believers and surrender to it. Those who receive His government, receive life. God’s life is absolutely pure. It is the very life of God in the Spirit with all His life-giving properties.

This river symbolizes the life of the Holy Spirit within believers. Jesus spoke prophetically of this in *John 7:37-39*. *“Now on the last day, the great day of the feast,*

Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.' But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.'

The river of life flows in the midst of the street or square. We already know that the street of gold (gold representing divinity), symbolizes our walk in the Spirit. Walking consists of movement. Our walk in the Spirit is our life in God with its continual development and growth. This life is not confined to going to church on Sundays. It includes every aspect of our lives - our home life, our business practices, our pleasures, our love life, our friendships, our prayer life and our intimacy with God! This river flows in the midst of the street or square. God is the source of this river, and it flows from His throne into our innermost being. God's rule or government by His Spirit is within us, so His throne is situated within us - not in a faraway heaven.

The river of life symbolizes the Holy Spirit, and He brings us the abundance of life that is ours in Christ! Notice that God's life is the source of our life, and His life is our life. His life is always one with His government and authority. It is one with His nature of love and grace. God's nature is always against unrighteousness and everything that looks like truth but isn't. This river is clear as crystal, and beautiful in its freedom from all impurities - from all lies and all deceitfulness. God's life has the power to do away with all the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life! Life does away with our greatest enemy, which is death!

Since this river flows in our innermost being, it brings every area of our lives into submission to God's authority and nature. **We have become partakers of His divine nature, and therefore His nature is reflected in all that we do and say.**

The Tree Of Life

Where do we find the tree of life? In verse 2 it tells us that it is "*In the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*" The Concordant Literal New Testament reads, "*in the center of its square*" instead of "*in the middle of its street*".

What an interesting description of a tree! This is not the description of a natural tree. Have you ever seen a tree that grows on either side of a river? We can easily visualize two identical trees growing on either side of a river, but this is one tree! This verse does not say "trees;" it says "*the tree of life*", and we know there is only one tree of life.

We cannot visualize a tree that originates below the waterbed of the river and sends forth a tree trunk to either side. Therefore we know that this has to be interpreted spiritually.

How could one tree be on both sides of a river? This can only be said of the tree of life because it is in perfect union with the Spirit of God. This symbolism tells us that everything drawing its life from the water of the Holy Spirit brings forth life and bears fruit! It gives life to the whole city! God's life has no evil or corruption in it!

The tree of life is on both sides of the river, yet it is **one** tree! In the garden of Eden there were two trees: one was the tree of life, and the other was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In the new Jerusalem there is no tree of the knowledge of good and evil; there is only one tree, and that is the tree of life! Since there is no evil in that tree, there are no choices to be made; there is **only obedience!** Those who eat the fruit of the tree of life walk in obedience to the government of God.

Those who eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, walk according to their own choices - and **choice is disobedience**, for its fruit is both good and evil, and **none** of it is to be eaten. Humanity has changed the rules by claiming that you can choose the good of that tree, yet avoid the evil. It does not realize that it is **one** fruit, and that it is both good and evil. The fruit looked good to Adam and Eve, so they ate it in disobedience! The tree of the knowledge of good and evil with its choices is not found in the new Jerusalem. The source for making choices is self and the source for obedience is God. **There are no choices for those who dwell in God's government because they walk in obedience.** The source of all they do is God.

The tree of life bears twelve kinds of fruit and yields fresh fruit every month. The number twelve is important! The fruit is the result of God's government in us, and it always continues to be under the government of God! We know that the fruit (not fruits, for it is one fruit) of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (**Gal. 5:22-23**) These are different facets of the fruit of the Spirit, and they all function under the authority of God at all times. This is God's provision for us in Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit!

Fruit is not for the life of the tree but for the nurture of others. As we bear the fruit of the Spirit, it will nurture those who eat it. For example, as we love God, we will also love others, and this love will bless the recipients of our love. Love covers a multitude of sins and forgives those who sin against us. **Our love will nurture others even as Christ's love nurtures us.**

Nothing is wasted in God's economy. Even the leaves of the tree have a specific function. They are for the healing of the nations! Leaves speak of life. The first sign of visible life in a tree is the sprouting of leaves. The first sign of life in us takes

place when the Holy Spirit breathes His life into the dead letter of the scriptures, and makes them real to us. Without His life we remain in legalism, condemnation, and in the reliance on self-effort to obtain righteousness - and it can never attain to God's standard of righteousness! The truth brings light, and does away with the deceptions we thought were truth.

In order to identify the nations, we must remember that this is a book of symbols. Many of the keys to these symbols are found in the Old Testament. When the children of Israel entered the promised land, they had to contend with and overcome the nations that were possessing the land that God had given them. Spiritually speaking, after we become Christians we have to overcome our wrong thinking, ideas and imaginations that are possessing our land illegally. So the nations symbolize our thoughts and imaginations, for they are always against the Spirit and the knowledge of God. They want to keep us from believing that God is who He says He is, and that we are who God says we are. They foment fear and unbelief. **Only when God's life reigns in us, are these wrong thoughts taken captive through our faith and trust in Christ and our obedience to Him.**

"We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." (2 Cor. 10:5) As the life of Christ is manifested in us through our obedience, our mind will think God's thoughts and do His will. No philosophy or religious system or medicine can produce this healing. The life of Christ in us will change both our thinking and our imaginations, and they will become Christ-centered and filled with life. When the whole body of Christ demonstrates this healing, the ministry of the Spirit will come forth in Christ's power and authority! Can you imagine the tremendous impact this will have on traditional Christians and on unbelievers? I believe it will draw them to the light!

"There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads." (vv. 3-4)

There is no curse in the mind of Christ; the curse is in the Adamic mind. Christ took away the certificate of debt consisting of decrees that were against us. (Col. 2:14) There is no curse for those who function in the mind of Christ. The old Adamic mind functions in the letter of the law with its blessings and curses, but those who have the government (throne) of God within them are free of the curse. They are free to serve God and do His will, for they are not ruled by their old thinking.

"They will see His face." What does that mean? "They" refers to those who know who they are in Christ; they know that they are not living under a curse. Our face identifies

who we are; it brings recognition. Those who are ruled by the mind of Christ will recognize that which is of Him! It is very hard to recognize a good counterfeit; it takes an intimate knowledge of the real to detect the counterfeit. In Hong Kong, where we lived for a good number of years, every large bill was scrutinized under a light to determine whether it was a counterfeit or an authentic bill. The light revealed the counterfeit. Only those who have an intimate knowledge of Christ can distinguish between the real Christ and the many faces that masquerade as Christ.

“And His name will be on their foreheads.” They have a name - not a number. We hear a lot about the number 666 on the forehead, symbolizing the carnal thinking of man, but who wants to be a number? Overcomers have a name! The name of Christ symbolizes the nature of Christ. **To have Christ’s name written on our foreheads means that we have the thinking and nature of the Christ within us.** Wearing the helmet of salvation protects our mind from receiving the lies of the enemy. **As we function in the nature of Christ, the fruit of the Spirit will be evident in all our actions, desires and interactions with people.**

The Light Of Life

“And there will no longer be any night; and they will no longer have any need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever”, (actually, “for the ages of the ages.”) (v.5).

“And there will no longer be any night, and they will no longer have any need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun” The absence of physical light does not point to a condition in a physical heaven that we will experience after we die. This is for now! “Night” symbolizes darkness and ignorance. Ignorance is not stupidity. A stupid person won’t use the knowledge he has, but an ignorant person lacks knowledge. In **Acts 17:30** Paul said, *“Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent.”* **Repentance takes us out of our ignorance and darkness, and brings us the light of Christ. The mind of Christ brings us into oneness with the will of God.**

The light of the lamp symbolizes man-made light. The word “light” also means understanding. We hear expressions such as “the light of understanding shone in his eyes,” and “he suddenly saw the light,” meaning that he suddenly understood. So the light of the lamp symbolizes man’s philosophy, and the light of the sun symbolizes natural understanding of spiritual realities. Christ Jesus is the true light, and He does away with man’s philosophies and religious systems in which shadows and darkness exist.

In God's glorious light there are no shadows and there is no darkness - there is only light! In the natural light of the sun there is always day and night and there are shadows. If we only function in natural knowledge, we will never see God's glorious light; we will only see Him in shadow and in limitation. Only the Holy Spirit of truth can give us spiritual understanding. As we abide in Christ, we are filled with His light. There is no darkness in Him! **His light does away with our natural understanding of spiritual realities!** Those who are filled with the light and understanding that is in Christ will reign with Him for the ages of the ages.

“And he said to me, ‘These words are faithful and true’; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must soon take place.” (v. 6) This is a confirmation of what was communicated to John by Jesus Christ in **Rev.1:1**. At the very beginning of this revelation it says that God *“sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John...the things which must soon take place.”* When God communicates revelation to us, He always confirms it. God is so faithful in confirming His words to us!

“The things which must soon take place.” The natural mind constantly looks for the fulfillment of prophecy in historical events instead of seeing its spiritual significance. Everything spiritual must have its fulfillment in people - not in history. This spiritual understanding has to take place in us so that the nature of Christ becomes visible in us at this present time. This brings about the revelation of Jesus Christ to the world. It has to come through His people, even as the revelation of the invisible God came to us in Jesus Christ.

“And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book.” (v.7) We know that Christ is always with us, and that He has promised never to leave us. Yet here He says that He is coming quickly or swiftly (Concordant Literal). When Christ comes to us personally, He comes quickly, suddenly, speedily or unexpectedly. His understanding comes to us with the speed of lightning. His comings are like lightning, for suddenly illumination floods our soul. His coming to be glorified in His saints will be no exception. Suddenly that which was an enigma to us becomes so clear. In every new revelation of Him, we say that He came to us. Although we are not always aware of Christ's presence, yet He is always with us. **With each new revelation that we receive of Him, we become aware of His presence, and we say that He came to us.**

However, in **2 Thess. 1:10** we have the promise that Christ is coming again, not to reveal Himself to us, but *“to be glorified in His saints on that day and to be marveled at among all who have believed - for our testimony to you was believed.”* He is not coming in the physical body of a man to whisk His people up to heaven. **He is coming to be glorified in His saints! What a glorious revelation!**

After Jesus Christ was resurrected, God gave Him authority over all things, and seated Him far above all heavens! In His humiliation He remained obedient, even to the point of death. He is worthy to receive honor and glory forevermore! This is the glory of our Head, for we are all members of His body. Here He comes to be glorified in His saints, that is, in His body! He is coming to fill His church with His power and anointing! **We have enjoyed a measure of anointing, but think of how an unlimited anointing in the believers will affect the unsaved!** It will expose religion for what it is, as well as all the painful, unhealthy spurs that have grown out of Christianity and its traditions. As people learn truth, they will learn to follow the Lord!

Christ Jesus is coming again! However, He is not coming to take away sin, nor is He coming in the physical form He had when He walked and taught in Judea and Galilee. He is not coming to rapture His church so she can escape tribulation. **He is coming to bring a greater revelation of Himself in the overcomers to deliver all of creation.** We know that Jesus came again in the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and this promise to come again was written many years later. **Therefore this promise does not refer to His coming again in the Holy Spirit, but in His sons! Pentecost gave us the down payment of our inheritance, and at Christ's coming again to be glorified in His sons, we will receive the fullness of the Spirit.** The manifestation of the sons of God will deliver all creation from its bondage to corruption. We look forward with great anticipation to this wonderful event!

The scriptures show us that God revealed Himself progressively throughout the ages. In Christ Jesus we have received a perfect revelation of the Father. **(Heb. 1:2-3) Now the world is to receive a perfect revelation of Jesus Christ when He comes again to be manifested in His sons.** The revelation of Jesus Christ in His sons brings glory to Him.

“Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book.” A prophecy is an anointed word from God. It does not necessarily predict future historical events; it may be a word of encouragement, direction, warning, or a combination of all these things. This revelation of Jesus Christ came from God. **(Rev. 1:1)** God gave this message to Jesus Christ so that He could show His bondservants the things that must shortly take place. These things need to take place in those who are His bondservants (not in history), so that they can be a revelation of Christ to the world. **We are blessed when we pay attention to His words and obey them, for they are God's way of changing us into the exact image of Christ!** The blessing rests on those who are **obedient!**

“I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. But he

said to me, 'Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God.'" (vv. 8-9)

John heard these things with spiritual ears. Hearing God takes place when we understand and obey the message. It was evident that the multitudes to whom Jesus spoke were only hearing with physical ears because they did not understand the message. **We all need spiritual ears to understand a spiritual message. John understood the message and was filled with awe!**

John was so overcome with this vibrant message that he wanted to worship at the feet of the messenger. The first time this occurred was in chapter 19:10, and he was told not to do that. He was only to worship God! To our great surprise, he tried it again, and received the same rebuke: "Don't do that. Worship God." Maybe we shouldn't be surprised, because often we also need more than one rebuke.

How hard it is for us to refrain from hero worship! We want to worship Jesus as a physical man; we want to walk on the same ground He walked when He was on earth (a physical impossibility), and identify with His physical activities. We don't want to identify with His spiritual struggles and victories. Hero worship is so much more enjoyable! There is also the temptation to idolize a great speaker or prophet or faith healer. We believe this message contains a solemn warning for us to refrain from hero worship.

We are not to worship the messenger. In the book of Revelation, Jesus is the messenger, and as such He will not receive worship. He said, "*God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.. You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.*" (Jn. 4:24; Luke 4:8) God is spirit, and we cannot see spirit. So the worship of a seen object or person is prohibited. We are only to worship God! We are not to worship Jesus, the man who walked the streets of Galilee. It was the anointing, the Christ within the man Jesus, that performed the miracles, and that gave Him the words of truth and life. Jesus identified with us as our brother, a fellow servant of those who heed the message of this book. But now we no longer see Him as a man, for it is "*Christ in you, the hope of glory.*"

"And he said to me, 'Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.'" (v. 10) In other words, don't keep this prophecy a secret. **It is all about the great victory that is ours in Christ; it is about the change that He produces in us!** When our mind is transformed we are able to think the thoughts of Christ. We are not to keep this transformation a secret in our heart; if we do, it will go down to the grave together with our body. It is to be revealed in our everyday life! Whenever God opens our heart to hear His words, that is the time set for us to reveal it in our life - in our words and in our actions. God's timing varies with individuals for He

does not open everyone's heart at the same time.

“Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and the one who is holy, still keep himself holy.” (v. 11)

The wrongdoers are not to pretend that their wrongdoing is right, and the filthy ones are not to pretend that their filthiness is cleanliness, and the unrighteous are not to pretend that they are righteous, and those who claim to be righteous must also be righteous. If they claim to be righteous when they actually are unrighteous, their righteousness is a pretense. **The righteous are to be righteous in all their thoughts and actions and interactions with people, and God's holy ones should keep themselves holy and separated from all evil.** Here God is telling us that we are not to pretend we are something we are not. **God hates hypocrisy. Christ's harshest words were against the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees.**

“Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” (vv. 12-13) The promise to come quickly is repeated. Then He says that His reward is with Him. What is His reward?

Here John was shown that we are God's reward! In **Ephesians 1:18-19** we read, *“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might.”* (Emphasis ours) God's great reward is having man in His image! **In Genesis 1 we see that God purposed to make man in His image, and in the last chapter in Revelation we see that He has accomplished His purpose!**

How amazing it is to see that all who have received the new humanity in Christ are the firstfruit of God's great reward for giving His Son for the salvation of humanity! Jesus said that the Son of Man is coming again. He is not coming as an individual; He is coming as the corporate Christ - as the Son of Man, Christ and His body; Christ with His bride! Creating for His Son a bride who will fulfill all His desire, is the firstfruit of God's great salvation that He has achieved for all humanity in Christ!

The purpose of His coming is *“to render to every man according to the work he has done.”* Why is God so keenly interested in handing out rewards for the work we are doing? We find the answer in **Gen. 15:1** where God spoke to Abram saying, *“Fear not, Abram: I am your shield, and your exceeding great reward.”* (KJV) **Is there any reward that is greater than the Lord Himself?** He is our greatest reward! Christ

is the anointing, and His anointing in us increases as we obey Him. The works that flow out of faith are works of obedience, and they are rewarded with a greater anointing - with more of Christ. He always appears to us as the Christ. Unbelief is disobedience, and there is no reward for that. Disobedience carries within itself its own penalty. Only God-directed works are rewarded.

This wonderful announcement that Christ comes to reward His faithful ones, is followed by the declaration that Christ is everything we need! In the opening chapter of this book, Christ said, *"I am the Alpha and the Omega"*, and in the closing chapter these words are repeated. The Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and the Omega is the last letter. All the words that we need for communication are formed from the letters of the alphabet. Similarly, everything we need in life is found in Christ Jesus! He is our sufficiency for all our natural and spiritual needs! He is the end of our old humanity, and the beginning and fulfillment of our new humanity.

Christ Jesus is the first and the last; He is the beginning and the end. He is the Word of God. All things were made through Him, so we know He was before Adam. He has always been, for the Word is God. However, in His identification with humanity as the Son of Man, He is the first, the prototype of a new humanity. He is also the last, for all things find their consummation in Him. Everything in us that is not of His nature is eradicated or consumed by God's fire. God's consuming fire is not a physical fire; it is a spiritual fire that consumes all our dross and all our self-will. Only His nature in us remains! **It is *"the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe"* that is able to accomplish this. (Eph. 1:19)** The almighty power of God in the Holy Spirit is the strength of His might! His power is unlimited! What a mighty God we have!

"Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter the gates into the city." (v. 14) Why do we need to wash our robes? The white robes that we have received are robes of righteousness. How do they get soiled? They get soiled when we try to add our own works of the law to the righteousness that we already have in Christ. Therefore they have to be cleansed of all self-righteousness and self-effort, for the works of the law produce pride, and do not attain to God's standard. The natural mind tempts us to think that we are better than others because of something we have done. It tells us that we are better because we fulfill all the requirements of a good church worker, etc. But nothing we do can merit access to the tree of life. It is only the righteousness of Jesus Christ that qualifies us to partake or eat of that fruit! Christ alone is our passport; He alone is our righteousness! **(1 Cor. 1:30)** Nothing of self can be added. Any addition disqualifies us from entering in.

How do we wash our robes? In **1 John 1:7** we read, *"But if we walk in the Light*

as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin." The correct rendering of **Lev. 17:11** states that the soul is in the blood. The blood (soul) of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. Our cleansing takes place as we walk in the Light - not by self-effort! Light reveals what is hidden in darkness; it reveals our lusting and desire for self-glorification and all the things that feed and enhance the self-life. **As we receive the soul of Christ, we receive His thinking, His desires, His emotions, His attitudes and His will - His very nature!** Living in Christ's righteousness and grace cleanses our robe of all unrighteousness.

"Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying." (v.15) The statement, *"Outside are the dogs,"* does not refer to canines. In Jewish tradition the Gentiles or unbelievers are called dogs - and unbelievers have no way of getting into the new Jerusalem. They have to become believers in Christ Jesus before they can enter in, for He is the door. Unbelief keeps us from having faith in Christ.

The word sorcery comes from the Greek word PHARMAKIA, and our English word pharmacy has the same root. *"It primarily signifies the use of medicine, drugs and spells; then, poisoning; then sorcery."* (Webster's Dictionary) Sorcery is the use of an evil supernatural power over people, and is usually accompanied by incantations that appeal to occult powers. Sorcerers use occult powers to supposedly keep demonic power away from people. Their claim to mysterious powers and their many incantations draws a lot of attention to themselves.

How does this apply to us internally? Do we believe in a power other than God's power? Do we believe in carrying good-luck charms, like a four-leaf clover and/or a rabbit's foot? Do we use expressions like "touch wood" to ward off evil? Do we believe that there are two powers - God's power and Satan's? **We need to know that there is only one power, and that is God's power!** The devil's so-called power is rooted in lies and deception, and therefore is not a true power. Truth destroys his power. Jesus told Pilate that he (Pilate) would not have any power over Him if it had not been given him from above. Therefore, any thoughts, feelings and emotions that would misdirect us, and cause us to place our confidence in anything other than God's power has to be put away. Sorcery has no place within the bride of Christ. She knows the power of God; she knows that He is sovereign. She will not receive the lies and deception the devil spews out of his mouth.

Immoral people do not accept God's principles of right and wrong behavior, and therefore do not live in conformity with them. They chase after that which is lewd and obscene because their heart is not right with God. Physical immorality is easier to detect than mental and spiritual immorality. Mental immorality is the nourishing

of the desire for wrong behavior, and spiritual immorality is to accept the praise and honor that only belongs to God. If we receive it for ourselves, we are actually robbing God. This is immorality!

Murderers kill. Is there anything in us that kills the word of God? Most Christians do not realize that it is the flesh, the carnal mind that always opposes the Spirit and tries to kill the word that comes from the Spirit. Cain and Abel are our first examples. Cain would not listen to God, so in spite of God's warning he killed Abel. Carnality does not obey God, so no carnality can enter God's rule. **Believers have the mind of Christ, but they don't always allow that mind to rule them.** The mind of Christ always believes God and delights to do His will.

Idolaters don't worship God; instead, they worship their own images of God. In **2 Cor. 10:5** we read, *"We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ."* We are to cast down all our imaginations that are against the knowledge of God, and believe His declaration of who He is. We cannot know God unless we believe that He is who He says He is. Our own ideas of who God is, are not valid. We can imagine Him to be a God of love who would never cause us to suffer. But this is not the God of the Bible. **Love wants what is best for us, and if suffering and difficulties will help us to grow and make us strong, God will give them to us. Our Father's love includes discipline and restoration.** If we worship a different god, he is a god of our imagination, and we are guilty of idolatry even though we don't actually have any physical idols in our house.

We commit idolatry when we worship something other than God. If we have an excessive devotion or admiration of anything other than God, we are committing idolatry. If we chase after or accept other gods, like money, honor, culture, intellectualism, etc., we are guilty of spiritual idolatry.

Those who love and practice lying are also outside, for they exemplify the devil's nature. Jesus said that the devil is the father of lies. (**Jn. 8:44**) Here we see the great divide, the great contrast. The devil never speaks truth, and Jesus only speaks truth. In fact, Christ is the truth! The devil's kingdom is one of lies, and Christ's kingdom is one of truth. Lies have no foundation, but truth does have foundation. The two kingdoms can never be merged or united, for they are opposites; they strive against each other. Lies can never do away with truth; they can only hide truth until truth exposes the error.

Do we love truth or the error we thought was truth? Loving truth will cause us to be willing to leave our comfort zone - the lies we thought were truth. In **2 Thess. 2:10** Paul writes that people receive "the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved." If we do not

love truth, we will prefer to remain in our comfortable pew, and glory in the lies that promise an easy life. Believing the truth is like swimming against the stream - against the mainstream thinking of religious humanity. Believing the truth is difficult, because liars will persecute the truth. Liars fear the truth because it reveals their immoral living. Truth frees us from the lie, and brings us into the kingdom of truth where there is peace, joy, righteousness and love! In Christ there is no error or darkness!

“I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.” (v. 16) This message is for the churches; it is not for those who are outside the church.

In spite of the fact that humanity had rejected, tortured and killed Jesus without cause, He continues to love and forgive. His identification with us enables Him to bring us into the new sinless humanity that is ours in Christ. His words and His testimony as written in this book come in the authority of truth, and therefore are to be heeded and obeyed.

It is interesting to note that Jesus has a two-fold identification. Not only is He the **descendant** of David, but He is also the **root** of David. On the basis of His royal birth as a descendant of David, He has the legal right to the throne. But how can He be both the descendant and the root without claiming identification with humanity and with God? It is impossible! He is the root, the source of David’s kingly lineage, and He is also the source of our life and kingly lineage!

He is also the bright morning star! The morning star is the harbinger of the light of a new day, and therefore a light-bearer. It is visible in the eastern sky, it gives light and direction to mankind before the sun makes its appearance, and it announces the arrival of a new day. This portrayal is used figuratively of Christ and His spiritual light. However, natural man is blind to spiritual realities; he does not have an organ adapted for its reception. **Only Christ can give him the capacity to see spiritually.**

In **2 Peter 1:19** it says, *“So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.”* Christ is the fulfillment of the prophetic scriptures concerning His coming into the hearts of believers. Christ’s coming to earth announced the arrival of a new day, and this new day began when the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost!

“The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.” (v.17). This verse brings us the sweet strains of a new message. The Spirit and the bride are in perfect harmony, bringing an invitation for all to come and drink of

the water of life! This invitation comes from the Spirit and the bride (the perfected church, the overcomers). At the present time this invitation is going forth from the Spirit to those who are chosen of God. But praise God, the time is coming when it will go forth to all peoples and all nations! **At present the firstfruit is being perfected into the image of Christ, but we know that the harvest follows the firstfruit!**

The water of life is to be handed out without any cost to the recipient. The words of life are to be given out freely. The understanding God has given us is to be heralded and distributed without cost. It is not to be merchandised! Freely we have received and freely we are to hand it out free of cost. **If we don't abide in God's admonition, the greed factor takes over, truth is sacrificed, and the gospel becomes intellectualized and entrenched in rituals and traditions.** In order for the money to come in, evangelists and pastors and ministries frequently yield to the temptation of becoming people-pleasers. Yielding to this temptation causes them to lose their anointing, and brings them into a bondage or slavery to people. God wants complete obedience; He also wants us to trust Him to supply the needed resources for the work to which He has called us.

"I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book." (vv. 18-19)

The words of the prophecy of this book are true, and the prophecy is complete. There are to be no additions or subtractions. Those who add to, or subtract from the prophecy, have need of more cleansing. Anyone who adds to it will have to undergo more of the plagues that are described in this book. Our additions will bring more of God's addition of plagues that are needed to cleanse us from all our carnal thinking. God will achieve His goal for each of us, and use as many plagues as are needed to achieve perfect cleansing of all our wrong thinking!

If anyone takes words away from this book, God will take away his part from the tree of life. Why did Adam and Eve lose their access to the tree of life? Didn't they take away from the words God had given them? God had told Adam that he would die if he ate the fruit of the forbidden tree. Through unbelief that promise was disregarded. A subtraction took place, and they were barred from the tree of life. Our subtraction from His word brings God's subtraction from the tree of life. We can only access that tree by functioning in the truth! Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life. There is no other way!

"He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming quickly.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." (v.20)

This is the third time in this chapter that Jesus says He is coming quickly. Quickly does not refer to a time interval, but to His manner of coming. What a blessed assurance to know that He is coming quickly. **He comes to us with the speed of lightning in every new revelation of Him that we receive.** Those who have an intimate knowledge of Him have experienced this. We are in Christ, but He is also being formed in us. The revelation of Christ in the overcomers is His coming again. Christ brought the revelation of God to the religious community and to the world, and now we are to bring the revelation of Christ to the religious community and to the world.

“The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.” (v.21) Some early manuscripts say, *“with all saints”* instead of *“be with all”*. This emphasis on grace is characteristic of Paul’s epistles, but not of John’s earlier epistles. It is a beautiful ending to John’s revelation. We have been saved by grace - not by works! The divine influence of the grace that we have in Christ is always to shine forth in our lives. **Grace does not withhold love and forgiveness. Our love is not curtailed by the evil actions or slights targeted against us. Since we have freely received God’s grace and forgiveness, we need to freely extend grace and forgiveness to others.**

“Amen” means, “So be it.” John adds his approval to everything written in this book. This is a true rendition of the revelation given him by the Holy Spirit.

In closing we would just like to say that we have spent many hours researching the meaning of the Greek words used, reading, listening to tapes by various speakers, meditating and listening to the Spirit. We have learned many things in this labor of love, and we know that much more could be written. It has been such a blessing to learn that this book is not about external events in the years to come, **but about the things that are currently happening within us as a result of God’s processing that is needed to change us. It truly is a revelation of the Christ within us!** It has blessed us to know that God’s processing will continue until Christ’s life and love shine forth from us. We also rejoice that God’s fire is not a literal fire, but a spiritual fire burning away all that is corruptible, as well as to know that the word “torment” is a wrong translation of the word “touchstone.” This study has opened our eyes to see that God’s salvation is so much greater than we had ever dreamed, and we pray that you will also be blessed with greater understanding and intimacy with our Lord!

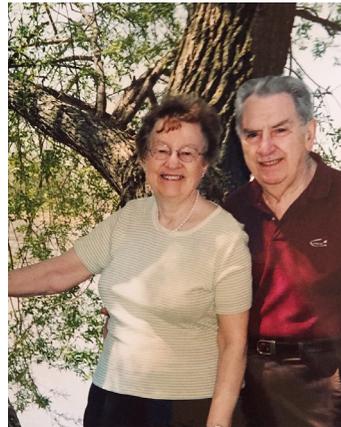
Mary and Ernie Kroeger

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“Revelation: Unveiling the Symbolism,” made me realize how much of our Christian teachings are based on man’s traditions rather than on biblical truth.

This book reveals the importance of reading the Bible under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who reveals God’s truth.

This book puts God’s plan for humanity into simple & easy to understand terms. It should be considered required reading by anyone who truly seeks God’s truth.



The Authors
May, 2004

Brian (Canada)

I’ve learned a lot about the symbolic interpretation of Revelation...
...so different from my previous understanding! I had felt lost about the seven churches, the dragon, plus the punishments poured out by angels. Now I see it’s about the relationship of the human heart with God.

I really appreciate learning that all God’s judgments are redemptive. They are for our growth. It awakens my faith that there is nothing to fear, for God is a God who will consume all the guilt and iniquities in a human being.



Mary Kroeger at 100
September, 2018

Also, I now have a deeper spiritual understanding of the meaning of heaven.

There is a lot to digest in this book. It shows me the wrong teaching I have known.

I believe that as I am willing to learn, God will reveal truth to me. I believe it was no accident meeting the authors of this book.

Never in my life could I imagine meeting Mary and Ernie Kroeger, since I’m from thousands of miles away in the Philippines. I now have this truth to pass on to my brethren in the Philippines and to anyone who will receive it.

Thank you very much, Mary, for your hard work.

I’m one who has benefited from your labour.

Maria (Philippines)