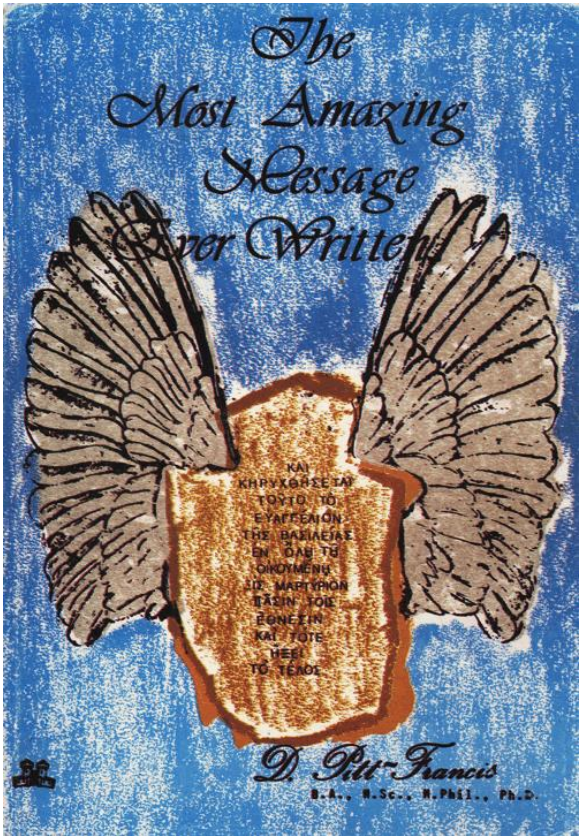

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THE MOST AMAZING MESSAGE EVER WRITTEN

The genius and symbolism of John's Apocalypse. A Spiritual exposition of the Book of Revelation as a predictive and prescriptive study of the progress of the Church in carrying the testimony of its risen Lord to all nations, and of its interaction with, and persecution by the World, prior to the Second Advent of Christ.

Dedicated to the Greatest of all Teachers,
- and to the unknown student.

THE AUTHOR

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4. Statistics: A Dictionary of Terms and Ideas (Hutchinson-Arrow, 1981) - jointly with C. A. O'Muircheartaigh
5. Numeracy and Accounting (Holt-Saunders, 1981)
6. Accounting Concepts and Methods Workbook (Holt-Saunders, 1981)
7. Accounting Concepts and Methods (Holt-Saunders, 1982)

The Most Amazing Message Ever Written

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CHAPTER ONE

SEARCH FOR A MISSING KEY

The Enigma: Three Fundamental Problems: The Weakness of 'Praeterist' Views: Historical Interpretations: Some Future Meaning?: Two Related Problems: The Christian Answer: The Real Challenge

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The Enigma

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, or Apocalypse of John, remains one of the greatest of all enigmas, even though it has been in the world for nearly twenty centuries. Schemes of interpretation have been many, most of them having been concerned either with fitting the symbols of the book into some historical sequence or with reading the book as a prediction of the 'end of time', but each interpretation has raised difficulties for the interpreters. No single interpretation is without its stumbling-blocks. There are inevitable symbols or details that cannot be fitted into the general scheme of interpretation. In most of these interpretations the book has been grossly devalued, to be regarded simply as a political prophecy, in which world events are predicted in much the same cryptic style as that used by Nostradamus many centuries later. It has provided fuel for the fiery predictions of doomsday men. It has stretched the mathematical abilities of those who have sought to understand its time periods. Throughout the twenty centuries of its life, nations and dynasties have emerged and disappeared, only to be regarded as new actors on a political stage, by those who have sought to use the book as an

almanack.

Three Fundamental Problems

Before we attempt to look for meaning in the book, it is essential that three fundamental problems be considered. First, there is the problem whether the book was written to give the writer's contemporaries strength to cope with their immediate problems of persecution during the persecutions of either Nero or Domitian, or whether it was intended to be an historical preview of the major events between the writer's time and the Second Advent, or a specific prophecy of the events accompanying the Second Advent itself. The second problem is the character of the book. Many of (1) its accounts of bloodshed and plagues seem to contrast the Jesus of the Apocalypse with the Jesus of the gospels. There are, of course, many similar prophecies of coming wrath in the Old Testament, and it appears (2) simple to explain the difference by saying that most New Testament writings reflect a period of grace, but that the book of Revelation, along with a few other passages in the New Testament, depict time when an unrepentant world has been given all its chances and must await its doom. There the explanation would remain, if it were not for a third problem, that the book's colourful symbolism is akin to that of other, yet spurious, apocalypses which were written at about the same time, or earlier. Some examples should, perhaps, be provided at this point so that the problem can be understood. Some of the best examples may be found in the books of Enoch and the Apocalypse of Ezra (to be found in the Old Testament Apocrypha as II Esdras). There were many other such writings, and most of them were written before the Apocalypse of John. Some, such as the War

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(1) Rev 11. 6; ch 16
(2) Zechariah 14: 16-21

Document, have been found in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Some were written between the Maccabean period (172-160 B. C.) and the time of Herod (37-4 B. C.). Other apocalypses were unearthed in 1945 at Nag Hammadi, and have recently been published. Most of these were written after the Apocalypse of John, and reflect a different trend in apocalyptic writing, a tendency to write revelations of a less 'political' character. Yet, the problem remains. The Revelation of John has a flavour similar to the 'apocalyptic' style of contemporary authors, many of whom would be discredited by the great mass of orthodox and some heterodox Christians. What hallmarks has Revelation, to show that it was different from them, and if it is different, as an ingenuous work of Jesus through John, why was it written at a time when so many other, yet spurious, apocalypses were written?

The latter two of these three problems **are** related to each other. The 'blood and thunder' character of much of the book, sufficient to give its enemies cause to libel it as 'sub-Christian', is strangely similar to the character of other writings (e. g. The Apocalypse of Ezra). They can thus be considered together. Let us first consider the problem of the three different and apparently contradictory schools of interpretation, the **Praeterist** (believing in a fulfilment of the prophecy in or shortly after John's time), the historical (believing that, somehow, Revelation was written to be fulfilled in the history of politics some time between John's days and the Second Advent of Christ), and the **futurist** (believing that the very word **Apocalypse** is a double 'entendre', and refers not only to a Revelation by Christ but to his final Revelation, his Second Advent, **and** to the historical events that are scheduled to herald and surround it).

The Weakness of 'Praeterist' Views

It should be understood, at the outset, that the three categories of interpretations are packages of convenience. Originally there was one attempt to interpret the book in accord with the events of John's time. As history proceeded and Jesus did not return, the ingenuity of expositors was 'taxed' to find later applications of the same prophecies, and thus the historical school developed. Though many of these are attractive, it must be appreciated that over 1900 years of history is sufficiently long a time to provide a considerably larger number of interpretations of the Apocalypse than have, in fact, become available. The 'praeterist' schools of interpretation were originally concerned with attempting to prove that the Apocalypse **could** be fulfilled during the early centuries of our era, even though the Second Advent did not occur in the way originally expected, and though other explanations were available, to date the fulfilment of the prophecy in later history. As the book appears to relate to events that lead up to the Second Advent, and as any 'gap' in the fulfilment of the prophecy must denote a weakness in an exposition, the Praeterist view of the book of Revelation can really be held by two classes of people only:

(a) those who believe that the prophecy **was** capable of an early fulfilment when the Church became supreme in the Roman Empire, and the Kingdom of God was said to have been established, as the Church, for example, under Constantine (312 - 327 A. D.); and

(b) those who believe that the prophecy represents a set of human expectations, genuinely held by early Christians, but rendered quite futile by the process of history.

The **first of** these views is that of many Catholic theologians. Though the Church did not

change the world immediately, the Kingdom of God came with the Church's establishment of its own supremacy. Thus with its establishment as a new City of God in place of the old city, pagan Rome, a 'Kingdom era' began under a Catholic priesthood. Because this Kingdom was said to last for a thousand years (3) the return of Christ to earth was expected by many at or about the year 1, 000 A. D. It did not occur in the way expected, and the millennium came to be regarded as a much longer period, that of the Church's supremacy for some figurative time-span leading to the end of the world. If the Church had been a positive power for good throughout the middle ages, there would have been some reason for developing a modern version of this explanation, but the Church became corrupt, and the reformation and counter-reformation in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries of our era were generated by anomalies in the medieval church. These anomalies, the sale of indulgences, the veneration of relics and other malpractices tarnished the Church's image as a 'political' fulfilment of Biblical prophecies of the Kingdom of God, quite apart from its persecution of dissidents. The difficulties presented by this branch of preterist interpretation are thus formidable, and the interpretation need not be seriously pursued.

The **second** branch of preterist interpretation is that forwarded by some liberal theologians, such as R. H. Charles (4) in the International Critical

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(3) Revelation 20: 4-7
Note that to appreciate the Praeterist view, this chapter has to be read as a prophecy of the ultimate political supremacy of the Church subsequent to its period of persecution under **pagan** Roman emperors.

(4) R. H. Charles: Revelation (2 volumes) The International Critical Commentary (T & T Clark 1920, reprint 1971)

Commentary. The view of critical and liberal theologians is that the writer of John's Apocalypse expected the end of the world to come quickly, but that this fulfilment did not occur at the time expected. Thus, John is relegated to being considered as just one other Jewish apocalyptist, similar in outlook to the writers of II Esdras, Enoch and the many other writings of the time. For example, Charles believed that the writer commenced his work around the death of Nero, and that the work envisaged a great cosmic upheaval, when Nero would return (after his apparent death) to lead Parthian forces against the Roman empire (5). Because this immediate fulfilment did not occur, the work was to have been revised later. In Charles's opinion, it was originally written in Aramaic, perhaps in Nero's time or afterwards by a Palestinian Jew, but later rendered into Greek and overworked with other passages in Domitian's time - so explaining apparently conflicting evidence about the date of the book's authorship.

This view is a weak one, for it not only relegates the writer to the level of the authors of the many spurious apocalypses that were current at the time, but cannot be reconciled with anything but the most liberal view of the inspiration of the Bible. God is, of course represented in the Old Testament as making promises and then revising them because of human response. The book of Jonah is an obvious case of this happening. But that is quite different from revising a prophecy because an emperor, thought to be still alive, (by some magical means) was as dead as he could possibly be! No interpretation that allows this kind of supposed revision of the book, can truly be harmonised with the book's own claims of Divine authorship (6).

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(5) Revelation 9: 14

(6) Revelation 1: 1 and 22: 18-19

Thus the interpretation is, from the standpoint of this review of interpretations, weak, if for no other reason than that the book does not meet its own claims and expectations, since such expectations were later proved to be false and its own exalted claims would thus have been rendered useless.

Historical Interpretations

There is no uniform historical view of the Apocalypse of John. The historical interpretations of the book of Revelation can best be understood by imagining the symbols of the Apocalypse as though they were drawn in order of sequence on a large piece of elastic and then stretched to accommodate the ever-increasing time-span of history In order to get some idea of the way in which symbolism changed to accommodate history, compare, for example, the interpretation used in (7)Wesley's 'Notes on the New Testament' with that of Edward Irving (8) in four volumes, or of John Thomas in 'Eureka' (9). Less than two centuries separated these writers, and yet the interpretation of some of the earlier material in chapter 9 of the book had to be changed to try to accommodate the march of events. Interpretations of later passages, such as chapters 15 and 16, had to be altered drastically.

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(7) John Wesley: Notes on the New Testament
(8) (Wesleyan Conference Office, London, 1877, based on writings in 1754.)
(9) Edward Irving: Exposition of the Revelation (four volumes) (1828) John Thomas: Eureka (three volumes) (1861-69) The difference between the expositions of Mede (1627), Sir Isaac Newton (1733), Vitringa (1705), Elliott (1844) and Bishop Newton (1868) illustrate much the same thing.

A good illustration of the changes in the historical interpretation to accommodate history is the interpretation of 'antichrist'. Some of the early 'Fathers' of the Church identified antichrist with Nero and with Pagan Rome, but others thought that he would be a Jew of the tribe of Dan, (or a Samaritan, such as Simon Magus) who would oppress Christians and re-establish a corrupt 'Jewish' system of worship in Jerusalem, thus making it his capital. The extent to which either of these interpretations was popular depended largely on the amount of persecution that particular groups of Christians suffered at the hands of Romans and Jews. When the opposition from both these original enemies of the Church began to fade, there were new candidates for the role of antichrist, Saracens and Turkish armies overswept Eastern Europe and, because there was a new enemy, antichrist was identified with the Moslem oppressors of Christians. Only after the Avignon period, when three popes reigned contemporaneously, one in Rome, one at Pisa and one at Avignon, was there a serious attempt to identify antichrist with the Papacy, and this was coupled with the use of the description ' Babylon' by the adherents of one pope, when referring to one of the others. In the heyday of the Protestant reformation, the identification of antichrist with the Papacy became the most popular one among protestant expositors. It motivated the Fifth Monarchists of Cromwell's time, who not only accepted the traditional explanation of the five monarchies in Daniel 2, but thought of themselves as divine instruments to bring the fifth monarchy into existence. Most historical protestant expositions of the past centuries seem to agree in identifying antichrist with Papal Rome, but in recent years the great 'enemy' in the book seems to have changed his colour, like a chameleon, and is now often identified with the godless regimes of Eastern Europe. If historical political interpretations of the

book of Revelation teach us anything at all, it is that by their very diversity they reduce each other 'ad absurdum' to pointless attempts to fit an expanding history into a rigid apocalyptic mould, **unless** a strong case can be made for any one interpretation against all the others. The lesson is clear. Nations change in political role, in eminence and in attitude to the Christian message. Because they so change, any interpretation that seeks to identify the 'enemy' in the book with a political power, rests on the changing sands of time, and may, within a few years be seen to be a very weak one.

Some Future Meaning?

The futurist view of Revelation tries to associate the word 'revelation' (apocalypsis in Greek) with the Second Advent of Christ, for the word is often used by New Testament writers in context. Thus the fulfilment of most of the book is thought to be future. Futurists assume that the great events of the history of the Christian Church are quite insignificant when compared with the turbulent events that will lead up to, and precede the Second Advent.

Futuristic views of the Book of Revelation have many strengths. In the first place, the futurist does not have to interpret, only to expect. This expectation can change with the passing of time without doing much violence to futurist views. A second strength from the standpoint of popularity is that if the coming events are so cosmic, so widespread and so earth-shattering that the whole of nineteen hundred years of history is of not much consequence compared with them, then they can assume weird, horrific and macabre interpretations and so captivate the excitement and imagination of interpreter and listener. Interpreters of the historical schools may have treated the book like

modern interpreters of Nostradamus. Futurists, with very few exceptions, (10) tend to use the book as the basis for something as horrific as much of today's science fiction. There **are** exceptions. Some futurist expositors believe Revelation to have a worldwide, but not necessarily a literal fulfilment (11). Further, as a spur to Christian discipleship there is some virtue in believing that a final test of faith for all Christians may be much more sinister and grotesque than anything that history has yet produced. But the weakness of the futurist interpretation is that it lacks any **tested** fulfilment of the book, and **past** token of fulfilment that will help the believer endure the perils that may yet be to come. Thus all three schools of interpretation have their weaknesses. The preterist interpretations expected an early literal fulfilment of the prophecy, which did not occur. The **historical** interpretations rest on the shaking sands of changing politics. The futurist interpretations do not vindicate their claims with some token of fulfilled prophecy, the test of a prophet, provided by Deuteronomy (12). A satisfactory explanation of the book can be found, but only by moving outside the well-used path, by looking for religious, rather than for political fulfilments in history.

Two Related Problems

We can now turn to the other two problems mentioned at the outset. They are that the character of the book **seems** to be different from that of the

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(10) Compare for example some of Herbert W. Armstrong's predictions in Plain Truth magazine, and the evangelical film 'A Thief in the Night'

(11) Peter Watkins: Exploring the Apocalypse and the Future (1980)

(12) Deuteronomy 18: 21-22

Gospels, its plagues resembling those of Egypt and of Old Testament prophecy, and that the character of writing is similar to a style in vogue at the time, the apocalyptic style of writing, with similar threats and predictions.

Because these problems are related, and concern the charge that the character of the book **seems** to be nearer to the apocalyptic style of writing than to the Gospels, we can consider both problems together. It is futile to make the long-disproved claim that the Jewish apocalyptic writings were written later than Revelation, and were false apocalypses modelled on it. Some of those writings were centuries older, though perhaps some parts of the Apocalypse of Ezra (II Esdras in the Old Testament Apocrypha) **could** have been written afterwards.

The bulk of conservative scholarly opinion dates the Jewish apocryphal and apocalyptic books (those of the Old Testament Apocrypha and the Pseudopigraphia) somewhere between the time of the Maccabean revolt (B. C. 175-160) and the time of Herod (B. C. 4). Even the War Document (found among the Dead Sea Scrolls) was probably written by the Essenes before the fall of Jerusalem (A. D. 70) and therefore predates the Christian apocalypse. These books are distinctly Jewish (non-Christian) in character, despite the fact that they are similar to Revelation in most other respects. Jewish apocalypses were generally written in the names of Old Testament characters and were nationalistic and political in their emphasis. Very few of the Christian pseudepigraphic writings were ascribed to Old Testament characters. In the Nag Hammadi library, for example, only five books were ascribed respectively to Adam, Seth, Shem, and Melchizedek. Further, the Gnostic apocalypses (i.e. those largely written after John's Revelation) were 'other-worldly' in character and less concerned with the history of the 'world' before the

Second Advent than the Jewish apocalypses that preceded it.

John's Revelation is poised somewhere between these two bands of spurious apocalypses. It **is** concerned with things that 'must shortly come to pass' yet it has not the nationalisitic character of a typical Jewish apocalypse. It is therefore, surely, safe to say that it was probably dated also somewhere between those two bands, that is, it was written when nationalistic hopes had diminished after the fall of Jerusalem in A. D. 70, but before the 'other-worldly' heterodox apocalypses ascribed to the Gnostics.

Given this position, we are now in a position to ask some important questions which can provide us with the real key to interpreting the book. What was Revelation? Was it a Christian attempt to write just one more Jewish apocalypse with a Christian background? Or was it something quite different? Was it intended to be the **very Christian answer** to all the flood of spurious apocalypses with which the Jewish community had been plagued?

These questions set us on a path which all other expositors of the book seem to have avoided completely. Most of those who respect the book as an inspired authoritative Divine work place it in so different a category from the Jewish apocalypses that they dismiss any suggestion that there could be some similarity (at least in style) between them. At the other end of the spectrum, the liberal critical thinker is so aware of such a similarity that the Revelation is dismissed as just one more apocalypse. A superior one, perhaps, even a 'primus inter pares', a first among equals, but nothing more than that! This book sets out on quite a different path. I wish to do something very different, to state the case for believing that the book of Revelation comes into neither of these categories, but that it is Christ's own answer to the vain aspirations of the apocalyptic writers, to those of

John's predecessors and contemporaries who could look forward only to the world's becoming the Divine bloodbath, and those whose only expectations lay in the anticipated destruction of God's enemies.

The Christian Answer

The hypothesis that the Apocalypse captures the style of earlier 'spurious' apocalyptic writings in order to answer them, and disprove some of their expectations, may be difficult to prove completely, but readers are asked to consider at this stage just a few propositions.

1) Christians of all ages have adopted different strategic postures in order to save different classes of people. Paul, for example, 'was made all things to all men'. (13)
2) Such strategy often involved quoting (without either denial or endorsement) the literature of the opponents. For example, when Paul spoke to Athenians, he quoted the hymn of a pagan writer to Zeus, in order to preach that a Living God exists. When Jude wrote against the authors of spurious apocalypses, he quoted their writings in respect of the body of Moses, in order to show their own lack of respect for the apostles' authority. (14).
3) Interpretations of the Old Testament may be endorsed by usage, and thus quoted without respect to their original meanings. The 'virgin' prophecy of Isaiah may have referred in context to a 'young woman' and certainly to a contemporary of Isaiah, for the Hebrew word

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(13) I Corinthians 9: 19-23

(14) Cleanthes: Hymn to Zeus 4-5; Aratus: Phaenomena 5 Compare Jude 9 with Assumption of Moses as rendered by Origen (de Princ iii. 2. 1.) and Jude 14 with Enoch 1

'almah' means 'young woman'. By the time it was translated into Greek (C. 280 B. C.) it had come to mean 'virgin' (Greek 'parthenos' = 'virgin') and thus could be quoted in this context by Matthew (15) irrespective of whether the prophecy was intended to mean it or not.

4) In the parables Jesus uses current misconceptions without passing any criticism on them. The parable of Dives and Lazarus (16) uses a current Jewish belief that the favoured went to Abraham's bosom. Further, even in the parable of the prodigal son, Jesus passes no comment on the wisdom in eating a fatted calf (17) instead of the carob pods (husks) on which the prodigal had been surviving. For the parable was not a lesson in diet, but in Divine forgiveness.

Given these four propositions, it may be easier to appreciate that just as, in argument, an opponent's thought patterns may be used to put over a better point of view, so the Apocalypse uses the imagery of the Jewish apocalypses to preach a finer message.

This is not to say that the writers of the spurious apocalypses were wrong in believing in a coming Day of the Lord, nor incorrect in thinking that it would be a day of wrath. Two errors may, however, arise in the minds of those who may be so preoccupied with the 'day of wrath' at the expense of everything else.

1) It is possible to be so obsessed with the nearness of Judgement, that the 'one talent' of very small time imagined to be

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(15) Contrast Matthew 1. 23. with Isa 7. 14 (RSV) but compare with Isa 7. 14. (LXX)

(16) Compare Luke 16: 23 with the Rabbinic belief in Abraham's bosom

(17) Compare Luke 15: 23 with Leviticus 3: 16

ahead is put to very little use in saving

others, and they are pre-judged without further thought.

2) As a consequence of the first error, others, particularly national and personal enemies, are already considered prejudged, and the warning of Amos - not to desire the Day of the Lord for purely retributive reasons - is left unheeded (18).

The Christian message is that there is everything good about desiring the Day of the Lord, but that we should want it for the correct reason, not as passive spectators of the closing scenes of a horror film, hastily watching the death of the villain, but as participants in the drama, as those who by witnessing and making the world accountable to God, bring about, or 'hasten'(19) the very conditions in which the Day of God can take place.

The Real Challenge

The Apocalypse seems to have a fiery exterior, just like the burning bush. We are drawn, like Moses, from our preoccupations on the edge of life's wilderness to a book that appears to have a colourful and flamboyant exterior. Unlike the other fiery books that circulated in the desert fires of first century Judaism, this Book burns incessantly - it is not consumed. The other books may be a happy hunting ground of political speculators and prophets of doom. But again, this book is different. We stand, like Moses, on Holy Ground, and from the Burning Book (Bush) we are called by the Voice of God. (20)

The Voice told Moses, in effect, that he was no longer to be a spectator. He was probably aware of a prophecy (21) that God would deliver Israel from

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(18) Amos 5: 18
(19) 2 Peter 3: 12 (R. V. margin)
(20) Exodus 3: 1-14
(21) Genesis 15: 13

Egypt after a lapse of about 400 years. He could have stood still and waited for that event to happen and continued admiring the Bush, and being warmed by it. Thousands of Israelites would continue to be oppressed, and Pharaoh would continue his oppression, until, in some way, at the end of a given time period, God would miraculously intervene, and Israel escape from his clutches, while Moses continued, in the warmth of the Bush, debating the precise time-period, and details, with himself.

God's plan was different. It was not that Moses should overthrow Pharaoh and take control. Moses had already tried to do so, in a minor way, like the many who think that the Kingdom of God can be established by their own efforts (22).

God's plan was different. He would indeed overthrow Pharaoh in His time, but not before Moses had witnessed to Pharaoh and given him every chance to change his mind. God does not will that any should perish (23). He does not prejudge those who oppose Him, as we do. A 'gospel' had to be preached to Pharaoh, to his contemporaries, and to the responsible people of Egypt. God would intervene, but not before the whole of Egypt knew what was planned, whether they complied with God's requirements or not.

God does not condemn unless and until his offers are rejected, and in this respect the book of Revelation is an amplification of the Olivet prophecy of Jesus (24), not as an historical sequence but because it tries to emphasize the very message that those who read the earlier prophecy had missed. Jesus had said that the Gospel of the Kingdom would be preached to the whole world as a testimony (or witness) and that then the end would

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(22) Exodus 2: 14
(23) 2 Peter 3: 9
(24) Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21

come (25). The details given in the prophecy were **not** signs of the end, as is often thought, but things that would happen as a matter a course - nation rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom. The end of the world, with its cosmic upheavals, would **not** come until the Gospel had been preached to the world. This is the primary message of Jesus' prophecy.

It is this central message of the Olivet prophecy - in essence 'preach to the world, give the whole world a chance, and then the end will come' - that must characterise our approach to the book, and if this is so, it cannot be a cold sequential deterministic preview of European or of universal politics. The historical interpretation of Revelation must be a religious one, it must relate to the events that would characterise the Church's preaching of the Gospel to all nations, and like the Burning Bush and like Matthew 24: 14 must impel actions in witnessing, so that the end can come.

To end with our analogy, the Judaistic apocalypses of doom, current in John's time, are as dissimilar to the Apocalypse in purpose, though similar in appearance, as were the many burning bushes of Sinai, that burned themselves out in hours or minutes, to leave behind, black stumps of charcoal. For they, unlike it, do not impel witnessing action, and their message has been consumed. Further, even those historical interpretations of Revelation that regard it as nationalistic prophecy are similarly arid, for they fall into the very trap into which the authors of the apocalyptic writings fell.

In contrast, the true message of Revelation **burns afresh** with every moment of remaining history. It cannot be consumed until all mankind, like Egypt, hears an even greater message of salvation in

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(25) Matthew 24: 14

Jesus and is given the chance, by the apparent foolishness of preaching, to choose between good and evil, to be transfigured from a static ignorant world, to rise to the cloudless heights of God’s love or harden its heart against His very memory. Only when this happens will judgement come, as on Egypt - and only then will there be deliverance for God’s people.

CHAPTER TWO

AN OPEN DOOR

The Introduction and Letters: When was the Book Written?: A Door was Opened: Docile Guardians: The Holy of Holies: Who are the Presbyters?: The Scroll: The Meaning of the Vision

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The Introduction and Letters

Numerous books have been written about the Apocalypse. Most of these are in broad agreement about the first three chapters, and so a brief summary of these chapters will be sufficient, because any interpretations or opinions that readers may hold of these three chapters will not be out of accord with the two main principles explained in chapter one. These can now be summarised.

1) The apocalypse is in the style of the previous 'spurious' Jewish apocalypses of the period, because it was intended to provide, for the followers of Jesus, an answer to them, written in their own style.
2) All three strands of commonly accepted interpretation are deficient, quite apart from their respective merits and demerits, because they are couched in the **political** expectations of early, historical and latter-day expositors generally, and do not appreciate the main reason for the book - stated in 1 above, that the apocalypse was a Christian answer to such predictions of determined doom, and was, instead, a spiritual prophecy of the Church's attempts to **witness** to the whole

world, so that the 'end' could come (1).

It is for this reason that the very theme of witness is evident in the introduction. For example:

1) John bore witness to the Word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus (2) Christ; and
2) Jesus Christ is himself called 'the faithful and true Witness'(3)

After the blessing and ascription of praise, John is confronted by 'one like a son of man' walking among seven lampstands and holding seven stars. The symbols are similar to those used in the seventh and tenth chapters of Daniel. Though he may ultimately, as in Daniel (4) refer to a multitude of people, there is little doubt from the final paragraph of the chapter, that the speaker, who is identified with the 'son of man' being, is the Lord Jesus Himself, the firstborn of that multitude. (5). Thus, He officiates as a priest among lampstands, the seven-branched Jewish menorah, showing His present position as the new mediator (5). Unlike the son of man of Daniel (4) he has the white hair (like wool) of the Ancient of Days Himself, being now made of His nature. He has also His penetrating eyes. Yet His feet are like burnished bronze (6) showing that He had become perfect through suffering refinement.

The picture is thus a symbolic, but balanced picture of the living Christ, as the firstborn from death. The vision appears 'on the Lord's (7) day' to John, a parallel with the first day of the week, on which He rose from the dead. In Greek, the expression 'the Lord's day' (kyriake hemera) is quite different from 'the Day of the Lord' ((he

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(1) Matthew 24: 14
(2) Revelation 1: 2
(3) Revelation 1: 5
(4) Daniel 7: 13
(5) 1. Timothy 2: 5 Hebrews 4: 11-16
(6) Hebrews 2: 10 5: 8
(7) Revelation 1: 10

hemera (tou) Kyriou))(8). Not only is this subtle difference a warning against those who desire **the** day of judgement (on others) for its own sake. The meaning is quite different. 'Kyriake' is used elsewhere in the New Testament (9) for the Lord's Supper and in contemporary writings, as the Didache, clearly meant the first day of the week, when the Lord's supper was eaten. The reference places a clear 'starting point' to the book. Though the vision was not given until a generation afterwards, the spiritual testimony of the Church (7) **starts** with the death and victory of Jesus on the 'Lord's Day' and **ends** with ' the Day of the Lord' when the Church's testimony has been completed. The primacy is not one of time sequence only. It is one of priority. Salvation is preached first, then judgement comes afterwards.

The choice of the candlestick symbol is deliberate. Asia and Galatia (10) were the earliest areas to be evangelised. They represented in essence, that 'world' that lay outside the confines of Israel, and the Jewish community. The light is the preaching of the Gospel (11).

The seven churches selected were an interesting valid sample of the Gentile Church that lay outside Israel. Both 6 and 6^2 (=36) are important numbers in sampling. In essence, the letters that were written to them in the next two chapters could have been written to sample churches anywhere else. Seven comes just above the minimum sampling requirement.

The churches are not ordered in a downward recession, though this impression is wrongly engendered, because the worst church (Laodicea) comes

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(7) Revelation 1: 10
(8) Contrast with 2 Peter 3: 10 and with Amos 5: 18 in the Septuagint
(9) 1 Corinthians 11: 20
(10) Compare Isaiah 66: 19 with Acts 14
(11) Isaiah 42: 6; Matthew 5: 14-16

last. Most of the warnings and blessings need no interpretation. They are plain for the churches of all ages of history to read. The symbols used in the seven letters require some explanation, but as most of these occur later in the book, they can be explained when they occur. Before proceeding to the fourth chapter, let us briefly consider the date of the book.

When was the Book Written?

To some expositors, the date of authorship matters considerably. If it is assumed that the 'Lord's Day' is not as suggested, but some 'Day of the Lord', such as the end of the Jewish state in A. D. 70., then an interpretation, which involves persecution under Nero, 'hangs' upon a date shortly before A. D. 70. If the sequence of seals has an historical interpretation, commencing as some do, with A. D. 96 then an A. D. 96 date 'fits' better, for an earlier date would pose an awkward gap in interpretation. Both datings rely on external evidence, which was not forthcoming for nearly a century later. Irenaeus (12) uses the term 'Domitian' in the context of the book, but the term could have been a title of Nero. Further, if the writer was the Apostle John, to whom it has been traditionally ascribed (though the title of the book and its introduction could refer to some other John) then there (13) is strong evidence that he was martyred earlier in the century. Further, one tradition states that he was recalled from Patmos before his martyrdom. This could have taken only a few years, but must be considered when searching for a probable date.

If, as was suggested earlier in the chapter, the book's starting point, its 'termius a quo' is not

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(12) Irenaeus: Against Heresies V. 30: 3
(13) Clement of Alexandria: Stromata 4: 9

the date of its authorship, but the date of Christ's resurrection, then the date of writing does not matter much.

However, some thoughts are offered to the reader, with the help of the only reliable (internal) evidence. They are the following.

1) If John was martyred at an early date, after having been returned from Patmos, though later than Peter and the other apostles of Jesus, then assuming that the apostle John was identical both with the elder, and the writer of the Apocalypse, the book could not have been written **long** after A. D. 70 and could have been written before it (i. e. during the reign of Nero). (13) (14).
2) The book was written during persecution, and thus the date is most likely to have coincided with the persecution of the Church by Nero (c. 67 A. D.) or by Domitian (c. 96 A. D.).
3) It contains Aramaisms, though written in Greek. This may indicate that the writer still thought in Aramaic, and may have written an original of Revelation in Aramaic on Patmos in Nero's time.
4) Such a work would have had a limited circulation to the seven Asian churches, some of whose members were familiar with Aramaic, being Jews, but many of whom spoke Greek.
5) After Nero's persecution, the book was circulated, having been re-edited for general circulation and recast in Greek.
6) By the time of the next persecution (Domitian's in A. D. 96) it had become sufficiently popular to provide the Church

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(13) Irenaeus: Against Heresies V. 30: 3
(14) See John 21: 20-24

with much-needed spiritual strength in difficult times.

7) It is probably its popularity during that time, that caused it to be associated by Irenaeus (12) and later by Eusebius (15) with the time of Domitian.

A Door was Opened

At the beginning of Chapter 4 John records that he sees the door 'having been opened' in heaven. In other words he noticed that the opening had already taken place. The figure of an open door is common with the 'spurious' apocalypse of Enoch and the Testament of Levi. (16). But if style is used to counter wrong ideas, perhaps we can take lessons from these apocalypses how **not** to understand the figure. In both cases the figure is associated, as strangely by most commentators on the Apocalypse, with the imparting of some new revelation, or understanding of things (i. e. of the future) just as the unsealing of the sealed scroll (17) is also so understood. Herein lies the first fallacy in reading the book. Later, the Gnostics who regarded the doors of the heavenly spheres as being guarded by archons, but opened by the understanding of words and phrases, fell into a similar trap.

The door had **been opened**. This symbolised a foregone act which had occurred a generation earlier when Jesus rose from the dead (on the Lord's Day) to ascend as he does later in the chapter, to the very throne of God. The open door coincided with the open tomb. Through it we may have boldness to enter the holiest of all by a new

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(13) Irenaeus: Against Heresies V. 30: 3
(15) Eusebius: Ecclesiastical History 3: 18: 3
(16) I Enoch 14: 15; Testament of Levi 5: 1
(17) Revelation chapters 5 & 6

and living way (18) to be in 'heavenly' places with Christ Jesus (19). The figure of the open door is always associated with salvation (and preaching salvation) in the New Testament, rather than with the furthering of intellectual, Gnostic or futuristic understanding. Nathaniel would see 'heavens (20) opened' to reveal the risen 'Son of Man'. The people of Macedonia would have the door opened to them (21) and the Philadelphian church was promised that the door was to be left open a little longer for them (22). By Jesus' death and resurrection, He became the ladder between heaven and earth on which Nathaniel may have contemplated. Not that some spatial heaven is needed, to understand the figure. Eternal life involves unity with a heavenly God in a heavenly nature, wherever it may be enjoyed. Behind the door is not the literal heaven, of the kind which any literalist may have imagined, but far less is it some special insight into the world's future politics. Instead, behind the door is the opportunity of true salvation in Jesus. Therefore, only God can open the door. We cannot do so. (23)

Behind the door, there are also many of the symbols used by current Jewish apocalypses with which the readers of Revelation may have been familiar. Revelation was intended to answer them. So the symbols are the same, but the meanings are different. Let us take the comparisons and contrasts with 1 Enoch, mentioned earlier, and explore them together by means of a convenient summary.

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(18) Hebrews 10: 19-25
(19) Ephesians 2: 6
(20) John 1: 51
(21) 2 Corinthians 2: 12-13
(22) Revelation 3: 8
(23) Revelation 3: 7

1 Enoch	Revelation
An exclusive ‘crystal wall’ (24)	A ‘crystal sea’ over which there is direct access to the Throne (25)
Protecting tongues of fire to exclude people (26)	Seven lamps of fire (to give light to people) burning before the Throne (27)
The writer passes from one house to a second house to behold the Most High (28)	As soon as the door is opened John enters the presence of the One who sits on the Throne (29)
‘Myriads of myriads’ too terrorised to behold God (30)	‘Myriads of myriads’ and thousands of thousands praising God and the Lamb (31)
Enoch receives doubtful visions and spurious astronomy (32)	John learns about the interaction between the Church and the World (33)

He is told to come and see the things that ‘must be hereafter’. (33) What are those things? Though one is tempted to think of them as a Nostradamus-style serialization of the events between the two advents of Christ, such events occurred for the most part, because of the delay in the Church’s witnessing to the whole world. If the Church had done so earlier, the conditions of Matthew 24: 14 would have been fulfilled and the Second Advent would have occurred. Actually, the events of

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(24) Enoch 14: 8-15, particularly 14: 9
(25) Revelation 4: 6 (26) Enoch 14: 9-10
(27) Revelation 4: 5 (28) Enoch 14: 15
(29) Revelation 4: 1 (30) Enoch 14: 21-25
(31) Revelation 5: 12 (32) Enoch chs 15, 16 & 34-36
(33) Revelation 4: 1-2

mundane history are just colourful incidentals. In reality, the 'things that must be hereafter' are the Timeless City of God, and His ultimate dwelling among men. The opening of the door of Christ's passion and resurrection made this 'hereafter' possible to mankind. Previously, it had not been possible for mankind to attain this 'hereafter'.
The summary has shown the stark contrast between the pseudo-apocalypse of Enoch and the Revelation. Instead of a walled palace of an inaccessible God, there is a clear way to the Throne of Grace across a crystal sea. The fiery tongues and the obscuring clouds are replaced by seven lamps which resemble their earthly seven-lampstand counterparts, the welcoming light of salvation preached to mankind.

Docile Guardians

Behind the door are the living ones - counterparts of both the differing cherubim and seraphim of the Old Testament. What were they? It is wishful thinking that associates their four faces with four aspects of Christ depicted in each of the gospels respectively. Though the faces can be identified with the camps of Israel because of the four standards, it is a 'non sequitur' to suggest that they must therefore represent Israel in this passage. The cherubim seem to be 'guardians of the gate' associated with 'keeping out' rather than 'welcoming in'. They appear in the Genesis narrative after Adam's transgression to prevent his (34) re-entry to Paradise. They appear on the veil of the tabernacle and temple to prevent access to the Most Holy (35). They occur in vision when Israel is to be expelled from its land (36).

Further, even the use of the faces of the

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(34) Genesis 3: 24
(35) Exodus 26: 31
(36) Ezekiel 1 & 10

cherubim (37) on the camp standards of Israel carries the meaning of protection from, and exclusion of enemies. Even though the different, but allied seraphim are associated with healing impurity (38) they also, in the initial context of the word, both healed and destroyed (39).

Given that this is the real association of the symbol, what does the symbol mean, and what does the passage teach? In Genesis 1 there are four faces, associated with the whole of creation. They are:

(a) the face of the deep; (40)
(b) the face of the waters; (41)
(c) the face of heaven; and (42)
(d) the face of the earth (43)

The reference to four faces, in this case, of course, depends on a literal translation of the Hebrew text, but is given as a convenient way of expressing the truth about the cherubim. God, who is unseen, is always obscured by the things that are seen. They are 'temporal', and the four faces of creation represent, in symbol, all that obscures God and drives man from Him. No symbols can be better chosen. Lion, ox, man and eagle are the four extreme points of the cosmic Zodiac, as it would have appeared to the ancient world, and so would have signified to the ancient world, as indeed the four faces listed above that spatial universe in which God is always apparent in His creation, yet seems personally evasive. He cannot be found in space, for He is beyond and behind the very limits of the space that He has Himself created. Nor do these symbols only represent the lifeless aspects of the material universe, such as the heaven, earth and the surface and depth of the sea. They also signify, by

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(37) Numbers 1: 52, 2: 3 and ch 10 (38) Isaiah 6:6
(39) Numbers 21: 6-8 (40) Genesis 1: 2
(41) Genesis 1: 2 (42) Genesis 1: 20 (lit.)
(43) Genesis 1: 29

their very appropriateness, the living universe. Most marine life cannot readily be seen by man. The largest of all remaining life forms fit clearly into four main classes, birds, predatory and non-predatory animals and man himself.

So the cherubim represent, as convenient symbols, as four extreme points of heavenly creation and as four faces of all creation, the very allness of that creation that obscures God, yet reminds us of Him.

The gate-guardians of the ancient Canaanitish, Egyptian and Babylonian cities were perversions of the Biblical Cherubim, those symbols of a visible creation that reminds us of God yet obscures the Way to Him. Sphinxes, winged bulls, griffins and gryphons, all these may be similarly considered to be perversions of the Biblical cherubim. The very worship of creature rather than creator may come into a similar category.

But in Revelation, the picture is different from those references that have been taken from Old Testament sources, both in respect of cherubim and seraphim. They were there, for the most part, to keep man from God. But now the four creatures, appropriately chosen - for apart from describing creation, they were the four most worshipped creatures of the ancient near east - no longer stand guard, but are beyond the door that has opened in heaven. They are still there to remind man that as created living things they point the way to God, but obscure Him. Indeed, they still show that man's very separation from the Eternal God is his identification with lion, ox and eagle. It is his very natural existence that (as a natural creature) continues to expel him from the Tree of Life, as the cherubim symbolically did after the expulsion from Eden. The creatures were present in symbol through the Old Testament not only to expel - but to remind him that he was naturally expelled by his choice to be identified with other dying

life-forms.

In Revelation, however, they are docile. They no longer wield a sword of fire as in Eden, nor thunder judgement on Ezekiel's chariot wheels, nor do they predict impending destruction like Isaiah's seraphim. Instead they are submissive, and subservient to the One who has prevailed to open the Scroll - and obtain its benefits for mankind.

The Holy of Holies

The symbols of the Apocalypse have already been contrasted with those of Jewish contemporary literature. As the cherubim (and seraphim) of the Apocalypse have now been contrasted with those of the Old Testament, it can be appreciated that other symbols are also different in their meaning from those of the Old Testament. This is a reasonable result of the difference between the Christian message and the rituals of the Law of Moses.

In the Tent of Meeting (or Tabernacle) of the Old Testament the equivalent (or counterpart) of the Throne was the Mercy Seat. The presence of God was depicted by a brilliance that hung over it.

There was no scroll in the hand of that Brilliance, for the only scroll associated with it was a covenant of death (44) hidden in a box under it. The high priest entered the Most Holy once a year with **a** few drops of blood to make ritual atonement. Jesus is here depicted instead as a Slain Lamb, prevailing by his blood, to take the book and make a permanent atonement for sin.

There is a second set of differences. The high priest of Israel entered the sanctuary alone, but in the heavenly Sanctuary there are already 24 presbyters. It would be tempting to draw parallels between the 24 presbyters (45) and either the 24

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(44) Deuteronomy 31: 26

(45) Revelation 4: 4

orders of priests or those of singers under the Old Dispensation (46) (47). But no other priest, and certainly no singers of the Old Dispensation would have had the right to enter the Most Holy.

Who are the Presbyters?

As was seen in the previous section, the figure 24 associated with the presbyters, is also used in the Old Testament of courses of priests and singers. They served by rotation, so even if they had been allowed to enter the Most Holy, they would only have been serving at the same time on very special occasions.

The symbolism is thus drastically transformed. The 24 elders, unlike the priests and singers, do enter the Most Holy Place, and they do serve at the same time. But their service is also different. Unlike priests and singers they are seated. They may have been angels in the actual vision, but who could they possibly represent?

It is only the Church of the Living God who are allowed to enter the Most Holy through the blood of Christ, who 'sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus' (48). They are both priests and singers (49) (50) but unlike Mosaic priests they offer the sacrifices of praise (singers) and unlike both, they serve continually in the Most Holy. We are unable to say whether there were 24 presbyters in the ancient Church, 12 Jewish and 12 Gentile. That does not matter. The number has been chosen to contrast the elect with the priests and singers of the Old Testament. They are able to enter the Most Holy, are beyond the veil and in the very presence

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(46) 1 Chronicles 24: 7-19
(47) 1 Chronicles 25: 9-31 (48) Ephesians 2: 6
(48) 1 Peter 2: 9
(49) Hebrews 13: 15

of God Himself. The only beings that separate them spatially from the Scroll, from the realization of all that the Book of Life contains, are the four living ones.

What better picture could there ever be in symbol of the position of the Church at present? In theory it has entered the veil, been raised up with Christ and made to sit in heavenly places (48). But the Scroll is very much like the Tree of Life in the Genesis account. It is beyond and above the guarding cherubim. Yet their aspect now seems to have changed. In the Old Testament they were destructive and expelling. Now they are docile, submissive and thankful because Christ has prevailed above the order of existing things, above that very elusiveness of the visible creation, which they represent; and because He has braved the fiery sword (34) and become worthy to pluck the fruit of the Tree of Life, that is to take the 'Book of Life', the scroll from God's right hand.

The Scroll

The Scroll in the right hand of the One enthroned is the remaining important symbol in chapter four. Most expositors have assumed that this represents the message of the book, some prophecy of the future events. This results from misreading Daniel's prophecy of a sealed book, among other things (51), but that prophecy referred to the understanding of Daniel's own book.

Is it likely that John would 'weep much' because there was no one to unfold the future to him, if this is what the vision meant? Knowledge of the future is not a particularly useful privilege, if one is unable to enjoy the future. Balaam and

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(34) Genesis 3: 24
(48) Ephesians 2: 6
(51) Daniel 12: 4

Caiaphas, for example, (52) (53) had such gifts on rare occasions. The Scroll must contain something far more important than the knowledge of immediate (mundane) future events. Note in this context that the events of chapters 6, 7 and 8 do not proceed from (or out of) the Scroll. John's attention is diverted away from the opening of the Scroll by the Living Ones, in order to see them. Further, the seals are across the outer edge of the Scroll, and though the unsealing is a process, it is clear that all seven seals have to be broken before the process of opening the Scroll can commence, just as, for example, Naaman has to wash seven times (54) before healing could commence.

Having dismissed the view that the Scroll is the prophecy, let us turn to the Old Testament for clues. There, the Scroll is evidently the Law, and because it is not kept, it brings its curse on occasions, as in Ezekiel (55) and Zechariah (56). Like this Scroll, Ezekiel's was written 'within and without', but even writing on the outside cannot be read if the Scroll is sealed. The analogy is an appropriate one. If the message of Life (the Word of Life) is to impel anyone, it must both be opened and read. The danger is that, as with Isaiah's scroll, it could be delivered to an illiterate to be told that he could not read, or to a literate to be told that the seals could not be opened (57).

Clearly, this Scroll is the counterpart of Zechariah's scroll, which measured exactly the same measurements as the sanctuary of the old temple. It does not bring death (56) but life. It is the Word of Life. It is that salvation in Jesus, which He received from God at His ascension, and instructed to be unrolled, unfolded and preached to

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(52) Numbers chs. 23 & 24 (53) John 11: 51
(54) 2 Kings 5 (55) Ezekiel 2: 8-10
(56) Zechariah 5: 1-4 (57) Isaiah 29: 11

the whole world (58). To use the phrase 'Book of Life' may be confusing for this is usually regarded as a book containing the names of the blessed (59). Let us, instead, think of the Scroll as the Message of Salvation, the Word of Life in Jesus. Those who become united with it have their names inscribed on it, but to those who refused to be united with it, it is like Ezekiel's scroll of judgement (55).

The revelation of future symbols in the book, the rest of the symbolic drama, does not come out of the Scroll as some have thought. John's attention is distracted from the Scroll to see them happening. His attention is diverted, first by the Living Ones (60)who represent the distractions of natural creation, to see things of less importance, to a serialised drama which takes place concurrently with the unsealing of the Scroll, though it wrongly seems at times to be identifiable with it.

This distinction is important. When Jesus was asked for a sign of His advent on the Mount of Olives, He did not give a catalogue of events that would lead to His advent, but those events by which they could be deceived, for the advent would not come until they had witnessed to the whole world. The message of this chapter is identical. Here, the important thing is that the Scroll, the Message of Salvation, the Word of Life, is not only received by Jesus, but unfolded to the whole world by the Church in its witnessing process. Then the 'things hereafter' will be realised. Instead of carrying out its testimony, the Church, like John, can be diverted away from the Scroll, to see a concurrent drama, which is symbolised in later chapters, and which stems from an attention to mundane, created

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(55) Ezekiel 2: 8-10
(58) Matthew 28: 19-20 (59) Philippians 4: 3
(60) Revelation 6: 1, 3, 5 & 7

things, which the very Living Ones (60) symbolise. John does no wrong in letting his attention be diverted from the Scroll (60) for his act is symbolic of the Church's tendency through history to look at this event or that as part of the serialised drama, which may bring about the end of all things. The early Church's hopes of an imminent end resulted from a serialised reading of the Olivet prophecy. The Revelation shows that though these events may take place, if the Scroll has not been both unsealed and read to the world, the end will be as far away as ever.

The Meaning of the Vision

The symbols plainly depict that time several years before the vision, when Jesus had ascended to God's right hand, to receive immortal nature and all power in heaven and on earth. When he thus ascended, he did not merely 'receive gifts for men' in the language of Psalms. He also, in Paul's words, 'gave gifts to men'(61)(62). He has prevailed to take the Word of Life, and open it and offer it to all men through a witnessing Church.

Even the recently discovered Gospel of Truth (63) regardless of whether or not it contains errors elsewhere, preserved this meaning of the vision 'there was revealed in their heart the living book of the living.... Jesus was patient in accepting sufferings until He took that book since He knows that His death is life for many'. Regardless of what later Gnosticism understood as the 'Book', the original meaning is at least preserved by these words. The vision has to begin at a commencing point though it depicts 'things here-

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(60) Revelation 6: 1, 3, 5 & 7 (61) Psalm 68: 18
(62) Ephesians 4: 8 (63) The Gospel of Truth 19: 35 20: 15. (J. M. Robinson: The Nag Hammadi Library in English, Brill, Leiden 1977)

after', and the commencing point is the resurrection of Jesus from death on the 'Lord's Day'. It then proceeds to depict how the Church would saturate the world with His witness, so that the final judgement and His Second Advent could be implemented.

CHAPTER THREE

THE HORSEMEN

The Real Victory: The Lamb's Appearance: The Sequence of Praise: Opening the Seals: The Four Horsemen: Bloodless Conquest: Discord, Decay and Death: How Long?

The Real Victory

One of the most important messages of chapters four and five of the Apocalypse is that the Lamb (Jesus) has prevailed to open the Scroll by breaking its seals. This message is so important that it cannot relate solely to unfolding some message about future troubles, and it was concluded in the previous chapter, that the opening of the Scroll must relate to the availability of salvation in Jesus. However, as the Apocalypse of John is about the second advent of Christ, the time of the second advent must somehow be related to the message of salvation in Jesus. This relationship has already been explored in the first and second chapters. It is that Jesus will not return until the message of salvation in Him is fully witnessed throughout the world, and the number of 'elect' is made up. In the words of Jesus Himself:

"This gospel of the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come" (1).

If this relationship exists, it must follow that the nearness of Christ's second advent must be measured by the extent to which the Church has

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(1) Matthew 24: 14

witnessed to the whole world, and cannot, in general, be measured by the prevalence of other (external and political) signs, though some of these may be valid. This was what Jesus meant when He said:

"Take heed that no one leads you astray... you will hear of wars and rumours of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place but the end is not yet"(2); and

> ".. nor will they say 'Lo, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold the Kingdom of God is in the midst of you"(3),
> .... meaning, the major responsibility for the coming of the Kingdom of God lies with you.

We can assume that if chapters four and five of the Apocalypse provide us with the major factor upon which the nearness of the second advent will depend, the preaching of Christ's victory to all nations, the sixth and seventh chapters will probably, as Jesus did in the Olivet prophecy, warn us against the dangers of looking for external signs. The sixth chapter does so, in fact, in a remarkable way by showing how the writer's attention was diverted from the celestial conquest of Christ to look at matters which were mundane and 'down to earth'.

Before examining this sharp contrast let us stand with John before the Throne. The Lion of Judah has prevailed to 'open the Scroll' (4) John turns to look at a Lion and sees a 'Lamb'. The use of animal descriptions for people and races is common to the rest of the New Testament and to some contemporary apocalyptic and apocryphal writings. In the New Testament, Jesus used the identities of sheep and goats (5) to describe different classes of people, and in the Apocalypse of Enoch

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(2) Matthew 24: 4-6 (3) Luke 17: 21
(4) Revelation 5: 7 (5) Matthew 25: 31-46

the symbolic identities of animals are used to depict people of various races (6).

It is important that here, the Apocalypse, as elsewhere, uses a style that is common to all contemporary apocalyptic writing, both true and spurious, but it is even more important to examine the masterly use of that style. It was for the Lion of Judah to do what the 'lion' of the four cherubim could not do (7). Given that the cherubim in Revelation represent that natural order - which separates man from Paradise - explained in the previous chapter, Jesus prevailed because He was not only a lion, but a lamb. The greatest conquest is self-conquest by means of submissiveness. Thus, one who rules his spirit is better than one who captures a city (8). Self-mastery bestows qualities that natural worldly conquest cannot bestow. This is why Zechariah leaves his graphic description of the route of Alexander's conquest of the eastern seaboard of the Mediterranean to show Israel's King, riding on a colt (9).

Jesus prevailed by His submissiveness, by being a 'lamb'. In this case, the Greek word is well-chosen. When the picture of the suffering servant (10) is quoted in the New Testament the word 'amnos' is used (11). Revelation uses a different word for 'lamb': it is 'arnion'. Jesus has prevailed: His being 'suffering servant' is over. Now, He is a lamb given the task of leadership. The word 'arnion' is sometimes used for a ram wearing a bell, suitable for leading others. It is thus the Lamb who also shepherds. The term is even more appropriately used in chapter 7 (12). Soon, He will, as a prominent Lamb, shepherd the unnumbered flock to springs of living water.

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(6) Enoch ch 85-90 (7) Revelation 5: 3
(8) Proverbs 16: 32 (9) Zechariah 9: 9
(10) Isaiah 53: 6 (11) John 1: 29, & Acts 8: 37
(12) Revelation 7: 17

The Lamb's Appearance

Thus the 'arnion' is the risen Christ, as the 'amnos' was the suffering servant. Both are lambs, but the term 'arnion' is more appropriate to the Lord's other title, 'the Lion of the tribe of Judah'. He has prevailed over all things, because He prevailed over Himself. The 'all things' (the natural order) are here represented by the four faces of the Living Ones, for, as was explained in the previous chapter, these represented that 'natural order of things' that keeps man from the bliss of returning of Eden (13). This is why it is the 'living ones' who first praise the Lamb, for He has prevailed over all that they depict. It is logical that the presbyters should be the next to praise Him for they have benefited by His victory. Finally, the whole of creation praises Him (14) because of the global consequences of His conquest. Even here, the logic of the sequence reveals that the whole of creation must learn of Him, and the underlying message of the whole book is once more implied - that the real nearness of Christ is measured not by any external signs, but by the extent to which the Gospel is witnessed to all nations (15).

The Lamb's appearance is unique. He has seven horns and seven eyes. It is common to explain this description as meaning simply that He has been given omnipotence (seven horns) and omniscience (seven eyes), for the number seven is sometimes understood to mean perfection, and (16) horns are associated in the Bible with power, and eyes with vision (17) and knowledge.

Such an explanation is satisfying from the

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(13) See ch 2, 'Docile Guardians'
(14) Revelation 5: 13 (15) Matthew 24: 14
(16) Psalm 148: 14 (17) 2 Chronicles 16: 9; Zechariah 3: 9; Ephesians 1: 18

standpoint of symbolic interpretation, but it is oversimple. Apocalyptic literature uses horns to represent people. This is true of both Biblical and non-Biblical apocalypses (18). In Daniel, Zechariah and elsewhere in the Apocalypse, the 'horn' is so used, particularly horns attached to animals. No explanation can therefore be complete unless the seven horns and seven eyes are actually identified, as the seven stars associated with the seven candlesticks are earlier associated with the seven angels of the seven churches of Asia (19).

Further, the statement that seven in this context simply represents perfection, may be difficult to prove. Thus we must look for personages who may be represented by the seven horns and seven eyes, who by their access to God reflected some of His power and insight. Indeed, the term 'seven spirits (of God)' which has recurred in the Book, may be helpful in identifying them (20). To a reader of the Apocalypse familiar with current apocryphal literature the seven spirits of God would seem to be those seven angels next in the angelic hierarchy. They were Gabriel, Raguel, Raphael, Remiel, Michael, Uriel and Saraquel (21).

In the Apocalypse, on the contrary, there are no seven angels, as such, who have direct access to God. The figure of 'seven angels' common to Jewish tradition and to Zoroastrian thought (the Amesha Spentas) as used later in the Book is, of course, later associated with the blowing of trumpets and the pouring of the vials of God's wrath (22). But those roles are subordinate, even though the seven angels are described as standing before God. The lesson of these early chapters is that, as next in line to God Himself, they have been superseded by

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(18) Daniel 7: 7; 8: 3; Zechariah 1: 18; Revelation 12: 3 1 Enoch 90: 37 (19) Revelation 1: 20
(20) Revelation 1: 4; 4: 5 (21) Enoch 20
(22) Revelation 8: 2; 16: 1; 17: 1

the Lamb. Thus, though angels are ministering spirits (23) the importance of the 'seven angels' in the celestial hierarchy is diminished not only because their role as 'seven spirits' is more appropriately performed by the Holy Spirit, in both omniscience and omnipotence contexts, but because their functions are now better performed by the Lamb - by Christ. Thus though the figure of 'seven spirits' remains, to indicate that which performs all that the seven angels of Jewish apocalyptic tradition were reputed to have done, the insight and power associated with them (as lamps of fire, and as winds) (23) (24) are now attributed to the Holy Spirit, and the omniscience and omnipotence (as eyes and horns) are now shared by Christ, Who, having all authority in heaven and earth, (25) now takes the position those seven angels were reputed to occupy. Thus, the seven distinct personages of Hebrew tradition have gone, and one Person with attributes of all seven has taken their place.

The popular suggestion that the number seven represents completeness or perfection is incapable of sound proof. It represents the Church, as in the lampstands of the earlier chapter (26). Thus, not only is the Lamb omnipotent, but He acts by means of the Church (27), and through the Church His message will be preached to the world. He may have conquered once for Himself, but this conquest is not complete until the message of His conquest is taken to all nations, though He has Himself been anointed with the horn of oil above His fellows (28). For as a parallel with the Old Testament Joshua ben-Jozedek, He was entrusted with the seven eyes (29) of Divine insight. The figure seven is also appropriate in this context, for not

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(23) Hebrews 1: 7 (24) Revelation 4: 5
(25) Matthew 28: 18 (26) Revelation 1: 12-13
(27) Matthew 18: 17-22 (28) Hebrews 1: 9
(29) Zechariah 3: 9; 4: 10

only are there six spatial directions to which one can look - north, south, east, west, upwards and downwards, but there is a seventh non-spatial direction into which one has to look, to penetrate oneself.

The Sequence of Praise

This sequence is the real measurement of the nearness of the Second Advent, it is the measurement of the extent to which Christ's victory has been broadcast to the World. It must be repeated at this stage for it sharply contrasts with the horsemen signs that follow in chapter six of the Book. First, the living ones praise the Lamb, for they represent that natural barrier in things external, which man evoked by his transgression. Next, the presbyters praise God, for they represent the redeemed community, and Jesus has made them a 'kingdom and priesthood' to the rest of mankind. Then, when the redemption process is complete, 'every creature' to whom the message must be carried praises the Lamb for His deliverance.

The message of praise is essentially the extension of the message of the vision, the redemption of the elect, by Christ's own conquest. Yet it is an anticipated message, for in the time-sequence of the vision the consummation of the process which this threefold doxology represents is as far away as ever. The message has not yet been carried to the ends of the earth. The Scroll has been given to the Lamb, but it has not yet been opened, and, with the Church's aid, read to the whole world. Not until all seals are broken can this take place. Thus, the vision of chapters 4 and 5 represents a simple - sounding ideal, but the seals and the remaining visions represent the human attempts to achieve those ideals.

Opening the Seals

The previous sentence needs explanation. Until now, John has been gazing ideally at the throne, and the threefold paeans of praise depict an idealised interpretation of the Olivet prophecy. No one should be deceived by signs. Jesus overcomes all things, then the 'gospel of the Kingdom is preached to the whole world for a testimony' (1) by the elect who sing His praises and then 'the end comes' (1) in which all creation has been redeemed.

From this ideal stance, John's attention is diverted away from the throne by the living ones who represent the barrier of visible creation of all living and created things, that proclaim God's existence, yet tend to hide Him from us (13). John allows himself to be diverted from a celestial ideal to something mundane. There is a curious, un-noticed and oft-neglected parallel with the Olivet prophecy. In the circumstances of that prophecy the disciples asked Jesus for signs (30) of His coming and the end of the age, but He answered by giving only one clear **sign** (singular), the sign of the Son of Man in heaven (31), the fact of His literally having returned. All other signs were those by which people could be easily be deceived. In fact the only other occasion where the plural word 'signs' is used in the chapter is in that context (32). Thus, to interpret Jesus' answer to His disciples' question correctly - wars, commotions, civil disturbances, famines, pestilences, death, persecution and earthquakes would **not** be signs of His coming. They could all be regarded as parts of a natural process, caused by the very burdening

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(1) Matthew 24: 14
(13) See ch 2, 'Docile Guardians'
(30) Matthew 24: 3 (31) Matthew 24: 30
(32) Matthew 24: 24

and groaning of the visible creation in which they occur (33), though increasing burdening may cause them to occur with increasing frequency. Thus, it is most appropriate that John's attention should be diverted away from the throne by the four living ones, who collectively represent ordered visible nature. For the whole anticlimax from attending to things celestial to watching mundane horsemen, is an enacted parable, in which John himself appears to fall into the trap, into which Jewish and Christian believers have fallen, the trap of watching external signs,

There would only be one real sign of the Lord's coming, the sign of His real visible presence, but in John's days the disciples were already beginning to misunderstand the Olivet prophecy as a serial list of signs by which the nearness of the Second Advent could be measured, instead of reading the list as a set of naturally-occurring disturbances by which they could easily be deceived.

The Four Horsemen

If this is so, is there not a time-sequence associated with the four horsemen who mutually occupy the first half of the sixth chapter? Of course there must be, but that time-sequence is associated with a natural order of renewal, conflict, decay and death, rather than with a process of specific prophetic interpretation to one or another of a sequence of incidents. This partly explains why it is the living ones, who represent the natural order - that each in turn call John's attention to the elements of the sequence.

The sequence is an elaboration of the cycle of man himself. He begins in life as an untamed **young lion**, he settles to the more docile 'civilised'

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(33) Romans 8: 22

existence of the ox, he becomes **mature man**, and finally the body is dead, and the **vultures** are gathered together (34). This cycle is not simply a depiction of the natural life of one man, it applies to all natural things, to families, communities, cities, nations and empires. In particular it applies to Church history, and to each organization in turn that has claimed to be the true Church, and superseded a prior 'corrupt' Church. Each has gone through the phases of victorious conquest (in the merits of Christ's conquest), internal dissension, then decay, then death, and it was for that very reason that the Olivet prophecy contained the warning that any community of believers, anywhere, at any time, if it became dead in its watching, would be like a carcass, around which the vultures of destruction would gather (34).

This is the monotonous cycle of all natural things. Though, in context it applies to communities of believers, as we shall see, it can apply to nations, and it is for this reason that believers in the historical-ecclesiastical interpretation of the Apocalypse were so successful in a rather localised, but short - sighted application of the horsemen sequence to the period of Rome's decline from the period following Nerva, Trajan and and the Antonine Emperors, to the decline of the western Roman Empire. For like the rise and fall of all political orders this was a sequence of conquest, internal bloodshed, famines and then of political death, to undergo temporary revival in a new (Christian) context with the accession of Constantine. Yet this sequence is not peculiar to the first few centuries of the Christian era. It has been repeated on countless occasions in other contexts, even when applied to nations, rather than, more appropriately, to churches or to Christian communities.

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(34) Matthew 24: 28

For every nation, and for every empire, the first phase is a lion phase, when little matters but the subjugation and conquest of all others (35). Then when the institution or nation has settled, and been tamed and incorporated foreign elements, it will often be unable to control them properly, and domestic conflict will break out. This is analogous to the 'red horse' (36) phase of the cycle and is appropriately introduced by the 'ox' of the living ones. Such internal conflicts divert administrators attention from the essential needs of communities. So famine and decadence occur, with other disasters, and the very life of the community is threatened (37). Ultimately the community dies, and is devoured by some other predator. The 'body' has allowed itself to become weak, to die and to be eaten by a 'vulture' (38). This predator is some other community, that takes its place on the scene, so that the wheel of existence revolves again, again and again.

The error of a limited application of this prophecy to a phase of the Roman Empire is that it is not only short-sighted and localised but also that this would be the history of every community which called itself the Church. For each organization would embed itself in the natural cycle of existence and renewal, and thus the very processes of 'conquest' by witness would be impeded with almost regular intermittent periodicity.

Here lies the real secret of the reason for the inclusion of the cycle at this stage. Each Christian community would also go through those four phases, and somewhere or other on earth each Christian community would be in one or other of those four phases!

To tell us that there are those four natural phases - conquest, dissension, famine and death -

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(35) Revelation 6: 1-2 (36) Revelation 6: 3-4
(37) Revelation 6: 5-6 (38) Revelation 6: 7-8

would be to tell us nothing new, for they summarise all natural life. The importance of the sequence is that it would also apply to the Church.

Bloodless Conquest

The first rider is introduced by the **lion**, because the task of the Church in this phase is a continuation of the very conquest-function of the Lion of the tribe of Judah (39). Yet he prevails with an arrowless bow. The fact that there are no

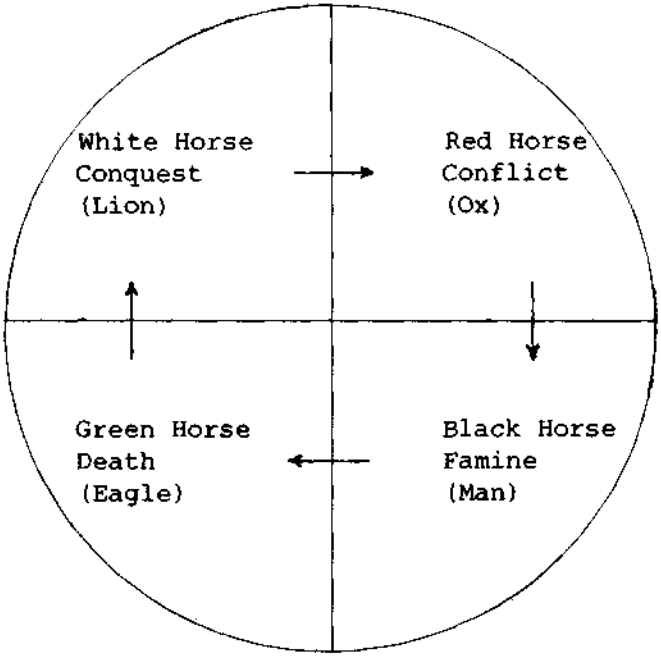

Figure 1 The Apocalyptic Spectrum

arrows may possibly mean that this is not a description of a Roman or Parthian conquest, as the historical school thought, but the conquest of the

(39) Compare Revelation 5: 6 with 4: 7 & 6: 1

world by the message of the Gospel. If this is so, and the conquest is that of the Church (or of the Gospel by the Church) in extension of Christ's own conquest (40) it must follow that the four phases also depict four phases of Christian communities, often existing side-by-side with each other, just as the letters to the churches of Asia depict different phases of institutional and spiritual development.

The cycle is a strange kind of spectrum. The colours are mundane colours. Unlike the usual spectrum, yellow, red, blue and green, the colours associated with heaven (yellow and blue) have been omitted and the more mundane white and black substituted in their place. The subject of the cycle is the Church, but the phases relate to each witnessing community in turn. Each would begin to conquer, with the equipment - of the gospel of peace (41), each would later become complacent and subject to discord from within (42) then become so preoccupied with this discord that the bread of life would be rationed and the oil and wine of divine comfort would become short in supply, because the community concerned would be so concerned with contentious side-issues that it would neglect essentials. Finally, each community would die (the eagle-phase), and be eaten by the vultures (34). Jesus warned that only by dying (and becoming a carcass) can a community of believers suffer the risk of being eaten by birds of prey.

The meaning is clear. Each successive community claiming Christ as Lord would forsake the Spirit of God, and try to conquer with the witness of the gospel in its own strength. Because witness would yield to debate and dissension, the arrowless bow

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(34) Matthew 24: 28

(40) Compare Revelation 5: 5 with 6: 2

(41) Ephesians 6: 15. Revelation 6: 1-2

(42) Revelation 6: 3-4

would give place to the assassin's dagger (the 'sword' - machaira - of the rider on the red horse). Then the witnessing community would be inclined to ration the very Bread of Life which it had been commissioned to give freely to the world, and the fountain of life would be reddened by human endeavours to make Christ's gospel into political propaganda.

Thus the rider on the white horse is identical with the one who conquers by returning in full strength at the end of the book (43). There are no arrows, not only because the conquest is bloodless, but because the arrow represents the false tongue (44) and false words can only hurt.

Further, the bow would be closed, for it would normally be closed if carried in one hand. If arrows are not used, the bow is closed. If arrows are words, the bow aptly represents a pair of lips that are closed, an apt symbol of peace. Silence, of course, does not preach but the gospel of Christ is a gospel of peace (45) and therefore more aptly signified by a closed bow, rather than an open bow. Though the Hebrew word for bow (used in war) differs from that for rainbow there is an association of ideas, and by an early promise which (46) forms of the basis of later apocalyptic symbol, the bow aptly symbolises conquest by the message of a 'covenant of peace' to all nations.

Discord, Decay and Death

Given the logic of the previous symbols, the symbols of the remaining horsemen should be easy to interpret. If the Church could take its message to all mankind, all would be well and the end

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(43) Revelation 19: 11
(44) Psalm 120: 3-4 (45) Isaiah 42: 1-4
(46) Genesis 9: 13

would come (1). But from its earliest days the Church has entered politics as a means of conquest and subsequently learned the lessons of politics.

Thus external debate has given place to internal contention, and the 'sword of the Spirit' (47) to weapons of expediency. It is noticeable that the discord phase is one of domestic discord, and is introduced by what would have been regarded in John's day as the domestic animal of the four, the ox. The sword of this sequence is a short dagger-like sword. Conquest embraces more people, and they bring their viewpoints and their customs with them. Just as Rome paved the way for internal conflict by taking Eastern possessions, so the Church made powerful converts who brought their disagreements into it.

The third phase **decay** is poised between dissension and death, between the dagger and the 'longsword' of a fourth horseman. The famine of this phase is not one of bread and water, but of hearing the Word of God (48). The Bread of Life would be available, but rationed and unmilled. There is no more apt a symbol for a contentious Church that is so preoccupied with controversies about inessentials than that it carries on only the bare task of distributing unmilled corn to the masses at a price, distributing only the more important sections and passages from the Word of God. The oil (of divine grace) used by (49) the early Church in healing, and the wine (needed for its sacrament) could not be 'hurt' when they were available, but prepared bread was not available, and unmilled corn rationed. The Word of God was always available and the Church, throughout history, often assigned itself the right of guarding it and of interpreting it. But the message of the Scriptures was often

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(1) Matthew 24: 14
(47) Ephesians 6: 17 (48) Amos 8: 11
(49) James 5: 14

obscured by the Church's own traditions.

The Bible provides the bare essentials for salvation even when incompletely or unideally translated. It is for the Christian community to distribute such unmilled grain freely and without stint (50), to prepare from it the more easily digestible loaves of spiritual nourishment, to add the oil of Divine grace and the wine of spiritual refreshment. When it is locked up in its own controversies, the Church fails to do so, and thus the great number of its constituents suffer spiritual famine.

The clear aftermath of unresolved famine is spiritual death. Thus the fourth rider is a being defined as 'death' and Hades follows him. Yet the wheel rotates. Spiritual death always begets a form of protest and revival. Apostasy begets reformation. While on 'one fourth' of the earth (51) there is death, on another there is renewal, on yet another conflict and yet another decay. In this way the passage is both similar to the description that Ezekiel gives of impending judgement on Jerusalem, and yet contrasts with it (52). Ezekiel's judgements are total: they are to kill with sword, famine, beast and pestilence. The four elements, sword, famine, beast and pestilence, are similar, but the judgement is restricted to a fourth part of the earth. This is the great assurance that the Christian community (taken as a whole) would not suffer the same result as the Kingdom of Judah. Never in the past 1900 years has the whole of the Christian community everywhere been corrupt and decadent. There has always been some measure of protest and reform somewhere, to make up for weaknesses elsewhere.

Thus, logically, the 'fourth of the earth' means the part patrolled by the fourth horseman at a

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(50) Isaiah 55: 2 (51) Revelation 6: 8
(52) Ezekiel 14: 21

given point in time. The locations of the horseman at any given moment of history are different, yet never, at any time, is the Church everywhere either decaying or dead. This is the assurance that, although the testimony of the Church follows a mundane process, because it is concerned with bringing the gospel to a 'mundane' people, its witness never fails completely, nor does it succeed completely. The monotony of the cycle is, itself significant, for as in the case of the Old Testament prophet, Zechariah, it begets a kind of 'impatience' on the part of those who watch it! The less patient cry: "How long?"

How Long?

Akin to John's 'patrols' depicting revival, heresy, apostasy and spiritual death are the 'patrols' of the book of Zechariah. They occur twice in the prophecy (53). In the first chapter, they are in the guise of Persian patrols who not only relate to peaceful years that followed the accession of Darius Hystaspes when the 'earth remains at rest' but taught the prophet that lack of political unrest was not enough. Only by going into the north country (Persia) and settling conditions for the rebuilding of the temple could the Spirit of God be put at rest, or quietened (54). Thus, lack of incident (or quietness) is, in itself, disquieting. The comfort of the times provided the best possible opportunity for rebuilding the temple at Jerusalem, yet it provided an inclination to live comfortably in (55) 'panelled houses' and neglect the building process.

The horsemen of the gospel are intended to build a 'spiritual temple' of redeemed people by preaching

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(53) Zechariah 1: 8 & 6: 1-8
(54) Compare Zechariah 1: 11 with 6: 8
(55) Compare Zechariah 1: 11 with Haggai 1: 1-6

to every living creature, but the endless regularity of the process and non-achievement of that objective cause 'stillness' and lethargy, with demoralising questioning about when and how the process should end. The land was 'at rest': it was inactive (55).

The comparison with the post-exilic period is interesting. Some Jews may have expected judgement on Persia. They had believed, perhaps, that Ezekiel's temple would be built shortly, in a miraculous way. The fact that Jerusalem and the temple were neglected was not due to lack of miraculous intervention. It was because God would not intervene in the way they expected. He wanted them to carry on the building process. Haggai also echoes this message (55).

So, as the Persian empire 'sat still and was at rest' at the accession of Darius they also 'sat still and were at rest' in a less favourable way, and the temple of God was neglected. The situation in the Apocalypse is modelled on that in Zechariah. The real work is that of building the living temple of God, of (56) which each believer is a 'living stone'(57). When the gospel has been fully witnessed and the number of the elect is made up, then will Christ return.

So, in the case of the fifth seal (58) the reply to the question 'How long?' is analogous to that in Zechariah. The end will not come until the house of God has been built and every pillar and (61) every stone in it made ready (59). But there can be no harvest without prior sowing, and similarly there can be no temple without witness and mar-

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(55) Compare Zechariah 1: 11 with Haggai 1: 1-6
(56) Ephesians 2: 21 (57) 1 Peter 2: 5
(58) Revelation 6: 9-11
(59) Compare Haggai 2 with Revelation 6: 11
(61) Compare Zechariah 1: 12 with Revelation 3:12 & 6: 10

tyrdom. The number of martyrs must therefore be complete, and the existing martyrs are told (in the symbology of the passage) to rest until their number is made up. Such a process would only take a 'little season' if the work of witnessing to the rest of the world could be done quickly.

Hence, as in the case of Zechariah and the delays in the construction of the second temple, the answer to the question 'How long?' rests largely with us. Only when the white horse is allowed to carry its message to the whole world will the end come. Only when the effects of contention, heresy, apostasy and spiritual blight are nullified can the earth 'sit still and be at rest', and in such circumstances even a little season can accomplish great things. Then the work of building up the 'living temple' (56) (57) will be accomplished, and then the ever-orbiting patrols, on the lookout for an end that does not seem to-come, will stop their human efforts at anticipating the Kingdom of God.

Then only, when the number of elect has been completed, will come the real earthquake promised by Haggai, by which all things will be shaken (60) and the nations bring their wealth to the House of God, for the (61) praise of God will then have extended beyond the cherubim and the presbyters, 'to every living creature'.

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(56) Ephesians 2: 21 (57) 1 Peter 2: 5

(60) Haggai 2: 20 as an anticipation of Ezekiel 38: 19 before 40-48

(61) Compare Zechariah 1:12 with Revelation 3:12 & 6: 10

CHAPTER FOUR

A ‘HEAVENQUAKE’

Shaking Heaven and Earth: Christian Parallels: Shaking Heaven and Earth by Christian Testimony: The Great Earthquake: Christianity the Leveller: Untimely Optimism

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Shaking Heaven and Earth

The first chapter of this book discussed the Apocalypse of John in its relationship to other apocalypses. Though its style of writing is similar to that of prior Jewish and Christian apocalypses, it was intended to be an answer to them, and particularly to their false stances in anticipating the end of all things. The writers of Enoch and II Esdras had misunderstood the Old Testament, and in John’s time the Old Testament and the Olivet prophecy had been similarly misunderstood by those who thought that such prophecies contain buried ‘signs’ of the exact time of the second advent.

We have seen that the essential message of the Olivet prophecy is that the gospel of the Kingdom must be preached to the whole world before the end can come (1) but anyone casually reading the Olivet prophecy may easily think that the catalogue of wars, commotions, famines, (2) pestilences and heavenly phenomena were those signs for which the disciples could have been asking. If so, Jesus could have provided a well-timed chronological

(1) Matthew 24: 14
(2) Matthew 24: 4-8

sequence intended to show believers where they were, along a well-charted path of progress through the intervening centuries (3).

We have seen that the teaching of Jesus was different. He taught that these were events by which we may be deceived (4) though we may expect them to occur with increasing rapidity as the natural creation is (5) more heavily burdened and groans with pain because of human waywardness.

He was not asked for those 'signs' (plural) which he gave as warnings of possible deception and wrong anticipation. He was asked for a 'sign' (singular) (6). The only occasion on which the word occurs (7) later in the singular in the chapter is the 'sign' (singular) of the Son of Man in heaven, and this would be the consequence of their witness to all nations. It is not a case of 'Lo here' or 'Lo there' but the Kingdom of God is 'within' or 'among' you - it is your responsibility (8).

So, to use the words of Haggai and their New Testament counterparts 'heaven and earth' would be shaken 'yet once more' (9) or in (10) a 'little while', but this real shaking of heaven and earth would result from the prayers of the saints (11) and from their testimony, to bring the 'desirable things' of all nations to the (12) new living temple of God, the Church of Christ. Whenever the elect would abandon their task of shaking heaven and earth and resort to looking for natural and supernatural phenomena as indicators of the end,

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(3) For example, interpretations of Matthew 24: 29-30 (4) Matthew 24: 4 (5) Romans 8: 22
(6) Matthew 24: 3 (7) Matthew 24: 30
(8) Luke 17: 21 (9) Compare Haggai 2: 6 with Matthew 24: 29 & Revelation 6: 12-17
(10) Compare Haggai 2: 6 with Hebrews 12: 26 & Revelation 6: 9-11 in particular 'little while' with 'little season'
(11) Acts 4: 31
(12) Haggai 2: 7 as understood in Hebrews 12: 26

their very task would be prolonged.

This may not seem to follow, yet it is attested by history. When the Church (in whatever phase of history) has ceased to be conscious of its spiritual status as a witness to the whole of creation under an all-powerful Jesus (13) and been hoodwinked by political disturbances into thinking that its task is nearly complete, then its efforts have deteriorated and it has become ineffective.

The Olivet prophecy is similar to those parts of Haggai and Zechariah on which the Apocalypse here draws so freely. The disciples' question to Jesus reveals the error of thinking that the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem would be synchronous with the end of all things (14). Jesus' reply is effectively different. Not only has the literal temple to be destroyed (and that would happen shortly) but another temple has to be built, a new spiritual temple of believers in answer to the real conditions of Haggai's prophecy on which the literal temple has been built. Yet, even though heaven and earth are shaken (15) the Olivet prophecy cannot be fulfilled until the last stone is added to this new temple, until the last believer is added to the real House of God.

In building this new temple there are often breaches. The 'heathen' enter the sanctuary and lay spiritual Jerusalem in heaps. The tasks of building the living temple of the future and of making up God's elect are retarded, because human walls are made to take the place of the temple's more confident spiritual defences, and creeds replace the real exclusiveness of the life of Christ in us.

Such walls are for defence, yet their construction may, like all human defences, prejudice the interests of the very people they are supposed to

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(13) Matthew 28: 18-20

(14) Compare Matthew 24: 3 with Luke 21: 7

(15) Matthew 24: 14

defend. In the context of the fifth seal, the martyrs wonder whether their martyrdom had really been in vain. The cry is for retribution on all who have troubled the Church, both within and without. If Psalm 79 is exilic, as is commonly thought, the answers to the cry are similar. Haggai's answer to the cry of Psalm 79 is 'a little while' (12) while Revelation's answer to the cry of the fifth seal is 'a little season'(16).

The parallel can be pursued further. In the time of Zechariah and Haggai people were concerned about the apparent delay in rebuilding Jerusalem and its temple. Some, who had been tempted to think that Ezekiel's prophecies would be fulfilled in their days, were now inclined to blame God, because such prophecies had not been miraculously fulfilled.

Yet Haggai reminded them that the delay was their own fault. They lived in panelled (17)houses, while God's temple was in ruins. They misunderstood how much of the responsibility for rebuilding was theirs, and how much was God's responsibility. They may even have believed (18) that their own restoration to their land in the days of Darius fulfilled Ezekiel's vision of the resurrection of dry bones (19). If so, they could expect a miraculously-built temple (20) shortly, one which they could not possible build themselves. Viewing these events, they could, on the basis of their own imperfect reading of Ezekiel's prophecies, expect that fulfilled prophecies of a great conflict with all nations (21) and of a great earthquake (22) would come before the rebuilding of such a temple. On the

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(12) Haggai 2: 7 as understood in Hebrews 12: 26
(16) Revelation 6: 11 (17) Haggai 1: 4
(18) Ezekiel 37
(19) Compare Ezekiel 37 with Ezekiel 40-48
(20) Ezekiel 40: 2 (21) Ezekiel 38 & 39
(22) Ezekiel 38: 19

basis of the very order of Ezekiel's prophecies, the great war with all nations would come first, then the great shaking, then the rebuilding of the new temple. So, from a human standpoint, it was justifiable that they should live in comparative comfort, while God would prepare to shake the nations (21) then heaven and earth (22) then build the temple for them in His good time (19).

It was for Haggai to correct this mistaken view. There would be a final armed conflict between good and evil as Ezekiel had prophesied, but the most important shaking of heaven and earth, sea and dry land was not that type of earthquake. It was a shaking by public witness, so that the 'desirable things' of all nations could be brought into the temple of God. It would take a 'little while' to build (12) this temple, if the elect would pray and witness with true fervour, and as it is inconceivable that the precious gifts of all nations could be brought into a temple that had not already been built, the work should be pursued speedily, and the temple completed.

Christian Parallels

The Christian attitude is similar. It is tempting to look at Israel's last day regathering in the present century as a fulfilment of Ezekiel's 'dry-bones' prophecy (23), to believe that Ezekiel's prophecy of world-wide conflict is the only one that must be fulfilled before the second advent of Christ (24) and to think that Ezekiel's temple vision somehow indicates that temple that must be built after He comes.

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(12) Haggai 2: 7 as understood in Hebrews 12: 26
(19) Compare Ezekiel 37 with Ezekiel 40-48
(21) Ezekiel 38 & 39
(22) Ezekiel 38: 19 (23) Ezekiel 37
(24) Ezekiel ch 38 & 39

Such an interpretation of prophecy loses sight of the real interpretation of Haggai via Hebrews (12), that the real precursor to the second advent of Christ, is that shaking which must be administered by the witnessing community, in shaking heaven and earth by their witnessing so that every stone and pillar of the living temple can be fashioned when all nations bring their 'desirable things' ('desirable people') to its construction (12).

Babylon could be blamed for destroying the first temple, but only complacent Judah could be blamed for its continued desolation. The same may be said of the Church as an institution. Political elements have entered the Church and rendered parts of it ineffective (25) and its enemies have devoured large sections of it (26) but only the people of God, its own constituents, can be blamed for its continued ineffectiveness, whenever it is ineffective.

Thus, although the cry may be: 'How long?' the real answer to the question lies with the disciples of Him, who has been given all power in heaven and earth (13). Herein is the answer to the question not only in Zechariah, but also in Psalm 79. There, the desecrated temple and desolate city were initially the work of the enemy, (26) who had:

(a) allowed the people of God to be devoured by beasts; and

(b) let the dead bodies be eaten by eagles (or vultures).

These two processes depict external and internal corruption, being ravaged by beasts in accordance with the language of the fourth seal (27) and

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(12) Haggai 2: 7 as understood in Hebrews 12: 26

(13) Matthew 28: 18-20 (25) The lesson of the horsemen of the previous chapter

(26) Compare Psalm 79: 2 with 79: 12 (27) See the interpretation of the fourth seal in chapter 3

allowing oneself to become dead, to be devoured by the eagles (28). As in the case of the Apocalypse (29), the writer of the Psalm expects seven plagues (30) but they are not full answers to the question of desolation. Rather it is that the number of the elect should be made up, and that the very testifying process should be consummated (31).

Shaking Heaven and Earth by Christian Testimony

It may be doubted that the real 'shaking' previewed by Haggai (12) has anything to do with the preaching of the gospel of Christ. Such doubts may be dispelled by examining the ways in which such Old Testament prophecies are used in the New Testament.

For example, Joel wrote:

> "And the Lord shall roar from Zion,
> and utter his voice from Jerusalem;
> and the heavens and the earth shall shake"(32)and the initial context of his prophecy is linked by New Testament writers with the period after Pentecost, when the Church was especially empowered to begin its testimony to all nations (33).

In Peter's understanding, the risen Christ roars from Zion, and utters His voice from Jerusalem, where He suffered and rose again. The consequence of this message is that heaven and earth are indeed shaken, so that they yield the most desirable things (the most desirable people) of all nations, to become stones and pillars in the new living

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(12) Haggai 2: 7 as understood in Hebrews 12: 26
(28) Matthew 24: 28 in conjunction with Revelation 6: 7-8 (29) Revelation ch 15 & 16
(30) Psalm 79: 12
(31) Compare Revelation 6: 11 with Matthew 24: 14
(32) Joel 2: 28-32 compared with Joel 3: 16
(33) Acts 2: 17-21

temple. Further, heaven and earth are shaken of all those imaginary deities (34) who once seemed to occupy them. They now lose their power. Though these imaginary beings once ruled the minds of men, now they are ashamed and 'blush' (35) before the Lord who truly rules even now, over 'Zion'.

This is the only real earthquake that **must** precede the return of Christ, for it is this real shaking of all nations that causes them to yield their real wealth to become part of a new holy nation (36). Such riches are the desirable things of Haggai (36), (37) the jewels of Malachi, the present of the latter Isaiah (38) and the offering of Paul in his quotation from Isaiah (39). This earthquake of testimony has been occurring in spasms ever since John's days, but every time the real earthquake has been abandoned for watching natural and political earthquakes, the effects of the great spiritual earthquake are delayed and seem to be untimely (40).

If this is so, we may anticipate the correct interpretation of the sixth seal. If this interpretation of prophecy is correct, the sixth seal (41) will depict an **untimely** earthquake, one which seems to have all the signs of being the final earthquake before the second advent, yet on closer examination is nothing but a false alarm. If this is true, the message of the book and of the Olivet prophecy to this point, is reiterated. But is it true? The theory can only be tested by examining the details of the earthquake and comparing them

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(34) Compare Joel 3: 16 with Isaiah 2: 1-4 & 20-22
(35) Compare Isaiah 24: 21-23 with (34) supra, and Ephesians 6: 10 (36) 1 Peter 2: 2-10, compare with Haggai 2: 7
(37) Malachi 4: 2-3 (Mass text)
(38) Isaiah 66: 20-22 (39) Philippians 4: 17
(40) Compare Revelation 6: 12-17 with 7: 3
(41) Revelation 6: 12-17
with those of the Olivet prophecy.

The Great Earthquake

After the 'heavenquake' of the Olivet prophecy, God send his angels and the elect are gathered from the four winds of heaven (42), In contrast, after the 'heavenquake' of the sixth seal, the four winds of heaven are ordered not to blow on the earth, because the elect have not yet been sealed. Here again is the spirit of the true message of the prophecy. The most accommodating earthquake occurs, and it includes those signs in heaven that Jesus describes at the **end** of His Olivet prophecy. It does not appear to form part of that catalogue of events at the beginning of the prophecy, by which Jesus says, some may be deceived (43). Yet the 'heavenquake' (the shaking of heaven and earth of the sixth seal) is no more than an untimely false alarm.

The seal sequence uses material from the Olivet prophecy in a remarkable way. In the Olivet prophecy (44) great tribulation is followed by signs in heaven, then by the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, and then angels are sent to gather the elect from the four winds of heaven (42). This is an intended logical sequence. The persecuted elect are moved by great persecution to greater prayer and witness, as in the fifth seal sequence, so that heaven and earth are shaken. This shaking results in the 'ingathering' of the full elect from the four winds of heaven, for the 'desire' of all nations is brought into the House of God (45).

Note, however, that three elements of the sequence are replicated in Revelation (of which one is altered) but that one is missing completely. There is

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(42) Matthew 24. 31 (43) Matthew 24: 4-8
(44) Matthew 24: 29-30
(45) Compare Matthew 24: 31 with Haggai 2: 6-7

persecution. It is followed by a great earthquake in which heaven is shaken. But the sign of the Son of Man in heaven does not follow the 'heavenquake', and when the four winds are later described, they are restrained so that the work of ingathering does not occur. The meaning is thus clear. It is that all the signs of the Olivet prophecy could occur, but if the elect have not been sealed and its number has not been made up, the sign of the Son of Man will not occur, and Jesus will not return.

The message is clear. It is as though Jesus is saying: "When you see some worldwide catastrophe, which seems to affect heaven and earth, in which the whole order of things seems to be shaken, judgement will still not come on the world, if the world has not been suitably warned by preaching, and the number of the elect made up."

The contrast is intentional. It is intended to get across the major warning of the Olivet prophecy. At this stage, it may be useful to tabulate the major differences between the Olivet prophecy and Revelation.

Olivet Prophecy	**Revelation**
After tribulation there are signs in the sun, moon and stars. The sun is darkened and the moon does not shine (44).	After tribulation the sun becomes black and the full moon becomes blood. Yet, the sequence is untimely, for the sun and the full moon do not normally appear in the sky at the same time (46).

(44)Matthew 24: 29-30 (46) Revelation 6: 12

There is no mention of stars falling from heaven as untimely figs from a tree. Here Revelation uses a prophecy of Isaiah about the downfall of Edom (47). The fig tree parable (48) indicates greater maturity.	The reference to untimely figs is a significant one. These are winter figs. To use Jesus' parable of the fig tree, summer is very near (48) when the fig tree puts out leaves. But this sequence depicts a shower of unripe and untimely figs (49).
There is no mention of heaven being rolled together as a scroll. This is another reference from the Edom (47) prophecy, an untimely 'down-fall', for Edom survived the defeat depicted.	The figure of a scroll being rolled up is borrowed from Isaiah (47) not from the Olivet prophecy. It stands in contrast with the unrolling of the scroll by Christ (50). Instead of revelation and culmination, there is some measure of disillusionment.
The sign of the Son of Man (i. e. Christ) appears in heaven immediately after this sequence (51).	The coming of Christ is missing from the sequence. All the conditions are apparently present. But Christ does not return, for the reason given afterwards.
Immediately after the return of Christ, angels gather the elect from the four winds of heaven (42).	Angels cannot gather the elect from the four winds of heaven, because they have not yet been sealed. Their number has not yet been 'made up' (52).

These indications of untimeliness show that the purpose of the sequence is to provide warning against appearances. Even the very sign that was, on the basis of the Olivet prophecy, destined to precede the advent itself, could be a false alarm. There is an unnatural appearance of sun and 'full moon' in the sky at the same time. The stars fall

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(42) Matthew 24: 31 (47) Isaiah 34
(48) Matthew 24: 32-34 (49) Revelation 6: 13
(50) Revelation 5: 5 (51) Matthew 24: 30-31
(52) Revelation 7: 3

like untimely figs, but the fig tree has not correctly put forth even leaves; the scroll of heaven is rolled up rather than unrolled; the Son of Man does not appear, and the angels are prevented from gathering the elect because their number has not been made up.

But even this sequence does not necessarily provide us with the correct interpretation, and to do so, we must look at the symbols more carefully and see how they are used in the Old Testament. The earthquake of the sixth seal is patterned on the true earthquake, and if the spiritual counterpart of Haggai's prophecy has been correctly interpreted, the shaking of 'heaven and earth' is the Church's witness to the Living Christ. The untimely political counterpart of that real earthquake occurs at this point to teach that a premature optimism about the results could distract from the very task of shaking heaven and earth, and hinder the conditions necessary for the Second Advent.

The 'heavenquake' affects six things in nature, they are sun, moon, stars, heaven, mountains and islands. What did these six things mean to a contemporary of John? Some interpreters take sun, moon and stars to mean Israel, but such an interpretation is based on very few Old Testament precedents, such as Joseph's dream (53) and Jeremiah's prophecy (54) and it, in any case, deals with only three of the six items mentioned. The interpretation that sun, moon and stars represent political figures (e. g. governments) has even less real support from the Bible, and is again a partial explanation, for it interprets only three of the six items listed.

Christianity the Leveller

The main targets of Christianity were the imag-

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(53) Genesis 37: 9 (54) Jeremiah 31: 35

ined gods of the ancient world. The object of the Christian message was to shake such imagined deities out of their places, so that men would give real glory to Christ, and to the God of Heaven alone. Paul describes the conflict of Christian witness as a struggle, not against flesh and blood but...

> "against the principalities, against the powers,
> against the world rulers of this present darkness;
> against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (55).

To many unacquainted with the real impact of the gospel, both sun and moon seemed to have personalities which they did not possess, as did the stars of heaven, heaven itself, and those exalted parts of nature such as mountains and islands.

Thus Isaiah 2, which contains primarily a prophecy against idolatry (56) in Israel and describes idol-worship in the context of 'high mountains' and 'lofty hills' contains a description of the flight of men into caves and holes of the rocks from the terror of God, and this description is borrowed in Revelation (57).

The end of the worship of sun, moon and stars is also foretold by Isaiah in a later passage, where the imagined gods of heaven are described as being punished:

> "On that day, the Lord will punish the host of heaven, in heaven -
> **and** the kings of the earth, on earth - they will be gathered together as prisoners in a pit...
> ... then the **moon** will be ashamed, and the

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(55) Ephesians 6: 10-12
(56) Compare Isaiah 2: 20-22 with 2: 12-14
(57) Compare Isaiah 2: 18-19 with Revelation 6: 15-17

> **sun** confounded for the Lord of hosts will reign."(58)

Here the host of heaven **cannot** represent the kings of the earth, who are separately described in this passage. The kings imprison themselves in a pit, just like those of chapter 2 who enter the caves and holes of the earth and the chief men of the sixth seal. (59)

The effect of Christian testimony would be the downfall of the imagined gods of the ancient world who were all associated with the exalted things of nature. In a Graeco-Roman context, for example the sun would have been associated with Apollo, the moon with Artemis, the stars with many deities and heaven itself with Uranus. Mountains and islands were not only objects of worship, but often places of worship (compare the 'high place' worship of apostate Israel). Yet the Graeco-Roman context is a partial and deceptive one, and has resulted in a restricted and partial understanding of the prophecy. The interpretation is the obvious one, and yet the most neglected one. In the Old Testament, the words 'sun' and 'moon' occur frequently as the objects of false worship. The phrase 'host of heaven' (i. e. the stars) is similarly used. The teaching that those things that are exalted in nature represented the gods that were then thought to exist, against whom Christianity made its onslaughts was plainly accepted by the early Church in its reading of passages such as:

> 'every mountain and hill shall be made low' (60) - to prepare a highway for the progress of the Gospel.

There are not, nor have there ever been 'spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places' in the sense in which the phrase may primarily have been understood by converted pagans, but the adoration

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(58) Isaiah 24: 21-23 (59) Revelation 6: 15-17
(60) Isaiah 40: 4

of sun, moon and stars has dominated the religious cults of every nation under heaven, and every kind of evil has been associated with it. The Old Testament prophecies, such as those quoted from Isaiah, were taken to mean that the gods would lose their power, because of Christian testimony, for the bulk of people in the days of Isaiah and of John would have regarded sun, moon and stars as personalities in their own right, whether they worshipped them or not.

Every nation worshipped its sun-god and moon-god. The light of sun and moon was equated by many with the supreme light of God Himself. The perverted worship of all nations was directed to the host of heaven, and Isaiah, in the passages quoted (56) (57) (58) foresaw the time when the host of heaven would be 'ashamed' by the supreme light of Divine Truth.

It would have been tedious in Revelation to have named specifically the deities of Greece and Rome, far less those of all other nations. The names of the sun-god, Apollo, Ra, Amon, Baal, Bel-Marduk.... would have alone formed quite a catalogue. Add the names of the moon-god, the host of heaven, the sky, island - and mountain-gods and the list would have been impossibly long. Further, this chapter does not, as does Isaiah, mention those associated with oaks and trees (56), but only the exalted obstacles to the progress of the Gospel, those in the sky, and those that project towards the sky. Jesus' words (61) are even more concise, for He says that the 'powers of heaven' will be shaken. These powers are not natural phenomena (e. g. the 'order' or 'course'

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(56) Compare Isaiah 2: 20-22 with 2: 12-14
(57) Compare Isaiah 2: 18-19 with Revelation 6: 15-17 (58) Isaiah 24: 21-23
(61) Matthew 24: 29 Note particularly the use of 'dunamis' See Liddell and Scott: Greek Lexicon 1: 3 page 402

of nature). In its original context the word meant forces or armies. It is inconceivable that angelic armies should be shaken, hence the word must, using the language of Ephesians, mean those imaginary forces reputed to exist in the heavens (55), the spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places. This collection of 'powers' was the pantheistic ragbag of Greece, Rome, Egypt, Babylon and the other ancient nations. These powers would lose their control over peoples' minds because of the boldness of the Church in its preaching. They would make way for the Lamb of God to occupy heaven, and much later human scientific knowledge would reveal them to be no more than sterile masses of matter.

Thus, the 'principalities and powers', the 'powers of heaven', 'the host of heaven' would soon lose their influence. Shortly, Clement of Alexandria would be derisory in his 'Exhortation to the Gentiles' about the apparent impotence of those gods, who had once seemed to be so active.

The downfall of the exalted objects of worship is followed by the flight of the world's leading men to caves, holes and other places of refuge to hide from the 'wrath of the Lamb'. (62) Such a process does not need the return of Christ, nor does it need that final 'earthquake' that may precede His advent. In the pagan world, kings, priests, army-commanders, rich and strong... all depended on the religious cults that dictated their social standing. Examples of this principle have survived to recent years in India. In this process, it is the strong that take notice first, and then 'slaves' and 'every man' that follow suit. The gospel first influenced the influential, the term 'pagan' being

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(55) Ephesians 6: 10-12

(61) Matthew 24: 29 Note particularly the use of 'dunamis' See Liddell and Scott: Greek Lexicon 1: 3 page 402

(62) Revelation 6: 16 & 17

derived from a Latin word that originally meant a 'rustic' and therefore a non-influential person.

The basic principle underlying the sixth seal sequence is that the earthquake is untimely, premature, and therefore a 'flash in the pan'. This has been established from the data in the table earlier in this chapter. Instead of the 'real earthquake' of shaking 'heaven and earth, sea and dry land' by preaching and witnessing, there was instead a partial earthquake by which people were deceived. What is the real interpretation of this earthquake? When, if ever, did such an event occur in history?

Untimely Optimism

In reality, this partial untimely earthquake can be understood to mean **all** preaching that is **partial** in its effect from John's days to our own. Yet, the description most aptly fits the first onslaughts of Christianity in the first few centuries of our era. Christianity partially shook the ancient gods from the skies around the Mediterranean and the gospel levelled ranks, so that all trembled at the impending wrath of the Lamb, but this levelling was nothing compared with the later levelling effects of the Christian socialists and their Marxist counterparts. The great men of western Europe were asking the rocks and mountains which they had previously worshipped to hide them from the coming wrath of the lamb.

But this process was partial and was never completed. The early flame of Christian evangelism in the first few centuries of our era spread to Spain in the West and was known to have reached the East Indies in the East. In every country under the known 'heaven' Christ was preached. But political conquest was limited to Europe, and soon afterwards the Church rested on its laurels. In Graeco-Roman Europe, Zeus and Hera had been rendered impotent

after this partial conquest, but in the East the faces of Indra and Varuna were unmoved. Thus, there was no conquest of paganism. There were only a few tremors, and because of the unsatisfactory nature of the earthquake the day of the wrath of the Lamb did not then come. Thus, to use our tabular comparison of this chapter, the Son of Man did not appear in the clouds of heaven, at the point at the end of the sixth seal sequence, where one is led to expect it, and then in the seventh chapter, instead of sending His angels out to gather the elect, He halts the four winds so that the elect may be sealed, and even this sealing is restricted to comparatively few people (63).

It now seems that we may have come very near to the traditional historical exposition of Revelation, which identified the earthquake of the sixth seal with the accession of Constantine, because its most appropriate fulfilment occurred at that time. Such a view lapses from the ideal view propounded earlier, that Revelation is intended to contain lessons for the Church, rather than to be an almanack of political events. The differences between the view propounded in this chapter and the historical-ecclesiastic interpretation should now be summarised.

1) The earthquake is the shaking of Christian testimony. Any shaking which seems to witness to the whole world in fulfilment of Jesus' condition for His advent (64), but does not do so is an untimely earthquake, and partly satisfies these symbols.
2) The earthquake of the sixth seal cannot therefore be an isolated political upheaval, however great its impact. The restriction of the earthquake to the accession of Constantine and the end of

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(63) Compare Matthew 24: 31 with Revelation 7: 1-8 (64) Matthew 24: 14

pagan rule in Rome is therefore a localised and partial interpretation of the event.

3) The symbols **do** relate to the decline of paganism, but in a more general way. The symbols do not apply to pagan rulers, but all six exalted aspects of nature (sun, moon, stars, sky, hills and islands) as representing the more prominent deities of paganism.
4) In the first few centuries of our era, Christianity made great strides in witnessing to the whole world, before settling down in the West during the Middle Ages. The partial earthquake described the whole of that initial outburst of preaching, not the culmination of that period in the accession of Constantine.
5) The errors of the historical application of the sixth seal sequence to Constantine are thus that such an interpretation is partial, political and does not take full account of the victory of Christian testimony over idolatry in both Eastern and Western worlds.

Thus, the earthquake was a premature miniature of the greater glory that would come. Sun and moon will be ashamed at the greater glory of New Jerusalem, whose lamp is the Lamb of God (65) but he will not be revealed in the clouds of heaven until the witnessing process has been concluded (66).

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(65) Revelation 21: 22-23
(66) Compare Matthew 24: 14 with 24: 30

CHAPTER FIVE

THE FEW, OR THE MANY?

Restricted Viewpoints: Fresh from the Sunrising: A Parable based on Isaiah: Sealed in the Forehead: The Number of the Sealed: Imperfect Censuses: The Innumerable Company:

Restricted Viewpoints

The untimely earthquake of the sixth seal was very like the conquest of Canaan by Joshua. Trumpets brought down Jericho, (1) (2) the sun and moon stood still. Canaanite idolaters were vanquished (3) and, just like the great men of the sixth seal sequence, five (4) Canaanite kings hid themselves in a cave. Yet the events of those magnificent years were soon superseded after the death of Joshua into a period of Israelite idolatry in which there was no unifying influence, and to some extent, each tribe exhibited a parochial attitude, considering itself almost a nation apart. Thus Joshua's conquest soon appeared untimely, and was superseded by a lapse into anarchy, from which it did not wholly recover until the time of Samuel, Saul and David. Some of the events of the sixth seal sequence so aptly recapture the events of the time of Joshua that the comparison should not be disregarded. (1) (2) (3) (4). It is as though we are being told that the events following the accession of Constantine would be similar. The

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(1) Joshua 5: 16 (2) Joshua 10: 12-14
(3) Joshua 10: 15
(4) Compare Joshua 10: 16 with Revelation 6: 15-17

Church would abandon its spiritual means of witness for an involvement in politics, and lapse into a period of dissension and division similar to that of the Book of Judges. The catholic section of the Church would enter the Charybdis of politics, and occasionally be drawn in by the whirlpool of the world, while the protesting section of the Church would be shipwrecked on a Scylla-like isolationism, from which it would watch the downfall of the world in doomsday fashion, without doing too much to save it.

Thus, apparent success would be followed by set-back and dissension. Scholars have a word for the dissenting isolationism into which Israel lapsed after the early conquests of Joshua, they call the time of the judges the 'amphictyony' - a word originally used to describe federations of Greek cities around a common shrine. The analogy with the Judges period is appropriate to the early church, though religious duties were not intentionally 'shared'.

Before discussing this period of dissension, let us review the contrast between the Olivet prophecy and the seal sequence of Revelation. Unlike the Olivet prophecy, Revelation does not disclose the sign of the Son of Man in heaven after the signs in sun, moon and stars have occurred. In the Olivet prophecy, the elect are gathered from the four winds (5). These winds scattered Israel prior to the (6) time of Zechariah, and are to regather them (7), but as the New Testament uses the symbol for the gathering of all children of God (8) (whether Jew or Gentile) scattered abroad, we may expect the symbol unlike in Ezekiel (7) to refer to that gathering of all the New Israel in Christ when he appears.

But, in the different context of the Apocalypse

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(5) Matthew 24: 31 (6) Zechariah 2: 6 (7) Ezekiel 37 (8) John 11: 52

a crisis occurs. The elect cannot be gathered from the four winds, because they have not yet been sealed. Indeed, using the principle of Divine dealing with men expounded in chapter 1, God does not and will not 'hurt' mankind until the number of the elect is made up - until all are sealed. In the chapter, they have not been marked, sealed and selected. But how will this selection occur? By human means, or by Divine means? The chapter is interesting for it presents us with two differing pictures:

(a) human sectarianism, with its false accuracy in trying determine who will ultimately be saved; and
(b) the end result of the selection process, a result known to God alone.

The contrast is seen forcefully by contrasting the first part of the chapter (9) with the latter part (10). Though the first vision of the chapter seems to be methodical and orderly, it is designed, as will be shown, to betray the way in which human beings so often act, a panic series of actions in the face of an impending judgement.

Although the sealing is of God (11) for its end result is the salvation of an innumerable multitude, the process of sealing in the first part of the chapter is borrowed from Old Testament symbolism to show that questionable methods and organization often spring from the best motives.

Fresh from the Sunrising

Thus, the chapter presents us with two pictures. The first is a (9) descriptive account of the way in which those entrusted with the Gospel would try to seal the elect against that judgement of which they were only too aware. The second (10) is a

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(9) Revelation 7: 1-8 (10) Revelation 7: 9-17
(11) Revelation 7: 1-3

graphic, idealistic and ultimate picture of the true seed of Abraham, the final multitude of the redeemed, a multitude which, like the seed of Abraham, cannot be counted (12).

Let us investigate the somewhat restricted and restrictive methods of sealing used in the first part (9). It is written in the repetitive style of Jewish genealogical writing, and of the apocalyptists of John's day. The word lists of Chronicles (13), the early patriarchal genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 (14), the repetitiveness of Numbers (15) and parts of the War Scroll (16) of the Dead Sea Scrolls are similar. It is not in this repetitive monotone because some human scribe has added it. The monotone is a deliberate act of Divine inspiration, for it seeks to parody a series of exclusive Christian communities who would try to compile registers of the elect, as we shall see.

Before investigating the association of this passage with the Old Testament, and particularly with Isaiah, let us note one small association with the book of Enoch. According to Enoch, those winds that came from the sides of the earth were favourable, while those that came from the **corners** of the earth were unfavourable (17). In this chapter the angels stand on the corners of the earth, not the sides of the earth. A fifth angel comes from the sunrising (18) the direction to which the Essenes worshipped, and that to which most Church buildings would later point, and to which communities of worshippers would face. The Essenes were an exclusive community, and their exclusiveness would be carried through the Nag Hammadi literature to

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(12) Compare Revelation 7: 9 with Genesis 22: 17
(13) 1 Chronicles chs 1-9 (14) Genesis 5: 1-28 & 11: 10-30 (15) Particularly Numbers chs 1, 2, 3, 7 & 26
(16) the Qumran 'War' scroll chs 3
(17) Enoch ch 76 (18) Revelation 7: 2

Christian gnosticism, and later to monasticism, as the first protest against the Church's compromise with the world. Each protest movement would, despite the association of the passage with a literal sun-rising - take its fresh-found strength from the real sunrising, as the word 'anatole' means (19), from the resurrection of Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness (20), just as the seal sequence started with Jesus' conquest over death, prevailing to open the scroll on the Lord's day (21). It is from the 'sunrising' to the 'sunset' that God's Name will be great among the nations (22). Every fresh revival, every fresh protest against the Church's compromise with the world, would begin at the heart of the Christian Gospel, with the death and resurrection of Jesus, and while the sealing process continued, those winds associated with adverse conditions (17) would be restrained. God's final judgements on the world would be deferred.

A Parable based on Isaiah

With the assurance that the sealing process does mean the 'making up' of the number of the elect, we can now investigate the way in which the contrast in the chapter is based on a verse in Isaiah.

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(17) Enoch ch 76
(19) Revelation 7: 2
(20) Malachi 3: 16
(21) Revelation 1: 10 taken with 5: 4-5
(22) Malachi 1: 11

Isaiah	Revelation
... restore the preserved of Israel (23)	The 'sealed' are all Israelites (24)
... raise up the tribes of Jacob (23)	Twelve tribes are specifically Mentioned (25)
... my servant (23)	Servants of God (26)
... my salvation (23)	'Salvation belongs to our God' (27)
... ends of the earth (23)	Corners of the earth (28)
People who are no longer hungry and thirsty are shepherded to living fountains of water (29)	The whole passage (several verses) (29) from Isaiah is quoted with very little alteration, in Revelation (30)
The lesson of the whole passage is that the work would not be restricted to Israel, but that God's servant would be a 'light to lighten the Gentiles'(23)	The lesson of both passages taken together is that the work of salvation would not be restricted to an apparently well-defined number, but extend to an innumerable one. (31)

Given the whole impact of the message of Revelation up to this chapter, it must be concluded that, as the lessons of the book are for the Church, not for racial Israel, the whole parable based on Isaiah 49, must in this chapter be a lesson for the Church. There is no doubt of the real meaning. Just as Israel settled down to a period of introversion and internecine squabbling after the days of Joshua, so the Church would, after

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(23) Isaiah 49: 6 (24) (26) Revelation 7: 3
(25) Revelation 7: 3-8 (27) Revelation 7: 10
(28) Revelation 7: 1 (29) Isaiah 49: 9-11
(30) Revelation 7: 15-17 as a quotation from (29) above (31) Revelation 7, as a whole

its initial successes, undergo a period of anarchy, parochialism and amphictyony. The servant attempts to perform his function in restoring the New Israel (= the Church). He tries to secure a restricted community, but is told that the true Divine objective is a multitude that cannot be counted. Thus the restricted picture of the first half of the chapter is not a restriction to Israel, but a parable that the Church would restrict itself as Israel so often did, making the process of sealing into a confined conversion process, a restriction to national boundaries, a compilation of Church registers and communicants of warring churches, a false number of communicants. Thus unlike Isaiah this passage is not about the contrast between the few in Israel and a great multitude of Gentiles, even though the salvation of Gentiles is the objective and the phrase 'light to lighten the Gentiles' (23) in Isaiah is well associated with the sunrising or 'dayspring' of (32) this passage, in the songs of Zechariah and Simeon in Luke (33).

In this case the contrast is between the restrictiveness of the Church, in its narrow sectarian numbering of the redeemed, and the innumerable multitude that would ultimately be saved. It tells us that after the initial Joshua-like earthquake of conquest, the Church would settle down to a period of introversion in which sectarian tribal divisions would supersede its commitment to testify to the world.

Sealed in the Forehead

The process of sealing in the forehead draws on two important Old Testament references. In Exodus,

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(23) Isaiah 49: 6
(32) Revelation 7 as a whole
(33) Compare Luke 1: 78 with 2: 32

at the time of leaving Egypt, there was a sprinkling of doorposts, so that each family may be preserved. The importance of the ritual is that protection was confined to each family, to those that were within a particular house (34). This first reference is important because it forms the basis of another protective ritual mentioned by Ezekiel (35). As in the case of the passover ritual there is here also a destroying angel, but in this case, each individual is sealed or 'marked' by one having a writer's inkhorn. Six executioners were commissioned to destroy the inhabitants of Jerusalem, but before they were able to do so, a seventh person, clothed in linen, was sent through the city with an inkhorn to place a 'mark' on the foreheads of those who were destined to escape the punishment. In archaic Hebrew the letter 'tau' meaning 'mark' took the form of a cross. This cross was to be written on the foreheads of those who sighed over the abominations committed in Jerusalem (36). A first reaction in comparison between Israel and the church would be to identify these with those 'sectarians' who sighed because of the 'abominations' committed in the main body of the Church in each of its lapses into apostasy.

However, the interpretation is not as easy as that. The sealing of the forehead formed the basis of a Christian practice of identification with Christ. In New Testament times it was identified with the baptism of the Holy Spirit (37) which followed immersion in water and was, in the first instance, demonstrated by the appearance of tongues of fire on the heads of the early apostles. In later times, water immersion was followed by effusion, the pouring of oil on the forehead of the believer to signify the invisible baptism of the

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(34) Exodus 12: 21-27 (35) Ezekiel 9: 1-4
(36) Ezekiel 9: 4
(37) Compare Ephesians 1: 13 with Acts 2: 3

Holy Spirit that had taken place. Human practice soon whittled down the baptismal process, however, and within a few centuries the western church had begun to adopt 'christening', the sprinkling or marking of a cross upon the forehead in place of the full baptismal process.

The vision is objective and descriptive. It describes and hints at what would happen in the churches, without condemning or commending the process. The seal of God is introduced in the first place, and this clearly represents the true baptism of the Holy Spirit. But what follows is different. It is, as we shall see, an almost mechanical process of application to the forehead without even confirming whether (as in the case of Ezekiel) the seal is actually being administered to those who really sigh about the Church's lapses into back-sliding.

Thus, the reference to being 'sealed in the forehead' is almost a hint at double-entendre. It is, at face value, the teaching that all who will be saved must be sealed by the Holy Spirit, but it is more profoundly a hint that the whole teaching of selection through baptism would be diluted to become a mechanistic process, whereby for example, some early Calvinists were reputed to have believed that infant-christening marked predestination to salvation irrespective of the types of sins committed afterwards. The contrast between the human association of the forehead with 'baptism' and the original act of baptism (a complete wash-ing) is also in the contrast between the sequences. The numbered 'redeemed' of the first half of the chapter are sealed in the **forehead**, but the un-numbered redeemed of the second half of the chapter have **washed** their robes in the blood of the Lamb, and made them white. (38)

The interpretation of the chapter is now becom-

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(38) Revelation 7: 14

ing clearer. After the initial onslaughts against paganism, the Church, the new Israel lapses into a period of introversion, an amphictyony of 'tribes' (or parochial units) as in the days of the Judges. There is realization that optimism about total conquest was false, and there is disillusionment. Such a large number has to be made up, and these must be sealed with the real seal of God, their hearts must be won by the Spirit of God - the true seal upon the forehead. The instruction is a true and faithful one, but the method in which it is implemented becomes literalistic and mechanistic. The true seal of God is invisible, but here is a visible sealing of the forehead, the Church's alteration of the rite of baptism is anticipated.

Such an interpretation seems credible, but there are still gaps to be filled. Before examining the apparently weak points in the proof of this hypothesis, it is worth observing that in the Apocalypse, sealing is almost a contrast of unsealing.

'Unsealing' involves opening the scroll and reading the gospel message to the world, whereas 'sealing up', means confining the message to an individual, in this case to those localised communities that carried on a restrictive mission of sealing to attempt, in a very small way, to make up the number of the elect. Thus, unsealing the scroll and sealing the elect are parts of the same process, but contrast with each other not only because the one process is verbally the negative of the other, but because one process means the propagation of the gospel, whereas the other means the preservation of it.

The Number of the Sealed

The number 144,000 (39) seems at first glance to be a large number, but is, in fact, very small. The

(39) Revelation 7: 4

populations of the smallest boroughs of Greater London, Kingston-on-Thames and Richmond, have been approximately 140, 000 during the past decade. This number cannot literally represent the total number of the redeemed, for as the chapter later states, that number is so great that it cannot be counted. Truly, there are few that be saved, but God's grace is not restricted by the weakness of man. His ways are not our ways, nor His thoughts our thoughts, (40) and indeed the total number of the redeemed is as sand on the seashore and as the stars of heaven for multitude (41).

To say, as some have, that the number is a literal number of Jewish redeemed - as contrasted with that of Gentiles (41) is to do disservice to the work of the Israelite community for fifteen centuries throughout Old Testament times -as custodians of the oracles of God. Further, the list of sealed omits the tribe of Dan, and if it is an ultimate literal list of Jewish redeemed, it presupposes that no Danite will ultimately be saved. The writer of Hebrews cites Samson as an example of faith (42). Samson was a Danite (43). His inclusion in the list of faithful does not necessarily imply a belief in his ultimate salvation, but there is, nevertheless some tension, if not contradiction, between believing that a list that omits the tribe of Dan is a list of those Israelites who will ultimately be saved, and believing that Samson, a Danite, will be saved.

A further attempt at identifying the 144, 000 with a literal number of 'literal' Jews confines the number to the first century, or to the time preceding the return of Christ, depending on whether the school of exposition is Praeterist or futurist, as explained in chapter 1 of this book. Neither view

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(40) Isaiah 55: 8

(41) Compare Revelation 7: 9 with Genesis 22: 17

(42) Hebrews 11: 32-38 (43) Judges 13: 2

is satisfactory. There were many more than 144, 000 Israelites in the Church of the first century. Three thousand were baptised at Pentecost in one day, and at a time when the Church had scarcely commenced its mission (44). The number is thus too small for the first century. Any application of the sequence to the last days, that is, to the time before the Second Advent, is contradicted by the fact that no Jew, at the present time can identify successfully with any one of the twelve tribes.

Finally, the number 144, 000 is not explained simply by saying that the number is a symbolic term for the elect, and that 'a multitude that no man can number' is its literal meaning. The relationship between the two sections (halves) of the chapter is one of contrast, not of comparison, as evidenced from the comparison with Isaiah.

We have looked at these unsatisfactory alternatives, and concluded that the number 144, 000 is evidently a symbolic round number, but symbolic of smallness rather than of largeness, and that the Israel of the passage is also symbolic, and intended to be contrasted with the universal picture of the redeemed that follows, again in its restrictiveness. It is now necessary to ask why **the** number 144, 000 is used.

This involves examining the problems of the passage, which can be summarised thus.

1) The instruction includes the sealing of the 'servants of God' yet the sealing is confined, not simply to Israel, but to a portion of Israel, excluding one of its tribes.
2) The tribe of Dan is omitted, for no apparent reason.
3) Unless 'Joseph' is taken to mean 'Ephraim', the tribe of Manasseh, one of the sons of Joseph is double-counted.

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(44) Acts 2: 41

4) No reason is given for the number 144, 000. It does not occur in the Old Testament, though the number 12, 000 does.
5) The order of tribes does not agree with any known order.

The first problem has been partially answered by suggesting that the passage depicts human attempts to carry out a divine instruction in a restricted community (the Church = the new Israel) without going to the whole world. The omission of the tribe of Dan, the double-counting of the tribe of Manasseh and the lack of order among the tribes can also be explained by saying that these 'errors' are deliberate, that the Spirit is depicting in advance the clumsiness of human pre-conceptions about salvation, and winning people to it, even though the number 144, 000 seems, at first glance, to be a good, solid 'divine' round number.

With tentative solutions to problems 1, 2, 3 and 5 of the above list, let us turn to problem 4, and follow the clue that has been provided, that though the Old Testament does not contain the number 144, 000, it does contain the number 12, 000.

In the last of Moses' battles 12, 000 are chosen, 1, 000 from each tribe to bring retribution on Midian. (45) God did **not** select this number: it was a human selection. He had, instead, previously instructed (46) Moses to number all Israel who could go to war.

Moses had, in compliance with this other command, numbered a much larger community of 601, 730. Nevertheless, even though the selection of 12, 000 was that for which Moses was alone responsible, God blesses the choice in retrospect, and not a single man of Israel perished. All escaped unharmed.

The arbitrary **human** selection of 1, 000 from each tribe was typical of most human administrative

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(45) Numbers 31: 1-5 (46) Numbers 26: 51

decisions. No account was taken of the differences of size between one tribe and another, and of the fact (47) that God had instructed Moses to take such tribal size differences into consideration. The lesson of the incident can be transposed into our interpretation of the sealing process. It is that as God blessed the war with Midian despite Moses' arbitrariness in selecting troops, and not a man was ultimately lost - so in the greater war with a new Midian, an insidious influence which would penetrate the Church (48) the methods would again be arbitrary, with an appearance of perfection, but ultimately none would be lost. The end-product of the imperfect process would ultimately be entirely satisfactory.

This lesson that all will ultimately be well, despite the use of human methods, is an encouraging one. It is reminiscent of Hezekiah's passover which was not ineffective even though (i) it was celebrated at the wrong time; and (ii) some of the people had not ritually cleansed themselves (49). God's grace makes up for human weaknesses, and often for failure to comply with His requirements.

However, there is a difference between the Numbers and Revelation numberings. In the former case it is 12, 000 out of all Israel - 1000 from each tribe; whereas in the latter it is 144, 000 from Israel, 12, 000 from each of the tribes included. This is an essential part of the parody. It anticipates a time in Church history when each 'tribe' or institutional division of the Church, would regard itself as Israel in its own right, fully believing that the whole of spiritual Israel would be found among its own ranks, and having only some occasional charitable feelings towards its 'separated brethren'. Not that - to use a sim-

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(47) Compare Numbers 26: 1-51 with vv. 52-56
(48) Revelation 2: 14
(49) 2 Chronicles 30: 13 & 18-19

plification - in reformation times Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox churches necessarily regarded the constituents of each of the two other classifications as beyond the pale of salvation. Yet, in mediaeval times each of the Church's major and minor subdivisions tended to regard itself as the Israel of God, providing the whole of '12, 000' to use the analogy from Numbers. It is logical therefore that in this account, there is an inward-looking 'tribalism' of the churches' views of salvation, a tribalism within a tribalism, almost a true counterpart of Israel in the days of Judges. Each community contained '12, 000' arbitrarily-selected components, and each believed itself (though only a tribe in Israel) to contain the whole of the arbitrary '12, 000', sealed to fight against the spiritual Midian, that was inevitably to be found outside its own ranks!

In the twentieth century one community, the Jehovah's Witnesses, has gone further in its sectarianism and actually assumed a 'register' of the 144, 000 of this chapter largely from its own ranks. This is the ultimate warning of the chapter. There can be no better caricature than is here provided, of self-isolated Christian churches, each considering itself to be the sole successor of the original apostolic Church, each maintaining to be the only church capable of providing Israel's '12,000' required to battle against Midian - yet each institutional church being in reality only one 'tribe' in a human version of the true Israel of God. It is thus logical that the only appropriate number the Revelation could use - based on the Numbers analogy, is the number 144, 000 (i. e. '12' distinct tribes of '12, 000' each).

Imperfect Censuses

It has already been seen that the sealing of this chapter is to some extent based on the census

of Moses. God had told Moses to number all those in Israel aged over 20 who could be enlisted for military service (50). Of the total number of 601, 730 Moses only used 12, 000. Though there was dissimilarity in the numbers of each tribe (47) the same number was taken from each tribe, even though there was a commandment that tribal sizes be taken into account (47). Moses was not ordered to number Levite children 'from one month old and upward', for it was a Divine principle that Israel as a whole should not be numbered. Yet, he numbered Levite children, even though there was no numbering of the children of other tribes (51). This is an arbitrariness and inconsistency about numbering non-Levite adults, and yet numbering all Levites whether adult or not. This inconsistency and arbitrariness is so typical of all human censuses. The practical application of the instructions to 'seal the servants of God' are similar. The result is an imperfect census, so typical of all human attempts to number the innumerable.

In the light of the conclusion that problems 1-5 in the previous section arose largely because the vision depicts human attempts to carry out a Divine instruction, we can turn in particular to problems 2 and 5, the omission of the tribe of Dan, and the jumbled order of the tribes.

The omission of Dan makes the number an imperfect one. It is necessarily imperfect because if 12, 000 from Dan had been included, the number would at least have been 156, 000. There was no command to exclude Dan. The repetitive list of those sealed is **interrupted** suddenly and the vision of the innumerable company is seen instead (52). First century believers may have thought differently. There was a prevailing belief that Dan was the real

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(47) Compare Numbers 26: 1-51 with vv. 52-56
(50) Numbers 26: 1-2 (51) Numbers 26: 62
(52) Revelation 7: 5-8

source of Israel's backsliding (53) and some of the early Christian fathers even thought that antichrist would spring from the tribe of Dan (54). Yet the source of this viewpoint is not scriptural. It comes from those apocalypses that were mentioned in the first chapter. If the Apocalypse of John is intended to answer the attitudes of other apocalypses while reflecting their symbolism, it is logical that the most despised tribe in Israel should be left until last, and as the sealing process is incomplete when the vision suddenly changes, the sealing of Dan appears to have been humanly overlooked.

At every time in Church history there has been a 'tribe of Dan' somewhere at the fringes of Christian church and beyond present concern. God does not overlook such sets of people, of whom the bulk of Christian opinion may be less than patronising. Though 'judged' unworthy by their fellows, they are truly 'Dan' the judge, and their ultimate sealing is the criterion (or standard of judgement) for the time of God's judgement and the judgement of the world, for when the fringes are redeemed the number of the elect will truly be made up. It is as though from the unpromising despised Dan come all the remaining constituents of the innumerable multitude of the following vision. Far from following the opinion of Jewish tradition, echoed by Irenaeus and Hippolytus, that tribe of Dan was antichrist, the vision seems to suggest by indicating, that human 'sealing' had not 'got round' to Dan - that from the standpoint of the nearness of the Second Advent, the most despised sections of the Church, the 'Dan' of the New Israel, is the most important tribe of all!

The omission of Dan raises the phenomenon of a

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(53) The Testament of Dan 5: 6 & 7

(54) See particularly: Irenaeus 5: 30, 2 (cited by Jerome) Hippolytus: De Antichristo 14

'missing tribe' in a census. This is reminiscent of David's imperfect census at the end of his reign, to which we shall shortly turn. To do so, let us consider the other difficult problem, the apparent jumble in the order of the twelve tribes that are actually mentioned.

It is, of course, easy to explain Judah's position at the beginning of (55) the list, for the birthright finally devolved on Judah. The mention of Joseph and Manasseh (effectively double-counting) can be explained if Joseph is taken to mean Ephraim, and the double-count can be explained because the blessing devolved on Joseph, though one would expect Ephraim to be specifically mentioned because Joseph's birthright devolved on (56) Ephraim, not Manasseh, and it is Manasseh, not Ephraim who may be double-counted. But this does not explain the apparent disarray in order of names.

Expositors' attempts to explain the jumble have been many and ingenious. Grotius is reputed to have stated that "Nullus servatur ordo, quia omnes in Christo pares". It is true that there is equality in Christ, thus there is logic in jumbling up the Church's 'tribes' to show that order no longer matters. But such a jumble does not explain this particular order of tribes. On the other hand, R. H. Charles in his (57) two-volume commentary on the Apocalypse, alleges that the order has arisen from copying and restores what he imagines to be the correct original order by a simple inversion. If the four tribes which follow Gad are transposed (including Gad) to the end of the sequence, the

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(55) Genesis 49: 8-12 (56) Genesis 48: 8-22

(57) R. H. Charles: Revelation (International Critical Commentary) pages 207 & 208 with particular reference to his expansion of Buchanan Gray (Encyclopaedia Biblica 4:5208 ff)

list becomes:

Judah, Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, Benjamin, Gad, Asher, Naphtali and Manasseh.

Such a list is not very different from the birth-order of the sons of Jacob, with Judah transposed to his primary position, and Manasseh as grandson, appearing last. The chief reason for not believing the jumble to result from a simple copying error, is that there is no evidence in any extant manuscript that such an error ever occurred. Thus the transposition commencing with Gad is a deliberate one, and it is to Gad that we must turn to find an explanation of it, bearing in mind that the transposition is not a copyist's error but a deliberate inversion, intended to make the otherwise orderly list of names look like a jumbled sequence, and to draw attention to the first of the four names, transposed, to the otherwise unimportant tribe of Gad.

Gad meant 'fortune' or 'luck', the very word was associated in Hebrew with randomness or chance. The apparently orderly sequence has already been proved to contain a measure of randomness, if not haphazardness. Christendom, the new 'Israel', like its earlier counterpart, would not be forsaken despite its backsliding. It too would be a collection of 'tribes' sealed in the forehead, and even turn to model its rite of baptism, not on the Biblical commandment to 'wash' by immersion, but on a 'literal' sealing in the forehead, anticipated both by Ezekiel's account of the marking of a cross with a writer's pen and inkhorn, and by the sealing process depicted in this chapter. The Revelation passage is, of course, no precedent for the rite of christening - it is simply an objective description of the way things would develop.

But Gad has a further association with the Old Testament - with the only other important census in the Old Testament, recorded by the writers of

Samuel and Chronicles (58)(59). Like this numbering process, David's census was also an 'ad hoc', imperfect, arbitrary one, and as the numbering does not in this case get round to include the tribe of Dan, so in David's case the tribes of Levi and Benjamin were both omitted.

The lesson of David's census is the same as that in this chapter. God's people cannot be numbered, and human attempts to register or 'seal' them in some artificial way inevitably fail. Gad, the eleventh tribe, is deliberately lifted in the list, to become the third tribe, to highlight the comparison between Moses's action and David's action in trying to number the innumerable Israel. Gad was, of course, also the name of the prophet sent to David in that untimely census, to tell the King of the error and the consequences of his action.

There is thus only one satisfactory explanation of the first half of chapter 7. The picture is one of a human attempt to comply with a Divine commandment. Instead of sealing all that will be saved, the sealing is confined to a restricted series of communities, each of whom considers itself to be the new Israel in its own right, and salvation appears as a mechanistic process of enrolment on the registers of a particular church. But such registration is imperfect, just like the censuses of Moses and David. An essential tribe may be omitted, and though the number appears to be perfect it is both incomplete and inadequate to describe that ultimate number of the redeemed, that multitude which no man can number.

The Innumerable Company

This caricature of the way in which the Church would use the methods of Qumran, to register the process of conversion, to identify membership of

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(58) 2 Samuel 24 (59) 1 Chronicles 21

human institutions with the real membership of the ultimate redeemed is an unfinished caricature. It is as though the sealing of the twelfth tribe is followed by an ellipsis.... The second half of the chapter bursts in on the unfinished first half. While John was waiting for the sealing of the tribe of Dan, the 'thirteenth tribe', the vision of the innumerable company bursts upon his mind.

There is no blind sectarianism, no parochial tribalism now, even though each witnessing remnant has played a vital role in the history of the Church. Instead the curtains of ignorance are removed, the blindfold has gone, and before the throne appears the countless multitude that is the true 'seed of Abraham'. The figure 'a multitude which no man can number' is a quotation from the promises to Abraham (60). The vision uses elements of Ezekiel 37, the prophecy of resurrection of dry bones. Though the 'dry bones' prophecy was intended to be a picture of a (61) political revival of Israel as, for example, in the present century, the early Church identified it with the spiritual regeneration of the new Israel, from men 'dead in trespasses and sins' (62), given life by the Holy Spirit of God (63), brought together by the four winds (64) and among whom God in Christ would finally tabernacle (65). The true Israel, the ultimate Church, is thus seen to be the real fulfilment of Ezekiel's 'dry bones' prophecy. This is thus a picture of **ultimate** spiritual regeneration and revival for the redeemed.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem and performed the first of a series of functions that would end at

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(60) Compare Revelation 7: 9 with Genesis 22: 17
(61) Ezekiel 37 (62) Compare Ephesians 2: 1 with Ezekiel 37: 3 (63) Compare Ephesians 1: 13 with Ezekiel 37: 9 (64) Compare Matthew 24: 31 with Revelation 7: 1 with Ezekiel 37: 9
(65) Compare Revelation 7: 15 with Ezekiel 37:26-27

Calvary, the multitude of disciples cried: "Hosanna", meaning 'save now', expecting that His Kingdom would have come at that time (66). In this case 'Salvation to our God' more correctly can be taken to mean 'Salvation belongs to our God'. Though it is a variant of that cry on the Sunday before crucifixion, it means that the elect now recognise fully that the real prerogative, to save or not to save, does not rest with any human branding, but with God alone, Who by various means will save all whom He desires to save.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem before the first palm-bearing company the message was that God would not confine Himself to the elite in Israel, but would perfect praise from the mouths of babes and sucklings (67). Conversely, in this case the message is that God does not confine Himself to some human version of the 'Israel of God', some institution, some church, but saves whom He will.

In this vision also, there are not only the palms of that entry into Jerusalem, there are also the white robes, requested by the persecuted of the fifth seal (68). The elect have now put on the robes that were given to them during that seal sequence. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem, people cast their old clothes beneath His feet. They now have new, white robes, fashioned on His righteousness. It is a presbyter, an elder of the new Church, those points out the distinction between the washing of these robes in the blood of the Lamb, and the sprinkling of blood that sanctified the robes of Levites (69). The robes of priests of the Old Testament who served God by 24 alternating courses sanctified their robes by sprinkling with blood. These who serve God 'day and night in His temple' cannot be satisfied with a partial sprinkling.

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(66) Matthew 21: 9 contrast with Revelation 7: 10
(67) Matthew 21: 16 as a quotation from Psalm 8: 2
(68) Compare Revelation 6: 11 with 7: 17

They, who are not solely of Levite, or of Israelite origin, but priests taken from all nations, would serve God perpetually in His temple.

The emphasis in Ezekiel 37 is also on the unity of the new Israel. No longer now are they a divided nation, not even in two divisions as in Ezekiel 37. Instead of a tribal amphictyony there is one nation and 'David' is to be their shepherd (70). The pattern of this prophecy is also apparent from a careful reading of this vision, for though in Ezekiel's case the contrast is between two branches and one nation (71) and in the case of the Apocalypse the contrast is between twelve 'tribes' and one large company under one shepherd (72), the contrast is, in fact, an echo of Ezekiel. The lesson is that ultimately the apparent divisions in the community of Christ no longer matter - that all become one under the Good Shepherd. This is not the only lesson of the comparison between the two passages. In both cases, the redeemed multitude pass through tribulation. In Ezekiel this tribulation was (73) among the nations, while in Revelation it is the 'great tribulation' (74). The contrast is that, as Isaiah hints, in the parallel studied earlier, the 'great multitude' is not confined to Israel, nor even to some structured 'new Israel' thought to be the Church. Those who have endured the hunger and thirst for spiritual things evoked by the events of the third seal are now led to 'living waters'

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(69) Contrast Exodus 29: 21 and Hebrews 9: 22 with Revelation 7: 13-17
(70) Compare Ezekiel 37: 24 with the use of shepherd in Revelation 7: 17
(71) Ezekiel 37: 16-17
(72) Compare Ezekiel 37: 24 with Revelation 7: 17
(73) Compare Ezekiel 37: 21-23 with v. 26 and ch 36: 18-19
(74) Revelation 7: 14

(75), and in the earlier Isaiah quotation, the words 'he who has pity on them' are replaced by the 'Lamb', the 'arnion', the prominent ram, that, wearing a bell around its neck is used to 'shepherd' the remainder of the flock.

The final, and the broadest lesson of the whole chapter is that both few and many are necessary in the purpose of God. The 'few' are like that servant in Isaiah's servant songs, who suffers for the great (76) multitude. Truth is often kept alive by those who appear to be sectarians and heretics, who cannot compromise their position. They are like the faithful remnant of Elijah's day. They seem to be alone, but 7,000 have not bowed the knee to Baal (77). In contrast, the 'many' are not forsaken entirely, just as Israel was not forsaken as a nation, despite its abominable practices of the days of Judges, and the time of Manasseh. Christian backsliding is a hazard, as was Israel's backslidings. The dangers of such backslidings are even greater (78). The consequences could be far more terrible. But this does not detract from the fact that the ultimate elect will be a multitude that no man can number, and that the constituents of that multitude may be drawn from many bodies of people, who in history were in a state of non-communication with each other.

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(75) Isaiah 55: 2-3. Compare with Ezekiel 36: 25 and Revelation 7: 17 and with Isaiah 49: 9-10
(76) Isaiah 49: 6 compare 52: 13-53 end
(77) 1 Kings 19: 18 (78) Hebrews 2: 1 ff

CHAPTER SIX

PUNISHING THE HOST OF HEAVEN

A Half-Hour Silence; A Return to Sinai: The Trumpet Sequence and Mount Sinai: The First Trumpet-Blast: The Second Trumpet-Blast: The Third Trumpet-Blast: The Fourth Trumpet-Blast: The Four Trumpet-Blasts in Historical Context

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A Half-Hour Silence

Correctly interpreted, the Olivet prophecy states that the only real 'earthquake' or 'shaking of heaven and earth' necessary before the Second Advent, is the earthquake of Christian testimony, using the weapons of that warfare that is mighty to God in pulling down strongholds (1). By such weapons, the Lord would, in Isaiah's language, 'punish the host of heaven' (2), and bring down the imagined gods of the ancient world, including every 'high thing' that exalts itself against the knowledge of God (1). Compared with this ultimate shaking, that of the sixth seal sequence was a partial and untimely fulfilment, limited to the 'high things' (sun, moon, stars, sky, mountain and islands) but not obliterating any of the deities associated with these.

From the vision of ultimate, redemption, the prophecy has to lapse back into the conditions of the partial earthquake and the incomplete number of those that were sealed. The seventh seal is opened and there is silence in heaven (3).

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(1) 2 Corinthians 10: 4-5 (2) Isaiah 24: 21-23
(3) Revelation 8: 1

This is quite unexpected. The scroll can surely now be opened. The Word is now available to large numbers of people. Christianity is no longer an underground movement, but established as the State religion in some of the Western world. The message is clear. Even if the obstacles to unrolling the scroll are taken away (i.e. the seals are broken) it does not follow that the scroll will be opened. Instead of the great wave of testimony that one would expect when Christianity became prominent as a State religion, there was silence in heaven. Heaven was not being shaken, as it should have been.

The silence stresses the untimely and partial nature of the earthquake. It sketches the differences between the 'few' that are sealed and the great multitude of those who are to be redeemed. It is as though the Church is so overcome by its success, that there is shock, and this shock enforces an unmerited 'sabbath' of rest.

The silence is not only an anticlimax to the noise of the sixth seal. It is a penetratingly long one. Expositors of the historical school often tried to calculate an 'historical' equivalent of (4) the 'half-an-hour' - perhaps 15 years after the accession of Constantine. But the time period was never intended to be symbolic. It is the long period of apparent inertia, through which John patiently waited for the trumpets to sound. If the book of Revelation took only a few hours to communicate, the period of half-an-hour would have been long - and seemed even longer.

The phrase 'silence in heaven' has a double meaning.. It is not simply that the 'prior' heaven (i.e. the sky) had been rolled up like a scroll (5) or that the unsealed scroll (6) should have been read, but was still rolled up (i.e. unopened).

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(4) Newton: Dissertation on the Prophecies (p. 475)
(5) Revelation 6: 14 (6) Revelation 8: 1

This would simply have meant a silence in testimony against the prior heavens of the world, and against the 'exalted imaginations' that still needed to be taken away before the knowledge of Christ.

There is a second meaning. The word 'heaven' may refer to that in which the door was previously opened (7). If so, 'heaven' can be taken to mean 'revelation' and a silent heaven can mean absence of revelation (8). Can this process also be historically identified? In the first few centuries the Gospel warred against the 'high imaginations' of the ancient world by its testimony. Finally, it was able to enter politics and use the methods of politicians, and its weapons became those of worldly conquest. Already, by spiritual weapons it had reached the whole known world (9). Its entry into the politics of the fourth century West seemed to be its final thrust. But it was the reverse. Its spiritual momentum would be reduced, and its powerful impact on the pool of humanity would produce weaker, and less formidable ripples.

The position may be summarised by saying that the Church abandoned much of its spiritual power for human and political methods. The charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit were endowed richly in the first century, but the Church was warned that they could be neglected (10), despised (11) and even 'quenched' (12). The miraculous powers of the Holy Spirit were never **'withdrawn' from** the Church, but they were, in a large measure **abandoned by** the Church.

There is an analogy with Israel at Kadesh-Barnea. The forty years of Israel's wandering in the wilderness were not fully necessary. They

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(7) Revelation 4: 1 (8) John 1: 51
(9) Romans 10: 18 & 16: 26 (10) 1 Timothy 4: 14
(11) 1 Thessalonians 5: 20
(12) 1 Thessalonians 5: 19

occurred because of disbelief in God's ability to conquer Canaan at the time of Kadesh Barnea, the commencement of that period. When they finally entered the land of Canaan forty years later at the time of Joshua, there was not the immediate conquest that had been promised in God's strength at Kadesh Barnea, but a tedious task that was not completed until the time of David and Solomon. Similarly the Church abandoned its early optimistic belief in miraculous powers and possession of them, for 'human' conquest that became more political as its momentum increased. The sound of the Gospel went to the ends of the earth (13) but the summit of world-testimony seemed to recede as the climb progressed.

Within the new Israel, a new Judaism was generated. The temple had been destroyed in part-fulfilment of the Olivet prophecy, and some had even identified the 'great earthquake' promised in the Olivet prophecy with the dismemberment of the very stones of the Jerusalem temple by the Romans in A. D. 70 (14). But the slaughtered phoenix of Jewish militancy, ritualism and sectarian selectiveness was already being resurrected within the Church. As Judaism had its hierarchy of angels, and its organised priesthood to stand between man and God, so a new ecclesiastical counterpart would create a pattern of saints and priesthood, and there would be in every mediaeval church counterparts of the Old Covenant distinction between holy and most holy.

Thus, there were three senses in which heaven became silent.

1) The Church neglected its original rich endowment of the Holy Spirit, 'neglecting'

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(13) Romans 10: 18 & 16: 26 in part-fulfilment of Matthew 24: 14

(14) Luke 21: 5, 6

(10); 'despising' (11) and 'quenching' (12) that miraculous spiritual armour with which it was equipped to fight the imagined gods of that age.

2) There was not only 'silence in heaven' in the sense of 'absence' of revelation, but in recognition of the limited nature of that earlier earthquake, that had seemed to be so successful at the time. The silence was thus a shocked anticlimax.

3) Taking both 1 and 2 together, and accepting that the Word of the Gospel was unsealed but still rolled up, and that the 'heaven' of pagan imagination had also now become rolled up, the silence is also a shaky silence. It is one that has no confidence in the imagined pagan heavens that have gone, nor in the earthquake, wind and fire that have removed them, but still awaits, as Elijah did - the 'still small voice of God' (15).

A Return to Sinai

As an institution, the Church had not been taught that the prevalence of the 'still small voice' of Christ's testimony is more important than the earthquake, wind and fire imagined to be signs of the nearness of the Advent. To be taught the lesson, Elijah went to Horeb - to Sinai the mount of God. The Church also, as hinted in the previous section, lapsed into an imitation of the methods of Judaism before it, it replaced the grace of Mount Zion with the tactics of Sinai (16).

The trumpets expand this theme. Whereas the seal-sequence showed that the Church would to some ex-

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(10) 1 Timothy 4: 14 (11) 1 Thessalonians 5: 20
(12) 1 Thessalonians 5: 19 (15) 1 Kings 19: 11-12
(16) Galatians 4: 21-31 and Hebrews 12: 18-29

tent abandon the arrowless bow, the Spirit of Grace, for political means of conquest with Christ's Gospel, the trumpet sequence shows how that change would come about - how conversion to professed Christianity would result often from fear rather than from love.

The Church had applied the words of Joel: "the Lord also shall roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem, and heaven and earth shall shake".... (17) to its own preaching at Pentecost and thereafter, and nations were flowing to this new spiritual Zion, turning from idols to Christ (18) - but now the rumblings of Sinai were replacing the welcome of Zion, and political compulsion was often replacing freewill.

The Trumpet Sequence and Mount Sinai

As the seal sequence demonstrates how obstacles would be overcome in the preaching of the Gospel of Christ, the message of the Scroll, to the world, so the trumpet sequence indicates the consequences that would follow when the sound of the gospel would be proclaimed to the world - and the comparative silence that followed the seal sequence would be broken.

Yet, the imagery of the previous section seems to lead us back to Sinai, rather than to Mount Zion. It is not that the message of the Gospel would be that of Judaism, but that the institutional churches, now powerful, would lapse often into the methods and tactics of the Old Testament, and motivate people by means of fear rather than by means of love. The warning that such methods would be used occurs many times in the book of Revelation.

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(17) Compare Peter's use of Joel 2: 28-32 (Acts 2: 16-21) with Joel 3: 16

(18) Compare Joel 3:16 with Isaiah 2:2-5 and v. 20

Notice the necessary prelude to the trumpet sequence. The saints' prayers are now mingled with incense (19). This is the reason for the phrase in Revelation 8 (20):

> "thunder, voices, lightnings and an earthquake"....

which is a replica of the description of mount Sinai in the Old Testament (21). The new Israel had come to Mount Sinai in a different sense than the old Israel. It would shortly use the methods of Judaism instead of those of the earlier Christian martyrs. It would use the methods of politics, warfare and intimidation to carry its message to the rest of the world, and in so doing, it would render that message less effective.

Joel had written that after God had:

> 'poured', His, 'spirit on all flesh'(22) there would be signs in heaven, but afterwards: 'blood, fire and pillars of smoke'(23).

Peter had applied the first of these statements to Pentecost (24). It is as though the latter would undesirably yet necessarily follow, as Jesus had said that He had not come to bring peace but a sword (25). This lapse from the methods of Christ to the methods of the earlier times, and of Judaism, is stressed in the prophecy of the two witnesses (26). To be sure that there is a comparison with Sinai let us examine some of the similarities between the warnings of the letter to the Hebrews and the trumpet sequence. (See following page)

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(19) Revelation 8: 3 (20) Revelation 8: 5
(21) Exodus 19: 16 (22) Joel 2: 28
(23) Joel 2: 30 (24) Acts 2: 17
(25) Matthew 10: 34 (26) Revelation 11: 1-13

Hebrews 12	**Revelation 7/8**
The mountain that may be touched, a blazing fire.. (27)	Something like a mountain burning with fire... (28)
Tempest (27)	Hail and fire mixed with blood (29)
Darkness and gloom (30)	Partial darkness (31)
The sound of a trumpet (32)	Seven trumpets (33)
Innumerable angels (34)	Innumerable multitude (35)
'Root of bitterness (36)	Star called 'Wormwood' (37)

These six similarities are not exhaustive. They serve to show that the book of Revelation is echoing something about the dangers of Sinai listed in Hebrews. As the Church, as a whole, did not lapse into Judaism doctrinally, it follows that there must be something else from Judaism that would have to serve as a warning. That something else is not necessarily, but most evidently, that the Church would lapse into the methods of Judaism.

Bearing this in mind, let us see whether the first four trumpet-blasts can be historically explained.

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(27) Hebrews 12:18 (28) Revelation 8:8
(29) Revelation 8:7 (30) Hebrews 12:18
(31) Revelation 8:12 (32) Hebrews 12:19
(33) Revelation 8:6 (34) Hebrews 12:22
(35) Revelation 7:9 (36) Hebrews 12:15
(37) Revelation 8:11

The First Trumpet-Blast

Some of the details of the trumpet-blast sequence are like those of the plagues of Egypt. But these are not in the order of the ten plagues of Egypt. Indeed the 'hail and fire' that follows the first trumpet blast seem reminiscent of the seventh plague of Egypt (38). The importance of the seventh plague is that it was the first occasion in which Pharaoh appeared to repent and relent, but changed his mind as soon as the danger had passed. Previously, there had not been any sign of repentance on his part.

There is little need to explain the significance of this fact. In the first chapter of this book the comparison between the mission of the Church to the world, and the mission of Moses to Pharaoh's Egypt was fully demonstrated (39). It is as though we are being reminded of the partial effect of the sixth seal. Christianity would appear to triumph in the Western world, but the triumph was partial and short-lived. Like Pharaoh, the world would seem to have repented already, but change its mind shortly afterwards.

So much for the reason for using the seventh plague in this context. But what of the details of the sequence? When Israel entered Canaan there was more fire and blood, but it was not supernatural. The hail was the assault of conquering Israel, and hailstones were a feature of Joshua's battles - in particular that in which sun and moon were halted (40) . The 'blood' was the ensuing bloodshed, and the 'fire' was that 'cherem' or ban of devotion by which the contents of such cities as Jericho and Ai had to be put to the sword (41). The Hebrew word

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(38) Exodus 9: 22 (see particularly 9: 27)

(39) See ch 1, particularly the section 'The Real Challenge' (40) Joshua 10: 11

(41) Joshua chs 6 & 7

aretz and the Greek word ges can both be translated 'earth' or 'land'. Joshua's blood, hail and fire had been directed at the **land** i.e. the land of Canaan, for which both Hebrew and Greek words are used as often as they are employed to mean the 'earth'. Thus, the judgement is on something represented by the land of Canaan, or land of Israel. The expression 'a third part *of* can be understood to mean a partial judgement. It is as though throughout the trumpet sequence God does not judge a particular group fully. There is only partial rejection so there is only partial judgement.

It was to begin, as Peter stated, at the 'house of God' (42) and the first people to be judged would be the 'people of the land', not the aboriginal Canaanites now, but the people of Israel themselves. Malachi, for example, threatened that Elijah (John the baptist) would be sent to Israel, and if his message was rejected, the land would be smitten with a 'cherem' (43), the word used by Malachi being identical with that used of the conquest of Jericho and Ai by Joshua. In the hailstorm of Egypt, trees and grass suffered (44). The 'cherem' of Joshua was not to be directed at trees, for the tree was a means of human nourishment (45), yet a proportion of trees would naturally suffer from the devastation of the conquest itself.

The Gospel was first preached to Jews and they were the first to suffer the effect of partial rejection. About a third of the 'people of the land', the new 'Canaanites', the rejecting Jews, suffered death in the first two centuries.

It must not be thought that the Jews were evicted from Palestine after Bar-Cochba's rebellion against Rome in 135 A. D. There were colonies of both Jews and Samaritans in the land of Israel

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(42) 1 Peter 4: 17 (43) Malachi 4: 6
(44) Exodus 9: 25 & 31
(45) Deuteronomy 20: 19

until much later in the Christian era. Despite Josephus, there are no reliable methods of calculating how many Jews perished in the siege of Jerusalem in 70 A. D. and there are even less reliable data from which to calculate the number of Jews who were destroyed at the insurrection of Bar-Cochba - after which most Jews were removed from Palestine. Nevertheless, it is fair to think that a 'third' of Jews in Palestine may have perished during the first two centuries. Whether this is so or not, the symbol of a 'third' to represent 'a part of' remains an adequate description of the proportion of Israel that perished because of judgements against the 'people of the land'. Further, the description ought not to be limited to those obvious times of destruction of Jews in the first two centuries. The judgement is one of principle. Preaching was 'to Jew first, then to Greek' (46). Consequently blindness happened to 'a part of (47) Israel, so we may logically expect judgement to have come upon 'a part of (='a third of) Israel, for the old Israel was the first constituent of the world on which judgement would ultimately be passed.

Once the symbols are seen clearly, the remainder of the description of the first trumpet sequence can also be clearly identified.

The 'tree' symbol is associated so often in the Scriptures with the nation of Israel, that quotation seems almost unnecessary. A few quotations may serve to illustrate that whether fig tree, olive, or vine are used, Israel is usually meant:

> "I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none" (48)
>
> "The Lord called your name a green olive tree" (49)
>
> "natural branches" (Jews) will be "grafted

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(46) Romans 1: 16 (47) Romans 11: 25
(48) Luke 13: 7 (49) Jeremiah 11: 16

back into their own olive tree" (50)
"the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel" (51)

The 'grass' symbol is usually associated with the proliferation - and yet the transitional nature of people generally. If trees represent prominent Jews, then grass must represent that multitude of proselytes from all nations who had 'sprung up' under Israel's shade, yet who would be quick to disappear after Israel's disgrace, partly because some would actually become Christians and partly because the Jewish community would not often be a proselyting community in future. The Judaising of the Kingdom of the Khazars in southern Russia centuries later is an exception to this principle.

Thus Israel's numbers were reduced in their land, and a multitude of proselytes disappeared. The Judaean 'third' of the land lost its Jewish community quite early, and much of the community was later restricted to the coastal regions, for example to Javneh, where the council of Jamnia codified the canon of Scripture for the Hebrew community shortly after Jerusalem was destroyed.

Thus, after Elijah came in the ministry of John the baptist, the (43) land was smitten with a 'cherem'. Just as the first 'people of the land' (the Canaanites) were smitten by Joshua, so the backsliding Jews, the second 'people of the land' were partly smitten by the new Joshua (Jesus).

There would later be a literal fulfilment of this prophecy. The land of Israel would be turned into a desert for many centuries. But all that is secondary and future, and outside the terms of immediate reference of the prophecy. The judgement was primarily against the people, the devastation of the land of Israel was a necessary consequence.

Before moving to the next trumpet blast it is

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(43) Malachi 4: 6 (50) Romans 11: 24
(51) Isaiah 5: 7

desirable to reflect on the logic of this first trumpet blast. It is reasonable to believe that the first of these judgements was that directed at Palestinian Judaism.

(a) because the Jews were the first to hear the 'trumpet-blast' of the Gospel of Christ (46);
(b) because Palestinian Judaism was the source of that influence which first opposed the Church, and later entered it and partly corrupted it, and hence
(c) because the sequence will shortly warn about the Church's return to some of the methods of Sinai, a symbol often used by Christians of their Jewish contemporaries (52).

Secondly, the figure of the 'cherem' directed at the time of Joshua's conquest can only refer to those counterparts, to the 'people of the land' of the time, who were mainly Jews, and this conclusion is, as we have seen, substantiated by the scriptural use of tree-symbols for the Jewish people. Further evidence in support of the interpretation could easily be obtained by studying the use of 'hail' in the Old Testament. Both Isaiah (53) and Ezekiel (54) use the figure of a hailstorm to mean a foreign 'blitzkrieg' against the people of Israel carried out respectively by the Assyrians (53) and the Chaldeans (54). In this case, the principal difference is that the main agents of the hailstorm were the Roman armies.

Finally, as we have seen, God does not bring total judgement until there is total rejection. These judgements are concerned with a 'part' of the world, which like Pharaoh at the time of the seventh plague, appears to have accepted, then re-

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(46) Romans 1: 16
(52) See Galatians 4: 21-31 and Hebrews 12: 18-29
(53) Isaiah 28: 2 & 30: 30 (54) Ezekiel 13: 11

jected the Gospel message. As the first constituent (46) of that part of the world was Israel, and blindness happened to a 'part of Israel, it is reasonable to interpret this first trumpet as the judgement that had already commenced to come on 'part of Israel' when the book was being written.

The Second Trumpet-Blast

The first trumpet-blast was followed by the picture of a 'burning' land. The consequence of a burning land is a burning mountain (55). Judaism could not receive the judgement that came upon it without also exporting the consequences of that judgement to all those nations who were in the sea of nations. There is no doubt that the burning mountain is a picture of Sinai, for the figure is so used in some manuscripts of the Epistle to the Hebrews (56).

First century Jewish Christians had been warned about the dangers of retracting to that Judaistic 'Egypt' from which they had been (57) delivered across the sea of Christian baptism. Two passages, already quoted, are important in this context:

(a) the letter to the Hebrews (58) where Christians were told that they had not come to a mountain blazing with fire, but to a heavenly Jerusalem; and

(b) the earlier epistle to the Galatians (59) where Hagar was said to represent the 'mountain in Arabia' (an obvious reference to Sinai)and Sarah was used as the symbol of the

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(46) Romans 1: 16 (55) Revelation 8: 8-9

(56) Hebrews 12: 18 (4 Greek sources, and some Vulgate and Syriac MSS)

(57) 1 Corinthians ch 10

(58) Hebrews 12: 18-29 (59) Galatians 4: 21-3

'heavenly Jerusalem' of which all Christians are described as citizens.

Judaism would truly be jettisoned from Israel's land into the sea of nations, but this judgement has already been partially described in the first trumpet sequence, and it would thus be inappropriate to identify the second trumpet sequence with Judaism also. If the vision 'burning mountain' does not specifically mean Judaism, what does it mean? The text is interesting. The words should be translated:...

'**something like** a great mountain burning with fire' (55).

Therein lies the secret of exposition. The vision does not describe the 'burning mountain' (Sinaitic Judaism) but **something like** it (i. e. 'something like' Sinaitic Judaism).

The thing **like** the burning mountain is that Sinaitic (priestly and militant) version of Christianity which supplanted the simplicity of the primitive Church.

The smouldering mass would soon make the Scriptures into a new Torah, and weave human traditions around it, replacing the teaching of the apostles by a new priestcraft.

The effect of a burning mountain on water is an explosive one. In this case it is sufficient to kill a large quantity of fish, and of those 'living creatures' in the sea.

In the Bible, the sea is often used to symbolise two things:

(a) the wicked nations, who are like a troubled sea (60), and from whom the four beasts (Gentile nations who would oppose Israel) had arisen (61);

(b) the sea of transition, through which Is-

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(55) Revelation 8: 8-9
(60) Isaiah 57: 20
(61) Daniel 7: 3

rael and the Church have to cross in baptism (62).

Spiritually, the converted are the 'fish'. They alone survived the great flood, apart from the contents of the ark (63). Jonah is said to have been swallowed by a 'great fish' (not a whale)(64) to be preserved from the storm. The early Christians were described as (65) 'fishers of men', and in early Christian imagery the symbol of a fish (Greek ICHTHUS) representing as an acronym the Greek words for 'Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour', was used to depict the Christian faith.

Thus the nations would be affected by the Gospel - but by a 'version' of the Gospel using the methods of Sinai. When such methods were taken from Palestine into that 'sea' of surrounding nations, the effect would be explosive, and the result would be that many, but not all, potential converts converts would 'die' from the impact. Not all would be casualties, the rest would either remain alive in the sea, or be 'fished' into the Gospel net. Thus came the third of Joel's conditions. 'Blood and fire' came with the first trumpet-blast. 'Vapour of smoke' - the steam of impact (the word is similar) came with the second trumpet-blast. Christianity was powerfully witnessing outside the 'land' of Palestine in the sea of nations, but imitated Sinai often in the process, resurrecting the tactics of vanquished Judaism, and thus many fish would neither remain alive nor be caught in the net. They would die.

The Third Trumpet-Blast

Jewish cosmology divided the earth's surface in-

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(62) 1 Corinthians 10: 1
(63) Genesis chs 6-8
(64) Jonah 1: 17
(65) Matthew 4: 19, see also 13: 47-50

to land and sea. Under that surface were the 'springs of the deep' (66) and above it was the vault of heaven. Thus the trumpet sequence:
Earth, Sea, Springs of the Deep, Heaven is a logical one.

In the third trumpet sequence a great star would fall from heaven and it would blaze like the mountain of the previous visions. But as the fire of the great mountain would be quenched in the sea, so **the** fire of the great star would be quenched in the fountains of water. The cosmological contrasts can be illustrated.

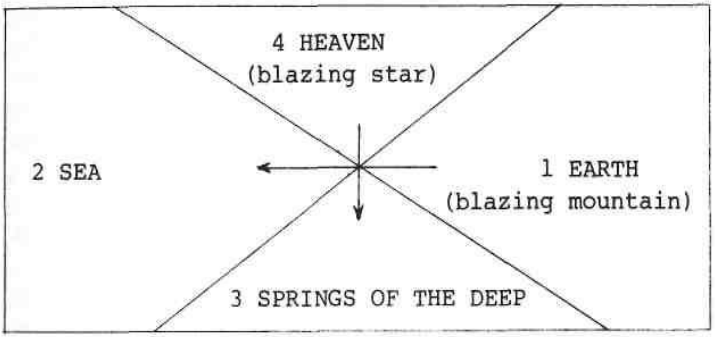

Figure 2 The Trumpet Sequence

The important thing about both fires is that they are not like the burning bush. They blaze but are consumed (67).

What does the star represent? In the rival Jewish apocalyptic literature, which the Apocalypse was intended to answer, the fall of a star meant the fall of an angel (68). In pagan parlance, as we have seen, stars were gods. When the Hebrews introduced into their thinking foreign elements, stars could

(66) Psalm 87: Compare vv 1 with 7
(67) Exodus 3: 2 (68) Compare Enoch 86: 1 with 86: vv 4-6. Also see the Zend Bundahish

not represent gods, for there was only one God. Stars could, however, represent angels and could even have been identified with them.

In Enoch (69) the stars of heaven were said to have rebelled and cohabited with beasts. The symbols represent the angels' revolt supposed to have occurred before the Flood. This was led by one great star, Mastema, an equivalent of Satan in the book of Enoch (70). The myth that the sons of God, whose transgression (71) brought the flood into existence, were angels, not men, was commonly believed by first century Jewish writers, including the apocalyptists against whom the Apocalypse was written. The New Testament books (72) of 2 Peter and Jude echo this interpretation of Genesis 6, not by way of endorsement but to answer the corrupt thinking of those who believed that angels were capable of such rebellion. Later, the Church was to use the Lucifer passage written against Babylon to teach that there had been some primaeval rebellion among the angels, in which a personal supernatural devil had been involved.

Before heaven (in this case, the sky, not the heaven in which the vision is enacted) could be cleared of its imagined pagan gods, it seems thoroughly appropriate that it should first be cleared of the misconceptions of Greek-speaking Jews. If the 'burning mountain' represents Judaism, in its Sinaitic, literalistic context, it is appropriate that a 'burning star' should represent that other 'angel-worshipping' side of the Jewish spectrum. It too would be attacked by the Christian Church, but in the process the Church would absorb some of its angel-worship, via the last of the Essene writings, then the works of the early Gnostics, and afterwards the heresies apparent in some of the

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(69)(70) Enoch 86: 4-6
(71) Genesis 6: 2
(72) 2 Peter 2: 4-5 & Jude 6 & 9

books of the Nag Hammadi library (73).

The 'great star' burns like a 'lampas' (74), the word used by Greek classical writers both for the torch of the Olympic Games, and for the beacon-light that shone at Alexandria.

The Alexandrian connection with Hellenistic Judaism is only too apparent. Thus, if the blazing mountain is associated with the Sinaitic and literalistic nature of Palestinian Judaism, the blazing star is associated with those Jews, who, particularly among the diaspora had become mystical and angel-worshipping, and whose teachings would later enter the Church through some compromises with the teachings of some of the more perverse gnostics.

Not all Gnosticism was bad, but the resurgence of angel-hierarchies similar to those of Hellenistic Judaism, relegated the importance of Christ as the saviour of mankind, and thus Paul often warned the first-century Christians against such beliefs (75).

The gnostics produced writings whose claims reduced the importance of the canonical writings of the Holy Spirit in the minds of many early Christians. Thus the phrase 'rivers and fountains of waters' is used in the passage.

There is little doubt that the New Testament identifies 'fountains of water' with the Holy Spirit. Consider the following passages which are a relatively small sample.

> "The water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (76)
>
> "... Out of his heart shall flow rivers of

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(73) See particularly the Tripartate Tractate in Robinson: The Nag Hammadi Library in English (Brill: Leiden, 1977)

(74) See the title 'lampas' in Liddell and Scott's Greek Lexicon (75) Colossians 2: 17-19

(76) John 4: 14

living water. Now this He said about the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive" (77)

or even in the previous chapter –

"the Lamb will guide them to springs of living water" (78).

The Church administered the water of life, the Spirit of God, from the wells of salvation (79), and if it had allowed itself to have been truly nourished from those wells, the dangers of backsliding would have been minimised. Instead, as has already been seen from the comparison between this chapter and the letter to the Hebrews (80) there was a proliferation of writings claiming to be the work of the Holy Spirit, some produced for gain, and thus the effect of the real works of the Spirit was, in some cases, poisoned. The epistle warned against a 'root of bitterness'(80) by which some would be defiled. It was in the 'gall of wickedness' that Simon Magus tried to buy the Spirit's gifts. It was in failing of the grace of God, that the birthright of the Holy Spirit would be lost by many institutional churches as Esau lost his birthright (81).

The Holy Spirit was not withdrawn. The age of miracles did not cease because the Church's miraculous gifts were suddenly taken from it. They were neglected, 'despised' and quenched in contravention of Paul's instructions. Then pretenders came on the scene who claimed gifts that they did not possess (82) often for personal gain (83), and the living springs of the Spirit were replaced in many cases by mistaken interpretations of the canon of Scrip-

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(77) John 7: 38-39 (78) Revelation 7: 17

(79) Isaiah 12: 3 (80) Compare Hebrews 12: 15 with Revelation 8: 11. See Deuteronomy 29: 18

(81) See Acts 8: 23-24 and compare Hebrews 12: 16 with Genesis 25

(82) 1 John 4: 1-2 (83) 1 Timothy 4: 6-10 & 6: 5

ture, poisoned and made bitter, stagnant, muddy and sandy by a great mass of tradition. Thus many suffered spiritual death by drinking of such bitter waters (84).

Jewish tradition had maintained that rivers and fountains of waters from the earth's bowels emerged from earthly Zion. They, were the 'springs of the the deep' of the Psalms (85). Using the analogy, when the spiritual Zion, the Church, threw the prince of this world from the spiritual heaven of imagined Hellenistic thought, it too was partly poisoned by the fallout. The interesting thing is that not 'all' but 'many' died a spiritual death from drinking the poisoned water.

Thus the initially glorious outburst of preaching faded because of:

(a) the judgement of the first trumpet-blast against the Jews of the land of Palestine;
(b) the absorption by the Church of the methods and tactics of Sinaitic Judaism in its conversion, after the second blast; and
(c) the introduction of false teachings claiming to be the work of the Spirit, so that, after the third trumpet-blast, the 'living waters' were, for some, replaced by a bitter counterpart.

The Fourth Trumpet-Blast

Having spread through the land, then to Gentiles, then to Hellenistic Jews in the dispersion, and having absorbed some of the influence of each, Christianity now moved out to attack the entirely pagan skies as the fourth trumpet indicates (86). But its success at this time was only partial, for at this time it neither fully evangelised the world nor did it fully attack the 'host of heaven'.

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(84) Revelation 8: 11 (85) Psalm 87: 7

It could (87) have shaken all the imagined gods of the ancient world from their places at that time, if it had retained its 'Springs of Water' of Spirit Gifts. Instead, in its own strength it succeeded in testifying to only a part of the world. It was to influence that 'third of' (='part of') the world included Europe and parts of Asia and Africa.

Thus, to use the meanings of the symbols already interpreted in explaining the sixth seal sequence, the disgracing of sun, moon and stars, the imagined gods of the ancient world, was a partial one. Christianity had set out with the objective of fulfilling the 'mountain of the house of the Lord' prophecy of Isaiah 2. In the trumpet sequence, in fulfilment of Isaiah 2, there was judgement against cedars of Lebanon, high mountains, ships of Tarshish and the loftiness of mankind in the order of the first four trumpet-blasts.

But the impact was muted. Only a third of the gods of the pagan night would lose their glory, and the result would be a period of intense darkness, in which the very intellectual sustenance that the pagan philosophers of the ancient world had provided would be dimmed, and yet the full glory of Christian teaching also diminished. Soon, barbarians and Muslims would make their impact and the Western Church would take many centuries to recover. Jesus had said:

> "If the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" (88)

Christianity's image was often tarnished in the minds of the great thinkers of the world, people such as Aurelius, Plotinus and Porphyry.

The Four Trumpet-Blasts in Historical Context

The four trumpet-blasts have brought us to the

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(86) Revelation 8:12 (87) Isaiah 2: 18 & 24: 21-23
(88) Matthew 6: 22-23

period of the sixth seal sequence by a different route. The message of the seal is that the victory of Christian witness would be partial and untimely and comparatively silent (i.e. even when the scroll is opened, and the obstacles removed, there is comparative silence), while the message of the trumpet blasts places the weakening of the victory in some logical order, and explains why the victory of Christian testimony was partial. First, the Jews, the original recipients of the Gospel would be partially punished for their partial rejection of the Gospel in their own land. Then Sinaitic Judaism would penetrate the Church and so blaze into the pagan world with disastrous effects on some. Then, the Spirit gifts would be partially rejected by the members of the Church by failing to observe the advice of Paul to the Thessalonians and to Timothy (89), and the clear fountain of the Spirit would be replaced by the 'gall of bitterness', by a tradition of interpretation that had in its angel-worship conceded so much to pagan idolatry, the 'root of bitterness' in Deuteronomy, from which the writer of Hebrews quotes (90).

Thus, the attack against the real pagan world, that lay outside Israel, would be muted after its initial outburst, weakened by the very insipid nature of the 'root of bitterness' (90). Hence, in the fourth trumpet-sequence, in repetition of the events of the sixth seal-sequence, there was only a partial dimming of the sun, moon and stars, the imagined gods of paganism, leaving nothing to replace them, preparing the way for what some have rightly called the 'dark ages'.

In this context the body of Christ, at least the 'visible' Church, is warned that it may die. Hence,

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(89) 1 Thessalonians 5: 19-20 & 1 Timothy 4: 14

(90) Compare Deuteronomy 29: 18 (Septuagint) & 23 with Hebrews 12: 15

(91) Revelation 8: 13

the eagle(= vulture) flies in (91) mid-heaven, in reminder of the Olivet prophecy (92) that if the body of believers becomes a carcass, the vultures will be gathered together. Because the visible Church was beginning to lose its initial dynamism, the danger lay 'in mid-heaven'(i.e. right overhead). The lesson of the trumpet sequence, as a whole, is a clear one. The blasts are proclamations of the gospel to various people and areas of interest, beginning with Israel. Partial rejection, partial blindness and partial judgement came on Israel as God's first witnesses, and the remaining blasts were partial blasts with partial judgement reserved only for those who had rejected the Gospel of Grace. The very partial nature of the sequence resulted from the Church's partial failure to listen to the warnings of the apostles. Revival would come when the Church would once more be filled with Holy Spirit as in apostolic times. Until then, partial judgements would follow partial testimony, and the conditions of the Olivet prophecy about the advent of Christ could not be fulfilled (93).

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(91) Revelation 8: 13 (92) Matthew 24: 28
(93) Matthew 24: 14

SEVEN

TWO INVASIONS OF THE NEW ISRAEL

The Warning of Deuteronomy: The Fifth Trumpet-Blast: The Fallen Star and the Hybrids: The Key and the Smoking Pit: Sparing the Grass of the Earth: Tormenting the Unsealed: The Army of the Abyss: The Sixth Trumpet-Blast: A Spiritual Captivity: The Time and Method of Judgement: The Description of the Horsemen: The Number of the Invaders: The Great Paradox

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The Warning of Deuteronomy

Both the seal sequence and the trumpet sequence have brought us to the same point in history by different routes. Both also stress the parallel between the Old Israel of the Old Testament, and the New Israel (the Church). Deuteronomy (1) warned that the Old Israel would compromise its faith, and that some of its population would be bewitched by the very idolatry that they had sought to destroy, and that a root of bitterness (2) (a compromise with idolatry) would weaken Israel, rendering its conquest only partial. Finally, because of this compromise and partial conquest, the land would ultimately have two invasions, (3) a minor one and later a major one from beyond the Euphrates (4).

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(1) Deuteronomy chs 28 & 29
(2) Compare Deuteronomy 29: 18 (Septuagint) with Hebrews 12: 15
(3) Deuteronomy 28: 36
(4) Deuteronomy 28: 49. Note the use of the 'eagle' symbol

The Apocalypse teaches that the Church would be similar. It stresses the lesson of Deuteronomy repeated by the writer of Hebrews. When Christianity is testified to the whole world, Christ will come, but if the 'conquest' of Christian testimony is only partial because the Church is weakened by compromise with Judaism - both legalistic and Hellenistic, then with paganism, the conquest becomes partial, the 'Canaanites' still exist within the confines of the Church, the territory of the Church becomes weakened then suffers two invasions (a) a **minor** invasion from hell itself, from that 'abyss' or 'bottomless pit' that should have been vanquished, then (b) a **major** invasion from outside the Church's territory, from beyond the spiritual 'Euphrates' - that which should have defined the boundary of the Church, as the literal 'Euphrates' was the boundary of the land promised to Abraham - and to the Old Israel.

The lesson of Deuteronomy (via Hebrews) is thus developed. The first four trumpet blasts are the inadequate conquest of Canaan (= the world) by the testimony of the New Israel (= the Church). The fifth trumpet blast signals an 'underground' harassment by invasion, from the very forces that it was supposed to have conquered (the effects of vanquished paganism - still surviving in the mediaeval Church), while the sixth trumpet signals a twin invasion from 'beyond Euphrates' that would bring to an end the 'kingdom' of the Church, just as the twin invasions of Assyria and Babylon from beyond the literal Euphrates brought to an end the twin kingdoms of Israel and Judah. The source of the first attack would be the 'spiritual' and underground attack from forces of superstition supposed to have been conquered. They would be the 'root of bitterness', that would continue to weaken the visible Church. The source of the second attack would be at the very end of Church history, just before the end of all things, from a new Babylon

(or Assyria or Persia), from forces supposedly vastly superior to the New Israel. This analogy should be borne in mind as we proceed.

A second analogy is that of seed-time and harvest, one that is often used in the Gospels, as in the parable of the weeds (5). If it is already appreciated that the sixth trumpet (by comparison with (1)(4) Deuteronomy and with Israel's history) must be blown almost at the **end** of the Church's tenancy, shortly before the Second Advent then it is, by analogy with the parables, a signal of the time of harvest. In contrast, the first four trumpet blasts describe that initial attack on the pagan world at the beginning of Church history in the first few centuries of our era. It must therefore follow that the fifth trumpet blast concerns the period of germination (i.e. between sowing and harvest), the time when the 'kingdom' of the Church (Christendom) is in existence.

The logical position can thus be tabulated as follows.

Season	**Old Israel**	**New Israel (=Church)**
See-time	Partial Conquest of Canaan	Partial 'conquest' of the Roman world
Germination	Period of the Kingdom Harassment by minor powers that should have been subjugated	The period of the Church's tenure. Harassment by 'pagan' elements. Dark Ages
Harvest	Assyrian and Babylonian invasions	Opposition from a greater enemy. Pseudo-scientific materialism.

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(1) Deuteronomy chs 28 & 29

(4) Deuteronomy 28: 49 note the use of the 'eagle' symbol

(5) Matthew 13: 24-43. Also, by analogy, 47-50

In a future chapter, the terms 'dragon', 'beast' and 'false prophet' will be added to the threefold list of parallels, for the table also defines the three periods in which these influences operate. Further proof of this 'timing' may be needed before we specifically consider the meaning of the fifth trumpet sequence. It can best be obtained by considering the phrase 'the hour and day and month and year' (6) used of the sixth trumpet sequence. Each of the four terms in this phrase is used in the Old Testament of the time of judgement on Israel at either Assyrian or Babylonian hands. The attempts of historical-school expositors of earlier centuries to identify the words with an historical period of 391 1/12 years on the basis of a supposed 'day for a year' principle were ingenious but not satisfying.

The hour is the day, the month and the year. It is the hour of judgement, day, month or year of judgement on the New Israel, the visible Church. Thus, each of the trumpet-blasts is a phase of proclamation of the Gospel to the world, and:

(a) the **first four trumpet sequences** cover the seed-time, the rise of the Church in the early centuries of our era;

(b) the **fifth trumpet** covers that period of 'kingdom' in which the institutional church 'ruled' a part of the world, but suffered many of the deficiencies of the Old Israel of the Old Testament;

(c) the **sixth trumpet sequence** describes a great invasion from supposedly superior forces (which will be later identified), such an invasion being analogous to that of the Assyrian and Babylonian

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(6) Daniel 4: 33 compared with Matthew 24: 28 and Revelation 3: 10. Also Isaiah 2: 12 compare Amos 5: 18 and Matthew 24: 36 Hosea 5: 7 (lit. Hebrew) and Isaiah 63: 4

invasions of Israel and Judah; and

(d) the **seventh trumpet** describes a moment in history when the conditions of the Olivet prophecy have been fully met, and the Gospel has been fully witnessed to the whole world. It signals the judgement of the world and the second advent, as contrasted with the sixth trumpet, which signals a 'judgement' on the visible Church.

The Fifth Trumpet-Blast

It has been concluded in the previous section that the fifth trumpet sequence must span the period between the original sowing of the Gospel and its harvest, between those first few centuries of the rise of the visible Church at the beginning of our era and the great 'invasion' of the New Israel that will signal the end of its tenure and that final outburst of preaching that is to herald the Second Advent.

Between seed-time and harvest (7) there is an almost slack period of waiting as wheat and weeds grow together (8) and at this time neither can be truly identified. This period can be identified with that when:

(a) the Church would reach a 'mid-heaven' and continue to expand but lose much of its vigour; and

(b) there would be a lag between two intensive periods of preaching similar to that between:

(i) the exodus from Egypt and the conquest of Canaan when Israel, through unbelief at Kadesh Barnea, failed to take Canaan immediately; or

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(7) Matthew 13: 1-30 (8) Matthew 13: 24-30 & 36-43

(ii) the period of Israel's national existence described either as an 'amphictyony'(Judges) or a 'divided kingdom', but necessarily one of partial conquest spanning the period between the epochs of Exodus and final invasion.

The fifth trumpet sequence thus spans most of the period between the first and second advents.

This is the real meaning of the period of five months (9) used in the description of the vision. There have been ingenious attempts to identify the period with the 150 (or possibly 300) years of Saracen invasions on the supposed 'day-for-year' principle. Such identification is unnecessary. There **are** five months between seed-time and harvest and five months is the normal breeding period for locusts, who are the agents of the judgement on the 'unsealed' section of the visible Church.

A common Jewish saying of Jesus' day was 'another four months before harvest'. It was often an excuse for laziness, and for not profitably spending the time between seed-time and harvest. Jesus, for example, illustrated the rather 'indolent' nature of the saying when He used it to indicate that ripe harvest of the Gospel that was already available in His day among the Samaritans (10). It is clear that Jesus must have been referring to this saying for He was actually in Samaria during the hot season, and therefore less than two months before the harvest of that year. The four months of the saying spanned the period from April to the beginning of September, but the actual inclusive period between sowing and harvesting was **five** months, not four. Hence the five months of the prophecy (9) are not explained by reference to some artificial use of time-period symbols. 'Five months' was the

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(9) Revelation 9: 5 & 10 (10) John 4: 6 See also McGregor 'Gospel of John' (Moffatt) pp. 110-111

most appropriate way of describing a period of 'sitting back' while wheat and weeds would grow up together. It was the breeding period of locusts, and as Joel implied, all stages of locust-breeding are equally malignant (11). The harm is spiritual not political. Only those who have been truly sealed by the Spirit of God (12) in real, rather than in apparent (13) response to the commandment of chapter seven (14) are exempt. The inkhorn prophecy of Ezekiel was one of physical protection. In contrast, Jesus did not promise His followers physical protection, and therefore the **harm** and **torment** of the locust-forces described in this vision **must** be spiritual harm.

Jewish apocalyptic literature (15) had wrongly used both of Joel's visions of **literal** and symbolic 'locusts' (i. e. armies of **men**) as meaning that literal armies would attack Israel in the 'last days'. Christian expositors followed suit. But Joel's real message was that Israel's blight was its own fault. The Apocalypse applies Joel's symbolism to the Church. There would be internal blight. It was to result from the failure of the New Israel.

Yet, political armies cannot vanquish the Church, but spiritual armies can 'weaken' it. In this respect the fifth trumpet sequence is an attempted antithesis of Jesus's promise at Caesarea Philippi (16). The ultimate Church is built on the 'rock'

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(11) Joel 1: 4 Also Charles: Revelation Vol 1 (ICC) p. 243 and Driver: Joel and Amos pp. 82ff. (ICC)

(12) Revelation 9: 4 (13) Revelation 7: 4-8

(14) Revelation 7: 3 (15) Compare Joel chs 1 & 2 with 1 Enoch 76: 9 & 11, and see the Septuagint of Amos 7: 1 where a comment has been added identifying the locust plague of the chapter with the 'host of Gog'.

(16) Matthew 16: 18

of Daniel 2 (17) and the gates of Hades will never prevail against it, but its 'visible' or institutional counterpart can often be temporarily weakened by the forces of Hades. The ultimate Church can never be overcome, but the visible Church, Christ's witness in the world, can suffer all the hazards and judgements, resulting from periodic spiritual blight, from which the Old Israel also suffered.

The Fallen Star and the Hybrids

The star of this sequence is that of the third trumpet-blast. It has already fallen from heaven, hence the words may be literally translated 'a star having fallen from heaven' (18). It has already been identified in the previous chapter as the jaded star of Hellenistic Judaism, that pagan-influenced angel-worshipping gnosis, that was the fountain-head of those apocalypses that John's Apocalypse was intended to answer. For example, to the author of Enoch the perversion of mankind was not man's fault primarily. It had resulted from the descent of 'stars' (plural) from heaven, led by a 'great star', liberally interpreted, as the (19) revolt of angels before the flood, followed by their cohabiting with human women. This was depicted vividly as the union of stars with cattle - producing all kinds of hybrid creatures, such as elephants, camels and asses! There is no more insidious a doctrine than that which says that 'gods' (in pagan thought) and 'angels' (in Hellenistic Jewish

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(17) Compare Daniel 2: 35-6 (particularly the Aramaic word for 'mountain' which is literally 'rock') with Matthew 16: 18

(18) Revelation 9: 1

(19) Compare 1 Enoch 86: 1 with Revelation 8: 10 & 11, 1 Enoch 86: 2-4 with Genesis 6: 1-4 and the whole with Revelation 9: 1-11

thought) are rebellious and are the real cause of human sin, for such a doctrine removes moral responsibility from man and places it in the hands of some immoral 'Zeus'.

Paganism had its own hybrids, such as the centaurs, those long-haired bow-bearing creatures, half-man and half-horse, who are in some respects akin to the hybrid creatures of the fifth trumpet-sequence. Hellenistic Judaism was in itself a hybrid between true Judaism and paganism, and some elements in the Church would continue the imagined doctrines of Hellenistic Judaism in a Christian guise. Thus, the Church would be invaded by a hybrid between Hellenistic Judaism and Christianity, and continue some of the doctrines of paganism (which it had set out to conquer) in another guise. Such was, as in Israel's earlier case, attempted union between the forces of good and evil. Yet, these are like oil and water. They will not naturally mix, and any attempt at mixing them will (like an emulsion) be a man-made one. If marriage between good and evil is attempted, a peculiar hybrid will result.

So are the peculiar creatures that result from the union between the 'star' (wormwood) and Hades (the abyss) (20). They are locusts in appearance, but they do not harm grass as locusts do (21). Instead, they hurt men like scorpions (22). A locust with the characteristics of a scorpion is, in itself, a peculiar hybrid, for locusts are insects but scorpions are arachnids. The creatures are thus 'hybrids' between two completely different categories of life.

Further, they transcend sexual boundaries, for though they are 'men' yet they have the hair of women (23). They also transcend the boundary between wild and domestic animals, They have lions' teeth, yet their wings sound like the noise of

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(20) Revelation 9: 1 (21) Revelation 9: 4
(22) Revelation 9: 5 (23) Revelation 9: 8-9

horses rushing into battle.

The Apocalypse uses the thought forms of the Jewish apocalyptic literature that it was intended to counter. In that legendary literature, as we have seen, human sin resulted from a strange marriage between 'angels' and women, the angelic rebellion having been led by a 'falling star' by the equivalent of Satan. The 'hybrids' that resulted were supposed to be the giants of the Genesis account (24) and the lesser gods and demons of pagans - all of whom were supposed to have resulted from union between some 'god' and a woman. In the Apocalypse the symbols are transposed. There would indeed be an attempted union between the 'divine' and the human but on a religious plane. The mediaeval Church would compromise its doctrine and bring into it elements of the very pagan world that its testimony was intended to conquer, and a spiritual invasion of the new Israel would result. With this model in mind the details of the prophecy of the fifth trumpet-blast can now be interpreted.

The Key and the Smoking Pit

First, the angel has the 'key of the abyss[1] (25). In contrast, Jesus gave the Church the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven and the (26) gates of Hades could not prevail against it, but Jesus reserved to Himself the keys of death and of Hades (27), for He alone had conquered them. The Church has never been given those keys, for its function is to save, not to condemn. In fulfilment of Jesus' words to Peter, it does, of course, both 'bind' and 'release'

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(26) but in a redemptive sense only. The words are used by the Lord in (28) quotation from Isaiah,

(24) I Enoch 86: 2-4 compare Genesis 6: 1-4

(25) Revelation 9: 1 (26) Matthew 16: 19

(27) Revelation 1: 18 (28) Compare Matthew 16: 19 supra with Isaiah 61: 1

where 'bind' is used of the broken-hearted, and release' or 'loose' is used of the prisoners of sin. Thus, it binds the broken-hearted and releases the prisoners of sin, and though both words seem to be opposites, they are both used in a redemptive context. The Church has never been given the duty or privilege of sentencing men to hell (in whatever sense the word is understood) for all judgement has been given to the Son (the Christ).

To say that the 'star' was **given** the key, is not equivalent to saying that the star was entitled to it. Possession is not property.

On pagan and philosophical premises, some thinkers would, as agents of the fallen star of Hellenism, re-open the 'hell' of the pagan world and replace it with something far more fearsome. To pagans and to Jewish Hellenists, hell had been some 'watery unfinished part of the universe'. The mediaeval Church would construct its own new hell as a place of torment, and embellish it with other concepts, such as limbo and purgatory, and the world of Christendom (hybrid between paganism and original teachings) would be terrorised for centuries with the doctrine of eternal torments.

The imagery of the account at this stage, the description of the 'smoke of the great furnace' is taken from:

(a) the account of Abraham's dream of Egyptian bondage (29);
(b) the account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (30); and
(c) a description of the smoke on Mount Sinai (31).

The first of these quotations appears to be used to (29) indicate that just as Abraham was promised

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(29) Genesis 15: 17 (compare 15 v 13)
(30) Genesis 19: 28
(31) Exodus 20: 18
(32) Hebrews chs 3 & 4

that his descendants would undergo a period of Egyptian bondage before the nation would emerge 400 years later to overcome the Canaanites,. so there would be a new bondage for the new Israel, the bondage to an Egypt that should have been destroyed, before entering into rest (32).

The second quotation, the smoke of Sodom and Gomorrah (30) is used to illustrate the insidious and perverted source of the trouble to be judged. Both Peter and Jude (33)(34) used Sodom and Gomorrah in a similar context, as does the Apocalypse later.

The third of these quotations (31) illustrates the Sinaitic nature of much of the mediaeval institutional Church. Not only did it use the methods of Sinaitic Judaism, as we have already seen, but the phrase 'pillar of smoke' contrasts with 'pillar of fire', that used for the source of Israel's guidance through the wilderness (35).

Instead of such guidance, the sun and air were darkened. In the mediaeval dark-age interregnum between the classical glory of paganism and the final triumph of Christian witness, the pillar of smoke and the locust-fantasies would darken:

(a) the **'sun'** of paganism, - an interpretation consistent with that of the sixth seal, and third and fourth trumpet sequence; and

(b) the **'air'**, the supposed habitation of demons, the location of those imagined demigods that Christianity should have proved non-existent (e. g. 'prince of the power of the air') (36).

The next element of the prophetic detail, the

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(30) Genesis 19: 28 (31) Exodus 20: 18
(32) Hebrews chs 3 & 4
(33) 2 Peter 2: 6 & Jude v. 7
(34) Compare above with Revelation 11: 8
(35) Exodus 40: 38
(36) Ephesians 2: 2

period of five months, has already been explained when locating the time-period to which this trumpet sequence is relevant. It is the normal five months between seed-time and harvest in which wheat and weeds grow together and therefore spans the whole tenure of the mediaeval Church from its upsurge as an institution up to the renaissance and to modern times. The field is the world (37) and the cultivated portion of the field is the Christian world. The wheat represents the children of the Kingdom and the weeds are like the locusts. They exist to torment, to choke and to render unfruitful.

Sparing the Grass of the Earth.

The locusts were told not to hurt the grass of the earth (38). But how could they have done so, anyway, if as the account says - the grass was already destroyed during the first trumpet sequence (39)? This seeming textual inconsistency caused Charles (40) and others to reject the hypothesis that the first four trumpet sequences were part of the original text.

However, there is no inconsistency. It is based on a sound Old Testament precedent. During the locust plague of Egypt, the locusts ate everything that the hail had not destroyed. Here, however, they were not allowed to do so, hence - the Apocalyptic instruction. The hail of the ten Old Testament plagues did not ruin: (41)

(a) the wheat and spelt of Egypt for they were late in germination; or

(b) any of the crops of Goshen, though the text

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(37) Compare Matthew 13: 38 with Revelation 9: 4

(38) Revelation 9: 4 (39) Revelation 8: 7

(40) R. H. Charles: Revelation Vol 1 (I. C. C.) pp. 219-223

(41) Exodus 9: 25-26 & 32

of Exodus does not state whether Goshen was actually exempt from the locusts (42).

This vision is the antithesis of the plagues of Egypt. As in the case of the first trumpet sequence, the grass is the 'people of the land', but the arena is now not the land of Roman Palestine, but the whole world of Christendom. No Goshen is exempt.

Yet, this is not a judgement on the pagan world, nor do the 'grass' (people of the land) suffer hurt. The Greek word for 'hurt' in this context is the opposite of that which means 'to do righteously' (adikeo). As lesser proselytes such would not suffer unrighteousness.

Tormenting the Unsealed

Chapter five showed two aspects of sealing in the foreheads:

(a) a true 'seal' in the New Testament sense, by coming under the influence of the Holy Spirit of God (43):
and
(b) an apparent, and literal 'sealing' using the precedent of Ezekiel's inkhorn-bearer, attempting to carry out the process in a pseudo-accurate and human way, confining the process to the new Israel, and even missing one of its tribes (44).

It is logical that, just as there were two meanings implicit in the vision of the sealing of **the** 144, 000 so there should be a continuation of that double entendre here. These two meanings are, of course, in antithesis. They are intended to contrast with each other.

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(42) See Exodus 9: 26, and compare with 10: 15 ff
(43) Ephesians 1: 13 (44) See the discussion in chapter five on the description of the sealing process

First, there is the real spiritual meaning. Those who are truly sealed are sealed with the Holy Spirit of God (43). Their sealing is invisible and spiritual, and as Jesus did not promise **His** disciples physical protection in this world, the 'torment' must also be a spiritual one. It is **the** torment of death and of an imagined army of demons that are the hybrid of Christianity, Hellenistic Judaism and paganism. Death is the king of this imagined army, for it is personified in the book of Job, and (45) equated with Abaddon (Greek Apollyon). Much of the success of mediaeval Christianity as an institution depended on its imagined (and non-Biblical) doctrine of hell, and of the torments that would await the unbeliever. Over this troop of 'doctrines of demons' (46) death itself was king. The use of Old Testament quotation and allusion is interesting. In the case of the passover, the angel of death struck those houses that had not carried out the passover ritual. In this case, ritual is replaced by reality. All who suffer bondage from the 'fear of death' (47) are tormented by convictions about the hereafter, and on these imagined pictures the mediaeval Church would base its source of torment. Not that this torment would proceed from the Church: it would proceed from an acceptance of such doctrines of the hereafter. The fear of eternal torment is, in itself, worse than that of death (i.e. annihilation). So, in those days, men would seek annihilation rather than unending torment.

Secondly, like the 'sealing' sequence, the words have an acceptable contrasting meaning. The Church would, during its worse days, assume all those who were not sealed in the forehead with a literal visible mark of grace to be unquestionably heretics. The visible mark is in itself in the context a symbol for all other doctrines and practices of

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(43) Ephesians 1: 13 (45) Job 28: 22 (Hebrew)
(46) 1 Timothy 4: 1 (47) Hebrews 2: 15

the visible Church. To seal, in such a context, would secure literal protection from literal torment, the torment of the inquisition and the considerable political means that the institutional Church had available for extracting confessions by fear. The two pictures of sealing and of torment have to be kept distinct for the visions imply both. Lastly, under this heading it does not necessarily follow that membership or refusal of membership of any of such human institutions secures or bars membership of the ultimate company of the redeemed. The ultimate redeemed are a 'multitude that no man can number', and membership of this multitude depends on criteria that God will apply to each individual in each human condition. The visible Church (es) is/are a shadow of the ultimate company of the redeemed. They are distinct sets.

The Army of the Abyss

The description of the army of the fifth trumpet sequence is not primarily a description of any human army. It is, as Charles (48) recognised, a description of an unearthly army of imagined demons. That they are imagined, not real, is a necessary consequence of believing the four earlier trumpet sequences to be a partial and unsuccessful attack by the Church's testimony on the paganism of its day. It has been shown earlier in this chapter, that each element of the description presupposes an unearthly mixture, for example:

(a) men's faces but with the hair of women;
(b) locust (insect) in form, but stinging like scorpions; and
(c) lion's teeth, but having wings that sound like horses.

As a description of the armies of an imagined hell, the passage uses as much of a cross-category

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(48) R. H. Charles: Revelation 1 (I. C. C.) pp 238-247

description of all that should have been destroyed - as is possible in a short space.

Yet, on the premise of the previous section, if the spiritual torment of an imagined 'spiritual' army of demons is matched by literal torment, the 'locusts' themselves must have their earthly antithesis. If the analogy between the old and new Israels is a correct one then any human counterparts must be found in those aspects of paganism, which have been destroyed yet which survived in mediaeval Christendom, just as Canaanitish practices survived in Israel during the period of the monarchy and led to invasions by neighbouring nations that should have been fully subjugated. The accounts of locust invasions by both Joel and Amos are accounts of literal locust invasions (49) and of immediate neighbours that would invade Israel and Judah for their sins. It is probable, for example, that Joel's prophecy describes both a locust invasion and an invasion by immediate neighbours that took place during the reign of Jehoshaphat.

As the prophecy is not of political powers but of spiritual forces, no one mediaeval army can fit the picture properly, and thus to apply the prophecy to Saracen armies, as did the early historical - school expositors, is to violate the principle of interpretation (50). In the traditional interpretation, for example, the description 'hair of women' was taken quite literally, and the phrase 'as it were crowns of (51) gold' was interpreted to mean 'yellow-coloured turbans' on the assumption that yellow-coloured turbans look very much like crowns of gold. But such descriptions do not fit the Saracens any more than the crusaders, for example, who also had long hair, comparatively speaking, and whose yellow hair could also match the description

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(49) Joel 1: 4 (lit). 2: 25 (symbolic) also Amos 7: 1
(50) Revelation 9: 7
(51) For example Thomas: Eureka: Vol II pp. 460 ff

'as it were crowns of gold' if the point were pressed. The purpose in the description is to summarise the many facets of the armies of the 'dark ages', but to do more than simply to describe them literally. Even the bows carried by such horsemen are not simply those of archers in the so called 'age of chivalry'. As in the case of the first seal sequence, the bows are the lips of men and their arrows are words (52).

How then is the phrase, 'as it were crowns of gold' to be understood? The locusts 'have no king' (53) but these locusts are different. They have a king (54), and he is Abbadon (Greek Apollyon), whom we have interpreted already as 'death' or 'destruction'. This antithesis with Proverbs (have no king) is heightened by the reference to crowns of gold, but hair of women. Scripturally, long hair is a symbol of subjection (55), yet a crown of gold is a symbol of authority, and by analogy with the description of the 24 presbyters, it is also a symbol of the authority of Christ. The description is therefore another way of saying: "These (mediaeval horsemen) seem to have both the righteousness and the authority of Christ to 'reign as kings"(56) in their own right, but they are, in reality, subject, and in many cases their authority is that of Abaddon (= destruction), not that of Christ. There could be no more apt description of the armies of chivalry, and the age of feudalism. For in mediaeval times each lord was a 'quasi-king' in his own right. He held all property on behalf of the king, who claimed to hold it on behalf of God. The whole structure was an earthly pattern of hierarchy, and of those celestial hierarchies, those 'principalities and powers' of paganism and Hellenistic Judaism which the gospel had come into being to

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(52) Psalm 120: 3-4 (53) Proverbs 30: 27
(54) Revelation 9: 11 (55) 1 Corinthians 11: 2-16
(56) See 1 Corinthians 4: 8

destroy, and to replace with the only authority of Christ, to whom all power 'in heaven and in earth' has now been given.

Thus, during the ages of ignorance, the 'Canaanitish' pagan influences were power to the mediaeval Church from a political standpoint, but like the Gibeonites and like Israel's marauding neighbours during the monarchy, they were its spiritual weakness. It was able to use the furnace of the-pit (the fear of hell torments), with imagined armies of demons, to terrify mankind into nominal subjection to Christ. If those armies failed to work, the civil and religious crusading armies of Europe were an available force (though a rabble) to impose the supposed will of Christ by means of harm and torment.

The locusts' real power to sting lay in their tails (57). This is another way of saying that their destructiveness would not simply be upon impact, though, like the locusts of Joel's prophecy, they had the 'teeth of lions' (immediate destructiveness) (58). There would be a long-term, consequential, 'tail' or 'aftermath' effect which would render Christendom weak, for the subsequent invader, the collection of armies of the sixth trumpet sequence.

Thus, in summary, the invading army can be understood at two levels.

1) It can be understood as a hybrid army of supposed demons, of a superstition that Christianity should have conquered, but like Canaanitish superstition with the old Israel, was wedded with it to become

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(57) Revelation 9: 9

(58) Compare Revelation 9: 8 with the poetic description of locusts in Joel 1: 6, noting that 'of a lion' is a Hebrew expression in Joel 1: 6 meaning 'of lions' as in Revelation 9: 8

a hybrid mixture of all that Christianity left unconquered. In this sense the beast of the abyss is also a hybrid of those four empires that afflicted the old Israel, and though destroyed, as pagan powers, remained to afflict the Church.

2) It can be understood as a description of the human armies of the age of chivalry, or the dark ages. In this context the following table may be useful.

Descriptive Detail	Symbolic Meaning
Locusts (49)	The destructiveness of underground and immediate political influences that the new Israel should have conquered.
Teeth of lions (58)	A poetic description of locusts signifying the speed of destructiveness as in Joel (58).
'As it were' crowns of gold, but in pretence. In reality having long hair, the Biblical symbol of subjection.	Because they have a king (Abaddon) they cannot be kings, as locusts In reality having long ought not to have a king (53). Thus, they both parody 'kings' (56) and the 24 presbyters (59). Though feudally subject to Christ, they are really subject to Abaddon.

(49) Joel 1: 4 (lit). 2: 25 (symbolic) also Amos 7: 1
(53) Proverbs 30: 27 (56) See 1 Corinthians 4: 8
(58) Compare Revelation 9: 8 with the poetic description of locusts in Joel 1: 6, noting that 'of a lion' is a Hebrew expression in Joel 1: 6 meaning 'of lions' as in Revelation 9: 8
(59) Contrast Revelation 4: 4 with 9: 7 with particular reference to 'hos.....omoioi' ('as it were' or 'what looked like')

Five months, the breeding period of locusts.	The period between seedtime and harvest when wheat and weeds grow together. The timespan of the mediaeval Church.
Scorpions with stings in their tails	The weakening and deadly effects would be in aftermath, rendering the visible Church weak for later judgements.
The sound of horses and chariots	Human armies of the 'age of chivalry' (horsemanship)
Tormenting the unsealed	The 'torment' of that which lies beyond death for the truly unsealed. Physical torment for those not apparently sealed by the visible (institutional) Church

The Sixth Trumpet-Blast

The Old Israel of the Old Testament was weakened by the upsurges of those influences that it should have destroyed, but had done little more than driven underground, whether they were the influence of Canaanite survivors or the invasions of near-neighbours. Such eruptions and disturbances often occurred during the period of the monarchy, and served only to weaken Israel for greater invasions that came from 'beyond the river', from the forces of Assyria and Babylon at the end of the periods of monarchy in north and south respectively.

The purpose of the earlier invasions was to weaken the new Israel, but the purpose of the later trans-Euphratean invasion would be to bring judgement on all that was corrupt in it, in preparation for a final revival of it. The new revival, in the historical analogy, would be like the post-captivity restoration of Israel, but much greater than it, for it would be the true spiritual inter-

pretation of the 'dry bones' prophecy of Ezekiel (60) and result in that final Spirit-aided miraculous outburst of preaching that would be the means of fulfilling the real condition of the Olivet prophecy and constitute the seventh trumpet-blast, heralding the Second Advent itself. A voice comes from the four horns of the golden altar, when the sixth angel blew his trumpet. The horns in symbol measured the wickedness of the people. Because of the old Israel's wickedness, they had been captive in Babylon. Therefore, when Zechariah inquired of the meaning of the four horns he was shown in vision, he was told: "These horns have scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem" (61). The use of the four-horn symbol at this stage registers the fact that the new Israel's wickedness has reached its climax, and that a new Assyro-Babylonian invasion is to take place, one in which the Church is to be harassed by apparently vastly superior forces from 'beyond Euphrates (62).

The location 'beyond Euphrates' suggests that the symbol of the river Euphrates be investigated. Praeterist interpreters regarded this prophecy as a prophecy concerning the literal river Euphrates, that is, of those Parthian armies that would invade the Roman Empire after Nero's demise. Historical school interpreters also seemed to mix literal and symbolic meanings by assuming that the prophecy concerned four waves of Turkish armies that would sweep across Europe from beyond the literal river Euphrates. The fact that most of the Turkish invasion of Europe came from an area far north of the literal river Euphrates did not seem to worry exponents of this school of interpretation. If the prophecy had been capable of such a literal ex-

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(60) Ezekiel 37 (61) Zechariah 1: 19

(62) The words 'bound by the great river Euphrates' suggest a place beyond the river Euphrates as the place of origin.

planation, it could equally well be applied to any power east of the river Euphrates at the time it was written or at any time afterwards, and the description would therefore be a very confusing one.

If the parallel that has been drawn earlier in this book between the old Israel and the new Israel is a correct one, then the invasion from beyond the Euphrates is a spiritual counterpart of those two invasions that came successively on Israel and Judah from forces located beyond the Euphrates. The Assyrian empire lay generally beyond the Euphrates. Babylon, in contrast, bridged the river (i.e. was located on both sides of it) but the dynasty that ruled Babylon at the time of the invasion of Judah was, in fact, an Assyrian dynasty.

The symbol, 'great river Euphrates' is thus important, not as a literal description, but as the demarcation of spiritual boundary line, for while it is true that the river was important as the boundary of the territory of imperial Rome at its height, it was also important as intended boundary of Israel, of the land covenanted to Abraham and his seed. "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates."(63)

This quotation is important because it contains 'great river' and' river Euphrates', and is thus the source of the conflation 'great river Euphrates'. It must be recognised that the river Euphrates was often regarded by some as the boundary of the ancient world, beyond which was the abode of supposed demons. It was thus the boundary between civilization and 'demonic chaos'. It can also be regarded literally as a geographical boundary of Christendom, for Christianity has not, until recent times, become a 'state religion' east of Euphrates.

But probably these literal associations with the Euphrates detract from the spiritual meaning of

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(63) Genesis 15: 18

the symbol. If Christendom were the new Israel, and, despite the warnings of the New Testament, suffered from failures comparable with those of the Old Israel, then, given that the river Euphrates was intended to be the literal boundary of the old Israel, it must follow, that, as a symbol, the term 'Euphrates' somehow defines the symbolic boundary of the Church.

The river Euphrates thus represents the dividing line between the Church and the world. Babylon, as a city (in contrast with the neo-Babylonian dynasty of Nebuchadnezzar, which was distinctly Assyrian) straddled, spanned and bridged the river Euphrates literally. This description amply and aptly defines the spiritual location of the (64) 'Great Babylon' of the book of Revelation, as we shall see. For it also straddles the Euphrates. It also bridges the intellectual and institutional boundary between the institutional Church and the pagan world to which it preaches, for the Babylon of the Apocalypse represents neither the institutional Church (as so many protestant expositors mistakenly thought), nor does it represent the pagan world. It represents the whole world of mankind, in contradistinction to the true city of God, that New Jerusalem that will ultimately be revealed by God. It infuses its insidious influence as much on the supposedly Israelitish (63) side of the river as on the supposedly pagan side. If there could ever have been an 'ideal' Church, then Babylon would aptly represent the pagan world on the other side of the river Euphrates, the institutional boundary. But the visible Church is not the ultimate company of the redeemed, and membership of one community does not necessarily result in, or result from membership of the other. Thus in an imperfect world, Babylon (the world) spans the symbolic Euphrates, the institutional boundary between the new Israel

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(63) Genesis 15: 18 (64) Revelation chs 17 & 18

and the pagan world which the new Israel seeks to convert. As we shall conclude later when examining the seventeenth chapter of the Apocalypse, Great Babylon includes all the unredeemed on both sides of the river, whether nominally defined as Christian or not. As a community Great Babylon (the world) stands in contradistinction to New Jerusalem (the ultimate redeemed). Thus, institutional Christianity is not Great Babylon. Institutional Christianity has become 'Babylonian' in the Apocalyptic sense only to the extent that it has been captivated by the world.

A Spiritual Captivity

The exposition of the earlier trumpet followed the 'root of bitterness' (65) warning by the writer to the Hebrews, in which many parallels between the epistle to the Hebrews and the book of Revelation were listed. The writer of Hebrews used the final warnings and prophecies of Deuteronomy quite extensively. In particular, Israel was warned that partial conquest of Canaan and compromise with idolatry would result in the following:

(a) intermittent captivity during the period of the monarchy (66); and

(b) an ultimate captivity from the land, caused by the invasion of a far-off nation at the end of the monarchy (67). Finally, Israel would be gathered from the four winds (68).

It has been shown that the Apocalyptic pattern for Christendom is a similar one, but the Apocalypse assigns a dual role to the 'four winds'. Not

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(65) Hebrews 12:15, compare Deuteronomy 29:18 (Septuagint)

(66) Deuteronomy 28: 36-46 (note the locusts in v. 42)

(67) Deuteronomy 28: 49-57

(68) Compare Deuteronomy 30: 4 with Matthew 24: 31

only are they the **four winds** of the Olivet prophecy, from which the elect (i.e. the converts to Christ) are gathered, so that Christian witness is completed before the Second Advent in fulfilment of the primary condition of the prophecy for the advent to occur (69) but they are also four winds of judgement on the world for rejecting the testimony of Christ. In either case they are associated with the time of judgement, first of the Church, and then of the world. Further, 'winds' and 'angels' are commonly associated in the Scriptures and in the apocalyptic literature that circulated at the time John's Apocalypse was written.

First, an example may be cited from Old and New Testaments. The psalm from which the writer of Hebrews takes his definition of angels is literally translated:

> "Who makest the winds thy messengers; fire and flame thy ministers" (70) Yet the words are rendered in the epistle:
> "Who makes his angels winds, and his servants flames of fire (71).

The meanings are non-identical and can be reconciled only by believing that the Scriptures take into account popular belief of the time, and in a poetic way, identify angels with winds.

An example of this popular belief comes from the second source, from the pseudepigraphia, and in particular, the book of Enoch. Note, first, that earlier in the Apocalypse, the four angels were seen at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of heaven (72). In pseudo-Enoch, the winds were thought responsible for moving the sun, moon and stars in their heavenly orbits, and the four corners of the earth were associated with unfavourable winds, that is, with those that brought

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(69) Matthew 24:14
(70) Psalm 104:4 (71) Hebrews 1:7
(72) Revelation 7:1

judgement on mankind.

Now, however, the picture is different. The phrase 'four winds of the earth' used earlier in the Apocalypse, has disappeared, never again to reappear in the Apocalypse, and, instead of being identified with the four points of the compass, and with the winds that blow from those four directions, the angels all appear to be in one direction, for, as they are bound by Euphrates, they must be located beyond that river.

Thus, the four angels of death (73) who previously restrained the four winds of judgement (74) are now located, not in four directions, but in one place, beyond Euphrates, ready to be released on the ailing institutional Church.

In the Bible, the number 'four' represents universality, the expanded universe of a 'once four-cornered earth' that, so to speak, appeared to lie beyond the confines of the Church, out there in the pagan 'beyond'.

The Time and Method of Judgement

The reason for this change of angels' location will become clearer as the strange description of the time of judgement is examined. First of all, note the description:

"The hour and day and month and year" (75).

This phrase does not simply contain elements that were intended to be added together to become a time period. Some of the earlier historical

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(73) Note the comment on Revelation 7:1 earlier in this book and the Apocalypse's careful use of existing symbols.

(74) 1 Enoch 76 for details of the adverse nature of these winds, but the sequence of chapters from 1 Enoch 72-76 for those that were said to move the heavenly bodies. See Revelation 9:14

(75) Revelation 9:15

school of exposition thought that by a simple application of the period of a day for a year found earlier in the Bible(e.g.40 years wandering in the wilderness for 40 days of faithlessness) the description could be equated with a time period of 391 1/12 years. Yet this calculation is a doubtful one, and its application is even more questionable. Those expositors generally interpreted the description 'beyond Euphrates' literally, concluded that the sixth trumpet blast must have been associated with the Turkish invasions, and, using the only certain date in that sequence, that of the fall of Constantinople in May 1453, either counted 391 1/12 years backwards to April 29th 1062 (76) on which date nothing significantly happened, or counted them forward to June 29th 1844 (77) - to a date that came and went!

The interpretation of the phrase will be clearer, if it is noted:

(a) that as there are four angels, so there are four elements (time periods) in the description;
(b) that the sequence is an expanding one; and
(c) that the hour is the day, and month and year, for only the word 'hour' in the sequence bears the definite article.

It has already been explained that each of these descriptions of a time period is used elsewhere in the Scriptures of a coming period of judgement or of trial.

The following table will make this fact amply clear.

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(76) Thomas: Eureka, Vol II pages 513
(77) T.Newton: Dissertation on the Prophecies" pp. 490-491

Period	Other Usage in the Bible
Hour	The same hour the thing was fulfilled (78). Of that **day** and hour **knows** no man (79). I will keep you from the **hour** of temptation (80). The same **hour** was a great earthquake (81)
Day	The **day** of the Lord comes (82). Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord (83). Of that **day** and **hour knows** no man (84). The **day** shall declare it (85)
Month	A **month** (lit) shall devour them (86)
Year	The **year** of my redeemed has come (88)

Each period is then an identical description of the coming time of trial for the new Israel, the Church, a judgement of the Church that would precede the judgement on the world. Each is a description of the same epoch in the Church's history, its own 'Babylonian' captivity, from which it would miraculously emerge with the fully aided preaching of the gospel, that seventh trumpet-blast that brings the Second Advent.

But this does not explain why four words are used to describe the same period, nor does it explain the expanding sequence. The only explanation that has previously been ventured is that there

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(77) T.Newton; Dissertation on the Prophecies pp. 490-491 (78) Daniel 4:33
(79) Matthew 24:28 (80) Revelation 3:10
(81) Revelation 11:13
(82) Joel 2:1 and Zechariah 14:1 (83) Amos 5:18
(84) Matthew 24:28 (85) 1 Corinthians 3:13
(86) Hosea 5:7 (literally) (87) Isaiah 61:2
(88) Isaiah 63:4

are four angels, and that the number 'four' is associated in the Bible **with** 'universality' (i.e. the whole world),hence the phrase 'four corners of the earth'.

In a figure, the expanding sequence indicates an expansion of knowledge about 'all things', hence the universality of the number 'four'. This correctly also explains why the angels are no longer in the 'four corners of the earth' enacting as it were, the outdated cosmology of the time the book was written, the outdated cosmology of pseudo-Enoch.

In a symbolic, yet remarkable, way the book of Revelation is telling us that the cosmology of its day:

(a) a cosmology of a flat earth with four corners (72) would be replaced by a new cosmology, that of:

(b) 'an hour, day, month and year' (74) - a cosmology of:

(i) an expanding sequence, expanding knowledge and expanding universe;

(ii) revolutions, such that the revolving atom would replace the four elements; and

(iii) hints of apparent delay in the advent of the day of the Lord in the expansive nature of the time periods, for each time period seems to get progressively longer,

This aptly associates the time periods with each other, identifies the time in which these events are destined to take place," explains the expanding sequence, and also hints at what is really meant by

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(72) Revelation 7:1

(74) 1 Enoch 76 for details of the adverse nature of these winds, but the sequence of chapters from 1 Enoch 72-76 for those that were said to move the heavenly bodies. See Revelation 9:14

the attack from the forces beyond the Euphrates. It tells us that the institutional Church becomes subject to a greater captivity when it has spanned its 'third' or 'part' of mankind.

The attack does not now come from unsubdued 'pagan' influences still alive within the nominal Church, but from an apparently greater influence outside it, the influence of scientific materialism, an influence that started in Europe with the renaissance, progressed for a few centuries as an awkward marriage between Christianity and science, and then continued in its own momentum as an influence supposedly superior to the new Israel, and opposed to all that is called god and worshipped (89).

The Description of the Horsemen

At first sight these creatures resemble those in the previous one, for the forces of evil are still horsemen (90), and they also wound by means of their tails (= after-effects). But now they do not have lions' **teeth** as in the fifth trumpet sequence. Instead they have lions' heads. The distinction is important and evidence for the standpoint of our interpretation. Their savagery is not one of **brawn** as in the case of the nominally-Christian, but partially uncoverted forces of ignorance, the forces of the dark ages. Instead, their savagery is one of intellect. They have lions' **heads.** The forces of intellect would succeed in the temporary 'death' of the institutional Church. They would do more than the demonic and chivalristic forces of the age of superstition could do.

Fire, smoke and sulphur proceed from the mouths of these creatures. Expositors of the historical school associated these three terms with gunpowder

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(89) 2 Thessalonians 2:4

(90) Contrast Revelation 9:17 with 9:8

(a 'compound' of sulphur, charcoal and saltpetre)and pursuing a rather limited application to Turkish invasions and the fall of Constantinople in 1453, suggested an application to the use of gunpowder and cannons in that event.

The limitations of such an exposition are obvious. Yet, the symbol is a useful one, particularly if the sixth trumpet blast signals the pseudo-scientific invasion of the Church, in which all the forces of nature of the material universe seem to be harnessed for the benefit of man. Curiously, the fall of Constantinople in 1453 was a watershed, if not the watershed of this movement. The error lies in restricting the description to that period. 'Fire, smoke and sulphur' (91) could in these days be taken to mean, for example, the **fire-ball** of Hiroshima (each nuclear explosion being a miniature 'sun'), the **smoke** of diesel fumes (on which most modern armed transport relies) and the **amber** associated with original discovery of electricity.

The vision does not merely depict those cannons that attacked Constantinople in the fifteenth century, nor does it depict the deadly introduction of gunpowder as a means of warfare through Europe before the fifteenth century closed. All such interpretations are narrow. Instead, it depicts the coming of the age of materialistic science, that 'Babylon' that would captivate the new Israel, with all its deadly aspects from the fall of Constantinople to the bombing of Hiroshima and beyond. The vision foresees that every unit of the new cavalry, every modern army, would be a miniature volcano, and that sulphur, smoke and fire would issue from them, as from the mouths of real volcanoes!

This interpretation of the symbols is consistent with the reference to the **breastplates** of these

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(91) Compare the two descriptions 'fire, hyacinth, sulphur' and 'fire, smoke and sulphur' in Revelation 9:17

creatures. This is curiously modern! Smoke, fire and sulphur are logically associated (as they have been above) with means of **attack.** Yet, the vision associates this threefold description with means of **defence**, with the colours of the breastplates worn by the invaders, with only one explanatory difference. Fire and sulphur remain the same as parts of the description, but 'smoke' is replaced by 'hyacinth'. As colours, these are also associated with attack, for the three colours represented, red, yellow and blue are three of the four spectral opposites, red, yellow, blue and green,- the missing 'green' being associated with those things subject to the attack, the green-ness of grass, fruitful-ness, trees and other living things. Hence, in a curiously modern way, the vision is saying that the only hope of defence (breastplates) for these armies is their means of attack. Taken to its ultra-modern extreme, means of attack are regarded as the only real deterrents, hence the arms race. The only supposed hope of defence rests in the stock-piling of nuclear and other deterrents.

The Number of the Invaders

The number of creatures seems modern even if it were to be understood literally. 'Two myriads of myriads' betrays the inadequacy of any attempt to limit the words to some series of invasions culminating in the fifteenth century. In fact, the description two myriads of myriads means literally 200,000,000- a larger number than that of any army that existed prior to modern times.

If the number has a symbolic meaning, as it should, then it must represent a number even considerably larger. It literally means:

> **Twice** 'myriads' of 'myriads'; or
> **Two** innumerable companies - by comparison of the converse descriptions of the other

company, the elect (92).

This could be a way of saying that just as the attack on the Old Israel came ultimately from **two** sources (the northern kingdom having been terminated by Assyria, and the southern kingdom by Babylon), and just as the attack on Babylon also came from **two** sources (the forces of Cyrus and Ugbaru (Gobryas)), so **two** irreconcilable forces would engineer the temporary 'death' of the institutional Church. It is, at this point, perhaps a matter of speculation to identify them (for example, the supposedly irreconcilable forces of atheistic fascism (Nietzchian intellectualism) and of materialistic and atheistic communism).The 'two' could even, in this case, as in that of the witnesses, be a symbol for 'two-ness' or division, and simply indicate the dissensions that would exist in the very ranks of pseudo-science. The importance of the symbol lies in the fact that just as Israel (destined to become an innumerable company) would be attacked politically by two innumerable nations, so would the new Israel be similarly attacked by two innumerable companies during its hour of trial.

The Great Paradox

The chapter gives us a reminder that the effect of all the forces of evil lies in their effects, in their aftermath. In this judgement as in the case of the fifth trumpet sequence, the new Israel would not simply be the sufferer of direct attack from the materialistic influences of false philosophy and pseudo-science. It would also suffer from the prolonged attack of dialectic materialism. The sting of such insidious influences would be in their aftermath.

Thus is depicted one of the great paradoxes of the book. The Church set out to destroy the

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(92) Compare conversely Revelation 5:11 with 7:9

world's idolatry and to bring it into subjection to the Lord by means of Christian witness. Though it is an error to suppose that the Kingdom of God would come by conversion only, its terms of reference were that the Kingdom would not come (93) until there had been sufficient Christian witness in the whole world. Yet, as Israel failed in its conquest of Canaan through compromise with idolatry, the conquest being partial even at the time of the monarchy, so the mediaeval Church would also fail to a large extent to carry out the terms of reference assigned to it.

The imagery and thought forms of pagan superstition were allowed to remain in that very abyss of which Christ had the true key, for the 'host of heaven' of pagan worship had only been partly shattered, and its thought forms had, along with Old Testament and Hellenistic imagery, been introduced into the mediaeval Church in a geographically extensive but ever-weakening kind of conversion.

Later, the forces of materialistic science, outside the confines of the Church, beyond the spiritual river Euphrates, sought to destroy the very idolatry within the Church, that the Church had sought to destroy outside it. But it, in turn, as we shall see, became slave to a new idolatry of bondage to materialism itself, to the very matter of which the previous ages' senseless idols were made. The superstitious and the materialist would choose their own idols in accordance with their respective astrological or steady-state concepts, but the age of matter insidiously produces a worse idolatry than that of superstition. In the age of idolatry, people did not invariably worship the idols themselves, but the spirits that were supposed to inhabit them. But now, the material objects themselves are worshipped, together with the inventions of mankind, and the very materialistic

(93) Matthew 24:14

view of the universe on which such pseudo-science is based.

Thus, the chapter ends with the comment that none of the judgements associated with the trumpets (voices of witness to Christ) had, for the rest of mankind, reduced idolatry 'to demons' and to idols of gold, silver, bronze and wood' (94). Yet, there is hope in this statement, for it can be concluded that when the 'rest of mankind' abandons such preoccupations, it will turn to accept the living Christ, the true 'image' of God, the head of all living creation (95).

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(94) Revelation 9:20-21
(95) Colossians 1:15

CHAPTER EIGHT

A FAITHFUL GOD - BUT A DIVIDED CHURCH

Contrasting Visions: The Rainbow Angel and the Two Witnesses: Promises to the Church and Mankind: The Little Open Scroll: Sweet yet Bitter: 'Prophesy Again[1]: My... witnesses: A Parable of the Church: The Reed of Encouragement: 'Two-ness and Division': Behaving Like Old Testament Prophets: The Ministry of the Witnesses: The Death of the Churches: Resurrection: The Seventh Trumpet Sounds

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Contrasting Visions

Previous chapters have explained that the major theme of the Revelation of John is to show how the Church, commissioned with preaching the news of Christ's victory over death would, like its Old Testament counterpart, the nation of Israel, fail for a long while in carrying its commission to all nations.

Up to the end of the ninth chapter, there have been two sequences. The seal sequence depicts the cutting away of those obstacles to the preaching of the Word of Life (the Scroll in symbol), the unsealing of a Scroll in heaven. But John's attention, like that of the Church, is diverted by the living ones (the fourfold symbol of living creation) away from the unsealing procedure to natural pictures of simultaneous conquest, conflict, decay and death of various bodies claiming to be the true church - of tribulation and of partial conversion of the world. The overall message is that, given all the opportunity to read out the message of the Scroll to the world, the Church still at-

tempts to measure the nearness of the Lord's Advent by the incidence of natural events in apparent disregard of the main commission of the Olivet (1) prophecy. Even when the seventh seal is opened, and all apparent obstacles are removed, there is protracted silence.

The trumpet-blasts are calls to salvation, but they are not unmixed calls for two reasons.

(a) They voice the message of salvation by the Church to the world, but signal judgements by God on those who hear the Gospel, but reject it.

(b) They also indicate the procedure by which the Church would change its tactics, and thus absorb alien elements to its own detriment by invasions from the intellectual abyss, whose superstition it should have annihilated, and from the forces outside itself.

Only by a restoration to its primary enthusiasm and by a resurgence of its miraculous powers can the commission be completed. Such a revival would be the seventh trumpet blast, sounding the Gospel message to the whole world. The tenth and eleventh chapters of the Apocalypse explain how this can come about, and also explain a problem that must, at this stage, be disturbing many readers. It can be summarised by raising two questions.

1) If the Church (generally speaking) introduces non - Christian elements into its teaching, at what stage, if ever, does it cease to be the true Church?

2) Given that Christendom (or any of its constituent churches) may at some point cease, from a practical standpoint, to be regarded as the 'true Church' (at whatever level of idealism the word 'true' is used) then do God or Christ abandon it in

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(1) Matthew 24:14

every sense in which the word 'abandon' may be used?

This question could simplistically be answered by looking at the example of Old Testament Israel. As a nation, Israel abandoned itself to the most' spiritually degrading beliefs and practices, yet never ceased to be God's witness (2) to the world. Despite the moral and spiritual standing of Israel at any time, if Israel had not existed, there would have been no witnessing nation at all. On the other hand, it is almost unnecessary to state that membership of the national community (Israel) would not 'guarantee' its rights and privileges to every member of it, and would certainly not 'guarantee' salvation in the ultimate sense. Throughout Israel's history, there were separatist communities who regarded themselves as faithful remnants, who separated from the main body for justifiable reasons, but who were probably branded as 'heretics' by the larger number. The 7,000 men in Israel who would not bow the knee to Baal in Elijah's day are an example of such separatists. In much the same way, the main body of the Church (Christendom) has been witness to Christ's death and resurrection for nearly 2,000 years, yet it has contained many with non-Biblical beliefs, and just as there were in the Old Testament case, those who separated from the the main body for various reasons, so Christendom has its separated communities with varying degrees of truth or error. Yet God remains faithful despite human backsliding, and in the final analysis, ultimate salvation will be a matter of judgement or justification of each individual professing Christian from Jesus' days to our own times, and beyond.

Thus, it is reasonable that any Divine explanation of the position should provide two contrasting pictures:

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(2) Isaiah 43:10

(a) a picture of the faithfulness of God in keeping His promises both in relationship to the Church and to the world; and
(b) a picture of the inadequacy of the Church, when measured up to the standard of Christ, in carrying out its mission of grace.

Let us bear these two contrasting pictures in mind when considering chapters 10 and 11 of the Apocalypse, and remind ourselves that the book of Revelation performs two functions, among others.

1) It provides - for Christians in **all** times of history, a series of enacted parables, about the Church's spiritual future, reminding it of its objective to preach to the whole world.
2) It provides answers to the Jewish apocalyptic (apocryphal) literature that circulated in John's days, by using the very symbols that the writers of the 'spurious' apocalypses had used.

It is necessary to sense how the Jewish apocalyptists used the Old Testament so that the Apocalypse's contrasting message can be fully understood. But, though the Old Testament provides a guide to the symbols of Revelation, it is wrong to use it as an exclusive key (or reference book) to explain the symbols. For a second factor is also necessary. It is the Spirit of Christ.

In the two visions of chapters 10 and 11, those of the rainbowed angel and the two witnesses, Old Testament symbols are used in two contrasting ways. The evidence for this contrast follows later.

1) The first vision is a reminder of God's abiding love, mercy and convenant - faithfulness to His people.
2) The second 'vision' (an extension of the first) is a descriptive account of the behaviour of the divided institutional Church in its witness to Christ.

Thus, though the symbols associated with the rainbowed angel vision of chapter 10 describe an ever-loving, ever-faithful God, the symbols associated with the two witnesses describe the Church, and effectively show that it would try to do the correct thing, but in the wrong way. It would try to follow the Lord, for the details and the time-pattern of its ministry would be patterned on that of Christ Himself. But its method of carrying out its mission would be such as to contrast with His, to such an extent that its mission would be much more similar to that of Old Testament prophets, than to the mission of a Christian community -using human methods rather than those of the Lord Himself. Thus, the subjects of the second 'vision' act in apparent ignorance of the faithfulness of God to all mankind. They, in the language of the earlier vision, ignore the rainbow, and attempt instead, to regurgitate a 'consumed' scroll - to unseal a thundering message of doom (3)

The Rainbow Angel and the Two Witnesses

The previous paragraphs will surprise those who have been conditioned to thinking of both chapters 10 and 11 of the Apocalypse as messages of judgement, gloom and doom. But this is not a case. Chapter 10 is not an anticipation of the dooms and woes of Chapter 11. Instead, it is a picture of God's desire to seal up judgement with mercy. It is a picture of His faithfulness to his promises. In contrast, the vision of the two witnesses illustrates how human 'churches' (the visible Church, or Christendom) treat the judgements of God. Not only does it anticipate them with some 'relish' as a measure of the nearness of Christ, but attempts often to carry them out itself, as the holy wars and the inquisition illustrate. Hence, though God's

(3) Revelation 10:1 & 4

leading witness in the world is the visible, institutional Church, there is no authority given, in the strength of the gospels, to witness in any other way than that in which the Lord Himself witnessed. 'Power' **is** given to the witnesses to perform acts similar to those of Old Testament prophets, but this is not Divine authority so to behave. In fact, both the words 'power' and 'authority' are absent from the original text (4). The witnesses have, humanly speaking, the 'power' to witness in a way uncharacteristic of Christ, and they do so. The RSV free translation 'I will grant' is meaningful. The witnesses have, so to speak, been given 'leave' to behave in the way in which they do, or have, humanly speaking, been allowed to do so.

The assertion that the two witnesses represent the Church (in the human 'orthodox' sense of the term) is often countered by the question: "Is the Church in question the 'true' Church or the 'false', and if 'false' how can it be God's witness?" I hope that this question has already been answered in the introduction to this chapter. The book of Revelation knows no 'human' distinction between the true Church and the false. All Christian churches have, to an extent, betrayed their trust through their history in some way or other, but membership or non-membership of any one of them does not, of itself, guarantee or debar an individual from membership of that ultimate 'innumerable company' whose constituents are known to God alone. They alone are the 'true Church' and membership of that community, the New Jerusalem of the final chapters of the book (5),is not a matter of choice or of human registration. It will depend on Divine mercy alone. To use the analogy with Old Testament Israel, there was never, in Old Testament times a well-defined group of people called the

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(4) Revelation 11:3

(5) Revelation chs 21 & 22

true Israel, and another well-defined group called the false Israel. As there was only one race of Israelites, so there is only one Christian Church, in the 'witnessing sense'. Of course, Israel was nationally divided for most of the period of the monarchy into two kingdoms, Israel and Judah. For most of the time, the northern kingdom (Israel) was more 'false' than the southern kingdom (Judah).But God's prophets were found in both kingdoms, and the very revolt that severed the kingdoms in the days of Jeroboam I had prophetic blessing. Thus, neither Israel nor Judah was the true 'Israel', or the false!

So it is with those human institutions that collectively make the Church of Christ. In that set of institutions there are remnants who hold the Truth in its purity, as there were remnants in the days of Elijah. But the 'gifts and calling of God are without change of mind' (6). Membership of the remnants does not guarantee a place in the ultimate City of God. Neither does membership of the mass mean condemnation and preclude salvation. Christ will judge each on the individual merits of each, for all judgment has been given to the Son. (7)

Promises to the Church and to Mankind

"The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable" (6). God is faithful to His promises, both to mankind in general, and to the Church in particular. Thus, the rainbowed angel vision quotes those Old Testament contexts that describe both these sets of promises. This is not an artificial or arbitrary interpretation. It is the only possible reason for the allusions in the chapter. The optimistic symbolism, including the rainbow, the description of

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(6) Romans 11:29
(7) John 5:22 and Revelation 20:12

cloud and pillars of fire, and the promise that there would be 'no more time' are all needed at this stage, because of the somewhat 'pessimistic' way in which chapter 9 ended.

To recall the previous sequence. Six of the seven trumpet-blasts have sounded, and though there is, as it were, only one more 'chance' for mankind it still seems (8) as inclined to idol worship as ever. Instead of demolishing all the idols of paganism, the Church retained many of them in its own superstition, and even the forces of pseudo-scientific materialism seemed to demolish this superstition, but set up a materialism that was as idolatrous as ever. At the end of the ninth chapter, the picture appears to be a very dismal one!

Jesus foresaw that the Church needed to be encouraged at this stage, and the symbols are all, as we shall see, symbols of encouragement. Even the 'pillars of fire' (9) that seem to be associated with doom, are incorrectly so interpreted. The words 'cloud' and 'pillar of fire' are truly associated with the faithfulness of God to Israel in leading them by cloud and pillar of fire for forty years through the wilderness. They are, as we shall see, the reminders that Christ will not forsake the Church, but continue to lead until it ends its 'wilderness journey'.

The rainbowed angel descends from heaven, to remind the Church (in the 'time no longer' statement) that its work has not yet been completed, but that Christ will not fail it until it has finished its task.

Note that there are two sets of symbols:

(a) 'rainbow' is paired with 'sun'; and
(b) 'cloud' is paired with 'pillars of fire' in the description.

The second pair of symbols is the more important

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(8) Revelation 9:20-21
(9) Compare Revelation 10:1 with Exodus 40:38

from the standpoint of the Church, for it is, as was already explained, a set of symbols relating to God's promise to the Church, to guide them as He did ancient Israel, through the wilderness of history to the promised land of the ultimate Kingdom of God. Because they were associated with Israel, the symbols are those of miraculous guidance. The pillar of fire and the cloud (by night and by day respectively) never left the camp of Israel until the journey through the wilderness had been completed. The angel in the vision is 'wrapped in cloud' but his feet are as 'pillars of fire'. Through Israel's journeyings its clothing and footwear did not fail. The symbols are thus concerned with supernatural provision and protection. In the previously quoted statement 'the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable' (6). All the errors of the Church do not signal a forsaking of it. God still leads those who claim Him as their God, despite their waywardness.

The first pair of symbols are seemingly of less importance from the standpoint of the Church, but important in defining God's faithfulness to mankind generally. They are natural signs indicating that God never utterly forsakes the world, that He never utterly forsakes mankind.

Again, there are two symbols.

1) The rainbow is the sign that God will, in the language of Genesis, never again 'destroy the earth' as he set out to do at the flood (10).
2) The sun is also a symbol of God's faithfulness to mankind, but fulfils both functions, for it is cited by Jeremiah, not only as mark of God's faithfulness to provide mankind with the 'ordinances of heaven' but also, on that premise, that He would not cast away His people.

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(6) Romans 11:29 (10) Genesis 9:8-17

Though in the former context, the 'people' is Israel, yet by principles of interpretation already consistent with the rest of the Apocalypse, the people, in this context must be the new Israel, the Church (11). The vision thus confirms that God, of whom the rainbow angel is a messenger, is faithful to both the land (Israel = Church) and sea (nations = mankind) on whom the angel sets his feet, that He will not destroy mankind without adequate witness (10) (11) , nor yet forsake His people, the witnessing community (11),but continually guide them with 'pillar of fire' and 'cloud'(12),as in the case of the Old Israel in their wilderness wanderings. There is, of course, some tension between the two sets of promises, a dilemma similar to that in the book of Jonah, where God's faithfulness to Jonah's message appears to be offset against the need to preserve the people of Nineveh if the city repented. Revelation poses a different answer from that in the book of Jonah. It is that of leaving the final judgement of the world (and the Second Advent) until the world has sufficiently heard the Christian message.

After using so many symbols that indicate that the vision relates to God's mercy, rather than His judgement, the chapter now begins to deal with the judgements of God, but in a remarkable way. The Church must be told that its message must be:

(a) of salvation rather than of condemnation; and

(b) of grace rather than of judgement.

This is the real reason for the drama of the little open scroll (13).

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(10) Genesis 9:8-17

(11) Jeremiah 31:35-36

(12) Compare Revelation 10:1 with Exodus 13:20-22

(13) Revelation 10:2

The Little Open Scroll

The scroll in this chapter (biblaridion) stands in complete contrast to the scroll opened by the Lamb (i.e. by Jesus) in the earlier chapters of the book. The earlier scroll was taken by the Lamb from the (14) right hand of one enthroned. It is also presumably taken by the Lamb's right hand, though this is not explicitly stated. As it was a sealed scroll, it had to be unsealed (15). When all seals were broken there was silence (16). It represents the Word of salvation, the Message of the Gospel.

In contrast, the little open scroll is in the angel's left hand, presumably, for he holds his right hand to heaven, and the text does not say that he raises the scroll heavenward (17). Instead of being as a Lamb, the angel 'cries as a lion', - a quotation from Amos (18). The book is open, and there is a subsequent noise of 'seven thunders', but afterwards, there is an instruction to seal up the message of the seven thunders. Thus, the two books stand almost in complete contrast with each other. The following table summarises these contrasting features.

The Seven-sealed Scroll	The Little Open Scroll
In the right hand of the One enthroned, presumed to be God Himself (14)	Presumed to be in the left hand of the covenant angel, for his right hand is raised to heaven (17)

(14) Revelation 5:1 (15) Revelation 6:1-8:1
(16) Revelation 8:1
(17) Compare Revelation 10:2 with 10:5
(18) Amos 3:3-8

Originally sealed up, then unsealed throughout the first sequence of the Apocalypse (15)	Originally opened (i.e. un- sealed) but its message is to be sealed
Unsealed by the Lamb	Presumed to be in the left hand of the covenant angel, for his right hand is raised to heaven (17)
When it is unsealed there is silence for a comparatively long period in the vision (i.e. half an hour) (16)	Seven thunders utter their voices

If the message that the Church should preach is primarily a message of salvation and of grace to the world, and if, as was suggested in the earlier chapters, the first scroll symbolises that message of life, its unsealing being the removal of obstacles in the preaching of the Gospel to mankind, then the little open scroll must stand for a divine, but less important message. If so, to what does it refer?

Note that there is no mention, in this case, of the lamb of God, but only of a 'lion' and that although the scroll appears to be sweet, the consequence of eating it are bitter.

By Old Testament parallels, as for example, that with Ezekiel's message of woe (19) we are left in no doubt about what it means. Alongside the preaching of the Gospel of Life, but of less importance, the Church has to be aware of another message, the message of judgement on those who" reject the Word of Life. The message is of less importance, hence the scroll is smaller. Because it is of less importance, the details of judgement are to be sealed up (20) .The 'rainbow' and 'sun' symbols have already been interpreted to show that the angel is concerned with the longsuffering of God to mankind.

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(15) Revelation 6:1-8:1 (16) Revelation 8:1
(18) Amos 3:3-8 (19) Ezekiel 2:9-10
(20) Revelation 10:4

There is a conflict between God's longsuffering with mankind and His promises to the Church, and this conflict can only be resolved by delay (21). Thus, the 'thunders' have to be sealed up. The book has to be consumed, in the sense that its message is known to the innermost part of the Church with all its bitter impact, but that the Church's preaching (mouth) should be with sweetness and grace. Until the Church has preached to the whole world (the sounding of the seventh trumpet-blast of the Gospel), the mystery (i.e. secret) of God's judgements on the world cannot be known. Thus, though the Church must not lose heart despite the great gulf in time, there will be an end to the apparently interminable period of God's longsuffering, hence the oath of the angel, which is based on a similar vision given to Daniel (22).

Thus, there is a condition attached to the end, and this condition is consistent with the whole message of the Apocalypse. The seventh angel has to sound; the trumpet-blasts of Gospel-proclamation have to be completed first. The earlier trumpet-blasts indicated the Church's previous attempts to preach the Gospel and the various consequences that followed. The ultimate seventh trumpet-blast is that perfect proclamation of the Gospel to the whole world, in perfect accord with (1) the terms of the Olivet prophecy, to finish the 'mystery of God'. Thus, the 'seven thunders' (of judgement) are sealed up. They will not sound until the Church has carried out the Olivet commission (1).

Thus, those who have misinterpreted this chapter as a 'bloodcurdling' description of the awfulness of God's judgements must be disappointed. There can be no judgement yet, only the 'rainbow' and the 'sun', the reminder of God's longsuffering. But, lest the Church should be discouraged, the angel does

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(1) Matthew 24:14 (21) Revelation 10:6
(22) Daniel 12:6-7

just what Daniel's angel did (22). He lifts his hand to swear by the Eternal Creator, that the end **will** come when the Church has faithfully performed her trumpet mission. The words: "Who created heaven and the things therein, earth and the things therein and the sea and the things therein," are reminiscent of God's apparent disappointment with what He had created, of the flood, and of the covenant made after it (23).Yet, the angel's oath, that there should be 'no more delay' is a promise to the Church. In this way, God is depicted as being faithful to His two apparently conflicting covenants, that associated with the **rainbow** (10) not to destroy mankind without thorough warning, and that associated with the **sun** (11) not to cast away His people.

Sweet, yet Bitter

Even though the message of the Church to the world is not primarily one of judgement, but of salvation, the Church must be made aware of the secret of God's judgement, the consequences of disobedience. Hence, there must be a mention of the seven thunders, so that the alternatives of obedience and disobedience can be fully comprehended.

For this reason, the quotation sequence returns to Deuteronomy, from which, as we have seen, many of the trumpet-references have been taken, via the Epistle to the Hebrews. Good and evil, and life and death are set before the Church, as they were set before Israel (24). The Word was not in heaven, or beyond the sea (two of the places mentioned in the angel's oath). Instead it was in their **mouth**, and in their **heart** (i.e. their inward part). **Mouth** and **heart** can perform different functions, however.

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(10) Genesis 9:8-17 (11) Jeremiah 31:35-36
(22) Daniel 12:6-7 (23) Compare Genesis 6:6; 6:17 7:19-21; 9:14-17 (24) Deuteronomy 30:11-14

Some of the Word can be in the **mouth**, (i.e. spoken) but some must remain in the **heart** (i.e. kept secret).

The drama of the little open scroll is a prescription for the Church in its preaching. The message to be preached to all nations was not to be the ranting, nagging message that spelt out the consequences of disobedience. It was to be the honey-sweet -message of grace and peace. This was the scroll in its mouth. The bitter implications of rejection of the message were but a background to their preaching. It was to be concealed in the conscience of believers - bitter in the heart and belly (25).

Even the act of lifting up the right hand to heaven is not an act principally associated with punishment of the enemies of the New Israel (26), but rather is it associated with blessing primarily, as in the case of Melchizedek, who blessed Abraham by the 'maker of heaven and earth' (27). The very description, 'maker of heaven and earth[1] is a reminder of God's faithfulness. For example, it is used:

(a) in the confession in the days of Nehemiah, where the description 'who made heaven.. earth... sea and all things therein' is coupled with the mention of the pillar and cloud (28) ;

(b) in the ten commandments, where it is aptly associated with (29) the rest that remains to the people of God; and

(c) in Psalm 146, where it is associated with the fact that God keeps truth (i.e. is faithful) for ever (30).

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(25) Compare Revelation 10:10 with Ezekiel 3:1-11
(26) Contrast the context of Deuteronomy 32:39-40
(27) Genesis 14:19 (28) Nehemiah 9, compare w. 6 & 12 (29) Exodus 20:11 compare with Hebrews 4:5 (30) Psalm 146:6

Thus, each quotation from an Old Testament source incorporating the description of God as creator of heaven, earth and sea, contains an explicit description of God as One Who keeps His promises, will lead His people, and ultimately provide a 'rest' for them.

There is, nonetheless, a commission to the Church to turn mankind from its waywardness. The Church's preaching must be sweet, but it is urged on in its preaching by its own secret, its consciousness of the judgement that may await the unredeemed. This dilemma is illustrated by a dual quotation from Amos.

Aoos	Revelation
The lion has roared. Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken. Who can but prophesy? (31)	He cried as a lion (32)
Surely, the Lord God will do nothing, without revealing His secret to His servants the prophets (33)	Then is revealed the secret of God, according to the good tidings (gospel - see RV) declared to His servants the prophets (34)

The Hebrew parallelism in the first of these quotations from Amos must make it clear that the Church's mission is not to preach a message of terror. If there is fear, it should be a reaction to the roar of the lion, as prophesying is a re-action to receiving the Gospel of God, which would otherwise be secret. The second set of quotations is the strongest possible evidence that the

(31) Amos 3:8. compare 1:2 (32) Revelation 10:3
(33) Amos 3:7 (34) Revelation 10:7

trumpet-blasts are the Church's preaching of the Gospel- The Greek verb 'evangelizo' (to preach the gospel) is used in this context (34).The text says in effect that the seventh trumpet will be contemporary with:

(a) the preaching of the Gospel (previously a mystery to some) to the whole world; and
(b) the culmination of the hope of the Church in the Second Advent - hence, in the revelation of the 'mystery of God' in this, other sense.

Until this occurs, the little book (of thunders of judgement) is sealed up. It is swallowed (35).It is in the heart (or belly) where its anticipation releases the thought of the bitterness that is coming for the world. But such anticipation is not intended to affect the Church's honeyed message of grace, with the mouth (36) nor the mouth (37) of the recipient, with which confession is made to salvation.

'Prophesy Again'

The principal teaching of chapter 10 is thus that the end has not come, because the Church has not yet finished its testimony to mankind. So, it must:

> "prophesy again, **before** many peoples, nations, tongues and kings," (38).
> There is no doubt that the easier reading:
> "prophecy again **about** many peoples, nations, tongues and kings."

is clearly incorrect, for the passage is a part-quotation from Jeremiah's prophecy, where the word 'before' is certainly used (39).As a personal symbol of the Church, John is told that his witness-

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(35) Revelation 10:8-10 (36) Deuteronomy 30:14
(37) Romans 10:10 (38) Revelation 10:11
(39) Jeremiah 1:10 & 25:15-26

ing is incomplete. To summarise, in this vision, Christ effectively promises the Church that He will never fail it, and ever lead it. The Church must preach with grace, but be itself aware of the impending judgements of God, though such judgements are not its primary message. Against this prescription, the realities of history, as predicted in the vision of the two witnesses, stand out in shattering contrast.

My...Witnesses

Few prophecies in the Apocalypse occasion more interest than that of the 'two witnesses'. Yet, though they are often regarded as heroes rather than as 'part-villains', their example and methods are not, as we shall see, those of Christ Himself. They are not villains, though the world may regard them as such, but neither are they exemplary, for they do not follow the methods of preaching used by the Lord Himself, and thus they present a hidden danger to those who may look to them as examples, instead of patterning their methods of preaching on those used by the Lord. This distinction will be explained later in the section.

Before doing so, it may be useful to explain some of the interpretations of the prophecy of the two witnesses that are current among Bible scholars, though it is inappropriate to spend too much time doing so. To the historical-school expositors, the two witnesses are generally understood as two witnessing communities (40)or sets of communities who opposed the Roman Catholic Church during the middle ages. In contrast, the futurist school of expositors believe that the two witnesses are either two persons or two communities who preach an Elijah-like message shortly before the Second Advent. This interpretation is based on the simila-

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(40) See Bishop Newton (supra) pp 497-526

rity between the ministry of the two witnesses and that of Elijah.

The first of these two interpretations is unsound. Though the witnesses are claimed, in the chapter, to be God's 'olive trees' and 'candlesticks' or 'lampstands' (symbols of His acceptance), many of the witnessing communities listed by protestant expositors as part of the mediaeval witness were more astray from the teaching of the Bible than the Catholic Church itself. They include, for example, the Circumcellion bandits who befriended the schismatic Donatists in the fourth century of our era, the Albigenses whose beliefs resembled those of the early Gnostic heretics, and the French revolutionaries.

The second, ore literal, application of the prophecy depicts the assumed advent of people, prior to the Second Advent, who are empowered to work miracles of harm, uring a period of grace, and thus to behave in a literally unchristlike manner. If the futurist, and more literal application of the prophecy is true, then, at some period prior to the Second Advent, the messengers of Christ will literally be authorised and empowered to breath fire at their enemies, and to turn their waters into blood. During the Christian period of grace, a period that lasts up to the Second Advent and the judgement of the world, it would be completely inconsistent with the teaching of the Bible for the servants of God to behave in this manner.

Fiery judgement will come at the Lord's advent (41) but the witness drama, by its very position before the seventh trumpet-blast, must depict something that will take place before the Second Advent, or that has already taken place. There is no sanction anywhere in the Bible for thinking that any of Christ's followers will have the authority to behave in a judgemental, vindictive, retributive

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(41) 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8

manner - as do these prophets - if the vision is to be literally interpreted.

A Parable of the Church

The riddle is solved by interpreting the two witnesses as a parable of the divided Church - of a divided Christendom. Though the teaching and practice of this divided Church is, in many respects, astray from that of the Bible, as were the teaching and practice of ancient Israel, yet (just like Israel) Christendom is never entirely abandoned by its Lord.

Before examining the amazing detail of the parablest is well to be reminded of a statement made earlier in this book. It is that the human distinction between 'true church' and 'false church' does not exist in the Book of Revelation. Humanly speaking there is no such distinction, for all churches (as human institutions) have varying degrees of human error. The only distinction in the Apocalypse is that between the institutional (or human) church (or churches) that would succeed the apostles, and that ultimate ideal Church of the future, the New Jerusalem that would descend from heaven. All other distinctions (of the us and **them** type) are man-made and artificial. Of course, there are 'remnants' (separatist communities) in Christendom who aspire to keep Bible truth pure, just as in the Old Israel there were purist 'remnants', such as the 7,000 of Elijah's day who did not bow the knee to Baal. But these remnants are not substitutes for the whole of Israel or for the whole of Christendom, as the case may be. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. If He did not (42) entirely cast away His people, even when they rejected His Son, how can He be said to have en-

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(42) See the argument in Romans ll:4ff. Compare 1 Kings 19:18

tirely 'cast away' any section of Christendom despite its error of doctrine and practice? The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable (43).

Such remnants, such schismatic communities, were necessary to Israel when the vast majority turned aside from true religion. In the same way, remnant communities have tried to bring Christendom back to the doctrine and practice of the early Church, at different times in its history. But these remnants are not the ideal Church. The ideal Church is that ultimate community whose members are known only to God, and this ultimate community will come into being when Jesus returns from heaven.

Some expositors have used this prophecy to justify excommunication of a large portion of the Church, by so interpreting the commandment not to measure the outer court (44).However, the court is **part** of the holy city. So one cannot regard the outer court as the symbol of an apostate Church, and also logically regard the holy city as the true Church.

Thus, the whole Church is holy. Though the gates have been opened to many who have not the Spirit of Christ, though the 'Gentiles'(45) have trampled its 'outer court' (46) , and though it has been reduced to a political institution, and harboured every kind of vice - yet it is still holy, by its very association with the Lord Jesus, Whom it claims to serve. Its people are all the 'chosen people' though consisting of 'unfaithful witnesses', just as Old Testament Israel were the 'chosen people', yet consisted of 'unfaithful witnesses'. Just as Israel was divided into two kingdoms through most of its history, so Christendom has largely been divided into many major Churches.

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(44) Thomas: Eureka (Vol II) pp. 597-602

(45) Revelation 11:2

(46) Gentiles in this case meaning non-Christians in the true sense (43) Romans 11:29

Just as Israel was thoroughly apostate in the reigns of kings such as Ahab, Jeroboam II and Manasseh, so has Christendom, except for small remnants been thoroughly apostate in periods of its own history.

The Reed of Encouragement

God never forsook the Old Israel completely, nor has Christ ever completely forsaken His Church. The reed with which the temple has to be measured is a parable of encouragement. The bruised reed is not broken (to quote one of the servant songs of Isaiah), nor is (47) the smoking line of flax quenched, until Christ brings forth judgement to victory. Though it may be weakened by heresies and strife, yet it does not end its testimony until the Second Advent, when judgement is brought forth to victory. The work of Christ is to heal, (48) not to destroy, and to encourage, not to condemn. The same kind of reed (Greek: kalamos) occurs in this passage as in the Septuagint of Isaiah. But in Revelation, it is not bruised. It represents Christ, and Christ, as the reed, is the only standard by which the temple of God can be really measured. The reed is thus not a creed, nor is a statement of faith, though definitions of Christian belief are advisable. In contrast, the reed is Christ. His 'bruised' life is the only standard by which any in the holy city can be measured as worshippers in the true temple. But in the human counterpart of this temple there would be both good and evil. Some would trample while others would worship and witness. Some would destroy while others would help and encourage.

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(47) Compare Isaiah 42:1-4 with Matthew 12:17ff
(48) Matthew 12:15. (Compare Isaiah 42:1-4)

'Two-ness and Division'

The two witnesses are a parable of a divided Church. We need not try to find two identities, for the 'two' in the symbolism represents the very fact that the Church is divided. In the early chapters of Genesis, division was always into **two** constituents, for example, light and darkness, earth and waters, and so on. The Old Israel on which the prediction of the new Israel, the Church, is modelled, was also divided into two political entities (Israel and Judah).The parable says, in effect, that the Church will remain divided throughout its period of testimony. Only in death will it become one. Only by dying as a political institution will it regain its spiritual unity and integrity. It is because of this model on the Old Testament, that there are so many Old Testament quotations, for the churches' method of witnessing resembles that of Old Testament prophets, but contrasts with the Lord Whom they claim to serve.

The time periods of the prophecy are not 'day-for-year' periods (e.g. 1260 years), nor are they literal periods of time just before the Second Advent. The 3*5 year and 3*5 day periods are based on the pattern of the ministry of Christ. Christian tradition has always believed that the ministry of Christ lasted for about 3*5 years, and the New Testament itself states that He was dead for about 3 days. Hence, the ministry of the witnesses is primarily patterned to look as though it is modelled on the ministry of Christ Himself. But the period of 3*5 years (a time, times and a half) has other Scriptural associations for it is used in Daniel as the time of desecration of the literal temple of God in Jerusalem (49).Thus, the ministry of the witnesses becomes a neat paradox for it combines an apparent copy of the ministry of Christ, with a

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(49) see Daniel 7:25 & 12:7

time of spiritual desolation. The phrase'1260 days' is an appropriate symbolic description which simply means 'the length of the Church's 'ministry' however long, in literal time, that period may be', for though the period of the Church's ministry is patterned on that of Christ's, it would in reality be a period of a desolated temple, in which the Church would be 'desolated' from within by human nature, and desecrated from without by the spiritual 'Gentiles' (nominal Christians).

Given that each of the numbers involved is a symbolic descriptor, we can return to the explanation of the number 'two' given earlier, that 'two witnesses' simply means a 'divided witness'. The divided witness is an essential feature of the chapter. In Zechariah (50) two olive trees provide oil for one lampstand. In context they are explained as God's two anointed ones, the high priest Joshua and the prince Zerubbabel, who ministered to a united Israel (the one candlestick) after the Babylonian exile. Two olive trees nourished one lampstand. Two men administered to one nation.

This superficial explanation is simple, but does not take into account the fact that both these men were enacting a parable commenced in the visions of Ezekiel. In Ezekiel's 'dry bones' prophecy, from which extensive quotations are made in Revelation 11,the two nations (Israel and Judah) are represented by two sticks. These are joined in the (51) hands of Ezekiel, signifying the fact that after the exile the two nations would become one. As the sticks were joined in Ezekiel's hand, so the division between the houses of Israel and Judah would cease to matter after the exile. Both houses of Israel at peace with each other would provide the oil for one lampstand, the light of one religious entity. Both nations, previously warring with each

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(50) Zechariah 4. See particularly v.14
(51) Ezekiel 37:15-23

other, would now provide oil for one candlestick and the light of one religious community. Each warring community would become an 'olive', a peaceful entity. Thus the anointed ones may primarily mean Joshua and Zerubbabel, but the vision shows **two** (divided things) supplying the needs of one, so that priest and prince combine, Levite and tribe of Judah combine - and in the most extended analysis, the remnants of Israel and Judah combine, as olive trees, to supply the light fuel to **one** candlestick - **one** new Israel.

In Revelation, the description of the witnesses as **two** olive trees and **two** lightstands is a deliberate difference, intended to throw the symbol back to be copied on the time when Israel and Judah **had been two** nations (52).The light is thus not single, but double, or to use the more meaningful analogy of the Lord Himself, the 'eye' of (53) the witnesses is not single, but double. Thus even here there is the parable of a divided Church. Yet, it is the Lord's anointed as was King Saul, despite his errors. Christ has no other witness in the world, but the witness of Christendom, in whatever state it may find itself!

Behaving Like Old Testament Prophets

If the witnesses are intended to 'parody' the ministry of divided Christendom, do they do so successfully? The witnesses' behaviour resembles the behaviour of Old Testament prophets. It does not resemble the behaviour of Christ in His ministry. When James and John suggested that Jesus should call down fire from heaven to destroy the Samaritans in the same way that Elijah had done to destroy his opponents (54), Jesus told them that they did not know of what spirit they were made.

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(52) Revelation 11:4 Contrast Zechariah 4.
(53) Luke 11:33-36 (54) Luke 9:51-56

The Christian Church should, in accordance with these words of Christ, progress from Old Testament methods of conversion by fear into the ministry of grace, to the 'foolishness of preaching' with works of healing as the main miracles performed to call people to repentance. Instead of doing so, the Church resorted to other methods that, while resembling the miracles of Moses and Elijah, indicate a step backwards from the period of Christian grace to the methods of conversion of the Old Testament. The resemblances can easily be tabulated, as below.

The Two Witnesses	Moses	Elijah
Fire pours from their mouth and consumes their enemies (i.e. they command fire to consume their enemies).	Exodus 9:24 in prospect	2 Kings 1:9-14
Power to shut heaven that it rain not in the days of their prophesying	Deprivation of water by using 'blood plagues'	1 Kings 17:1-7
Power over the waters to turn them into blood.	Exodus 7:17-24	None
Power to smite the earth with every plague as often as the desire	The ten plagues Exodus chapters 7 to 12	The consequences of no rain, see 1 Kings 17:1-7 and compare with Joel

The resemblances should now be contrasted with the great differences between the ministry of the witnesses and the ministry of the Lord Himself. These differences are also tabulated, on the next page.

The Two Witnesses	The Ministry of Jesus
Fire pours from their mouth and consumes their enemies	Jesus' words of grace (55) are a well of water (56) springing up to life everlasting
If any man should hurt **them…**	Resist not evil (57)
Power to shut heaven	The heavens were opened(58)
Power to turn water into blood	Actually turned water into wine (59)
Power to smite the earth with every plague	Miracles of healing (i.e. good works) continuing the mission of Elijah **'lest** I smite the earth with a curse' (60)

If we take each of the four activities in turn, the 'ecclesiastical' interpretation will become clear. First of all, the fire. It was not fire that poured from the mouth of Christ to consume his personal enemies. His words are a well of water that spring up to life everlasting. Nor did his words consume his enemies, from a human standpoint. Rather was He consumed, and in so doing saved His enemies. Note that the witnesses use their powers to destroy their enemies. If any man should harm them he is doomed to be destroyed by the fire pouring from their mouth. There is little doubt that the fire is the antithesis of the 'honey' of the previous chapter. It is that burning message of judgement 'bitter to the belly', which the Church was told to seal up. Instead of concealing this message of the bitterness of condemnation - the flaming fire that will await those who reject the

(55) Luke 4:22 (56) John 4:14
(57) Matthew 5:39 (58) Matthew 3:16
(59) John 2:8 (60) Malachi 4:6

mercy of God (61) , the Church sought to use the fire, to terrorise the world to submission by breathing out its message of torment - of fiery condemnation in hell. In mediaeval times this was notoriously the case. Conversion was based on fear of torment, and its own constituents made the institution rich at the expense of the rich, and at the cost of their death-bed fears. Thus, the fire that proceeded from 'their (plural) mouth (sing)* are the fearsome fires of an imagined hell, that relied, as we have seen earlier, on pagan tradition, rather than on Bible teaching.

The second activity involves closing heaven and preventing its gentle rain from falling. As the table shows, Jesus did the reverse. He did not close heaven during His ministry. But the heavens were opened when His ministry commenced with His baptism, and they remained (in the revelatory sense) open until His crucifixion. In the case of the Church's ministry, heaven was closed by apathy. This apathy so often prevented the grace of the Holy Spirit being poured out, as in the first century. This interpretation is a necessary one, because the Holy Spirit's direct revelation from God is so often in the Bible designated by the phrase 'the heavens were opened' (62). What happened to the first century gifts of the Holy Spirit - those special gifts of miracles of healing, raising the dead and the gift of prophecy? Though parts of the Church have claimed charismatic gifts at most times of Christian history, and though there is today an upsurge of charismatic claims, it is still true that, as yet, even in this age in which charismatic gifts are reputed to be in the process of revival, the miracles are not as pronounced as they were in the first century. What then happened to

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(61) Scripturally 2 Thessalonians 1:7

(62) Mark 1:10: John 1:51; Acts 7:56; 11:5; Revelation 4:1

the first century gifts? Did God withdraw them? If the opening of heaven represents the distribution of Spirit gifts, then the closing of heaven could, and must logically, represent their termination. Yet this passage says that the witnesses, not God, would close heaven. God did not withdraw the gifts of the Spirit in the first century, but the Church by its apathy, inaction and failure to follow the initial drive which could, even at that time, have led to the conversion of all nations, 'quenched' the Spirit (63),'grieved' It (64) and 'neglected' Its gifts (65) to some measure within a century of Pentecost. Thus, through a failure to heed these three warnings of the apostles, the gifts of the Holy Spirit became restricted in their operation, and the rain of Christ's grace did not fall as abundantly.

Given that these interpretations of the first two details of the witnesses' activities are correct, the interpretation of the other two details is an easy matter. Waters are turned into blood. Given the interpretation of rivers and fountains of water when considering the third trumpet sequence, waters would represent the springs of water of life that the Church was, as an institution, charged to administer. During Christendom's history these have often been turned into blood, as wars and crusades have been fought to defend some principle of doctrine or other, quite often a false principle of doctrine.

Finally, the witnesses 'smite the earth with all plagues'. Nations have been plagued, not simply by crusades, but sometimes by the very unfaithfulness of the institutional church in carrying out its mission. The crusades were themselves not always conducted against infidels, as the pillage and murder of the Orthodox population of Constantinople

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(63) 1 Thessalonians 5:19 (64) Ephesians 4:30
(65) 1 Timothy 4:14

by Catholic crusaders witnesses. Nations were plagued because God's new witnesses were unfaithful in carrying out the terms of their mission as Israel had been in the past. The divided institutional church has often struck the earth with the plagues of its own misdoing.

The Ministry of the Witnesses

Thus, the two witnesses represent the divided Church, divided as ancient Israel were, but with one difference. They are not this time divided into two distinct entities, as were the people of Israel into the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah. This is simply the symbolism on which the parable of the witnesses is based. Instead they are fragmented into many ecclesiastical and denominational pieces. Yet, they are God's witnesses as the Israel of Isaiah's time were. They have lapsed from the commission, as Israel lapsed into idolatry. Yet they are never entirely forsaken by their Lord, who knows only them of all 'families of the earth' (66) The 3h year period is no more than an expression of the time-length of the Church's 'ministry' however long that may be. It is a kind of facade, for it is patterned on the assumed length of Jesus' ministry despite the startling differences between their ministry and His. Yet the very time period presupposes a temporary 'death' of 3*5 days, when its assumed mission has been completed, but when its original terms of reference (to preach to all nations) are still incomplete. This death of the Church now needs our attention.

The Death of the Churches

The institutional 'death' of the church is still

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(66) Hence the Amos references earlier

future for the world generally. In the West the Church is an ailing institution trying to become united by means of statements of intent, and discussions between ecumenical committees. In the East some of the churches are intensely persecuted by a godless State, and the position is different. If, to use the analogy of a previous chapter, the river Euphrates is breached, the Church can be invaded from outside and thus die by becoming a political machine in the fullest sense. The beast from the abyss is the political counterpart of the locusts from the abyss in the ninth chapter. It is also an amalgam of all those nations that made up the four beasts of Daniel's first vision (67). It is not a persecuting nation in the physical sense, but a spiritual oppressor. It represents all those spiritual influences that serve to oppress the Israel of God, as the four powers represented by Daniel's four beasts physically oppressed the original nation of Israel. The meaning of the passage is clear. This worldwide political representative of sin in all its forms will attack the institutional church by infiltration and by other propaganda methods so that it is not only rendered politically dead but also spiritually dead. The possibility that the Christian community can everywhere at any time be politically and spiritually dead is that which was envisaged by the Lord when He said: "When the Son of Man comes shall He find faith in the earth?" The situation inside the Soviet Union, for example, where the State is able to control 'recognised churches' to their detriment, and where others are driven underground, may be a foretaste of the real death of the witnesses in both east and west.

The world will rejoice as it has already rejoiced to some extent, at the fall of an anachronistic, ailing church. But the heart of the church

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(67) Daniel chapter 7

will not die. Instead, in prison camps, labour institutions and all the degrading and brainwashing institutions that godless man has devised, a new body will come to life, a body bereft of its previous sectarianism, a body of people who are prepared to be Christians for one object only, to serve the living Christ. In the Soviet Union and China there are already small foretastes of what will take place. The two sticks are being joined, the many churches who for such long periods sought some 'formal' unity, will attain to spiritual unity and right doctrine because of persecution by a common enemy.

Resurrection

The death of the institutional church will signal the birth of a new body of people. Just as Israel no longer perpetuated the antagonisms between Israel and Judah, the northern and southern kingdoms (68) the houses of Ephraim and David, after their two 'bodies' had become one in Babylonian exile and in diaspora, and just as Ezekiel had joined two sticks together to enact that the two political entities would become one in dispersion - so now the 'two' (representing many) dead bodies (representing all the fragmentations of the Christian Church) will become one body. Because the wrangling institutions are destroyed, the many bodies become One Body, and the Church is united once more, for all its disloyal and self-interested elements have apostasised in the persecution that the godless State will conduct. This unity is implicit in the actual Greek text of the Apocalypse which literally reads in verse 8:

> "their dead **body** (sing.) will lie in the street of the Great City.." (69)

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(68) 1 Kings 12 and Ezekiel 37:11-23
(69) Revelation 11:8

So they are now spiritually One. The differences that once mattered no longer seem to matter. Instead, in worldwide persecution, disinherited by that colossus of godlessness that has already raised its head over a third of the world, and no longer backed politically with power to torment its enemies, the Church will once more pray with united voice, with true and real aspiration, for the revival of that Spirit power that will heal the dejected fragments of the Church, as the original bestowal of the Holy Spirit healed the dejected disciples when the Lord was first taken away (70).

With uniform prayer for the Holy Spirit to be received in the full apostolic sense, and with a realization that the commission to witness to all nations cannot be completed without it, the Church will obtain that renewal of power from on high, and in receiving it be cleansed from its erstwhile impurities of doctrine and practice, as those newly baptised in Israel were, who received it at Pentecost (71).

As Jesus rose after three days, so the Church will rise to this renewal after a comparatively short period, spiritually described as 'three days and a half. New revival will thus dawn upon the world with all the authority of the living Christ behind it.

The words 'they stood upon their feet' are quoted from Ezekiel's vision of dry bones (72). In

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(70) The Spirit is the 'breath' of Ezekiel 37 interpreted in v.14 as the work of the Spirit of God on the House of Israel. This also anticipated the Christian dispensation (see Ezekiel 36:26-27) (71) Acts 2:40-47

(72) Compare Revelation 11:11 with Ezekiel 37:10. The normal word for army does not appear in the Hebrew text. Hence the spiritual rather than political nature of the revived body in both cases.

context they mean that Israel would become a great spiritual power. Interestingly, in the Septuagint version of the Ezekiel prophecy, the words 'an exceeding great army' are rendered 'a very great synagogue'. Israel became a spiritual unity (a church) when it ceased to be two nations. So, at this point, perhaps not far future to the present, the Church will become a spiritual 'unity' and cease to be a number of man-made institutions. After a long period of doing things inadequately in formal imitation of the ministry of Christ (indicated symbolically by the similarity of time periods) it will 'die' and by its institutional death, it will 'save' a very large number of people (73) a 'salvation by death' which is, itself, a shadowy imitation of the work of the Lord. Just as Jesus's death brought many more Jews to repentance than ever His ministry had done, so now the institutional 'death' of the Church will bring the world to its knees. All those 'partial' trumpets, those inadequate attempts to preach the Gospel will be superseded by the seventh trumpet, by that latter-day equivalent of Pentecost (74) in which the Word of Grace is communicated to the whole world by a community that is strong in the Holy Spirit, and has ascended symbolically into a 'cloud' as He literally did after His resurrection, before His 'Pentecost' (75).

The Seventh Trumpet Sounds

At last the seven-sealed scroll is not simply unsealed, nor is it simply opened to be followed by silence - but it is read to the whole world. The seventh trumpet is the very fulfilment of Matthew 24:14. It is the preaching of the Gospel to all

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(73) Compare this salvation by death with Acts 2:40-47
(74) Acts 2:43
(75) Compare Acts 1:10 with Revelation 11:12

nations, and becomes feasible once more because the Holy Spirit gifts are once more fully at work in the world. The seventh trumpet is the final obedience of the Church, now empowered with the Spirit that some of its first century members had neglected, grieved and quenched (63, 64, 65). No longer are there dry bones (76).No longer is there reliance on the supposed relics of saints and martyrs. Instead its members stand on their feet, 'an exceeding great congregation', as post-exilic Israel were prophesied by Ezekiel to have stood on their feet, 'an exceeding great synagogue'.

In this new Pentecost, as in apostolic times, fear (in the non-tormenting Scriptural sense) falls on every soul. There is an earthquake in the city of their ministrations. But it is not necessary for them to (77) preach in the temple (the hallowed 'tenth' (tithe) of the city) as did the apostles, for it is now no longer needed. Instead the whole city is being transformed into a temple, in anticipation of the time when 'there will be no temple therein' (78). Neither will there be self-styled remnants, necessary in the times of the Church's apostasy to preserve purity of doctrine, just as there were those remnants in Israel, like the seven thousand who would not bow the knee to Baal in the days of Elijah. Now the 'seven thousand'(79) the professing remnant, no longer have 'names' as such, but have become part of the revived Church, because the real 'remnant' consisting of so many whom the professing 'remnant' would have considered to be beyond the grace of God, have now obtained the fear of God, as the 'remnant' in Israel

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(63) 1 Thessalonians 5:19 (64) Ephesians 4:30
(65) 1 Timothy 4:14
(76) Ezekiel 37:11-23 as applied to Christendom
(77) Acts 2:43
(78) Compare Revelation 11:1 & 19 with 21:22
(79) Contrast 1 Kings 19:18 with Revelation 11:13

to whom the apostles preached at Pentecost, also 'feared' at the deeds of the apostles.

Yet, the time for repentance is short-lived. With the sound of the seventh trumpet-blast, which now preaches the pure Gospel to the whole world - the time of responsibility has arrived, and the time of opportunity has closed. Now the kingdom of the world will truly become the Kingdom of God. The repetition of the language of the rainbowed angel's oath in the psalm of the presbyters at the end of the chapter (80) is a reminder that the angel's promise has now been fulfilled. The Church has blown its final (and yet its only effective) trumpet blast, just as when Israel encircled Jericho there were seven trumpet blasts on the final day, but only one of them was effective. Now the Jericho of the world will fall. As it will, at last, have effectively witnessed to the world, the revived Church will have brought the end, the 'time of the dead', the time of rewarding saints, prophets and proselytes (81). Now there will be no distinction between the holy 'tenth' of the city and the 'court of the city and the 'court of the Gentiles', nor between the professing 'remnant' and the 'rest' of mankind (82). Just as the Jerusalem temple was opened after the desolation by Antiochus on which the 3% years ministry are also modelled (83) so now the real temple of God opens in heaven. Thus, false schismatic distinctions will matter no more. The New Jerusalem, the Holy City, is about to descend out of heaven from God, and all that matters for every believer is whether his name is written

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(80) Compare Revelation 10:7 with 11:18

(81) Compare Joshua 6:16 with Revelation 11:17-18

(82) Compare, for example Revelation 11:13 with Luke 18:11 (literally translated the 'rest of men')

(83) Compare with Daniel (supra) and 2 Maccabees 1 & 2

in that City. For throughout the ages, all true believers, despite supposed differences have been growing into a Holy Temple in the Lord in Whom each is built for a dwelling place of God by the Spirit (84).

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(84) Ephesians 2:19-22

CHAPTER NINE

A CHILD IS BORN

A New Beginning: The Impact of Christ's First Coming: Woman and Dragon: Divine Symbols to answer Pagan Myths: The Birth Pangs: Historical References: The Sun-clad Woman: Celestial Clothing: The Fiery Dragon: Two Dangerous Extremes: A Spiritual Conflict: The Real Enemy: Translated to the Throne: The Dragon falls from Heaven: A Ministry of Protection: A Ministry of Default: War in Heaven: No Place Found for them: War on the Remnant: Survival in Exile: Spiritual War on Earth: An Object Lesson

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A New Beginning

The previous chapter ended at the summit of Christian expectation. It concluded at the time when the dead are judged, when the Kingdom of God has come, and when all Christian expectations have been realised. The vision could, at this stage, have proceeded to describe the New Jerusalem but as it does not do so, we must conclude that chapter twelve takes us back in time. As the Revelation commences its visions with the ascent of Jesus into heaven to take the Word of Life and unseal it to mankind, it seems clear that the most appropriate point to which the book can return at this stage is to that time - to the first century. If the book has to make a 'new beginning', the most appropriate time to which it can return is to that 'new beginning' which occurred when Christ came into the world and when the Word was made flesh. In so doing, the book makes a new beginning, and it does so at the very time when God made a new beginning with the world in Christ's birth – when

the new creation germinated.

The birth of our Lord Jesus was the great 'divide' of history. It is also the great divide of the book, the commencement of its second Act. Between the two 'halves' of the book there is a connecting link, for the (1) first 'half ends when the kingdom of the world becomes the Kingdom of our Lord and His Christ, while the second 'half starts with the 'Kingdom and Authority' of God that was displayed when Jesus wrought salvation.

Thus, the main drama of Revelation is in two Acts. Act I of the Apocalypse was concerned with Gospel proclamation. The Church unseals the Word of (2) Life in the person of the Lamb, and it blows its trumpets of salvation (2) to the world. Because it has lost its early enthusiasm, and full spiritual power shortly after Pentecost, it does the work imperfectly until it is finally revived with the Spirit in persecution, and the task is completed.

Act II of the Apocalypse, in contrast, carries us outside the objectives of the Church. The scene is now the whole of humanity, and the drama is that of man's salvation and redemption in the context of an ever-changing world. For this reason, Act II is a recapitulation of the message of the sealed scroll, but there is a change of emphasis. The symbols may be global in their impact and meaning, but they are no more political or nationalistic than those that are presented in Act I. The only battle in the book is that for the salvation of mankind. Act II illustrates the spiritual conflict between the witnessing community and the powers of an alien world who oppress it spiritually.

The Impact of Christ's First Coming

It is logical to suppose that Act II of the book

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(1) Revelation 11:15 & 11:18 (R.S.V.)
(2) Revelation chs 6-8:1 & 8:2-11: end

should commence in the first century, just as Act I did, but it is even more realistic to consider that as the Act commences with a vision of woman and child, there is at least a symbolic reference to the birth of Christ, to that time when the Word was made flesh (3).The birth of the Lord Jesus was the great divide of history. The dawn of Christianity was the twilight of the ancient gods - it was the Gotterdammerung of that age that imagined the heavens to contain evil beings as well as good ones, and even though Christianity was often communicated by an erring Church (as the previous chapter can be seen to illustrate), the message of Christ has not left the world unaffected, and even non-Christian religions reformed to take a different view of evil. Greek and Roman mythology imagined its evil deities to be **in heaven**. Zeus himself was subject to every type of perverted human taste. The 'principalities and powers' in the heavenly places against which the early Church fought were the imagined deities assumed to be in heaven, many of whom were patently evil. Many of the Oriental and pre-Christian American deities were evil and assumed to exist in heaven.

Even though Christianity did not convert the world, its very presence has caused many of the non-Christian religions to reform their thinking, so that even by them, the concept of an utterly 'evil' deity **in heaven** has been superseded by a new mythology which relegates him to a less prominent place. Post-Christian religions such as Islam and Sikhism relegate the devil to hell. The view that utter evil can exist in heaven has largely been eradicated from the world's main religions.

A similar, but less significant reform also occurred in Judaism. Apostate Judaism thought Satan to be some prosecuting counsel resident in heaven, and this mode of thinking was the background of the

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(3) John 1:1

poetic book of Job (4) and the vision of Micaiah (5). Later Jewish apostate thought abandoned the view that Satan was some prosecuting counsel in heaven, and made him leader of a rebellion among heaven's angels (6) .But Satan, whether conceived as a prosecuting counsel, or as an utterly evil personal devil, or a symbol of all evil - has no place in heaven, and with the coming of Christianity came a radical change in men's thinking, the eradication of a belief in evil in heaven. So in Christian religious thought, as in Manichaeanism (which developed shortly afterwards) and then in Islam, in Sikhism and in reformed Buddhism, there may (only in some cases) be a belief in a personal devil, but such a being is not given a place in heaven, as was the 'devil' of pre-Christian belief. In pre-Christian paganism the heavens were imagined to be filled with good and evil deities, but even in post-Christian paganism, heaven is usually reserved for good deities, and earth, sea or some imaginary hell reserved for evil ones. These transformations in both Jewish, and pagan thought have coincided with the advent and preaching of Christianity, and cannot have been entirely unaffected by it. This factor helps us. to understand the fall of the dragon from heaven, which is described later in the vision.

Woman and Dragon

Act II of the Apocalypse thus commences by depicting two persons in heaven at about the time of Christ's birth and first century ministry. They are the woman and the dragon (7). They are there for different reasons. The woman is not in heaven **by right**, but by grace. Because she is naturally earthly, she returns to earth, to be pursued by the

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(4) Job chapters 1 & 2 (5) 1 Kings 22:19-23
(6) Enoch chapters 6-11 (7) Revelation 12:1-4

dragon. She is in heaven by that divine favour which enables her to produce the man-child.

Conversely, the dragon is not in heaven **by right** either. He is there by that usurped authority mentioned earlier in the chapter. By this usurped authority, Satan was imagined to have dominated at least a third of heaven in pre-Christian times. Babylonian, Zend and Teutonic thought assumed 'Satan' or his equivalent to be in possession of about a third of heaven. Jewish apostate thought (as in Enoch) also imagined a third of heaven to be in the possession of rebellious angels. The vision of a dragon occupying a third of heaven, and specifically defined as the 'devil and Satan' is provided at this stage, **not** to indicate some literal fact, but to summarise the preconceptions about the devil which had existed in pagan thought before the coming of Christ, and that had even crept into Judaism, and found their way into Christian mythology, but with one exception of believing that Satan had been cast out of heaven in the Christian case, but still remained in heaven in the case of most pre-Christian religions. It was primarily the task of Christianity to show the world that evil could have no place in heaven, that it did not occupy a place in heaven except in the imagination of mankind, and that it could be vanquished by the grace of Christ, and the Word of His testimony. Hence, as we shall see, the casting forth of Satan from heaven is a powerful symbol of what would happen to the human concept of evil as a result of the teaching of Christ.

The woman and the dragon cannot coexist in heaven. The woman is clothed with the sun, and her rising into heaven of divine grace is the dawn of a new day. Darkness and light cannot exist together. The dragon is Satan, the 'prince of darkness', the symbol of all that is wrong in the world. The whole sky must be filled with the light of true redemption. Thus, the woman is favoured (by grace) with a

position in heaven so that the dragon, who had usurped a position in heaven (in an imagined literal sense) may be dethroned.

Divine Symbols to answer Pagan Myths

The objective of the book of Revelation is to answer the spurious apocalypses which were in turn based on the world's pagan myths, with its own answer in their language. Several pagan religions included myths of struggles between a favoured woman and an evil dragon by means of a divinely-born 'messiah'. These accounts were, in turn, probably pagan distortions of a Genesis promise that the 'seed of the woman' would bruise the head of the serpent (8).The woman needed by grace to return to that divine 'heavenly' Edenic status from which, according to Genesis, she was expelled, and her return to favour would deprive the serpent and his worshippers of that imagined power that he seemed to have over mankind. Those women who surrendered to god-like heroes before the flood - a Genesis incident, reproduced in distorted form in all the ancient myths - did so because they wrongly understood the message of redemption through the human birth of a divine 'messiah' .It was partly in answer to Enoch's mistaken (and pagan-corrupted) account of this pre-flood incident, that this part of the book of Revelation was written. Let us then examine the myths, so that we can understand the masterly symbolism.

In German legend, Siegfried, the Son of Wotan by a human mother, slew the dragon. The symbolism in this case is, of course, crude and undeveloped. The development of the symbols is particularly pronounced in the myths of the four cultures by whom the Jews had been captivated, Babylonia, Persia, Greece (whose mythology influenced Rome) - and Hellenistic Egypt.

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(8) Genesis 3:14-15

They were appropriated in the spurious apocalypses.

Some of the more significant details can be summarised in the following way:

Nation	Details
Babylon	Tiamat was a seven-headed water-monster whose tail cast a third of the stars to the earth. He sought to resist the birth of Marduk by Damkina (a woman). Marduk was carried away to a safe place, but Tiamat turned on Damkina. She was protected by the earth and an eagle. (9)
Persia	There is no equivalent of the woman. Ormuzd was thought to have created the twelve constellations (stars) (10) and Ahriman the god of darkness was thought to have created the seven planets (heads) (11). He sent his servant, Azhi Dahak, to carry a third of heaven (third of the stars) (12) and so obtain the rulership of the world, but was defeated.
Greece	Python, the dragon, (13) was told that he would be slain by a son of Leto, a woman. Python pursued her, and she gave birth to Apollo on an island. Python was slain by him on the fourth day.
Ancient and Hellenistic Egypt	According to the Roman Plutarch, (15) Isis was clothed with the sun, and bore the child Horus, the son of Osiris. Set, the great dragon slew Osiris and pursued Isis. Isis escaped to an island, as did Apollo in the Greek legend.

(9) R.H.Charles: Revelation I (I.C.C.).pp.310-3. Gunkel: Schopfung 379ff (10) Bund 3:1; Revelation 12:1 (11) Revelation 12:3
(12) Revelation 12:4 (13) Dietrich: Abraxas pp.117ff (14) Compare Genesis 1:14-19
(15) Plutarch: De Iside, 22:30

The Apocalypse of Enoch	Enoch, like the man-child of Revelation, was caught into heaven. There is rebellion among the angels (a third of the stars of heaven). They are punished in 'Tartarus' (16). It was a false premise of 'Enoch' that there had been evil among heavenly angels, and the Apocalypse, like Jude, (17) was intended to answer this false premise.

Of course, the book of Revelation does not 'rely' on these parallels from pagan religions in any way whatsoever- as radical critical scholarship at one time thought. The Book of Revelation was written to counteract such influences - but to be understood by as many as possible. In the Hellenistic world many contemporary readers of Revelation would have been only too aware of some of the legends of Babylonia, Persia, Greece and Egypt. Further, the centre of Hellenistic Judaism was probably Alexandria, where many of the apocryphal apocalypses were written. Thus, the writer deliberately used the imagery and cultural legends of the four main nations that had dominated and influenced Israel, for this part of the book is concerned with the downfall of the oppressors of the true Israel. So the saga of the downfall of the 'world' - that, as a counterpart of the four oppressors of Old Israel would now persecute the Church, is written in that symbolic language that was actually used by the oppressors of the Old Israel (18).

The Birth Pangs

The legends have a common theme. It is the message of world-redemption. Some of the Old Testament

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(15) Plutarch: De Iside, 22:30 (16) Enoch 70 & 71
(17) Enoch chs 6-16.See Jude w.6, 7, 8, 9 & 11 & 13, all of which are references to apocryphal, apocalyptic sources
(18) See Daniel chapters 7 & 8

prophets foretold the redemption of the world in this context. Micah, for example, wrote of Bethlehem-Ephratah bringing forth a ruler in Israel, and said that when her travail would end, the rest of his brethren (19), (compare with the 'remnant of her seed' in Revelation) would return to the people of Israel. Though the whole prophecy is phrased in language of deliverance from Assyria, Matthew (20) used the text to illustrate the birth of Jesus. In similar vein, Isaiah said that Zion would deliver her man-child before she travailed, indicating that the time of travail would be short (21).But it was more than a poetic description of the brevity of Israel's labouring with child. It was a prophecy that Israel would produce her Saviour (Jesus) before her major period of tribulation during the Christian era. Thus, the Isaiah prophecy was fulfilled by the first century appearance of Jesus.

However, the Apocalyptic vision is more than a literal prophecy about the birth of Jesus. The literal facts are bases of the symbols used. The prophecy cannot be limited to the literal birth of Jesus by a literal woman for if that were so, the literal woman would be Mary, and all the symbolism would apply to her. The confusion of literal enactment with symbol is, itself anticipated in the Apocalypse, which is, after all a preview of ideas and ideals. Just as, in chapter seven, the prophecy presupposes a 'literal' marking of the forehead by the institutional churches in supposed compliance with an instruction to seal the forehead spiritually, so in this chapter, it almost seems to anticipate a time when some professing Christians would literally read the detail of its own prophecy and regard Mary as a heavenly intercessor. The prophecy is, in this sense, an extraordinary anticipation of what would happen to the beliefs of the Church.

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(19) Micah 4:9-5:4 (20) Matthew 2:6
(21) Isaiah 66:7-9

Theologically, in the minds of many professing Christians, the prince of darkness would be, so to speak, evicted from heaven, only to be replaced, not by Christ, but by the vision of a heavenly 'mother and child'. Thus, the book envisages a time when its own symbols would be understood in the most literal sense. The pagan dragon would be cast from heaven in the minds of masses of people, but although evil would no longer be imagined to have place in heaven, its place would be taken by a literal picture of Mary. The 'shadow' would thus have predominance over the 'substance' in ecclesiastical beliefs, so that the literal 'woman in heaven' would be clothed and crowned with nearly all the honour of God Himself.

However, the prophecy does more than anticipate the transition that would take place in the popular imagination of heaven, from that supposed to be inhabited by evil 'principalities and powers' to that occupied by a woman intercessor. Apart from anticipating its own 'partial' and 'literal' misinterpretation, the book provides clues to its spiritual interpretation. Before deciding what the woman in heaven represents, it must be appreciated that the narrative **is** based on the literal account of the birth of Jesus and the flight of Mary into Egypt.

Historical References

Over half a century before the book was written, the following events had taken place. The real Mary was about to bear a child when she was persecuted by Herod. If Daniel's fourth beast represented that Roman (22) - dominated Hellenistic world in which Christ was born, then some meaning must be attached to the ten successive horns, and the little horn (22) that supplanted three of the earlier horns. In

(22) Daniel chapter 7:25

'The Message of Daniel'(1970) I presented a case for believing that the ten successive horns were not Seleucid Kings (as is often thought by Bible critics) but the ten kings of the Asmonean line, dating from and including Judas Maccabees himself. The last three kings were deposed by Herod, and the last three years of his reign (from the birth of Christ to Herod's death) constituted a rule of terror and oppression. It is impossible to provide all the details of the case here. The Asmonean Kings did not, of course, 'rule' the 'body' of the fourth beast. They simply prospered because of it. The kingdom of Herod, which replaced theirs, was the most territorially extensive of all Jewish kingdoms. Even if this interpretation of the fourth of Daniel's beasts was not intended in Daniel's visions, yet there are important parallels.

If the fourth beast was intended to mean the Maccabean-dominated near-eastern world that formed the transition between the Seleucid and Roman Empires, and the horns (representing only a small portion of the beast) were the Maccabean succession, Judas, Jonathan, Simon, John Hyrcanus I, Aristobulus I, Alexander Jannaeus, Alexandra, Aristobulus II, Hyrcanus II and Antigonus, then the three that fell at the instigation of the 'little horn' can easily be identified. They were the last three of the list. Aristobulus II (BC 69-63) was poisoned because of the intrigues of Antipater and Herod, Hyrcanus II was killed by Herod, and Antigonus was killed by Anthony at the direct request of Herod. Thus, one-third of the ten were, so to speak, cast down to the ground by the little horn, just as one third of the stars were cast down to the ground by the dragon in Revelation 12.

To interpret Daniel thus, Herod had cast down one third of the Maccabean line, Jesus was then born, Herod sought to destroy him (23), whereupon Mary

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(23) Matthew 2:16-23

with Joseph) fled to Egypt for about three years signalling the 'time, times and a half of Daniel 7.Then Herod sought to destroy the other Bethlehem children, who were not the remnant of Mary's 'seed' except in a general sense, but nonetheless, the 'remnant of the seed' (24).

The Sun-clad Woman

The passage is thus based on a fulfilment of Daniel 7 in the details surrounding the actual birth of Christ. But if it is **based** on this historical fulfilment of Old Testament symbol, it cannot refer to the literal birth of Christ, nor to the woman Mary. Who, then is the woman of the chapter?

Paul says that all creation labours in travail (25) waiting for the manifestation of God's sons. But the woman (by the very presence of other symbols in the chapter) cannot mean all mankind. She must represent that proportion of mankind who desire redemption, for the rest do not 'travail' in the redemptive sense. She must represent those who produce the real deliverer, for much of creation will not be 'delivered'. Many of mankind will not be redeemed. The woman is favoured, as we have seen, with entry into 'heaven'. The opening of heaven represents the giving of God's grace (His Spirit). Grace is offered universally, and all mankind either has been or will be offered it at some time or other. But only a section of mankind has actually received God's grace. They are those who know that deliverance is actually available. Therefore, in Paul's definition (25) the woman would represent 'creation' only in a restricted sense.

Is the woman 'Israel' then? She most certainly is, if the term Israel is used as Paul uses it in

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(24) Revelation 12:17

(25) Romans 8:18-24. Compare v.23 with 'remnant of her seed' later.

Romans (26) to include 'godfearers' and all converted Gentiles including all who profess belief in Christ, because of the very existence of a racial 'Israel' in the past. The term 'Israel' would then mean all who have come within the immediate scope of salvation at any time in history. Of course, Christ died for all men (27) and we have no knowledge how God plans to save those to whom the Gospel has never been preached. Though those who know the Gospel must preach to all men (28) they have often been unwilling witnesses, and have failed by keeping the message of salvation to a select community. This was Israel's cardinal sin and can be ours.

It is sometimes a habit of Biblical scholars to draw some kind of dividing line between 'natural Israel' (the past nation) and 'spiritual' Israel (the Church). There are, of course, Old and New Israels in exactly that sense - hence the message of the Apocalypse, and the recasting of the warnings to Old Israel, so that they may become warnings to the Church. But, to use the analogy of the 'olive tree' in the Romans passage to which reference has just been made (26), there is really only one olive tree, not two. Some of the branches (Old Israel) were pruned away and other, alien, branches (Gentile Christians) were implanted, but this process had already been carried out even before the first century. In the time of Esther (29) some Gentiles had become Jews, and only a century previously the Maccabeans had converted the Idumaeans and other nations. Thus, Israel had proselyted many nations before Christ came, and when Christians preached the Gospel to Gentiles they merely extended this process.

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(26) Romans chs 10 & 11, particularly 11:17-24
(27) 1 Timothy 2:6
(28) Matthew 28:19-20
(29) Esther 8:17

The Church, however defined, is thus simply a continuation of 'Israel' and has behaved often as 'naturally' and unspiritually' as did the old nation of Israel. Thus, there is no need to decide whether the woman represents (a) Israel or (b) The 'Church'. She is the Israel of God, of all ages, -a community that consisted of Jews and proselytes in pre-Christian times -and of Christian in post-Christian times.

Celestial Clothing

She is clad in heavenly symbols for three reasons. Let us take them in turn.

1) As at the beginning of the previous vision, the details, sun, moon and stars are a reminder that God will be faithful to His promises to His people. Just as in that vision, the rainbowed angel had the face (appearance) of the sun, to refer back to God's promises (i) not to destroy mankind (rainbow); and (ii) not to allow 'Israel' to cease from being a witnessing community (30) - so in this case, the Jeremiah reference is expanded. The investiture is thus a prolepsis that the Church would soon be clothed with those 'everlasting convenant' symbols of Israel-sun, moon and stars. Joseph's dream (31) and the Jeremiah convenant (30) make it clear that sun, moon and stars were symbols of the people of Israel in the Old Testament. Now, the Church is the successor of all those promises attached to the Old Israel. Although God would reject many of national Israel, He would not reject those people whom He foreknew.

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(30) Genesis 9:8-17 and Jeremiah 31:35 & 36
(31) Genesis 37:9-11

The olive tree would survive, though some branches had been rejected and others implanted. Israel would still survive in the form of the Church, to be faithful to the Jeremiah promise (30), though its constituents would be mainly Gentile. Here is God's promise that His Israel has not been rejected (quite apart from the survival of the Jewish nation as such) -because the role of Israel is now continued by the Christian Church. This promise has already been anticipated in the vision of the rainbowed angel (32). The new Israel would continue 'as long as the sun' (33).

2) Using the other 'sun, moon and stars' symbolism -that of the earthquake of the sixth seal sequence, and that of the fourth trumpet sequence, the sun, moon and stars are also the imagined gods of the ancient pagan world, who were only partly shaken and partly smitten in those sequences respectively. The Church, wrestling with these imagined gods- with the 'principalities and powers' imagined to exist in heavenly places-(34) appropriated their influence, and their domination of the minds of men.
3) The third reason for her investiture with sun, moon and stars is that, in a more natural sense, they represent the whole universe. She is a queen, and the mother of One to Whom all power has been given in heaven and earth. Her people are

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(30) Genesis 9:8-17 and Jeremiah 31:35 & 36
(32) Revelation chapter 10
(33) Compare Jeremiah 31:35-36 with Psalm 72:17
(34) Ephesians 6:12

to 'inherit all things' (35). She is a kingdom of priests and an holy nation. These words originally meant Israel, but are now a description of the Church. So, she wears a crown of twelve stars, not just to represent the twelve tribes of Israel (as in Joseph's dream) but the very constellations themselves, for all things are hers (36).

The dragon tries to perform a rite of human sacrifice, so to speak - to consume the man-child, as soon as he is born, with the flames of the dragon's own 'fieriness' (lit. Greek, translated 'red'). The birth of Jesus and his ultimate sacrifice were intended to end not only human sacrifice - but all animal sacrifice. Wherever Christianity has been preached, 'animal' and 'human' sacrifices have respectively been severely limited and abandoned completely. This is a logical effect of the replacement of the dragon by the woman. There can be no place in mankind's religious 'heaven' for woman and dragon. One or other must go.

The Fiery Dragon

The dragon of the Apocalypse is not a political power (or nation). It is that spiritual influence that has enslaved mankind, and been served more slavishly than any dictator, particularly in pre-Christian times and by pagan peoples, because of the very belief that utter evil can exist in heaven. Thus, this chapter of the Apocalypse was written, as the earlier tabulation shows, to counteract the myth of 'heavenly evil' and the effect that this pagan falsehood had on Hellenistic Judaism, and was having on Christianity. The Apocalypse of Enoch, for example, had assumed (16) that

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(16) Enoch 70 & 71
(35) Revelation 21:7 (36) Romans 8:37-39

there had been a rebellion among the angels of God, and Jude(17) had earlier quoted these myths to counteract their insidious influence. Evil can never be vanquished if it is believed to be heavenly, and Christ had come into the world to triumph over evil in His own life, to make men realise there is no evil in heaven, that evil is the product of human wickedness.

Since the political rulers of mankind had claimed heavenly origin as the basis of their evil authority, the imagined source of their authority had to be evicted from heaven, in the minds of men. It had to be seen to be earthly.

The dragon is thus the evil source of all world rulership, imagined to be in heaven (in the pre-Christian mind), and the basis of all those pre-Christian emperors who claimed heavenly origin. In a figure, this 'devil and Satan', this imagined source of all pagan wickedness and political power, was 'cast to earth' by the strength of Christian conversion. That is - it was shown to be no more than human.

The chapter itself defines the dragon as 'the devil and Satan', not necessarily, even by that definition, the 'imagined' Satan of Christendom, but by the very part that the dragon plays in the drama, the summation of all the world's wicked rulership systems. It is the conglomerate of all Daniel's four beasts (37), those that persecuted the old Israel and is thus the world, as a political and spiritual oppressor of the new Israel - as the four nations of Daniel's first vision were the political oppressors of the old Israel.

It has seven heads, because all the heads of Daniel's four beasts total to seven, for his third

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(17) Enoch chs 6-16. See Jude vv. 6,7,8,9 & 11 & 13, all of which are references to apocryphal, apocalyptic sources

(37) Daniel chapter 7

beast (38) had four heads:

1 + 1 + 4 + 1 = 7

It has ten horns, because Daniel's fourth beast had ten horns, and though the picture of its casting stars from heaven seems to be quoted from Daniel's later vision of the ram and he-goat (39), the reference to a 'third of the stars' seems more likely to be a reference to the conquest of three horns from ten (roughly, one third). Much of the symbolism is therefore based on that of the fourth beast of Daniel's first vision (37) though the second vision (39) is quoted, and if my interpretation of the symbolism of that beast (explained earlier) is correct, then:

(a) the ten **horns** of Daniel 7 were Asmonean, and thus **Jewish**; while

(b) the seven **heads** were those of the oppressors of Israel, and therefore patently **Gentile.**

If this is correct, then the description 'seven heads and ten horns' does not simply encompass all the evil oppressive systems of the world, but all usurped authority, both Jewish and Gentile. It is thus a transformed symbol. Though based on the **imagined** usurped authority of imagined beings in heaven (those myths described earlier that provided the greatest motivation for human evil), the dragon really represents the usurped authority of man against God, the blasphemous 'divine' claims of the ruling dynasties of most pagan nations, and even the usurped authority of the ten self-appointed Levitical Maccabean rulers to the throne of Israel (40). Every aspect of the rebellious heart of man is signified by the dragon.

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(37) Daniel chapter 7

(38) Daniel 7:6-7

(39) Daniel chapter 8

(40) Daniel 7:7, given the interpretation expanded earlier.

Two Dangerous Extremes

The dragon is rightly defined as the 'devil and Satan'. There are, however, two extreme dangers in interpreting the dragon symbol in this vision. The first extreme is that of believing in a literal personal devil, purely on the basis of this and of other passages in Scripture, and thus of literally applying the language of this chapter to such a literal supernatural personal devil. The other extreme is that of reducing the remarkable piece of symbolism in this prophecy of a mere political level, and equating it with the victory of Constantine over paganism in the fourth century (as did the historical school of interpretation in the last century) or with another equally mundane political event.

Both erroneous extremes are equally dangerous, and they were both a feature of those Jewish apocalypses which the Revelation of John was written to counteract. Some Jewish apocalypses tried to recast the symbology of Daniel in their own times. Their danger was their overattention to the political struggles between Israel and her enemies.Others, such as Enoch, supposed that there had been a rebellion in heaven. The view that a literal Satan, a personal devil, literally existed in heaven and was cast to earth falls into the former of the two dangerous extremes.

Instead, the Apocalypse transmutes the symbols of political warfare against national oppressors to mean a spiritual battle against the forces of evil. If we say that the dragon represents the Roman State, or any other single nation or community which may have, for a short while, oppressed the people of God then we have missed the whole point

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(41) Compare Daniel chs 7 & 8 with some interpretations, e.g. II Esdras 11 and the 'War Scroll' of the Dead Sea Sect, inter alia

in the comprehensive, on-exclusive symbolism. Daniel's four beasts had indeed been four nations, who had, in turn, oppressed literal Israel, and apocryphal writers had distorted his symbology and applied his prophecies to whatever nation they thought would fit the symbols. Thus, the political re-application of Daniel's prophecy and other Old Testament prophecies, had become practically useless even by John's time (41).

A Spiritual Conflict

The real battle still goes on. It does not presuppose a fallen angel, for it is against the mind of the world, the prince of the world, the prince of the power of the air (42). The Christian must suffer physically because of evil men, and must be 'weak' and non-resisting when persecuted for his faith, and thus the battle of this chapter must be a spiritual, not a physical one. For he can be strong and victorious in his battle against the mind of this evil world in the knowledge that the 'dragon' is really powerless. There never was 'evil' in heaven, and thus the heavens are cleared of it, as they are also cleared of all those other demiurgic imaginations (the Gnostic aeons, the hierarchies of intercessors - and even the 'satanic' prosecuting counsel of Judaism).There is not even, so to speak, an angelic 'Jacob's ladder' - a hierarchy on which angelic intercessors separate man from God. Instead, all has been replaced

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(41) Compare Daniel chs 7 & 8 with some interpretations, e.g. II Esdras 11 and the 'War Scroll' of the Dead Sea Sect, inter alia

(42) See John 12:31 and Ephesians 2:2 as a pictorial personification of the 'mind of the world' generally.

by direct access to Him through a Living Christ (43) (44) .

The Real Enemy

The fact that the warfare of the chapter is a spiritual battle should be sufficient to detract from the second dangerous extreme - that of reducing the dragon to some political adversary of Israel or the Church, at a specific time in history. The warfare of this chapter is not fought with carnal weapons, and thus there are good grounds for thinking that the dragon is **not** a single political oppressor, such as pagan Rome. It must, for these reasons be a conglomerate of all those evil forces which have plagued this planet since time began. But what of the second, over-literal interpretation of the dragon as a 'personal devil'? The case against this extreme has also been partly presented. Could there have been such a literal 'devil' or even a 'literal' dragon, who perverted a third of the angels in heaven and cast them to the ground, as Jewish apocalyptic writers had actually believed? If we adopt this literalistic stance, we not only fall into the error of those books against which the Revelation was written but miss the main message of the chapter, that since the advent of Christianity to disprove the concept of imagined evil in heaven, no 'devil' has ever had any place there either:

(a) as the imagined evil occupants of the heavens in pagan religions; or
(b) as the imagined rebellious angels of the spurious apocalypses; (45) or even
(c) the imagined prosecuting counsel of early

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(43) Colossians 1:15 & 2:16-20
(44) John 1:51 & Hebrews 4:14-16
(45) Semiazah and Azazel in Enoch, and Mastema in other apocryphal writings.

Judaism, poetically assumed in the book of job (46).

There is no power but of God, and human authorities are ordained of God (47). All authority in heaven and earth has been given to the Son of God and all things are possible to the elect - to those who 'cast down imaginations' - who wrestle against those imagined 'principalities and powers' of human superstition. No earthly power or imagined heavenly principality can separate us from the true love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (48).

Translated to the Throne

The 'translation' of the manchild to the throne of God is the Christian answer to the mythical interpretation placed on the translation of Enoch (49) by the book of Enoch. It cannot refer to some mundane event, such as the accession of Constantine, an interpretation current among historical school expositors. Such an interpretation was excusable for those who really believed that Constantine was a champion of Christianity against paganism, despite his errors. It is less excusable to regard the prophecy as a reference to Constantine in his role of 'father of Christian apostasy', for all the symbols associated with the man-child are entirely good. If one examines the Old Testament for references to a manchild-deliverer, for example, there are the following:

1) The deliverer in Micah's prophecy (50).
2) The manchild of Isaiah (51).

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(46) Job chs 1 & 2. See also 1 Kings 22:19-23 and compare 1 Chronicles 21:1 with 2 Samuel 24:1
(47) Romans 13:1 and Matthew 28:18-20
(48) Romans 8:37-39 - compare 2 Corinthians 10:4 and Ephesians 5:12 (49) Enoch 70 & 71 compare Genesis 5:24 (LXX) and Hebrews 11:5
(50) Micah 4:9-5:4 (51) Isaiah 66:7-9

A third reference to an expected Messianic manchild may be found in the Hymns of the Dead Sea Sect (52). Given that the manchild is the deliverer of mankind, that he is the expected Messiah, it must be concluded, on the basis of the earlier interpretation of the sun-clad woman, that the travail that brought forth the manchild is not the travail of Mary alone, nor is it the travail of Israel, as a nation. It is the travail of the whole of God's community, and is summed up in His own travail to come to birth, for He transformed the birthpangs of the Messianic conflict into His own struggle against evil. He, as a human, experienced those pangs in the struggle to produce that 'resurrection' man-child, who ascended to the throne of God after three days in the tomb - but those pangs were accompanied with the joy of striving against evil, that joy which lay before Him when He endured the cross - despising the shame (53).

This Messianic travail was not the Armageddon (54) that some of the apocalyptic writers anticipated. It was the completion (in one man - Jesus) of a struggle against human sin and weakness. At the end of that travail, for Jesus Himself, were the birth-pangs of the crucifixion that led to the birth of a new 'resurrected' man, the 'firstborn' from the dead, but in a more cosmic sense, the life of Jesus was itself the climax(the birthpangs) of centuries of human travail.

Further, although He was caught up to heaven itself, the struggle continues as the woman (the community of God) produces the remnant of her descendants. Jesus spoke of this continuing struggle –this

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(50) Micah 4:9-5:4 (51) Isaiah 66:7-9

(52) See Gaster: Scriptures of the Dead Sea Sect (Seeker and Warburg) Hymns 3:3-18

(53) Hebrews 12:1 & 2 (54) Using the interpretation of 'travail' in (52) above.

continuing travail over many descendants, in His final discourse to the disciples when He spoke of their persecution in terms of a woman in travail having sorrow, but ultimately rejoicing because: 'a man is born into the world' (55).

But if this interpretation is correct, then we do not undergo (even in miniature) the great extent of the world's travail. Instead, we begin our travail (our struggle against evil) on the very threshold of birth - at the very hour of deliverance, both of the manchild in the symbolic sense, and of ourselves from the sins against which we fight.

The Christian life is comparable with the final birthpangs, where joy in every triumph against evil is far greater than physical suffering because of the knowledge that a 'new man' (56) is being born into the world. Thus, the woman's travail is, in the language of Jesus' last discourse, being repeated in each of us, the remnant of her seed (descendants).

In the very success of this struggle (with the imagined 'power' of the pagan 'devil' nullified by Christ's own faultless life), it can truly be said:

(a) of the devil, that 'his hour has come' (57); and

(b) of the woman, that 'her hour has come' (58).

In case (a) it is the hour of death, for evil has been rendered powerless by the righteous life of Christ, and can be rendered powerless in the lives of His followers, while in case (b) the climax of creation's travail (59) has been reached, and the birth of sons of God us now taking place.

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(55) John 16:21 (56) Romans chapter 6
(57) Revelation 12:12 (58) John 16:21
(59) Romans 8:22

The Dragon falls from Heaven

Satan was 'cast from heaven' (figuratively) by the very coming of Christ. Mankind had, for example, previously believed diseases to have been the work of superhuman devils, but when He completely cured people of them, He Himself said that he saw: "Satan, as lightning fall from heaven."(60). Furthermore, as He reached the final stage of His conflict, His own personal travail, He said that the judgement of the world had come, and that the prince of this world had been cast out.

This language is, of course, figurative. The devil is assumed, but no more supposed to exist, than were the pagan gods of the ancient world - those imagined 'principalities and powers' of non-Christian religions. Jesus divested the devil of all his imagined authority by His triumph over human sin at Calvary. He is now, in the language of the vision of woman and manchild:

(a) at 'God's throne', that is, at God's right hand, in real fulfilment of the enthronement psalm (61);
(b) 'shepherding the nations' (62); and
(c) using the 'iron rod' (63).

Nonetheless, the battle against human evil was not over, when Jesus was raised above all rule, authority, power and dominion, even though 'evil' has no real 'supernatural' base of power at all. The woman has other descendants to produce so she must be protected as long as: "the whole creation groans... waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God" (64).

Because she needs sustenance, the New Israel, the 'community of God' **after** the birth, so to speak

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(60) Luke 10:17-20 (61) Psalm 110:1, compare Psalm 2 (62) Revelation 12:5
(63) Compare Revelation 12:5 with Psalm 2:9
(64) Romans 8:22

is taken into the wilderness.

As Israel fled from Pharaoh even though they had been delivered by Moses, so the Church is taken into a wilderness where it can travail again with the remnant, the sons of new birth (65).The period in the wilderness, however, seems to differ from that of Israel in the wilderness. Let us see why this should be the case.

A Ministry of Protection

The final period of Jesus' travail against evil, the traditional 42 months period of His ministry, is a fitting symbol of the Church's travail to produce her new children (65).It is clear, from the ministry of the two witnesses, that the actual symbol 'three times and a half or 1260 days, or 42 months is simply a 'shorthand' way of saying: "However long the ministry of the Church may be". The period is actually undefined, for it is as long as the Church's terms of reference: "And this Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached to the whole world for a testimony" (66).

When these terms of reference have been completed, the Church will have brought forth all the sons of God (the remnant of her seed), and thus its ministry will have ended.

Though the symbol cannot be translated into a period of literal time, it is an interesting one, not only because it is a cipher based on the length of the Lord's ministry, but because of the significance of the number 42. For example:

(a) there are 42 **weeks** of human pregnancy;
(b) there were 42 **years** of wandering through the wilderness, if the period before the rebellion at Kadesh-Barnea is added; and

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(65) Compare Romans 8:22 with my comments on 'remnant of her seed' and with John 16:19-24
(66) Matthew 24:14

(c) Matthew lists 42 **generations** from Abraham to Christ.

The associations with human pregnancy and the wanderings of Israel (a, b) should be self-evident, but let us consider them before examining (c) which may be slightly obscure. Translated into 'meaning' the 42 months of the woman's sojourn in the wilderness mean our travail, our wilderness journey, our imitation of Christ's struggle, which began in the wilderness of Judaea, and ended in the spiritual wilderness of Calvary. It is the period of our nourishment, just as Elijah was nourished (67) for *3h* years during his ministry. The period cannot be explained by simplistic day-for-year methods of exposition, such as those used by the historical-school expositors of earlier centuries, for such expositors presuppose that the Church's ministry is 'fixed' in some way whereas it can only be interpreted in accordance with the Olivet (66) prophecy by assuming that it means the indefinite period, during which the Church carries out its commission (66). It is thus a powerful time-symbol for an indefinite period, and is based on the 42 months of the ministries of Jesus and Elijah, the 42 years of wilderness journey and the 42 weeks of human pregnancy.

Though the actual description of this period as 'forty-two months' does not occur until chapter 13 of the Apocalypse, it is well to consider the only other actual use of the number in the New Testament. It is (c) above, Matthew's list of the number of generations from Abraham to Christ (68), though some generations are actually omitted by him. Such a list could be a hint that the Church's period of testing in the wilderness of the world would also last about 42 generations - 42 'months' - in the sense that they are 'waxings' and 'wanings' of human

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(66) Matthew 24:14 (67) James 5:17 compare 1 Kings 17:8-16 & 18:1 (68) Matthew 1:17 ff

life. But even this suggestion seems to be a concession to those who seek rigid, well-defined interpretation of time periods. Yet Matthew's generation list is not, in itself, well defined, for some generations are missing from his reckoning. Thus, it may be better even to describe the Church's ministry as a period of 42 'generations' only in a loose, non-rigid way. The comparison is valuable however, for we are directed to think that just as there was a period of about 42 generations from the time of promise (69) to the birth of the manchild (i.e. Abraham to Christ), so there may be about 42 generations from the time of the new promise in Christ, to the other 'birth', the 'remnant of the seed' (70), the manifestation of the sons of God (71).

A Ministry of Default

We have already seen that the ministry of the two witnesses **agrees** with that of Christ in a formal time-symbolic sense, but **contrasts** with His ministry in method. The two witnesses represent a divided Church. The woman also represents the Church, now considered positively, rather than negatively, as in the previous vision, but it is well to consider some similarities between the two visions, as the period of 1260 days evidently mean the same thing, 'the indefinite period of the Church's ministry' in both cases. These similarities are concerned with the idea of delay. In the case of the two witnesses, there is 'delay' because of the partial 'Old Testament' way in which the witnesses carry out their mission, but there is assurance that when the seventh angel sounds his trumpet-blast - when the final, all-embracing message of Gospel testimony is given to the world

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(68) Matthew 1:17 ff (69) Genesis 18:10
(70) Revelation 12:17 (71) Romans 8:19

- there will no longer be delay. The woman also, like the witnesses, ministers by default. Though the delay is not self-evident it has already been shown that the figure of the woman in the wilderness is based on that of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness after escaping from Egypt. Most of this period was effectively a delay. Let us be reminded of the historical details.

Israel failed to enter Canaan after the rejection of Joshua's counsel at Kadesh Barnea because it overemphasised the difficulty of its task. It could have used its miraculous powers to enter Canaan on the wake of the impressive events that had already happened in Egypt. It wavered and so it suffered forty years' wandering. In much the same way the first century Church could have carried out its full commission to the world in the early years of the Christian era, on the wake of the news of Jesus' resurrection and the miracles that happened after Pentecost. Instead, within a century of Pentecost, as we discussed in the exposition of the vision of the two witnesses, it became less inclined to use those gifts with which it was endowed. God never purposely withdrew the gifts of the Holy Spirit from His Church, but the Church 'grieved' (72),'quenched' (73) and 'neglected'(74) them.

To use an analogy, the wind of God's Spirit has always been blowing, particularly since the day of Pentecost, but the mariners untacked the sails, and took to the oars - trying to do in their own strength something that could only have been done by the power of Christ. So the ecclesiastical 'ship' was placed in jeopardy, and did not reach its destination (66).

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(66) Matthew 24:14
(72) Ephesians 5:30
(73) 1 Thessalonians 5:19
(74) 1 Timothy 4:14

The destination can only be reached by miracle, by hoisting the sail and using the 'wind' of God's Spirit again (75). In the vision of the witnesses this fresh period of miracles was signalled by their revival when the Spirit of Life from God enters them. But such a revival of miracles is also implicit in the analogy of Israel in the wilderness. There were miracles throughout Israel's wilderness journey, but they were mainly associated with nourishment (e.g. manna from heaven and water from a rock). The most powerful miracles occurred on departure from Egypt and on entry into Canaan. In other words the most dramatic miracles occurred at the beginning and end of the period. This, at least, suggests that the most significant periods of miraculous activity associated with the Church's mission are to occur (a) at the beginning, i.e. during the century after Pentecost, and (b) at the end of the period, just before the Second Advent.

War in Heaven

The war in heaven is a masterly use of Old Testament symbols. In the Persian period, Michael was regarded as Israel's heavenly angelic representative. In a figure, he made war on Israel's behalf against the 'heavenly representatives' of other nations. There is no suggestion of a literal war between angels. The best illustration of this 'accommodation' of Persian belief to Jewish symbolism is to be found in one of Daniel's visions. There was war in heaven between Michael, the angelic prince of Israel, and the angelic princes of Greece and Persia (76). This symbolic war, a kind of drama acted by angels on behalf of various

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(75) In Greek, the word 'pneuma' can mean wind or Spirit, hence the double-entendre of John 3:8

(76) Daniel 10:10-21

nations, would be mirrored in events among nations on earth. Later in the same final prophecy of Daniel, Michael 'stands up' for God's people in a time of (77) trouble after the battles between the Egyptian and Syrian successors of Alexander had been completed. This second reference to Michael is clearly to the first century when the 'knowledge' of Christ could have been (78) extended to the whole world in a 'time of trouble' (79) if the Church had been entirely faithful to its terms of reference at that time.

Yet, the authors of the spurious apocalypses had misread Daniel. They had assumed that the first reference to Michael (76) referred to a literal battle between the forces of good and evil in heaven. Michael became the fourth archangel of the Book of Enoch. He interceded and (80) pleaded against the severity of divine judgement, while the symbolic war assumed literalistic overtones. Even in interpretations of Daniel, the symbolic celestial drama became supplanted by the concept of a real war in heaven against (a) Israel's enemies and (b) the forces of evil generally. The 'war in heaven' in Revelation is, in contrast, a transformation of the 'heavenly wars' of Jewish apocryphal literature, and a return to Daniel's symbolism. But in this case the enemy (the dragon) is the very myth of a devil and Satan, who is assumed to exist in heaven and therefore have some kind of supernatural power. The eviction of the dragon is the very process of disillusionment, the very realization that evil has no 'power' except in the minds

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(76) Daniel 10:10-21 (77) Daniel 12:1

(78) Daniel 12:4 (79) Equating Daniel 12:1 with the events following the destruction of Jerusalem (Matthew 24:21), given a short-term fulfilment of the Church's mission

(80) The 'War Scroll' (see Gaster, supra) 9:10-15 and Enoch chapters 20 & 40

of men. Just as Satan was not personally cast from heaven when Jesus performed His miracles (81) so there is no personal eviction in this case. In both cases the figure really means that evil - assumed to be so powerful, whether in disease or in the more general sense of this chapter - has actually been proved powerless.

No Place found for Them

The words: "There was no longer any place found for them in heaven," (82) are similar to those used of the pieces of the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel, after that image had been shattered. In 'The Message of Daniel' (83) I suggested that the impact between the stone from heaven and that image represented the events that took place after Calvary, for when Christ's authority and victory over all evil had been accomplished, and when He had been given all authority in heaven and earth, the power of Israel's four oppressors ceased to be relevant. It ceased to matter any more.

So it is in the case of this vision also. Jesus has ascended above the clouds of heaven to receive His authority, and evil has therefore no longer any place in (a) the Christian imagination of heaven or (b) in the Christian life.

It has taken Christendom a long time to realise the powerlessness of the 'spiritual' basis of evil, and to conclude that 'demons' are, in the final analysis, no more than figments of human imagination. The battle between Michael and the dragon is a descriptive forecast of what would happen in Christian theology. It would be a long

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(81) Luke 10:18 (82) Revelation 12:8 as a quotation from Daniel 2:35

(83) 'The Message of Daniel' (St. Brides lectures 1969) privately published in 1970.

theological process of demythologizing the 'devil and Satan', disillusioning the Church of the very concept of a highly powerful Satan –that 'hangover' from paganism and Hellenistic Judaism. In accordance with its own limited understanding Christian thinking originally 'literalised' this heavenly battle between good and evil, in much the same way as it 'literalised' the heavenly woman of this chapter, and conceived of her as Mary (in some celestial role) and in the same way as it 'literalised' the dragon as a personal supernatural devil. The message of the chapter (as of Daniel) is that in Christ's victory all spiritual adversaries have been rendered powerless just as Pharaoh's forces (on which this analogy is based) were drowned in the sea. In Christ, evil is seen to be powerless. All things work together for good to those who serve God, and are called according to His purpose.

War on the Remnant

The war will continue until all realise that evil has no heavenly basis. In this way each child of God has the assistance of the angels of God. In this sense, salvation and strength have already come, for the believer stands in much the same position as the Israelites did when they crossed the sea in escaping from Egypt. Thus, the song of salvation in Revelation (84) is quoted from that song which was sung after the exodus from Egypt. The imagined spiritual adversaries, those demonic evil forces that have their conceptual roots in paganism, have now sunk, as it were, in the depths of the sea. The greatest victory has been won: the Christian life has been rendered easier by the knowledge that sin has already been vanquished in Christ (85).

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(84) Compare Revelation 12:10 with Exodus 15:1-7
(85) Matthew 11:30

But although victory is possible because of Christ's victory, it is still uncertain, for all Christians have not the will to overcome. The 'man-child' is now in heaven. For Him there are no obstacles, for He has power in heaven and earth (86). This authority is 'kingship' or 'kingdom' in the sense in which the words 'Kingdom of God' are used in this song (84). The kingdom of Israel was a 'Kingdom of God' when the nation left Egypt, even though the kingdom was not realised until the conquest of Canaan, and there were no kings until the time of Saul and David - so in the case of the Church, the very enthronement of Christ in heaven constitutes a 'kingdom'. Yet, even though the 'Kingship' of God has come, the Kingdom of God will not be realised until after the Second Advent.

Survival in Exile

The woman must therefore live in the world until the number of the elect has been completed. How can she survive until she bears the 'remnant' of her seed? She can only survive in exile, and thus exists in the (87) wilderness, away from the onslaught of the Babylonian 'sea-serpent'. His flood seems to engulf her and sweep her back to that very sea through which she has been delivered by miracle (88).Yet, the earth swallows the flood (89) - yet another allusion to the song of Moses, and the woman survives. This woman thus represents the community of God, the 'positive' side of the Christian church. Despite the partial and relatively

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(84) Compare Revelation 12:10 with Exodus 15:1-7
(86) Matthew 28:18-20. Israel is described as a kingdom before entering Canaan, see Exodus 19:6 (87) Compare Revelation 12:15-16 with 1 Corinthians 10:1-11
(88) The miracle of the passage through the sea (87 supra) signifying baptism
(89) Exodus 15:12

ineffective conduct of its mission - despite the conquest, dissension, spiritual famine and death that have signalled the working of those human institutions comprising the Church - despite even the reversion to Old Testament methods of conversion, as illustrated by the witnesses - God does not forsake the Church (the New Israel) entirely. Here are positive and encouraging signs that however perverse Christendom may become it is never entirely forsaken as the 'Israel of God'. In this chapter the Church is viewed as a living organism, not as a set of human institutions. The contrast may be tabulated thus.

The Horsemen (Negative aspects of the Church)	**The Woman** (Positive aspects Of the Church)
The conqueror' wreath (90)	A wreath of twelve stars (91) indicating God's faithfulness to His promise (92)
A red horse, introducing 'internal dissension' (93)	A red dragon, the external (imagine) powers of evil, rendered powerless (94)
Starved of 'wind' and 'oil' because of heresies (95)	Nourished by the 'bread of life' and the water of life (96)
The 'organizational' churches are ultimately spiritually dead, and consumed by the eagles (97)(98)	The Church survives the death of its institutions for it is greater than them. It is, as Israel was, borne on 'eagles' wings' (99)

(90) Revelation 6:2 (91) Revelation 12:1
(92) Jeremiah 31:35-36 (93) Revelation 6:3-4
(94) Revelation 12:3, compare with Ephesians 5:12
(95) Revelation 6:6 (96) Revelation 12:14 compared with 1 Corinthians 10:1-11 (97) Compare the living ones, and Revelation 6:7 with Matthew 24:28 (98) Matthew 24:28 (99) Compare Revelation 12:14 with Exodus 19:4

God bore Israel on eagles' wings from vanquished Egypt, but even though Egypt had been destroyed and the only relevant authority for Israel was God's own authority, yet the voice of opposition reasserted itself in the priestly rebellion of Korah's company and in the political rebellion of Dathan and Abiram. Again, the earth opened her mouth and swallowed up the 'flood' of rebellion that they had created. So Israel survived as a community under the leadership of God.

To comment further on the table, spiritual death is the enemy of the organizational church, but it can be the 'friend' of the Church as a continuing living organism, using the contrast between the horsemen and the woman - as was explored in the table. Israel learned her lesson from the mistakes of the wilderness, when eagles devoured some rebels and the earth devoured others. Israel survived a whole generation's mistakes. The generation died, but Israel survived. In the same way, the institutions die, but the Church survives. As the 'body of Christ' (using the most extensive interpretation which these words can be given) - the general Church survives because she is clothed with the symbols of God's faithfulness to His promises to her (92). She will never be cast away, just as Israel was not cast away.

Her only Lord is Christ, the 'greater than Moses' (100). Her only chance of survival in human history is that constant renewal that must follow the deaths of those institutions and personalities who contest with Christ for place and authority in the minds of the members of any institutional church. Communities and personalities will ultimately die. The dust of the desert will swallow up their floods of opposition to the authority of Christ, and the woman will survive.

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(92) Jeremiah 31:35-36
(100) Hebrews 3:3

Spiritual War on Earth

Though the woman will survive, the remnant may not all survive. We may still be 'devoured' by the dragon if we attempt to return to the seashore where he stands (101).Sin can no longer 'accuse us before God' for Christ has placed us beyond all accusation (102). Nor can it war in heaven, for it has been demythologized in the minds of the true convert. Nor can it destroy the woman, for she has been promised nourishment and perpetual succession until she bears the 'remnant of her seed'. But sin can make war on individuals - on the 'remnant'- on the weak in Israel. Spiritually speaking, carcasses may still fall in the wilderness, even in the case of the New Israel (96).

The Church now has the merits of the Abrahamic promises. Her 'remnant of seed' are adopted by Christ (103) and become beneficiaries of Abraham. But they can differ from each other as the stars of heaven (104) (105) and are different from the sand of the seashore (104) (106) which the dragon tramples. If they always follow the risen Christ, their lives will crown the Church with the stars she wears (105) and with which the vision begins. If they forget their Lord and are trampled by the dragon on the seashore (106) they will be identifiable with that sand with which the vision ends.

An Object Lesson

The vision is thus an object lesson for the Church. It is written to emphasize the exalted position of the new Israel - to stress the strong

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(96) Revelation 12:14 compare 1 Corinthians 10:1-11 (101) Revelation 12:17 (Greek variant reading) (102) Romans 8:33
(103) Galatians 3:27-28 (104) Genesis 22:17
(105) Revelation 12:1 (106) Revelation 12:17

positive theoretical position of the Church in contrast with those visible, human wayward institutions which claim to represent it, and of whose members its own constituents are often practically composed. Despite the spiritual famine that the 'visible' Church suffers because of its own internal dissensions and heresies (as in the roles of second and third horsemen) yet as Christ's earthly representative, the Church is still nourished and perpetuated by access to the Living Word, so that the ultimate redeemed can be produced and survive, as Elijah was fed when Israel starved. The warfare of our lives is our Armageddon.

Our life in Christ is a time of travail. But it is not a full period of travail. Instead, the hour has already come, and ever since Jesus' victory, the process of birth is already taking place. The firstborn among many brethren (107) has already been born. Now for each of the remnant, for each individual Christian, the bulk of the travail can be forgotten, for 'joy that a man is being born into the world' (108).

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(107) Romans 8:29 (108) John 16:21

CHAPTER TEN

A FEARSOME 'THREESOME'

Dragon, Beast and False Prophet: A Clear Relationship: The Dragon: The Beast: The False Prophet: An Historical Relationship: The Sea Beast's Appearance: All Heads have one Mouth: The Fatally Wounded Head: Domination and Warfare: The False Prophet: Relationship with Daniel's Beasts: The False Prophet's Teaching: Enforced Lawlessness: The Mark of the Beast: Gematria and 666: Structural Values and 666: Triangular Numbers of 666: The Number of the Beast

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Dragon, Beast and False Prophet

The dragon, beast and false prophet can be understood to be counterparts, enemies and opposites of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit respectively. To do so, it is not necessary to accept any particular relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, nor is it necessary to assume that the book of Revelation anticipated the developments in the doctrine of the Trinity expressed in the Nicene and Athanasian creeds. Even if the Apocalypse did anticipate such developments, it does not necessarily follow that the book adds authority to any particular creedal interpretation. It has already been shown in the interpretation of the sealing of the 144,000 that the book seems to anticipate a 'literalistic' interpretation of the commandment in the form of baptism, 'sealing the forehead' carried out by the Western Church. Similarly, chapter twelve of the Apocalypse seems to anticipate both (a) a literalistic interpretation of the 'woman in heaven' (in Catholic theology) and (b) a literalistic

interpretation of the 'devil and Satan' by mediaeval Christendom generally.

When examining the fourteenth chapter of the Apocalypse, we shall face other cases of such anticipation of changes and developments in Christian beliefs. These changes are anticipated irrespective of whether they are good or bad, of whether they are well-grounded in Bible teaching of otherwise. Much may be written about the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, and particularly of the way in which the doctrine has been misinterpreted - for example by those who try to understand 'person', 'substance', 'essence' and 'incomprehensible' in terms of their modern meanings, rather than in the sense in which the originators of the creeds understood them. The creeds can be interpreted in a pluralistic way, and even though their wording cautions against it, they are assumed by some to teach a 'disguised polytheism'. The Nicene interpretation of the Trinity resulted largely from an attempt to interpret New Testament teaching in the mould of Platonic and neoplatonic thought respecting the three essences. It would be wrong to suggest that the Book of Revelation **supports** the developed Athanasian doctrine of the Trinity simply by describing the opposites, or enemies, of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the 'beast' visions of chapters twelve and thirteen.

However, the functional relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit as the three main objects (or objectives) of Christian belief is entirely Scriptural. Let us consider some examples of the Biblical 'triad'.

1) Jesus instructed the disciples to baptise in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (1)
2) The three are mentioned together at Jesus'

(1) Matthew 28:19

baptism. He comes from the water, the Spirit of God descends and the voice from heaven comes from God, the Father (2)

4) The disciples were not to call themselves 'rabbi', 'father' and 'master', for they had one teacher (the Holy Spirit), one Father and one master (Christ) (3)
5) There are varieties of gifts, ministration and means of working but there is the same Spirit, the same Lord and the same God (where the Lord is evidently Christ, and the God is evidently the Father) (4)
6) The 'triad' appears in apocalyptic form at the beginning of Revelation, where:
   (a) "the one Who is, was and is to come" is the Father;
   (b) 'the seven spirits which are before His throne' are an apocryphal representation of powers now assumed by the Holy Spirit; and
   (c) 'Jesus Christ, the faithful and true witness' is evidently the Son (Christ Himself). (5)

This does not presuppose those complexities that have resulted from misinterpretation of their relationship and misreading of the creeds, which, after all, are only human attempts to define their relationship. In the first of the creeds, commonly called 'The Apostles Creed' the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit is a very simple functional one, and we shall stress this functional relationship later when describing that between the three 'villains' of the book of Revelation, who are intended to be 'parodies', 'travesties' and 'enemies' of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit respectively.

Those who look for interpretation of the dragon,

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(2) Matthew 3:16-17 (3) Matthew 23:8-10
(4) 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 (5) Revelation 1:4-5

beast and(6)false prophet in the lives of Nero and his successors, and suggest that the Apostle John was too naive to anticipate the doctrine of the Trinity in creating these monsters as 'triune opposites' to God, Christ and the Holy Spirit have thus misunderstood several things.

1) The triune formula, as we have seen (1) is not a development. It is a scriptural baptismal formula.
2) The 'trinitarian' developments of the formula are not necessary to explain the view that the dragon, beast and false prophet are opposites of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
3) The Book of Revelation is elsewhere an anticipation of Christian doctrine and practice, and it would be curious if the doctrine of the Trinity had not been anticipated in John's Revelation in any way whatsoever.
4) A somewhat 'Judaistic' apocalyptic version of the formula appears in the first chapter of the book (5).

A Clear Relationship

The clearest, simplest definition of the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit is that exhibited in the Apostles' Creed, which is divided into three parts, commencing with the baptismal elements:

> "I believe in God, the Father Almighty....."
> "and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord....."
> "I believe in the Holy Spirit....."

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(1) Matthew 28:19 (6) See, for example Charles: Revelation (ICC) Vol 1 pp.345-373. Peake's Commentary (Nelson) pp.1051-3 (5) Revelation 1:4-5

The relationship is functional and historical. It is functional in that the Father is defined as the Almighty originator of all things, the Son as the personal manifestation of the Father (7) to mankind in the life of Christ particularly, and the Holy Spirit is the means by which, among other things, spiritual and physical 'miracles' are wrought so that reconciled man can be restored to God (8).

This is the functional relationship. The historical (or chronological) relationship is that the Father is pre-Christian, in the sense that He is Israel's God, Who revealed Himself to Moses and the Old Testament prophets. The Son is next chronologically, from the standpoint that the Christian age was marked by the revelation of God in the person of a man - in the person of Christ. The Holy Spirit in post-Christian, in the sense that, although the Spirit of God spoke through the Old Testament prophets, the term 'Holy Spirit' is very infrequently mentioned in the Old Testament. Instead, the New Testament uses the phrase not only of God's power at work, but of God Himself in every way at work in the Church. Thus, for example, the Holy Spirit says:

> "Separate **Me** Paul and Barnabbas for the work to which I have appointed them." (9).

This is clearly not a reference to gifts or power of the Holy Spirit but to God Himself, personally at work in the Church.

Thus, in its early simplicity, the relationship can be tabulated.

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(5) Revelation 1:4-5
(7) As in Hebrews 1:3
(8) Psalm 51:11
(9) Acts 13:2

Constituent	Function	Time-Coverage
Father	Originator of all things	Pre-Christian, in being most easily associated with the God of the Old Testament
Son	God manifest in the person of a man	The actual ministry and manifestation of Christ on earth.
Holy Spirit	God manifest in His power, and in particular, in the Church	Post-Christian, in that the age of the Spirit is most easily associated with the era of Church History

The table may appear to be oversimple, but it attempts to disentangle the Biblical teaching of the functional relationship between God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit from the confusion which could result from misinterpretation of the Church creeds. Further, it places the three elements in an ongoing time-relationship, such that the Old Testament period could be called' The Age of the Father', the New Testament period 'The Age of Christ's appearing' and the period of the Church's continued existence 'The Age of the Spirit', even though Father and Spirit have, for example, worked at all times. If these two aspects of relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit are fully appreciated, it should be easy to interpret the relationship between the dragon, beast and false prophet on the assumption that they are counterfeits of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit respectively.

The Dragon

The previous chapter has already shown that the dragon is the devil - as a concept, rather than as a literal 'fallen angel' or 'dragon'. He is the 'devil and Satan', for the text of the Apocalypse expressly says so (10), but he is not the powerful supernatural devil of Jewish or Christian mythology. The previous chapter showed that, given that the objective of the Apocalypse was to be the Christian answer to apocalyptic myth, the eviction of Satan from heaven to earth (11) is a figurative way of showing that the devil would cease to be imagined to be supernatural and 'heavenly', the very influences of sin being rendered powerless by the life and ministry of Christ (12). Thus 'the devil and Satan' are a simple, shorthand way of saying 'the origin' of human sin and wrongdoing, and the dragon's sphere of influence is mainly pre-Christian. He was, so to speak, 'cast from heaven' in concept - by the very ministry of Christ.

Given this explanation of the dragon as the 'devil' in concept, a devil who originated in pagan thinking, but who has been rendered powerless by the life of Christ, the following contrasts can be tabulated

God, The Father	The Dragon
The Father almighty	The father of falsehood (13)
Originator of heaven and earth, and therefore, of all things (14)	Supposed originator of human evil

(10) Revelation 12:9 (11) Luke 10:18
(12) Compare Hebrews 2:14 with Romans 8:3-4
(13) John 8:44
(14) Isaiah 45:7

Pre-Christian, in the sense of being worshipped before the advent of Christ	Pre-Christian, as the supposed occupier of the 'heavens' of pagan imagination, and to some extent, the myths of Hellenistic Judaism.
Descended to earth by being manifested in the life and ministry of Christ.	'Expelled to earth' in concept by the very sinless life, ministry and authority of Christ (11)
Gives His authority to the Son	Gives his authority to the beast (15)

The Beast

If the 'devil' is the 'opposite' or counterpart of the Father, then who is the counterpart of the Son? It is clearly Anti-christ, whoever or whatever that may be. The term need not be understood literally as meaning a personal - or a political organization. For example, in some contexts, the term may simply mean an influence of some kind. In the global sense in which the term is used in the book of Revelation, it is best to think of Antichrist as anything and everything (or every person) who opposes Christ. Having said that, we can examine the book of Revelation for the most appropriate meaning of the term in context. For example, if the dragon vision is to be interpreted in terms of a spiritual battle (a warfare against the forces of evil)it is inappropriate to think of the other two beasts as 'human' enemies of the elect, who wage physical persecution, do them material damage, or war against them with human warfare.

Thus, the 'beast' is also a 'spiritual' enemy of the elect, but a visible one, in contrast with the dragon, who in essence represents the supposed invisible originator of sin.

As Christ is the image of God, so is antichrist

(15) Revelation 13:2

in contrast the image of 'the devil and Satan'. It is thus, the continuing manifestation of all evil in the world of the Christian era - that world which succeeded Christ's first advent.

In Calvary, the Church was given the power to overcome all things through Christ. In theory, the 'stone' of Daniel's first prophecy had shattered the 'image' of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, for in Jesus's own words: "Now is the judgement of the world, now is the prince of this world cast out". (16).

The stone (Jesus) had shattered oppressing human authority (symbolised as the four empires that had oppressed Israel, in an image that depicted the successors of Nebuchadnezzar), for all human authority ceased to be relevant after Jesus overcame sin in His lifelong triumph and death. But, just as the rubble of the 'image' existed for a very long time until 'no place was found for' it, and just as the war against the dragon's 'angels' persisted until 'no place was found for them', so the 'rubble' of sin continues as a feature of the Church during the Christian period, until it is finally swept away. The references to Daniel are important for they explain why the 'beast' of Revelation 13 is a kind of 'hybrid' of the four beasts of Daniel's first vision (17). The four sea beasts have ceased to exist as independent oppressors of the Old Israel - the national people of God. Instead, there is a hybrid beast consisting of components of all of the four beasts, under the disguise of a 'spotted leopard' (18).

In other words, national oppression is no longer relevant as such. The whole world is the real 'enemy' of the elect, not because it physically (or literally) persecutes the followers of Christ, though it may often do so - but because it presents them with more subtle dangers, with quasi-

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(16) John 12:31 (17) Daniel 7:1-8
(18) Revelation 13:2

Christian alternatives and with pseudo-Christian standards.

Antichrist can therefore be understood as the whole surviving display of evil in the world during the Christian era, after evil had been in theory vanquished in Christ's death.

The beast comes from the **sea** (yet it is also the beast of the **abyss)** - because in ancient cosmologies the sea and the abyss were related to each other. The 'world' of the Christian era has been theoretically redeemed from the sea(of independent nations),from the 'wicked' who are 'like a troubled sea that cannot rest' (19), yet most of it has rejected the message of its deliverance, as a whole generation of Israelites did when they were redeemed from the sea. The reference to the **abyss** associates the beast with the locusts of the fifth trumpet-sequence, those undercurrents of evil during the period of the Church's partial supremacy. Thus, the 'age' (or era) of the beast is the era of the Christendom. It is the era of Christendom's apparent supremacy over part of the world, during which there were undercurrents from the abyss, subverse relics of paganism that disturbed even this partial supremacy, just as Canaanite relics disturbed the supremacy of Israel during the days of the monarchy. Historically, if the dragon is to be associated with a pagan unconverted world, and with the domination of paganism over the world before the first advent - the beast must be associated with the 'era' of Christendom, the 'span' of the Church's ministry. This agrees remarkably well with the interpretation of the details of the fifth trumpet sequence.

Some of the main similarities and contrasts between the Son, (Christ) and the Beast (Antichrist) can now be tabulated

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(19) Isaiah 57:20

The Son – Christ	The Beast - Antichrist
The image of the Father (20)	Has the same 'shape' as the dragon (I.e. seven heads and ten horns) (21)
Made of the 'vanquished' fleshly nature (The Word was made flesh) (22)	Composed of the four beasts (the 'rubble' of the image) of Daniel, those four empires representing political powers that persecuted Israel, but having been already 'vanquished' by Christ's conquest (16).
Has the mouth (preaching) of the Lion of the tribe of Judah, but is, in fact , the slain Lamb	Has the mouth of a lion (23)
The Father gives Him His throne (24) and authority (25)	The dragon gives him his throne and great authority (23)
Was mortally wounded, but rose again on the third day	One head of the beast is mortally wounded, but the deadly wound is healed (23)
Men worship the Father, and also adore the Son (26) because of the death and resurrection of Christ.	Men worship the dragon and the beast, because of the healing of the deadly wound.
Jesus assumes the role of 'Michael' the pre-Christian intercessor for Israel. Michael means 'Who is like God?'	Men say: "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?"
Ministers for a period of about 42 months according to Christian tradition. His ministry is one of reconciliation to God.	Ministers (uttering blasphemies against god) for a period of '42 months' in figure, this being the period of the Church's ministry also, for the 'world' within the Church and outside it must continue as long as it continues.

(16) John 12:31 (20) Colossians 1:15 (21) Compare Revelation 12:3 with 13:1 (22) John 1:14 (23) Revelation 13:2-10
(24) Revelation 3:21 (25) Matthew 28:18 (26) John 20:28

This table and the previous one are intended to show the similarities between the counterparts in the case of dragon and beast. They do not provide interpretations of the details of the 'beast prophecy' and we shall have to return to the first half of the chapter later in this chapter, to assess the way in which the details of the prophecy have been realised in history. Let us now turn to the beast of the earth, the false prophet.

The False Prophet

The descriptions 'beast and false prophet' for 'beast of the sea' and 'beast of the earth' are used respectively later in the book of Revelation. As for example:
'the mouth of the dragon.... beast, and
... false prophet' (27)
'devil... beast, and...false prophet' (28)

By clear analogy with chapters 12 and 13 of the book, the beast of the sea is the 'beast' and the beast of the earth is the 'false prophet' .Since the latter descriptions are clearer, they are those used in this interpretation.
If the dragon and the beast are respectively the 'opposites' or 'enemies' or 'parodies' of the Father and Son, it must follow that the 'false prophet' is the counterfeit, 'enemy' or 'opposite' of the Holy Spirit.

Before examining the parallels between the details of the Spirit's ministry and that of its counterfeit, it is useful to be reminded of the functional relationship between the Spirit, and the Father and Son. The Holy Spirit exercises the authority of God and of Christ in the Church. It works miracles so that people are guided to a knowledge of Jesus Who was 'wounded for our

(27) Revelation 16:13
(28) Revelation 20:10

transgression' (29) but whose 'deadly wound' was healed by resurrection from the dead. It not only leads us to Christ, but gives 'breath' (i.e. Spirit) to the 'image' of Christ in us (30)so that it also can speak with the authority of the living Christ, whether this authority is imparted by miracle (31) or derived from a knowledge of the Scriptures(32). Those who walk in the Spirit' are given a new name, and are no longer accountable, or to be reckoned, using the analogy of the 144,000. With this functional relationship in mind, we can examine the details of the second part of the chapter, and detect the counterparts or parallels between the activities of the Holy Spirit and those of its 'opposite', the false prophet.

The Holy Spirit	**The False Prophet** (Beast of the Earth)
Has the Lamb's (Christ's) power. power.	It has the horns of a lamb (33)
Speaks as the Father (9)	Speaks as a 'dragon' (33)
Exercises all the authority and functions of Christ in His absence (34)	Exercises the authority of the 'first beast', in this case meaning the 'beast of the sea' (33)
Causes people to adore Christ, who rose from the dead	Causes people to worship the 'sea beast' whose mortal wound was healed (33).
The source of all true miracles, wrought by Christians	Works wonders (33)
Tongues of fire (35)	Causes fire to descend from heaven
Makes the 'likeness of Christ' in the believer (30)	Makes an image of the beast (33)

(9) Acts 13:2 (29) Isaiah 53:5 (30) 2 Corinthians 3:18
(31) Acts 2:2-4 (32) Luke 21:15 There is no obvious 'miracle' in this case, yet the knowledge derives from a superhuman Source.
(33) Revelation 13:11-18 (34) John 14:12-24 (35) Acts 2:3

Causes the image of Christ (i.e. his likeness) to speak the words of life to the world, for each believer is a minister of Christ	Causes the image of the beast to have power to speak, sentencing any who do not have his mark to be slain (33) literally, yet those who have his mark, in paradox, receive spiritual death
The true seal of God in the sense commanded in chapter 7 – (but not necessarily that carried out in the chapter) – is the Holy Spirit (36)	The mark of the beast affects both right hand and forehead. (33) It must therefore be distinguished from the literalistic consequence the of chapter 7. It is something more all-embracing than any worldly or ecclesiastical or pagan rite
All are affected ultimately	All are affected
There is no real reckoning of the redeemed. Despite the formal exactness of the number 144,000 they cannot ultimately numbered	There is a real reckoning of the followers of the beast of the earth for the number 666 is not they cannot ultimately be simply 'the number of man', but more generally means' human reckoning' (33)

An Historical Relationship

The introduction to this chapter showed that Father, Son and Holy Spirit were both functionally and historically related. The ensuing sections traced similarities between the functional relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and that of their counterfeits (or enemies) - the dragon, beast and false prophet. There is also an historical (or time-sequence) relationship between dragon, beast and false prophet as there is between Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

It is clear that the ministry of Christ is the dividing epoch in the case of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, such that all history up to the first advent of Christ can be styled the 'Age of the Father', that surrounding the ministry of Christ,

(33) Revelation 13:11-18 (36) Ephesians 1:14

the 'Age of the Son', and that subsequent to the ministry of Christ, the 'Age of the Spirit'.

If a parallel is to be drawn with dragon, beast and false prophet, and if the beast is truly 'antichrist', then clearly history is again divided in respect of dragon, beast and false prophet by the ministry of antichrist, such that the whole of human history before the coming of antichrist can be associated with the dragon, and that subsequent to the ministry of antichrist is associated with the false prophet. Yet in the case of Father, Son and Holy Spirit the three influences are not uniquely identified with the time-periods concerned, but most appropriately associated with them. In much the same way, it should not be imagined that dragon, beast and false prophet are uniquely associated with the time-periods assigned to them. But the association will help in our interpretation of the three creatures.

Let us first tabulate the two time-sequences and compare them.

1 Father, Son and Holy Spirit: The Best-Associated Time Periods

Constituent	Most Relevant Epoch
Father	The period before, and up to the ministry of Christ. Thus, the Father is, so to speak the God of Old Testament as well as New Testament
Son	The ministry, death and resurrection of Christ, and the events associated with them
Holy Spirit	Holy Spirit The period after the ministry of Christ when the gifts of the Spirit were poured out on the Church. Hence, the Spirit is, so to speak, God at work through the Church

2 Dragon, Beast and False Prophet: The Best Associated Time Periods

Constituent	Most Relevant Epoch
Dragon	The period before, and up to the ministry of the beast. This coincides in the Apocalypse with the pre-Christian period, up to the partial conquest of the Gospel in the **first four trumpet sequences.** Thus, the **dragon** can be identified with the **world** as the enemy of God during the **pre-Christian** period.
Beast (of the Sea)	The period that coincides with the ministry of the Church (as the two witnesses) and the nourishment of the Church (as the woman) and also with the ministry of the beast (as antichrist). It coincides with the 'five months' from Gospel seedtime to Gospel harvest, with the period of the **fifth trumpet sequence.** Thus, the **beast** can be identified with the **world** as the enemy of God during the period of **Christendom,** whether the 'enemy' is nominally Christian or otherwise.
The False Prophet (Beast of the Earth)	The period after the end of the ministry of the Church, in which its boundary (the Euphrates) is breached, and the witnesses (the Church) attacked and killed. It coincides with the 'harvest' at the end of the period of Christian testimony, the 'Babylonian captivity' of the New Israel (the Church). It also coincides with the period of the **sixth trumpet sequence.** Thus, the **false prophet** can be identified with the **world** as the enemy of God during the **post-Christian period,** the period of pseudo-scientific miracle-working materialism.

It will be appreciated that the two sets of time periods are not identical with each other. The second set is later than the first. In the case of the first set, for example, the third time period commences with Pentecost, and has continued since that time. In the case of the second set, the first time period lasted into the first few centuries of our era, the second period continued through the middle ages and to some extent, to modern times, and the third period is not consummated until the 'hour, day, month and year' of the ninth chapter of the Apocalypse, which has already been discussed. This is future and coincides with destruction of the Church's testimony (destruction of the witnesses) for a short period.

This analysis has been useful because it gives us a working hypothesis for interpreting the beast and false prophet. The dragon has already been identified, not as a nation or political oppressor but as the 'enemy of God' in all its forms in the pre-Christian period. It was personalised as 'the devil and Satan', assumed to have had heavenly authority by pagans, but was shown to be powerless by the merits of Christ (37). Hence, the disillusionment is represented as a 'casting to earth[1] (38). The dragon was thus 'the present evil world' against which the apostles fought with their testimony (39).

Given that this interpretation was correct, we may proceed to conjecture the following in respect of the other two components.

1) **The beast** is the **present evil world** during the period of the Church's continuing existence. It summarises, so to speak, **evil**, the 'enemy of God' in all its forms through this period, whether this 'enemy' is to be

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(37) Again compare Hebrews 2:14 with Romans 8:3
(38) Compare Luke 10:18 with Revelation 12:9 &
(37) above (39) See Ephesians 6:12

found inside or outside the nominal Church as such. Its 'life' is contemporaneous with the period of the Church's ministry. Both last for the symbolic period of 42 months, though they perform different functions.

2) The false **prophet is** the **present evil world** at the end of the period of the Church's testimony. It summarises, so to speak, **evil**, the 'enemy of God' in all its forms at the end of the Christian period when Christianity temporarily 'dies' as a witnessing agent in the world, because its spiritual boundary, the 'Euphrates', has been temporarily dried. After a short interval, the Church is revived miraculously and fulfils its role. Thus, though it is the 'beast of the abyss' that kills the witnesses, the 'false prophet' coincides with the period of their death.

Using this interpretation as a working hypothesis, let us examine both beasts in turn to view the evidence for this global, far-reaching interpretation.

The Sea Beast's Appearance

The sea-beast is a conflation of all the four sea beasts of Daniel's first vision. It has aspects of lion, bear, leopard and dragon. Also, it has the total number of heads of all four of Daniel's beasts (40), and it has the ten horns of Daniel's fourth beast. Further, it is said to come out of the sea, because they come out of the sea. Thus, it appropriately represents 'the world' as the persecuting enemy of the New Israel, as the four beasts of Daniel represented the persecuting enemies of the Old Israel, given the differences already ex-

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(40) Compare Revelation 13:1 with Daniel chapter 7 generally

plained in respect of the dragon, that the persecution is spiritual, rather than physical in the case of the Church.

As the interpretation now appears to be supported by the very fact that the sea beast is a conflation of all of Daniel's sea beasts, let us examine the seven heads and ten horns in detail. The seven heads (40) are not capable of individual identification, nor are the ten horns necessarily individually identifiable. They do not have to be, at this stage, though they are identifiable in a later vision. In the visions of Daniel, the position was as follows.

Description	Number	Meaning
The Lion's Head	1	Babylonia
The Bear's Head	1	Persia
The four heads of the Spotted Leopard	4	The four major divisions of the Empire of Alexander
The Head of the Unidentifiable Beast	1	The 'aftermath' of the Seleucid Empire. Generally, Roman-dominated, but not entirely Roman
Thus, in total the Sea Beast of Revelation	7	The whole 'world' as the enemy of the New Israel

Also, given the correctness of my interpretation that the ten horns of Daniel's fourth beast were Asmonean princes, three of whom were to be usurped by Herod, the persecutor of the Son of God, not Seleucid princes (to be usurped by Antiochus Epiphanes) as is commonly thought, then the seven heads represent 'Gentile' usurpation of Divine authority and the ten horns represent Jewish

(40) Compare Revelation 13:1 with Daniel chapter 7 generally

usurpation of Divine authority.

Thus, the numbers of the heads and horns are important, not for individual but for global identification. In other words, the beast is the whole world as an 'enemy of God' during the period of Christendom in which the authority of all political leaders has, in theory, been already shattered by the authority of Christ, and 'no place is found for them'(41) but the debris of the image remains, so to speak, as a conflated, 'mixed-up' beast.

The beast's leopard-like appearance does not simply identify it with Greece (Daniel's leopard) but rather indicates its deceptive and international character. Daniel's leopard-kingdom of Alexander orientalised the near-East. Greek soldiers married Persian and Indian noblewomen and so they gave rise to that Greek equivalent of Babel, that later became known as the Hellenistic world. Nations became mixed, but this racial fusion was only a foretaste of what would happen after the impact of the Stone (Jesus) on the world. Hence, the beast is leopard-like because he resembles the Greek Empire of Alexander, as a synthesis in which national barriers cease to matter when the world is opposed to the people of God.

The beast is like a leopard for a more obvious reason. The leopard's spots are a disguise. The important feature of the 'enemy' during the Christian era is not simply that it has involved the whole world (as did the Greek Empire of Alexander) but that it often operated under a nominally Christian guise, and thus worked where it is not apparent, in the very context of the New Israel. The stealthy deceptive operation of the beast is also indicated by its bear's feet. The bear's feet are tenuous, and give the large clumsy animal some of its stealth, for they are also padded. Thus have the forces of evil worked in the world of the Christian period.

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(41) Compare Daniel 2:35 with Revelation 12:8

All Heads have One Mouth

The sea beast has the mouth of a lion. Some schools of thought have been puzzled that the beast should only have one mouth, when it has seven heads. The answer is clear. The beast can only have **one lion's head** (42) even though it may have six other heads. Therefore, it can only have one lion's mouth. However, the mouth resembles that of the 'little horn' of Daniel's fourth beast, for it speaks 'great words and blasphemies' (43),like the mouth of Daniel's 'little horn' though, of course, the mouth of chapter 13 verse 2 may be different from that of verse 5 of the same chapter. If we assume that this is not the case, and that the lion's mouth of verse 2 is the mouth that speaks blasphemies, it can also be concluded that this mouth is the only 'relevant' mouth in the quotation from Daniel, for although the mouth of the bear is also mentioned in Daniel, it simply holds three ribs in its teeth, and as such is too preoccupied to be able to speak blasphemy.

Thus, using the above interpretation, the seven heads have only one mouth. It is the mouth of the lion (44), not only because the laws of the world of the Christian era were originally derived from Babylonia, but because it is a devouring mouth. Both Daniel and Paul were delivered from this devouring 'lion's mouth' in different ways, and in different senses. Daniel was literally delivered from the mouths of lions, while Paul writes symbolically of having been delivered from the 'lion's mouth' (45) (46). Peter also writes that the 'devil' is like a roaring lion seeking prey (47). The 'devil' cannot be some political entity in this case, for the

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(42) See the table (page 260) enumerating the heads
(43) Compare Daniel 7:8 with Revelation 13:5
(44) Revelation 13:1 & 2 (45) Daniel ch 6 (46) 2 Timothy 4:17 (47) 1 Peter 5:8

Christian is told not to resist the political (48) entities of this world, but this devil has to be resisted by those who are 'stedfast in the faith'.

The lion is thus that which both slanders and devours the people of God in the 'present evil world' of the Christian era. It is the mouth of slander in every form (48). It is the opposite, the antithesis and counterpart of the Lion of Judah's message of peace. For He was also a Slain Lamb (49) and his 'Lion-mouth' preserves us by devouring death in victory, just as His spotless life is the Christian answer to the spotted leopard.

Just as the Father gives the Son His power, throne and great authority, so now in parallel contrast, the dragon, that imaginary fallen Satan (who seemed to have such great authority), now gives his backing to the evil forces of the world during the Christian era, for though he has been, in theory, destroyed by Christ, the rubble of his empire continues to exist, so speak, as the sea-beast, the evil world of the Christian era. The lion's mouth has a 'power' that, in theory, does not exist, for it has been shown to be ineffective by the very merits of Christ.

The Fatally Wounded Head

One of the heads of the beast is fatally wounded, but the wound is healed (50).Some scholars thought that the expected return of Nero was the basis of this prophecy. Though it may indeed have been one of the bases on which the prophecy is built (e.g. Nero had not been completely destroyed, and was expected to return at some future time) it does not necessarily follow that Nero is to be regarded as

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(48) Compare 1 Peter 2:13-17 with Matthew 5:38-42
(49) Compare Revelation 5:5-6 with Isaiah 53:7
(50) Revelation 13:3

a fulfilment of the prophecy, for as we have seen, the sea-beast is a world-wide force. It is the 'present evil world' in all its forms during the Christian era. Further, the myth of Nero's return was not the only basis of the prophecy. The myth of the many-headed Hydra was another basis. If the Hydra lost one head it could produce several others in its place. What then is the message of the deadly wound and of its recovery?

It is impossible to explore the meaning of the incident without first recollecting the parallel in the case of Christ.

This parallel has already been summarised when the contrasting parallels between Christ (the Son) and Antichrist (the Sea Beast) were explained and tabulated. The interpretation of the incident is the contrasting parallel with what happened to Christ. He was temporarily 'wounded to death' but His deadly wound was healed for He rose victorious over death. The death of Jesus was the fulfilment of a Messianic prophecy in Genesis that a 'woman's descendent' (51) would bruise the head of a serpent. In this sense, Jesus overcame the 'serpent' (the dragon, or sin-power) by His life of obedience, and His sacrifice. Through death, He destroyed the 'devil' (52).

Given that the 'devil' is dead, and was destroyed by the life of Christ, how can sin continue to be active? It is clear from a comparison of two parallel texts in Hebrews and Romans (53) that the apparent omnipotence of sin in human nature has been permanently destroyed by the very obedience of Jesus. Sin, and its sting (death) were both rendered virtually powerless at this event. They were, in theory, destroyed.

Yet, although sin and death were 'rendered powerless' in Christ, and in theory destroyed because

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(51) Genesis 3:15 (52) Hebrews 2:14
(53) Romans 8:3 and Hebrews 2:14

Jesus overcame their effects, yet they were **not** destroyed. At Calvary two contrasting events occurred.

1) Jesus, the Head of the Church, was wounded fatally, but continued to exist for ever.
2) Sin, the 'serpent's head' of the Edenic promise, was also fatally (51) wounded in theory (52, 53) but continued to exist for the time being and continued to inflict death on mankind.

To explore the second of these contrasting events, the fatal wounding of sin took place at Calvary, but the world was not changed immediately by the death of Christ. Sin was not (in practice) destroyed at all. All the evil that has existed in the world since Calvary, and all the death and decay that resulted from it, is evidence that the 'serpent's head'(the power of sin)mortally wounded at Calvary, destroyed in theory in the language of the letter to the Hebrews, still functions for the time being. Though sin was indeed fatally wounded at that time, the fatal wound appears to have been rendered ineffective. Sin and death continue to exist.

This is the real spiritual antithesis between Christ and Antichrist. Both appear to have received deadly wounds, yet both have revived. The explanation meets all the real terms of reference of Christ and Antichrist, but is incomplete because it does not use the details from Daniel on which the Apocalyptic prophecy is based. To use these details, we must look for a secondary, and more mundane interpretation. To explore this interpretation more fully we must decide which of the seven heads was 'wounded to death'.

When John had earlier been invited to see the

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(51) Genesis 3:15 (52) Hebrews 2:14
(53) Romans 8:3 and Hebrews 2:14
(54) Revelation 5:5-6

'Lion of the tribe of Judah' (54) he instead saw 'a Lamb, as though it had been slain'. In the case of Christ, therefore, the wounded Head is the 'Lion head', which is also, of course, the Lamb's. As the seven-headed beast uses the 'lion's mouth' (55) can we conclude that the effective 'head' is the lion's head? Thus, the contrasting parallel between Christ and Antichrist is a perfect one. But, to continue, the first (lion's) head of Daniel's four beasts (and seven heads) represented **Babylon**, and head of the image-colossus of Nebuchadnezzar's dream symbolising pre-Christian oppressors of Israel which Jesus had (56) shattered at Calvary as the stone shattered the image. Clearly then, the wounded head of the beast is its effective head - the lion's head, that which in Daniel's first vision represented Babylon. The vision says, in effect, that Babylon would be wounded fatally, but that its deadly wound would be healed.

In this respect, Babylon is an interesting city. All the other cities representing the capital cities of the other six heads survived their associated empires, and so did their nations. For example, Persia, Greece, Rome and the Greek kingdoms of Egypt and Syria have their counterparts today. But Babylon did not survive. It was not even a provincial capital in John's day. It survived the other image-powers (Persia and Greece, for example) as a city and did not sink into the sands until the beginning of the Christian era. Some of its bricks had then already been used for the building of Seleucia, and that in turn was replaced by nearby Baghdad. It was condemned to receive a fatal wound. Isaiah had predicted, centuries earlier (57), that it would be an utter ruin to the end of time.

But despite its utter condemnation as a city, Babylon **did** survive its fatal wound. It lives on, to

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(55) Revelation 13:2 (56) Daniel chapter 2
(57) Isaiah chapter 13

a greater extent than other condemned cities, for it exists as a cipher (58) - as a symbol of that world that is the counterpart of spiritual Zion -as a symbol of the antithesis of the Church of God. Thus, the myth of Nero's return to power and the legend of the Hydra **may** have been bases on which the prophecy was built, but there were greater bases:

(a) in Christ's condemnation of sin, by His own life and death; and

(b) in the destruction of Babylon, to continue, not as a city, but as the principle at work in all those who are not truly attached to spiritual Zion, to those whom Christ has redeemed.

Thus, the message of the vision has not to do with human politics. It tells us the following.

1) Christ has 'fatally' wounded all evil, but but it continues to survive as a challenge to us, so that Satan may once more be bruised, so to speak, under our feet (59).
2) The Babylonian colossus was effectively smashed by Christ in the first century when He claimed that the judgement of the world had come, and that the prince of the world had been evicted (60), and shortly after His time Babylon ceased to exist as a city - but Babylon's wound was healed, for its influence will continue throughout the Christian period.

Thus, though Babylon is a set of ruins, a 'terror to vagrants and a dwelling of jackals' (57), it is not dead. It is resurrected in all that opposes God. It survives as Great Babylon, (58) the 'City

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(57) Isaiah chapter 13 (58) See particularly the use of this chapter in Revelation chapters 17 & 18, and contrast with the New Jerusalem cipher in chapters 21 & 22

(59) Romans 16:19-20 (60) Psalm 137:1-3

of the World', by whose spiritual 'waters' the children of God must still sit and weep (60)in the language of the Psalms. Their lives are a struggle against the wiles of Antichrist, and the most prominent 'head' of Antichrist (its revived 'primus inter pares', or first among equals) is 'Babylon revived'. But as we have already shown, Antichrist encompasses the totality of all that is evil during the Christian era. In some form or other, it has dominion over all tribes, peoples, tongues and nations (61). No political system, whether secular or religious, whether pagan, papal or protestant has had universal dominion, and the worst of the world's evil systems have only been partial in their domination, and in their effects on humanity. As the beast's dominion is universal, and transcends them, it must be concluded that 'beast' and 'Antichrist' must describe the 'present evil world' of the Christian era, in all forms and influences.

The beast's 'warfare' is also primarily a spiritual one. At times in history it may have insidiously infiltrated the Christian Church, just as Herod (62) the 'little horn' of Daniel's fourth beast imposed his wishes on the Jewish priesthood after initiating the downfall of three members of the Asmonean family, marrying into it, and killing its final heir. It seeks to kill the testimony of the Church, and thus infiltrates it internally as well as opposing it externally. The interpretations of the fifth and sixth trumpet sequences, and of the vision of the two witnesses indicate the result of this warfare. The Church's 'testimony' will be temporarily destroyed for a short while at the end of time, but it will soon rise again, empowered by the Spirit of God (63).

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(60) Psalm 137:1-3 (61) Revelation 13:7-8

(62) See my interpretation of the 'little horn' of Daniel's fourth beast in 'The Message of Daniel' (St Brides Lectures, 1970) pp 51-53

Domination and Warfare

Thus, the war is not a political war against an organization. It is a spiritual war. The victory of the vision is that victory which the Christian should seek to accomplish against Antichrist during every day of his life. Sin (as the world in all its guises) is allowed to continue and trample the elect throughout the period of Antichrist, throughout the '42 months' of the witnesses' ministry, the 42 generations of human travail, for that period from seed-time to harvest, when wheat and tares must grow together (64).

The 42 months of the beast's domination are thus comparable with the five months from seedtime to harvest, associated with the fifth trumpet sequence. In a strange way, although the symbols are derived differently, as they are associated with the period of the Church's ministry, they are not unconnected. For example, if days are employed as months to indicate the length of a 'time', then 3*5 x 42 = 29.5 x 5 approximately. In other words, if *3½* times are made to be the same length as 5 months, the figure 42 recurs once more, the length of 'time' when used solely for this purpose.

The wheat-grains grow strong in spite of the tares (or weeds).The whole basis of Christian warfare is non-violence. This is the 'wisdom' of the passage. The Christian obtains true victory over the forces of evil by not resisting them, in the physical sense of the term 'resist'. The weapons of Christian warfare are not carnal (65).The words of the passage are not just a plea for non-violence,

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(63) Thus Revelation 11:7-13 explains 'overcome' in 13:7,leaving aside the textual differences in v.7 (64)See Matthew 13:24-43,but particularly the discussion of the '5 months' of the fifth trumpet sequence, the period from seedtime to harvest

though they seem to be so, superficially. They are an indication that the passage is not describing physical persecution and physical resistance, though that may sometimes have occurred. The passage is describing a spiritual persecution conducted by the beast, and a spiritual warfare against it.

The words: "If anyone is for captivity, into captivity he must go; and he that kills with the sword must be killed by the sword," - are a composite quotation.

The first line (66):"If anyone is for captivity, into captivity he must go," is a quotation from Jeremiah's plea to Jews not to resist Babylon physically, but to be subjects to it, so that the nation could survive for future generations. He was, in effect, saying that the best method of fighting Babylon was by **not** fighting it. The nation would then survive and be a witness against Babylon in future generations.

The second line (67): "He that kills with the sword must be killed by the sword," is a quotation from the words of Christ to Peter at His arrest.

Peter attempted to inflict a deadly wound on Malchus, the high-priest's slave, but was unequipped to fight properly, as are many Christians. Peter's violence could have led to greater retaliation. The healing of the wound 'pacified' the situation to some extent. Peter had to survive to carry on the warfare of spiritual witness. He could do so only by not becoming entangled in physical conflict.

Hence is the confidence of the saints. It is the confidence of this very interpretation, that the chapter describes a spiritual conflict rather than a literal one. It also establishes the principle

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(65) 2 Corinthians 10:4

(66) Compare Jeremiah 15:2 with Revelation 13:9-10

(67) Compare Matthew 26:52 with Revelation 13:9-10

that victory over Antichrist must be achieved by subservience to human forces of evil, just as Israel survived as a witnessing nation by becoming (66) subservient to Babylon, and as the Church survived as a witnessing people, because of Christ's (and Peter's) subservience at the time of His arrest (67).

The False Prophet

The following table reminds us of the period during which the false prophet, or 'beast of the earth' operates.

Trumpet Sequence	Creature	Time Period
The first 4 trumpet-blast sequences	Dragon	The initial impact of the Church on the pagan world, and its 'partial conquest' of spiritual Canaan, by its testimony
The fifth trumpet-blast sequence	Beast	The period of the Church's continuing ministry
The sixth trumpet-blast sequence	False Prophet	The end of the period of the Church's continuing ministry (Death of the Witnesses)

Clearly, if this analysis is correct, the false prophet (or beast of the earth) is due to manifest itself at the end of the period of Christian ministration, when the Church's testimony becomes temporarily ineffective, signalised by the death of the two witnesses.

If this is so, although the 'present evil world' continues as a wounded (yet restored) head throughout the period of the 'five months' from seedtime

(66) Compare Jeremiah 15:2 with Revelation 13:9-10
(67) Compare Matthew 26:52 with Revelation 13:9-10

to harvest (or the 42 months of the Church's nourishment) , it does not become totally unrestrained until the end of that period. When the hour comes, the present evil world is shown in its true light, its openest and basest form, uncoloured by any suggestion of religion.

The earth-beast orders all peoples to worship the sea-beast with the voice of the dragon - the world in its pre-Christian, pagan form. In this sense, it takes away even a nominal semblance of Christianity.

Relationship with Daniel's Beasts

The details of the second part of the chapter become clearer if the Old Testament references on which the vision is based are fully explored. First of all, if there is an historical relationship between the two beasts and the fifth and sixth trumpets respectively, as the current table shows, then the earth-beast (or false-prophet) must be associated with those hordes that invaded the 'land' (the territory of the Church) from 'beyond Euphrates' (i.e. beyond its spiritual boundary).

This is clear from one of the earliest references to a 'false prophet' in the Scriptures, also quoted in the Apocalypse(68).The false prophet was Balaam (69)who came from beyond Euphrates to curse Israel when they came out of Egypt, though he did not succeed in doing so. When he found himself unsuccessful, he attempted to weaken Israel by means of apostasy (the women of Midian), and the vision of the sealing of 144,000 is, as was shown earlier, based on the choice of 12,000 in Israel(1,000 from each tribe) to war against Midian as a result. Despite the existence of small remnants who preserved Truth against error (often as heretics) by

(68) Revelation 2:14
(69) Numbers chs 22-25, then see 31:4

warring against corruption with Spiritual Israel, total spiritual death (although as a temporary detail) ultimately comes on the New Israel at the end of its period of testimony, and during this period the false prophet is most active. Using the words of Paul to the Thessalonians, the presence of Christian testimony in the world is a 'restraining' influence(70).When this restraining influence is eliminated, then 'lawless man'(anomos)is revealed in his full array, and proclaim to be God (71) .On this analysis, the false prophet is 'lawless man', 'lawless humanity'. It is the 'present evil world' of the post-Christian, post-religious, materialistic period.

Another Old Testament reference is the 'earth-beasts' vision of Daniel. Though it is often realised that the 'sea-beast' of this chapter is the composite (conflation)of the four beasts that came from the sea in Daniel 7, it is rarely, if ever, realised that the 'earth-beast' of Revelation 13 is also a composite (conflation) of the two beasts that came from the earth in the vision of Daniel 8.

Let us tabulate some of the details.

Daniel	Revelation
The four sea beasts have the characteristics of lion, bear, leopard and 'dragon'. They have seven heads in total (1 + 1 + 4 + 1) and have ten horns (72)	The one sea beast of the first part of the chapter has the characteristics of lion, bear, leopard and dragon. It has seven heads in total, and has ten horns (73)

(70) 2 Thessalonians 2:6
(71) 2 Thessalonians 2:4 (72) Daniel chapter 7
(73) Revelation 13:1-2

The two earth beasts have the characteristics of ram, and he-goat. The ram has only two horns (74). The 'horn' of the he-goat makes war on the saints (76)	The one earth beast has the characteristics of lamb and dragon. However many 'horns' it may have, it has only two lamb's (ram's) horns (75). He makes war with the saints (77)

If the analogy between the two 'earth beasts' of Daniel and the earth-beast of this chapter is a valid one, then it is further evidence of its trans-Euphratean character, for the two horns of che'ram' of Daniel 8 represented Media and Persia, which lay beyond the Euphrates, and made war on Babylon. The false prophet (or earth-beast)is thus again seen to represent those influence that would attack the Church from outside, at the end of its period of testimony and temporarily captivate it, as Israel was so captivated at the end of its ministry, and monarchy.

It is unnecessary to detail the contrasting parallels between the false prophet (or earth-beast) and the Spirit of God, for these have already been tabulated. Sufficient to say that the earth-beast represents the source of all the world's **false** prophecy, as the Spirit of God is the source of all the world's **true** prophecy. After Christ's earthly life came to an end, His followers received God's Holy Spirit, so that they may not become "orphans'. As the life of the Christian era terminates, religion gives place to a 'pseudo-pentecost' of utter lawlessness, an 'orgy' of pseudo-scientific wonder-working in the age of irreligious materialism.

A parallel has already been drawn between the fifth and sixth trumpet sequences and the two beasts of this chapter. If the sixth trumpet in-

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(74) Daniel 8:3 (75) Revelation 13:11
(76) Daniel 8:10
(77) Compare Revelation 13:12 with 13:7

vasion represents the influence of the earth-beast, and both stem from beyond Euphrates (e.g. beyond the spiritual boundary of the Church) then a parallel may also be drawn between the two horns of the earth-beast and the two hordes of the sixth trumpet sequence (the **twice** 'myriads of myriads'). If this is so, the two horns simply represent a divided world, that is united for one purpose only, to destroy the remaining 'restraining influence' (70) of Christian testimony. In this sense, the two horns of the beast, (or two hordes of the sixth trumpet invader) represent a world yet future to our time, when different and opposing political systems (whether capitalistic or communistic) will be united in eradicating the restraining 'law-enforcing' influence of religion. The number 'two' simply means 'divided', as in the case of the witnesses, though there may be two opposing systems involved.

Thus as:

(a) the **two** witnesses represent a **divided church** restraining the world through the period of Christian witness,- so

(b) the **two** 'horns' and **two** hordes of the 'earth-beast' and sixth trumpet sequence represent a **divided world**(generally) but united only in one respect - that of eradicating Christian restraint (70)

The False Prophet's Teaching

The false prophet's teaching involves scientific materialism and humanism. It has to dismiss Christ's resurrection as superstition and to argue that there is no efficacy in the death of Christ. In doing so, it must also logically preach that the 'deadly wound' inflicted by Christ on sin, in His life and death, was an ineffective one. This dis-

(70) 2 Thessalonians 2:6

missal of Christianity as superstition is symbolised in the chapter by stating that the 'false prophet' preached that the world should pay reverence to the 'beast' whose deadly wound had been healed. The theme is capable of various levels of interpretation.

1) Post-religious humanism dismisses Christ's conquest over sin as superstition, and thus revives and restores sin, from the blow that it received at Calvary. Its death-wound is temporarily healed.
2) Post-Christian humanism dismisses the effect of Christ upon the world, and thus attempts to restore pre-Christian civilization as its precursor. Thus Babylon's 'death-wound' is temporarily healed.
3) Post-Christian humanism seeks to destroy the effects of that partial conquest of the world by Christian testimony, and restore the 'lawlessness' that existed before the world was partially subjected to the restraining influence of Christianity, and those religions affected by it (e.g. Islam and Sikhism).

The attack on religion is represented as an attack on superstition, and must therefore have the miracle of Elijah before the prophets of Baal-Melkart (78) as its **false** precedent. The reference to Elijah's miracle (calling fire from heaven) and the circumstances surrounding it, help to identify the methods used by post-Christian humanism. It seeks to relegate all religion to the realm of superstition, just as Elijah miraculously showed that Baal worship was superstition, and had no basis in reality.

The phrase 'fire from heaven' is a useful summary of scientific warfare. It resembles the reference to 'fire, sapphire and sulphur' (79) and 'fire,

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(78) 1 Kings 18:36-40 (79) Revelation 9:17 & 18

smoke and sulphur' (79) that refer to scientific warfare in the parallel vision of the Euphratean invasion. But, unlike Elijah, the earth-beast is a very poor iconoclast. He attempts to eradicate the idols of human superstition, but replace them with the greatest of all idols, the 'image of the beast', the idol of 'man' himself. This interpretation of the 'image of the beast' is clearly identical with the interpretation of the end of chapter 9 of the Apocalypse (80) with which we have already discovered many other parallels. Once religion has been destroyed, a worse idolatry raises its head. Man may become 'God' in the Nietzchian sense (in becoming 'superman' where 'God is dead'!), or he may exalt the State to the level of 'God' in manner typical of some communist regimes. Christian communities are in danger of dying under materialistic systems (particularly communist ones), not because of **seduction** by the Babylonian 'serpent' (the sea-beast), but because churches may be **forced** to become State institutions under the control of atheistic committees.

Enforced Lawlessness

The difference between the methods of the sea-beast and earth-beast is that between seduction and enforcement. The Old Israel was weakened by adverse spiritual influences which it allowed to continue during the monarchy, and finally conquered by a godless nation. The New Israel does not complete its task of overcoming the world by Christian testimony. Thus, it has been weakened by a 'spiritual enemy' during the period of Christian testimony, but will finally be forced to end its testimony, by being captivated by a godless power (the lawless one) just as Israel and Judah were captivated by Assyria and Babylon.

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(79) Revelation 9:17 & 18 (80) Revelation 9:20-21

Another Old Testament reference is relevant. The table has already drawn a comparison between the vision of the earth-beast and that of Daniel's visions of the ram and he-goat. Comparison with the ram has already been made: both have two horns. Comparison with the he-goat introduces, in particular, the subject of the little horn of the he-goat who can be identified as Antiochus Epiphanes. He, unlike the little horn of the fourth beast of the previous chapter, sought to impose paganism on Israel. He invaded the Jerusalem temple and erected an image of Zeus there (81). In the same way, the forces of humanistic materialism invade the Church of Christ (cross the Euphrates into the 'covenant land') and forcibly try to use it for their own ends.

The Thessalonians passage about the 'lawless man' (70/71) can now be used to explain this vision. In both cases, there are 'signs and lying wonders', those of 'pseudo-science'. Paul's words about the lawless one 'sitting in God's temple, showing himself to be God (or a god) ' are a direct quotation from a prophecy of Ezekiel against Tyre (82).Tyre developed from an unconquered part of Canaan that Israel should have subjugated in the time of Joshua, but failed to (83) subjugate. The details once more harmonise remarkably with the parallels that were drawn earlier in this exposition between the failure of the Old Israel and the failure of the Church. If Israel had subjugated Canaan at the time of Joshua, Tyre could not have developed with its evil commercialism and godlessness. Similarly,

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(70) 2 Thessalonians 2:6 (71) 2 Thessalonians 2:4

(81) See, in particular 'The message of Daniel' (supra) pp.58 et seq Josephus: Antiquities x. 11, and 1 Maccabees, 1:54

(82) Ezekiel 28:2 (et seq) (83) See particularly Joshua 19:29, which does not specify conquest of Tyre, but limitation of its borders

if Christianity had conquered the world completely by its testimony, the 'restraining influence' (70) would have been complete, and the state of 'lawless man', the man-worshipping commercialistic modern Tyre could also never have arisen.

The pretence at 'godhead' (71) has sometimes been misapplied by Protestant writers to the Papacy, but no pope ever claimed to be God. The highest claim made by the Papacy (rather that those made of it by others) was the claim to succeed the apostles, and thus to represent Christ on earth. No pagan emperor successfully claimed divinity, though many claimed divine origin. Divinity can only be claimed by men who believe that there is no higher authority than man himself, who think with Nietzche, that 'God is dead' (84).

Modern materialistic humanism fits the details exactly. It animates matter and gives 'breath' to the work of its own hands. It apes Christianity in its social concern, and in its apparent humanitarianism. It has given life to its 'idol' to such an extent that those 'marked' (indoctrinated) by it cannot distinguish between Christian service and the new idolatry (85).

The Mark of the Beast

In their eagerness to identify the beasts with the Papacy, Protestant expositors attempted to identify the 'mark of the beast' on the forehead with the rite of 'christening', and that on the hand with pretended stigmata. As earlier in the book, it is quite probable that the Apocalypse was written to anticipate interpretations and doctrinal changes, particularly interpretations at a lite-

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(70) 2 Thessalonians 2:6 (71) 2 Thessalonians 2:4
(82) Ezekiel 28:2 (et seq)
(84) Nietzche: Thus spake Zarathustra
(85) Revelation 13:14-15
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ralistic level. But such interpretations detract from the reality of the branding. 'Head' and 'hand' are useful symbols for intent and action and if the symbols are to be understood as 'marked' thought and action what is it that 'marks' the thoughts and actions of the beast's adherents?

The clue is not only to be found in the commercialism of the Tyrian reference (82) quoted by Paul when writing to the Thessalonians, but in the words: "That no man may buy, or sell"... (86). The 'mark' is thus associated with commercialism, with mammon, with the view that, if there is **no** justice, apparent justice can be 'bought' or 'sold'.

If this is the case, we can carry the mark of the beast on our head and hand, whenever we are bewitched by the contraptions of this age, whenever we make them substitutes for our spiritual well-being, and whenever the thought of a 'spiritual calling' (87) is even temporarily abandoned for material concerns. For these reduce us to thinking of ourselves in terms of the matter of which we are made.

Money is needed to buy and sell. 'Human reckoning' is usually in terms of money. Unquantifiable things are often translated into monetary terms so that material gains and losses can be predetermined and calculated. Cost-benefit analysis, for example, is based on the premise that every benefit can be translated. If the mark of the beast is 'mammon' as a human concern, a clue to the 'number of the beast' can be studied with enhanced meaning. The number is called 'the number of man', but this may be translated 'human reckoning' (88). **Human reckoning** is, of course, that which seeks to value everything in terms of material or monetary gains or losses.

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(82) Ezekiel 28:2 (et seq)
(86) Revelation 13:17
(87) Philippians 3:14
(88) Revelation 13:18

The people of God contrast with 'human reckoning' in several ways.

1) They are 'a multitude that no man can number' (89), just as Israel was. Thus, David sinned in attempting to number them, to see effectively, how wealthy he was, as a monarch (90).
2) They are freed from a debt of sin, so large that it cannot be reckoned (91).
3) They are urged to remit the debts of others (92).
4) They communicate with a God, Who is infinite - the unquantifiable (93).
5) They are thus outside the sphere of 'human reckoning', the mammon-based 'summing' and 'subtraction' of materialistic costs and benefits - the view that everything can be translated into human currency, and so measured (94).

This is the anti-mammon view of life. It stands in contrast to that of those who believe that happiness and human good can be measured in money, and that 'justice' can be bought. Balaam was cited earlier in this chapter as the model 'false prophet'. His primary error was that he attempted to prophesy for material gain.

We are now already in position to hypothesize that the number 666 has something to do with mammon - with a monetary view of life.

> 'Whoever has wisdom, let him reckon the number of the beast, for it is a human number (human reckoning). Its number is 666' (95).

If this interpretation is correct, we commence the problem with the solution, and try to judge what 666 has to do with mammon, instead of commenc-

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(89) Revelation 7:9 (90) 1 Chronicles 21:1
(91) Matthew 18:27 (92) Matthew 6:12
(93) Isaiah 40:17 (94) Romans 8:33, Isaiah 55:8-9
(95) Revelation 13:18

ing with the number, and puzzling what the solution should be. This, at least, is an advantage. Let us examine three methods of seeking a solution to the riddle of the number.

Gematria and 666

Before Arabic numerals were adopted in the Western world, letters of the alphabet were used to denote numbers. Thus each name had a numerical value, based on the sum of the letters that it contained. The process of calculating the number of a name by summing the numerical equivalents of the letters it contained was known as 'gematria'.

The Preterist school believed that Nero was the beast. If the Hebrew letters of Nero Caesar are added, the sum is 666, if the Hebrew form, Neron is used.

Ne	R	O	(N)	„ Ke	Sa	R	
50 +	200 +	6 +	(50) +	100 +	60 +	200	= 666

The second 'n' is an option, and if it is excluded, the number of (96) Nero's name becomes 616. Some manuscripts actually read 616 as a variant. But if the name adds up to different variations in the text, it becomes suspect, because only one of them could have appeared in the original manuscript. Further, if the identity really was Nero, why should Caesar have to be added, but not any of Nero's other names or titles?

The historical school tried to identify the number with pagan (or Papal) Rome. The most commonly used name was Lateinos (the Latin one) in Greek.

L	A	T	(E)	I	N	O	S	
30 +	1 +	300 +	(5) +	10 +	50 +	70 +	200	= 666

This is not the common form of the name. The name is usually written (97) without the bracketed E. In

(96) Charles: Revelation (I.C.C.) Vol 1 pp. 365-8
(97) Newton: Dissertation on the Prophecies pp. 548-550

this case, the number adds to 661, not 666. Words that identify the beast with the Papacy (used by 18th and 19th Century expositors) are even more suspect. We have used Hebrew and Greek letters. Let us examine one example in Roman numerals. It is the Papal title, and at least has an advantage of not being a 'made up' name.

V	I	C	(A)	(R)	I	V	(S)	„	(F)	I	L	I	I	„	D	(E)	I
5	+1	+100	+0	+0	+1	+5	+0		+0	+1	+50	+1	+1		+500	+0	+1

= 666

The name means the 'vicegerent of the sons of God'. Further, Roman numerals are in commoner usage than Greek and Hebrew numerals, and it should be easier for anyone to check the above calculation. In this case, the defect in the argument that the above title should be summed to 666, arises from the assumptions that gematria should be applied to Roman numerals, and in particular, that those letters that have no numerical equivalent (i.e. those bracketed above) should automatically be given the numerical value of 0. Unless this is done, the value 666 is unobtainable (98).

Other names have been suggested, mostly those that use the Greek alphabet, such as:

He Latine Basileia (The Latin Kingdom).

Romyit - in Hebrew letters (Romans).

Finally, the futurist school generally employs Teitan, though it has been borrowed from Charles (96) who was a preterist. Even this name does not add up to 666 if the redundant 'e' is excluded, and a variant of the name does exclude the 'e'.

The demerits of gematria are that:

(a) it does not stem from Divine wisdom but from pagan numerology, and it is debatable

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(96) Charles: Revelation (I.C.C.) Vol 1 pp. 365-8

(98) Western alphabets (except Latin) use the first 9 letters for units, the next 9 letters for tens, and so on. The Roman numeral system is more restricted.

whether any numbering system that derives from magic and astrology should be employed in Biblical identification; and

(c) there are many candidates for 666, but God is 'not the author of(99) confusion' and would not have been unspecific in such an important matter.

In support of b) the average value of a Greek letter, using the letters that represent 1 to 9, 10 to 90 and the remaining 6 letters as 100 to 600 is about 108, and as there is an average of about 6 letters in a small name, the probability of names summing up to about 650 is relatively high, and as there are hundreds of thousands of names from which to choose, the number of names from which to obtain 666 must also be quite large. In the Hebrew alphabet, the average value of a letter is higher, as final letters are used in the system, to bring values up to 1,000. As the total is 4995, and the number of letters (including final letters is 27(22 + 5) ,the average value is 185,but average number of letters in a name is smaller, and thus 666 again becomes highly probable. Gematria can thus be dismissed as the key to the solution of the problem.

Structural Values and 666

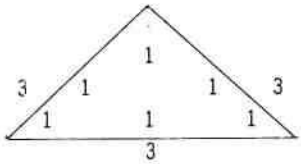
A second key attempts to use the structure of the name in Greek letters and look for clues. The name is written Chi, Xi, Digamma (chi for 600, xi for 60 and digamma for 6). The middle component Xi looks like a serpent in Greek. The first and last consonants look like Chi and Sigma which are, together, the abbreviated form of Christos - Christ. Thus, the number 666 in Greek letters **can** look like the abbreviated form of Christ with the serpent symbol interposed. Yet, this does not provide us with evidence of the identity of the beast. It

(99) 1 Corinthians 14:33

simply delineates the beast as the opposite of Christ, or antichrist, and can thus be used for any interpretation - Praeterist, historical or futurist. Further, it overuses the imagination of the reader. In early times manuscripts were written in 'uncial' (capital letter) script, and the letter Xi, written as a capital, does not look like a serpent.

Triangular Numbers of 666

A third key indicates the fact the 666 is a triangular number, that is, the sum of all integers up to a given number. Triangular numbers are so called because they can best be expressed in the form of a triangle. For example, a triangle of 3 can be illustrated:



In this case, the sum of the triangle of 3 is 6 (= 1 + 2 + 3).

All the numbers up to 8 add to 36, and all the numbers up to 36 then add to 666. Thus, the number of the beast is doubly triangular for it is the sum of all the integers from 1 to 36,and 36 is itself the sum of all the integers from 1 to 8. One could continue the process. For example, the sum of **all** numbers from 1 to 666 is 222111, and so on.

The triangular number device has been employed most successfully by those who believe the beast to be Nero, for the interpretation suggests that John expected Nero to return as the eighth king in **the** imperial system, and 666 is doubly a triangle of 8.If so, it does not explain the device nor nat-

urally lead to interpreting 666 as Nero. Further, it is incorrect to assume (as some do) that triangular numbers have evil associations. The 153 fish caught (100) after the resurrection are a triangle of 17, but the association is entirely good.

The Number of the Beast

What is true of triangular numbers is, of course, generally true of all numbers. No number has uniquely good or bad associations. The number 10, for example is both associated with the 10 commandments and with the number of horns of the beast. Similarly, the number seven is associated with the creation week, and with the heads of the beast. Thus, even numerology, as such, does not provide a clear interpretation of the number. We may, of course, say that 666 is the product of 37 and 18, that 37 is the number associated with David's heroes (101), while 18 is associated with judgement (102) , and that the product of the two numbers(= 666) is strength and judgement combined. This method at least sets us on right lines, for it urges us to examine the Bible itself, rather than gematria or a graphical, or mathematical construction of the name itself, and, as gematria has produced a confusing list of candidates, and the other two methods do not produce clear solutions, let us ask what the Bible has to offer as an interpretation.

The number 666 occurs twice in the Old Testament. One of the occurrences is the number of the descendants of Adonikam who returned from the Babylonian captivity. This usage can be excluded from our data, because the number of the descendants of Adonikam who returned from captivity is:

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(100) John 21:11
(101) 2 Samuel 3:39
(102) Luke 13:4

(a) 666 according to Ezra (103); but
(b) 667 according to Nehemiah (104)

The other reference to 666 in the Old Testament is that which we need, and that to which reference is being made in the Apocalypse (105).

It is (a) the **annual income** (b) of Solomon measured in (c) **talents of gold**. The three factors are important.

Elements of the numbers, of course, are associated with gold elsewhere, as for example, the measurements of the image that Nebuchadnezzar constructed, the precursor of the image of the beast (106), but let us first examine (b) above. Solomon's wealth was, of course, reckoned in many ways, for he satisfied the 'prohibitions' of Deuteronomy against kings who would get rich by 'horse-trading' (107).He accumulated silver, gold, horses and women. He was the arch-example of one who became rich by means of commercialism, trading between Kue (in Asia Minor) and Egypt. He was also the richest and most successful of Israel's kings. In Asia Minor about 666 years before Christ, Gyges of Lydia invented coinage, as the precursor of modern money. The wealth of 'golden Gyges' was a byword for later generations. He was the 'Gog' on which Ezekiel's prophecy of the final invasion of Israel is based (108). Now, money need no longer be weighed, as it had been. Instead, it could be counted. The world was signposted to accept money (as coinage) as a measuring rod of value. Further, the coins themselves could be used to foster the myth of divinity of successive emperors. Of course, accounts were still to be written in measures of commodities

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(103) Ezra 2:13 (104) Nehemiah 7:18
(105) 1 Kings 10:14 (106) Daniel 3:1 compare Daniel 3:5-6 with Revelation 13:15
(107) Deuteronomy 17:14-20 compare 1 Kings 10:28
(108) Bury: History of Greece (Macmillian) pp. 111-2, compare Ezekiel chs 38 & 39

(109) such as oil and wheat, as in New Testament times, but money was destined to become a standard for measuring wealth in place of all other standards, and annual income was to be the basis for valuing people.

Now the wheel has turned full circle. The value of a work-force may be expressed on accountants' balance sheets by 'discounting' future potential income. Men are reduced to material terms by expressing their worth in money as the capital value of their future annual income. Cost benefit analysts try to measure the inconvenience resulting from personal illness by translating it into money terms. Even though spiritual values cannot be bought or sold, there is a pseudo-scientific impression that everything in life can be translated into money, bought and sold.

Nothing seems to be exempt. Goodwill, externalities, public goods and services and mercy and benevolence are all valued in commercial terms, so that money takes the place of God, because it forms the basis of decision-making for so many. Those who previously consulted an oracle now resort to a cost-benefit calculation.

The writer clearly speaks later of:"...victory over the beast, and the number of his name," (110).

Unless we believe that he regarded numbers as powerful (as in some magical sense) - we must conclude that there is a warning that the number-system associated with 666 would **itself** be powerful. Even Babylon's number-system (which, incidentally gave prominence to the numbers 60 and 6) does not satisfy the conditions perfectly, though it formed the basis of many magical formulae.

If we disregard the confusing evidence obtainable from gematria, and turn to the Old Testament for an interpretation of the number and of the reason why it is powerful, the data suggest the

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(109) Luke 16:1-9 (110) Revelation 15:1-2

following:

1) It would be associated with buying and selling (86).
2) It would be associated with wealth obtainable by buying and selling.
3) It would be a means of human reckoning (a human number, or the number of man) (95) .
4) It would be associated with the beast of the earth, and therefore with the post-Christian period (95).
5) It would be a powerful means of decision-making (110).
6) It would be a means of using annual income to 'value' rich people (105).
7) It would also be associated with gold, and therefore with money which was originally coined from gold, and from electrum, an alloy of gold (105,106).

Monetary methods of decision-making (using such devices as cost-benefit analysis) satisfy all the conditions indicated by the data.

1) No one can buy or sell without money.
2) The methods adopted assume that all human values (even spiritual ones) can be translated into monetary benefits, and (without taking into account the effects of uncertainty of the values) attempt to express all values in the basest (materialistic) form of valuation.
3) Money-valuation has become the most typical means of human reckoning.
4) The rise of money as the measuring rod of value has been completed as a process in the post-Christian period, resulting

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(86) Revelation 13:17 (95) Revelation 13:18
(105) 1 Kings 10:14 (106) Daniel 3:1 compare Daniel 3:5-6 with Revelation 13:15
(110) Revelation 15:1-2

from that mercantilism which was contemporary with renaissance, and with the reformation.

5) It utilizes a numerical means of decision-making and so is able to replace the oracles and the numerological formulae of the ancient world.
6) It values 'human assets' in terms of annual income. People are ranked in terms of potential wealth.
7) It is materialistic and monetaristic in the fullest sense.

The interpretation that the number 666 represents a mammon-based system of decision-making (such as those pseudo-scientific decision-making techniques of our age) thus satisfies all the conditions of the data. Further, this interpretation uniquely highlights the greatest dangers of our age, the danger of materialistic commercialism - of worshipping money in the fullest sense of the term, when the greatest things of all. are without money and without price (111).

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(111) Isaiah 55:1-2

CHAPTER ELEVEN

VOICES OF PROTEST

A Spiritual History: The Lamb on Mount Zion: Out of the World: To Every Nation: Fallen is Babylon: Hell-fire Preaching: They Shall Rest: Put in your Sickle and Reap: A Return to the Cross

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A Spiritual History

The Book of Revelation is a spiritual history of the Church. Though it omits many of the details of political history that are irrelevant to that spiritual history, it clearly traces three time periods:

(a) a period of partial conquest by the witness of Christ over the pagan world in which Christ lived;

(b) a period of continued partial witness by the Church, but hindered by the very effects of partial conversion; and

(c) a period of resurgence of paganism, in which the Church would be 'invaded' by forces from beyond its borders, and have to reckon with the apparently superior forces of scientific materialism which would treat it as superstitious small-fry, as Babylon did with Israel.

The seal sequence, the two visions of few and many, the trumpet-blast sequence and the sequence of three beasts all fall neatly into one of the three categories. They can be identified with reference to other (e.g. Old Testament) data to see whether they most clearly relate to the original outburst of Christian testimony in the first few centuries, its period of survival (as a New Israel)

through the middle ages or to its temporary destruction before the return of the Lord.

This classification has one disadvantage. It leaves a long period of Christian survival (between 'seedtime and harvest', so to speak) of which little has been written previously in the Apocalypse. The length of this period is, of course, undetermined (and to some extent also indeterminate), and its length is conditioned by the failure of the Church to preach the Gospel:"...to all nations, as a testimony." (1).

Humanly speaking, this task is a problem. To communicate with other people it is always necessary to speak their language, or at least, to speak a language understandable by them. But when a message is translated into another language it often loses some of its meaning. Thus, there are twin dangers. If the Church **does not** attempt to communicate with the world - in the world's terms - it does not fulfil the condition (1) above. It may preserve its doctrines pure, but fails to carry out its commission. On the other hand, if the Church **does** attempt to communicate with the world, it often has to express its doctrines in terms that people will understand, and thus dilute its message. It need not do so patently. Sometimes its message may simply be misunderstood.

Thus, while the Church has mixed with pagans in order to reform pagans it has not been unaffected by different forms of paganism. The process is like a tight-rope walk. It has to be balanced successfully. Failure to 'mix' with the world may result in failure to preach the Gospel. Mixing with the world may result in dilution of its teaching, and loss in the real meaning of the Gospel.

This is the dilemma, but there are others. For example, the Church, like Israel, is liberated from an Egypt of superstitious paganism, and wanders in a

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(1) Matthew 24:14

wilderness. On the other side of that wilderness is a wonder-working Balaam, who seeks to denounce the Church itself, as a relic of religious superstition. Superstition and pseudo-science are opposing dangers, as are the need to evangelize the world, and yet remain separate from it. The Church's major problem in history is to maintain the balance that allows it to do both.

The fourteenth chapter of the Apocalypse is a series of caricatures of the 'wilderness journey' of the Church through the 'dark ages' to the rise of the false prophet. These caricatures would depict the results of the conflict between separation and evangelization that was mentioned earlier. The caricatures are generally represented by 'voices' of angels, and they signpost doctrinal movements associated with successive periods of Church history. As the Apocalypse predicts these movements objectively it does not pass judgement on them. The voices concerned may protest, warn or console, and may thus represent movements that would work at different times in the history of the Church. But these movements would be led by men who would make mistakes. For example, the reformation and renaissance occurred at about the same time. The reformation rectified many of the abuses in the Church, yet with the renaissance came the rebirth of scientific interest, and this, in turn - though signalling many benefits to mankind generally -led to the rise of the 'beast of the earth', the 'false prophet'.

The chapter may appear to be shapeless and disorganized, but this confusion is deliberate, for it is an objective picture of Church history with all its confusions, from the period of mediaeval darkness to the 'death' and revival of the Church, and the return of the Lord from heaven. Though shapeless as a picture, it is an accurate description of spiritual movements in the Church throughout the many centuries of Christian reformation.

The Lamb on Mount Zion

The first picture that the chapter provides is that of the Lamb standing on Mount Zion, accompanied by 144,000 spotless 'celibates'.(2).They are like the earlier 12,000 who were selected to do battle with Midian after the incident that had been incited by Balaam. But, whereas the earlier spotless community were allowed to take virgins of Midian (3) as wives, this community is entirely spotless and celibate.

The thought of celibacy being regarded as an ideal in a Christian context has been a puzzle to many. The proposition that the words 'have not defiled themselves with women'(4)mean 'are celibate' has been challenged on textual evidence by some expositors, the textual evidence being that some ancient texts read, of a symbolic 'woman', 'have not defiled themselves with **the woman**' 'singular), instead of: 'have not defiled themselves with **women**' (plural) (4).

The textual evidence for this reading is very slender, and even if the reading were shown to be a more likely rendering of the original text, the sense need be no different, for the following reasons.

1) 'Defiled with **the woman**' would not necessarily mean 'the woman' of the seventeenth chapter of the book. It could simply be a Hebraism meaning 'defiled with women'.
2) There is evidence that the phrase actually means sexual involvement of any sort, and is not restricted to illicit involvement (e.g. fornication or adultery), for the historical parallel is between Mount Zion and Mount Sinai. When

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(2) Revelation 14:1-5 (3) Numbers 31:1-6 & 13-20
(4) Revelation 14:4

Moses went to the top of Sinai to receive the ten commandments, he gave instructions to the people to be ready for the third day, and: "do not go near your **wives**" (5). These words are literally in Hebrew: "do not go near a **woman**" (singular).

Given that the passage refers to people who, for some reason, are described as celibate, it does not follow that celibacy is a general 'ideal', any more than it was for the whole nation of Israel at the foot of Sinai. The Apocalypse is predicting some future time, in the future to John's day, when celibacy would be an expedient for some who would wish to dedicate their lives to Christ, as it was a temporary expedient for all Israel, when the nation was at the foot of Sinai.

The Mount Zion symbol requires close attention. In Old Testament prophecy Mount Zion was physically associated with deliverance from Israel's national enemies. Joel, for example, writes of: "Deliverance....in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem for those who escape." (6)

The symbol of national deliverance is transformed by Peter at Pentecost to the more general symbol of spiritual deliverance for those who call on the name of Christ, and who associate themselves with spiritual Zion, the Church (7). Thus, the picture could be applied generally to the whole Church in this case, if it were not for the figure of 144,000 which, as we have seen earlier, tends to refer to a section of the Church which becomes exclusive in some way or other, as with the 'human' attempt to carry out an instruction to seal **all** 'the servants of God in their foreheads'(8), the 'all' being implied by the context, and by the use of the definite article.

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(5) Exodus 19:15 (6) Joel 2:32
(7) Acts 2:14-24 (8) Revelation 7:3

Were it not for the restrictiveness of the community, there would be little doubt about an application to the Church generally, who have, in Peter's interpretation of Joel's prophecy:

(a) taken refuge in spiritual Zion (The Church); and
(b) called on the Name of the Lord (Christ) (7,8,).

The picture of deliverance in Zion was also anticipated by apocryphal writers. For example, the Apocalypse of Ezra(9) pictures an innumerable company (the multitude that no man can number)standing on Mount Zion and one of them taller than the rest, who is interpreted in Ezra's vision, as the Son of God (10). All the others wear the mark of the Son of God, which is, in this case, a crown received from Him (10).

Clearly, the Apocalypse uses the material of the writer of II Ezra, but alters the symbolism to provide an answer to those who may have relied on this piece of apocryphal writing:

(a) Mount Zion is a spiritual rather than a literal mountain; and
(b) a restricted number of people are on it, in contrast to Ezra's 'innumerable company', who appear elsewhere in the Apocalypse (11).

The transformation of the meaning of the word Zion from a literal mountain to a symbol of the Church commenced with Peter's reference to Joel (6, 7). At the time most of the new Church were at Jerusalem on Mount Zion. They stayed there until the persecution that followed Stephen's martyrdom, after which they began to disperse and carry to the world the Gospel with which they had been entrusted (12).

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(6) Joel 2:32 (7) Acts 2:14-24 (8) Revelation 7:3
(9) II Esdras 2:42-48 (10) II Esdras 2:47
(11) Revelation 7:9 (12) Acts 8:1-3

In the letters to the Galatians (13) and Hebrews (14), among other passages, Mount Zion ceases to mean the literal mountain on which Jerusalem was built, and becomes associated with the heavenly Jerusalem where the 'general assembly and Church of the Firstborn' are surrounded by 'an innumerable company of angels' (15). The transfer of emphasis from literal Zion to spiritual Zion is a parable of the history of the Church, to which I shall return later. Though the passages in the Epistle to the Hebrews (14) and in Pseudo-Ezra (9) appear to be similar, their meanings are quite different. Pseudo-Ezra is the culmination of a Jewish tradition, which:

(a) associated the literal mountain of Zion with deliverance of God's people from the enemy;
(b) believed that God's people were physically
(c) (and racially) separate from their enemies; and
(d) identified the enemy with a national oppressor, as for example, in the Dead Sea Scrolls where Old Testament prophecies regarding Edom are sometimes interpreted to identify Edom with Rome (16).

It is thus associated with a Jewish tradition that teaches racial, physical and spatial separation.

In Hebrews and Galatians (13, 14):

(a) Mount Zion means the Church, whose new 'festal gathering of the Firstborn' (17) replaces Jewish feasts;
(b) God's people are not physically or racially separate, but make themselves separate by the

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(9) II Esdras 2:42-48 (13) Galatians 4:21-31
(14) Hebrews 12:12-24 (15) Hebrews 12:22
(16) As the reference to Obadiah's prophecy against Edom, in War 6:6
(17) Hebrews 12:22-23

way in which they live their lives; and

(c) the 'Edom' symbol becomes identified with ceremonial Judaism, and with the Law that had been associated with Mount Sinai. It was a 'blazing mountain' (18) soon to be cast into the sea (19).

Dr Charles and other expositors regard the opening passage (20) as a proleptic picture of the millennium. But its location in the chapter, at the beginning of a series of angelic visions, many of which refer to the world in its present state, seems to contradict such a view. The passage relating to the Lamb on Mount Zion stands out as a pure ice-capped mountain in a series of pictures that later run with blood, terror and torment. The vision of the 144,000 on Mount Zion is an island of security and redemption in a sea of storms. It is therefore unlikely to be merely an anticipatory preview of the millennium and of the final bliss of the redeemed after the Second Advent.

The second reason for believing that the vision of the Lamb on Mount Zion cannot be a 'final' picture of the redeemed after the Second Advent is that there are not an innumerable multitude, but only 144,000. If the suggestion made in respect of the seventh chapter is correct - that the 144,000 do not represent the whole company of the redeemed, but a humanly selected part of it, then there can be nothing 'ultimate' about this vision. It must refer (as does the vision of the sealing of 144,000) to a **section** of the Church who have become a secure community within themselves.

The community is not necessarily the same as that mentioned in the seventh chapter, for they are styled '**an** hundred and forty-four thousand' not **the** hundred and forty-four thousand'. Whether they are

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(18) Hebrews 12:18 (19) Revelation 8:8

(20) Charles: Revelation Vol II (International Critical Commentary) pp. 4-12

identical or not is less important than the symbol of 144,000. In the interpretation of the seventh chapter, the vision predicts that the instruction to seal the servants of God (with the Holy Spirit) would result in a literal pseudo-accurate sealing process in the Church reminiscent of the census that ought not to have taken place in Israel, and in which the tribe of Dan is omitted from reckoning, a forecast of sectarianism and schismatic movements within Christendom - in which each 'tribe'(institutional church) assumes itself to be a '12,000' (a whole Israel).Somehow, the vision of the 144,000 on Mount Zion must reflect this 'quasi-sectarian' pattern, but in the best possible sense of the term.

The angel that came from the sunrising gave instructions to seal the first 144,000. The Essenes who were sectarians, and who were associated with the Judaistic expectations related to the Dead Sea Scrolls mentioned earlier (21) worshipped towards the sunrising. In the Nag Hammadi Library in English (22), James Robinson traces a direct link between the Jewish Essene ascetics, some of the Gnostic sects of the second century, the Nag Hammadi library, and the beginnings of Christian monasticism. Though Gnosticism appears to be the 'black sheep' of- the succession, it has been established that this term has often incorrectly been used as a 'blanket' description of many sects that protested against the orthodox Church of their day for good reasons as well as for bad reasons, just as the Essenes had separated from the main Jewish community for both good and bad reasons. Some of the late apocryphal Jewish documents

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(21) See the literature on the Dead Sea Scrolls for evidence of monasticism among the Essene sectarians long before Christian monasticism

(22) J.M.Robinson: The Nag Hammadi Library in English (Brill 1977) pages 1-21

(which the Apocalypse was intended to answer) were associated with the Essene community, but found their way to the library of Nag Hammadi, and later into the hands of monastic communities, who, while not necessarily accepting their teachings, were, at least, responsible for preserving them.

Robinson (22)suggests that Christian monasticism may itself have resulted from a reformed Gnosticism - from communities who had separated themselves from the orthodox church, realising its demerits, and had regarded themselves as the 'true church' as opposed to an orthodox 'false church', but later became parts of the church as separate (and somewhat isolated) communities within it.

To suggest that the vision of the 144,000 on Mount Zion can be interpreted as a prophecy of Christian monasticism, and of the ascetic movement as the first major protest against the Church is not only consistent with the historical details, but is in remarkable harmony with the picture of the 144,000 given in this chapter. In chapter seven, they were several (exclusive) 'tribes' but here they are together as one number. They are not twelve distinct groups of 12,000 each - each claiming, so to speak, to be an 'Israel' (12,000) in its own right. Instead they are one community, though exclusive in another sense, as though they had made their peace with the great body of the orthodox church. Thus, though separation is still important (as in the sealing of the 144,000) it is almost that physical (geographical) separation which the early Church had associated with Mount Zion - for now this number separates from the world, and from its influences within the Church, by resorting to a geographical separation, by taking to mountain and desert, by moving away from places where the world's influences are most felt.

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(22) J.M.Robinson: The Nag Hammadi Library in English (Brill 1977) pages 1-21

A third reason for believing that the vision of the 144,000 does not mean the future (ultimate) bliss of the redeemed, but refers to an historical separatist movement (or movements), is that the 144,000 are celibates. Celibacy may be a figure of the ultimate state of the 'sons of the resurrection' (23) who are like the angels. But this is an anticipation of that ultimate heavenly state, for the company on Mount Zion could have been 'defiled with women' but chose not to be. It is a picture of a community (or communities) who not only sought physical separation in those places which they could identify with Zion, but who regarded physical celibacy as one of the hallmarks of the Christian life. There was nothing particularly right or wrong about such scruples. They were merely following good advice, such as that given by Paul in his letters (24).In Jesus' words, they became 'eunuchs' for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake (25). This third reason for believing that the vision relates to a movement at work within the Church (the monastic movement) is an almost decisive one. Celibacy and physical separation from the world are together almost exclusive characteristic of monasticism, and the three characteristics:

(a) celibacy;
(b) physical separation from the world; and
(c) association with the Lamb (Christ),

- make the vision a unique prophecy of Christian monasticism, as the first protest against the influence of the world on the Church, without either condemning or commending monasticism as such.

A fourth reason for believing that the vision represents an historical state rather than the ultimate state of the redeemed, is that no one was able to understand the heavenly music (26) except the 144,000 themselves. The music of heaven is for

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(23) Luke 20:27-40 (24) 1 Corinthians 7:1-7
(25) Matthew 19:10-12 (26) Revelation 14:3

all to understand, who avail themselves of it, but in this case the audience is a confined and cloistered community who 'hear' the angels singing, but are unable to communicate it to others. The picture is quite different from that of the innumerable company of the seventh chapter, who sing their own **'understood'** song of salvation (27).

Out of the World

The vision is therefore the first protest against the Church's association with the world. It is a picture of human attempts to anticipate the Kingdom of God by means of communal withdrawal from the world. There is nothing wrong with occasional physical withdrawal from the world. Jesus Himself physically (28) withdrew from the world on occasions.

At its best, the monastic ideal was very good. Men tried to follow their Lord to the forsaking of everything else. Their rule of poverty was the very opposite of that devotion to money, which in the previous chapter has been interpreted as the meaning of the number 666. This number symbolises, as we have seen, an attitude that attempts to measure men in terms of their material worth. But rules of poverty and a common sharing of all possessions ensure that mammon is excluded, as far as possible, as a means of personal assessment.

Similarly, the communities' rule of chastity involved a true abnegation of human domestic life, for a new kind of domestic life in the family of God, in which all are brothers. Their other main rule, that of obedience, associated them (at least, ideally) with the spotless obedience of Christ, the true Lamb. It represented the opposite of that spotted leopard-like appearance of the sea-beast

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(26) Revelation 14:3 (27) Revelation 7:10
(28) John 8:1

(29).Thus, they attempted to be 'Israelites in whom is no guile' (30), vicariously bearing the sins of many, just like Isaiah's suffering servant (31).At its best, monasticism sprung from the aspirations of those men whose ideal was to follow Christ in every respect, 'to follow the Lamb wherever He goes' (32) .At its best, monasticism was an attempt to anticipate the Kingdom of God by personal withdrawal from the world.

The golden age of monasticism was the first great protest against the Church's over-association with the world, for many in the Church had compromised with mammon, vice and disobedience. As the object was evangelical, and as the early Church adopted a community rule for the purpose of evangelism (33) there was nothing wrong with communal living, chastity (34) or with physical separation from the world (35) despite similarities between them and the monastic movements in other religions. Some of these communities taught wrong doctrines, but they need to be assessed by the extent to which their lives were affected by the life of Christ. In reality they were a strong pre-Protestant protest against ecclesiastical involvement with the world. For the Church, after a few centuries of existence, was being submerged in the world, like an iceberg in the sea. Monasticism was the tip of that iceberg. It was a mountain of aspiration towards purity. It was a finger of pure aspiration, that pointed towards heaven!

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(29) Revelation 13:2
(30) John 1:47-51 & 1 Peter 2:22-25
(31) Isaiah 53:5-6
(32) Revelation 14:4-5
(33) Acts 2:44-47
(34) 1 Corinthians 7:1-7 & Matthew 19:10-12
(35) Matthew 4:1-11 & John 8:1

To Every Nation

The lesson of chapter 14 is that the Church is required to preach to all nations, and that it must therefore:

(a) sufficiently involve itself in the world to be able to communicate to it; and yet
(b) **not** overinvolve itself in the world, so that its message is **not** lost.

The delicate balance between overinvolvement and isolationism is a difficult one. Monasticism was a protest against overinvolvement in the affairs of the world. The second protest would arise because:

(a) monasticism sometimes produced isolationism; and
(b) some monastic orders were becoming involved in the politics of the world by their influence on rulers.

Soon the monasteries were becoming corrupted, and there were needs for new forms of protest against apathy in the Church. Further, the Church needed to abandon its rituals and to preach a simpler Gospel. From the corruption and decline of the monasteries came the counteracting impetus for a new outburst of preaching activity, based on the essential message: "Fear God and give glory to Him."(36)

The reformation and counter-reformation witnessed evangelizing activity of a magnitude that the world had not seen since the early centuries of the Christian era. The evangelists were themselves human and taught errors. But it is incorrect to judge such missions by enumerating the doctrinal errors with which they were associated. Only God can do so. We can only be impressed by the extent to which they pioneered in distributing the Word of God to those who had not previously known Christ, and in rescuing them from the darkness of paganism.

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(36) Revelation 14:7

These evangelizing movements that followed the protestant reformation were partially the product of the renaissance, and the Church was already beginning to anticipate the end of all things. The common theme of such missions, some of which differed in doctrinal detail from that taught by the Catholic and Orthodox churches, was: "Fear God and give glory to Him" (36).

The Word of God was being taught to 'every nation, tribe, tongue and people' (37) - for the first time in its history, after the hiatus that had resulted from the relapse into the dark ages, after the part-conquest by Christian testimony in the early centuries.

Some evangelizing movements, like the Jesuit movement, were the natural consequence of the decline of the monasteries. The Jesuits (38)were persecuted by members of their own Church and originally in disfavour with the more well-established monastic orders. Yet they carried the Bible to India, China, Japan and Ceylon. These countries had not known about Christianity following the attempts of the Nestorian church to preach Christ to their peoples. They even tried to establish a miniature 'kingdom of God' among a tribe of South American Indians. Quaker missions later moved into the heart of the Ottoman Empire, and these were followed by energetic Protestant missions and by Bible Societies with their teams of translators.

All this activity 'in preaching to all mankind' in the second vision of the sequence is a reaction against the 'isolationism' (39) of the first vision in the chapter. It is not to say that there had not been continual preaching of the Gospel during the 'dark ages'. There were minor preaching campaigns in Northern Europe throughout the first millennium

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(36) Revelation 14:7 (37) Revelation 14:6

(38) See Christopher Hollis: A History of the Jesuits (39) Revelation 14:3

after Christ (40).But now the Church was beginning to recover from a slough of sloth, and the tide **was** turning. Never had there **been** in nearly a millennium and a half, such a full-scale attempt to witness to every nation. This was partly the result of exploration and discovery coupled with the knowledge that the world was a far larger place than it had been previously thought to be, and partly the result of improved means of communicating. The Church moved to more backward peoples, to those who actually worshipped: 'heaven, earth, sea and rivers and fountains of waters' (41) in their primitive aboriginal ignorance. Now, they also were being invited to worship Him - 'who **made** heaven, earth, sea and rivers and fountains of waters' (41) instead.

Fallen is Babylon

We have seen that in this sequence, angels' voices enact human movements. These movements are predicted in an objective manner, without condemning or commending them. They are simply described as trends that would occur within the Church. They would represent protests against the Church's inertia, and its compromises with the world.

The theme of the third voice of protest is: "Fallen is Babylon the Great...." (42)

The protest seems like an anachronism, for Babylon the Great has not yet been described or even mentioned, and thus some scholars have even doubted the textual authenticity of the passage. Why should the words 'Babylon is fallen' occur before Babylon is even mentioned? The words are a quotation from an early prophecy of Isaiah, and

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(40) As for example, the conversions of England, Denmark, Czechoslovakia and Poland, and conversions in Asia and Africa before the advent of Islam (41) Revelation 14:7

(42) Revelation 14:8

this (43) prophecy is not a description of the fall of Babylon after its period of imperial greatness, when it was defeated and invaded by Cyrus. In contrast, the earlier prophecy of Isaiah is taken from a collection of prophecies written at a time when Babylon was only a city state. The chapter in Isaiah (43) contains small prophecies against wilderness people then Babylon, then Dumah and Arabia. The words were written at about the time that Merodach-Baladan (Marduk-ipal-idanna) was seeking conspiratorial help in a rebellion that his city-state of Babylon was initiating against the Assyrian empire. Hezekiah, to his cost, found himself later drawn into this conspiracy. Hundreds of years were to pass between the Assyrian overthrow of the city state of Babylon, and the final destruction of the city in the Greek and Roman periods. Thus, Isaiah's prophecy related to the overthrow of a city state, that was later to grow into a greater Babylon as the chief city of an empire just as this prophecy relates to voices about the destruction of Babylon even before its greatness has been described.

The following table summarises and clarifies the position.

Literal Babylon	Greater Babylon
A **small prophecy** occurs in Isaiah about a city **state** of Babylon (43) that was to be overthrown for its rebellion against the Assyrian Empire. This was a miniature of the Babylonian Empire to arise a century later	A **small prophecy** occurs in Revelation containing a direct quotation from Isaiah. The city is associated with great (Apocalyptic) Babylon of the later chapters, but the quotation suggests that it is a **miniature** and undeveloped version of it

(43) Isaiah 21, particularly vv 9-10

Babylon arose to imperial power under an ex – Assyrian dynasty at the end of the seventh century about a hindered years after Isaiah's time. This restored Babylon in the model for the 'great Babylon' of the Apocalypse (44)	The prophecy quoted from Isaiah above is positioned **before** the actual references to the city that occur at the end of chapter 16, and occupy the whole of chapters 17 and 18 of the Apocalypse. This larger Babylon is the **world**, the antithesis of the city of God

These words in Revelation 14 are thus anticipatory, and as the angels in the sequence enact human trends and movements, we have to ask what this third protest movement could be, for it would be one which, so to speak, would try to identify a small city-state (comparable with Merodach-Baladan's Babylon) with the great Babylon of the Apocalypse. Imperial Babylon did fall under Cyrus, as the later prophecies of Jeremiah indicate - and the real 'Great Babylon' of the Apocalypse will fall at the Second Advent of Christ, as the later prophecies state, for Babylon is the city of the world. But what was this miniature Babylon, described as 'great' by the enacting angel-voice? What protesting voice followed (a) monasticism, and (b) the evangelizing (and largely protestant) movements against the Church's overinvolvement with the world?

To answer the question, one has to repeat that the Apocalypse anticipates religious concepts and their development, and therefore also anticipates errors in religious thinking, without necessarily passing judgement on them. The identification of Papal Rome with Babylon began within the Roman church during the days of the Triple Papacy, when popes officiated contemporaneously - at Rome,

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(44) See particularly Revelation 16:19 and the whole of chapters 17 & 18, where Babylon is clearly the 'city of the world'

Avignon and Pisa. After the protestant reformation, the protestant reformers were to identify the Babylon of the later chapters of the Apocalypse with Papal Rome, in much greater detail. In fact, most of the expositors of the protestant historical school of interpretation did so without reservation.

This mis-identification of the greater Babylon of chapters 17 and 18 of the book with Rome thus began shortly after the time of the second vision of the chapter, the movement of reformation and greater evangelical activity. Protestant thinking (45) identified Babylon with Papal Rome at its worst, and this third voice of protest predicted the destruction of the Roman Catholic 'version' of the Christian message. The Church had outlived the two earlier protests against the apathy of its members. It had outlived the call to monastic separation, and the call to more extended preaching. But this third vision represented a direct attack on a section of the Church. It started with the protests of Huss and Luther. But it shortly became more militant and anti-ecclesiastical. The voice of reason had pleaded against the malpractices in the Church, but soon the voice of unreason was to shout loudly against it.

In the seventeenth century in particular, the Book of Revelation was interpreted to mean that Christians should actively make war against the Papacy and establish a Cromwellian-type fifth monarchy in false fulfilment of Daniel's image prophecy (46).

The meaning of this third vision in the chapter in thus clear. It is a prophecy of a movement within the Church that would be against a 'Babylon'(so-styled) but not the real Babylon of the Apocalypse, only a small anticipation of it, differing as much from it as Isaiah's Babylon differed from the

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(45) See Hill: Antichrist in Seventh Century England (Durham) (46) Daniel chapter 2

Babylonian Empire of over a hundred years afterwards. This movement would misidentify Rome with the Great Babylon of the later chapters but serve to enhance the process of reformation within the Church.

Hell-fire Preaching

The chapter has already described three important consecutive movements within the Christian church. These movements would counteract its spirit of apathy at different times, and be directed against its overinvolvement with the world.

The monastic movement survived (as a 'protest' movement) until the end of one millennium of the Church's history, when some of the monasteries became corrupted by their wealth. The protestant reformation followed after a few centuries, and its simple message: "Fear God and give glory to Him," epitomises the evangelizing activity of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. This was followed by a much more militant protestantism in the seventeenth century. This spirit of militant protestantism would identify Papal Rome with Babylon though, using the analogies of the Book, Rome would, at worst, be only a miniature version of it.

The fourth vision in the chapter is associated with the voice of hell-fire preaching: "If anyone worships the beast he shall..... be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels... and the Lamb... and the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever." (47)

This passage looks like a description of hell-torments, reserved for the unredeemed. In fact, it is not a description of hell-torments at all. It is simply a description of a voice that would convey a message of hell-torments. There is a world of difference. The quotation has often been used by

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(47) Revelation 14:9-11

evangelical Christians to 'prove' that hell-torments 'for ever and ever' are reserved for the unredeemed. If the interpretation of this chapter (which is currently being pursued) - is correct, the prophecy is not a prophecy of hell-torments. It is a prophecy that, at a time in history, following the 'Babylon-is-fallen' voice, there would be an outburst of preaching in which hell-torments would play a significant role as part of the message of the preachers.

This can also be shown to be true, from historical sources. As soon as the rantings of fifth-monarchists died away, the doctrine of hell-fire torment reached its climax in Church activity. It had been used in the days of the fifth trumpet sequence (as was noted earlier) to evangelize with a message of fear. But now it was to be a very important weapon of conversion, whether true or false. In previous times, as at the time of the inquisition, doctrinal agreement had been enforced on victims by means of physical torture. But now the brutal torture of heretics was to be regarded as uncivilised, and yet something more fearful was to be found to replace it. Protestant practice thus changed accordingly. But Protestant churches were generally reluctant to soften this blow. No longer were there to be degrees of punishment in hell. No longer was there to be a 'limbo' for unredeemed children or a 'purgatory' for those about whom there was some doubt. Calvinistic protestantism would sweep aside these non-Biblical concepts, and yet retain, on an interpretation of this very prophecy, the belief that all unredeemed people would suffer eternal hell torments. This belief would become a greater terror in the conversion process than had been the physical tortures of the inquisition.

Some 'voices' in the Church thus motivated many to abandon some errors for other errors. Yet, underlying the whole of this vision is the Old Testament source of the quotation. It is another of

Isaiah's prophecies, not now against Babylon, but against Edom. Edom would become a desolate wilderness, and: "the smoke of her torment would rise up for ever and ever." (48)

We have already seen that the New Testament uses Edom, in both the epistles to the Galatians and to the Hebrews (49) as a symbol of apostate Judaism which claimed salvation on the basis of membership of a race, nation or some other humanly-identifiable organization. The 'Edom' symbol is an important one in this case. The facts are that the very anticipation of torments for those who are outside a particular 'elect' body can itself produce a state of 'torment' for that body. This does not necessarily identify the protesting movements with 'Edom', but the principle that all salvation is the monopoly of a particular organization can be identified with Edom, consistently with New Testament usage (49).

They Shall Rest

The next voice is a caution against too literal an understanding of the message of the previous voice of torment, just as the preaching of the everlasting gospel in the second vision of this chapter served to counterbalance the world-forsaking action of the celibates in the first vision, who looked for God in the wilderness and on the tops of mountains. This is consistent with the structures of the chapter. Each vision of protest serves to counterbalance a previous 'protest' - in case it is taken too far.

Many would quote the very words of this passage to prove the doctrine of everlasting torments in hell. This heavenly voice of the fifth vision in the sequence is the antidote to the message of

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(48) Isaiah 34:10

(49) Galatians 4:21-31, and Hebrews 12:12-29

torment. It says: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.... they shall rest from their labours" (49).

This is introduced by reference to 'the patience of the saints', and to those 'who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Christ'.

If the interpretation of the previous visions of this chapter can be logically pursued, it would represent a reaction in the Church against the effects of the hell-fire preachers. It would, in contrast, state, on firm Biblical precedent, that the dead would 'rest from their labours' until Christ's second coming.

Here, therefore, is a prophecy of those movements, particularly in the nineteenth century, that stressed the reality of death as a sleep in Christ, from which the believer would awaken at the future resurrection when Christ appears. This reaction against the belief that hell-fire would literally be 'everlasting' and the return to the Biblical view of death as a 'sleep' in Christ, was shared by many movements at the time, among which were the Churches of Christ, Campbellites, Seventh-Day Adventists, Christadelphians, Russelites (International Bible Students, Jehovah's Witnesses and others.

This belief in resurrection as an awaking from sleep is, indeed, the 'patience of the saints'. In history this voice from heaven was thus paralleled by the very protests about the irrational nature of the belief in hell-torments for all the unredeemed. This voice is said to come 'from heaven', for now an important Biblical truth is being reiterated. After centuries of belief in the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, the Scriptural doctrines of conditional immortality, and of reward by resurrection were being actively preached once again. This is not to deny that many Christians

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(49) Revelation 14:13

always believed that death would be a 'sleep' until the resurrection and the final judgement. However, in previous ages the implications of a belief in resurrection had not been fully considered. In an age of attack from materialism, the doctrine of bodily resurrection could be accepted as the answer to materialistic teaching on the subject of death.

Put in your Sickle and Reap!

If physical torture and persecution, and the threat of everlasting torment could no longer be used as the shock-weapon to rouse people from apathy, and make them aware of the impending Judgements of God, something else had to take its place. In the nineteenth century, the new weapon of preaching was a resurgence of expectations of the Second Advent itself. A minority in the Church had always proclaimed the imminence of the Second Advent, but the bulk of the Church taught that it would come at some far-off future date.

Now, with the abandonment of other weapons of stirring mankind to repentance, the original apostolic weapon could become more prominent - the teaching that the future advent of Christ was very near, and that the great upheavals of that century were evidence that the Lord was at hand.

This doctrine of an immediate harvest of the world rose to greater importance in Christian preaching for two reasons.

1) There were strong reasons for believing that the Second Advent was near, based on the political upheavals of those days, and their relationship to Bible prophecy. But the real 'sign' of the Second Advent - that the Gospel should be 'preached to all nations as (50) a testimony' had not yet

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(50) Matthew 24:14

been fulfilled.

2) The fear of physical torture (inquisition) had earlier been replaced by the fear of hell, and after the upsurge of Biblical teaching about death and hell had rendered this weapon obsolete, something else was needed to stir people to repentance. What better weapon could be used, than the apostolic weapon of the nearness of the Second Advent of Christ - now made much more likely by the fact that some of the conditions that were to precede the Second Advent, had already occurred?

So, people began to preach more widely that the harvest of the earth was near. The two final scenes in this chapter are associated with the Second Advent of Christ, but in a different way.

The caricature of the reaper is one that can be interpreted in a very 'literalistic' way. When the vision depicts Jesus as one like the Son of Man, who sits on a cloud, it anticipates a literal 'fifth monarchist' (51) interpretation of Daniel 7.Jesus is presented as one with a sickle, ready to reap the earth of its righteous grain. The vision caricatures the fact that as the end of the age would approach, so the voices that proclaimed the nearness of the end of the world would become more and more intense.

It states, in effect, if our interpretation of the sequence has been correct, that there would be an increase in 'latter day' type witnessing shortly before the Second Advent actually occurred.

History has confirmed that this has been the

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(51) Daniel 7:13 can, of course, be taken to mean the ascent of Christ into heaven, but is often associated with the Second Advent, and the vision of the reaper on the cloud is a sign that this interpretation of Daniel 7 would be prominent in 'latter-day' preaching.

case. There was a time when only a few Adventist sects stressed the imminence of the return of Christ. Now every 'church' (including Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches) has those who actively preach that the end of the world is near. Some have commercialised the message and used it for their own personal gain. Some have mixed the belief in the return of Christ with heresies. This is not important as a feature of interpretation of the prophecy. What is important is that the condition summarised in the prophecy has now been fulfilled.

It is also encouraging to realise that the very anticipation of the end of the world in Christian preaching is a sign, (if the prophecy is interpreted correctly) that the harvest of the earth is near. The harvest cannot occur until the condition of the Olivet prophecy (50) has been fulfilled, but the very preaching of the nearness of the harvest enhances the process of witness, and so brings the Second Advent nearer.

The harvest is clearly that of the elect. The vision of 144,000 referred to 'firstfruits' in a process of separation from the world, whereas this is the harvest of those firstfruits, and is an antithesis of them, just as in the earlier vision the multitude that no man could number were an antithesis of the earlier 144,000. The protesting movements are human and have their errors, but the 'harvest' - (the ultimate effect
1) of the 'remnants' on the Church; and
2) of the Church on the world), -
- serves to bring a greater number to ultimate redemption. Thus, by a skillful and delicate 'balancing act' between separation from the world to attempt to preserve pure doctrine, and communication with the world in its own language, the Word of God survives to bring a countless 'harvest' to salvation.

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(50) Matthew 24:14

A Return to the Cross

The six scenes in this chapter are like the six trumpet sequences though not necessarily entirely contemporary with them. They anticipate six 'movements':

(a) isolationism, culminating in monastic separation (C.l-11);
(b) evangelization with a simpler gospel, to 'every nation'(outside Europe)concurrently with the renaissance (C.13-16);
(c) fifth-monarchist protestantism denouncing what in true interpretation with Isaiah is shown to be a misinterpretation (and, at worst, a microcosm) of 'Babylon' (C.17)
(d) hell-fire preaching (C.18-19);
(e) a resurgence of Biblical teaching about the reality of death, of those who 'rest' in Christ (C.19); and
(f) revival of expectation of the immediate 'harvest' (end of the world) as a major element in Christian preaching (C.19-20).

No time-scale was given in the fourteenth chapter. These are movements in the Church that would naturally occur between 'seed-time' and 'harvest' during the 'five months' of the locusts, during the'1260 days' of the witnesses, in that central undefined part of the prophecy, which could have stretched for just a few years, or for many millennia - as the case may be. In fact, most of these have occurred. Only one (seventh) vision remains in the chapter. It is the vision of the final **grape** - treading as distinct from the harvest, which may be of wheat or of grapes (52).

The figure of treading grapes is associated in the Old Testament with a great downtreading of the enemies of Israel, as for, example, by Joel who urges that: "the vats overflow, for their wickedness is great." (53).

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(52) Revelation 14:17-20 (53) Joel 3:13

This is a picture of the wrath that God **could** inflict on His enemies, and in context refers to the 'final battle' in which Israel will be vindicated. This figure is, however, transformed in the later chapters of Isaiah: "I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with me."(54)

This passage may provide a hint of a different winepress, the winepress of self-subjugation. All the symbology of the New Testament associates 'down-treading' (in the 'winepress' context) with tribulation, and with that greater treading of the winepress, which provides the 'blood' that expiates from wrath. In this sense the blood of Christ becomes limitless in its effects - to expiate from the wrath to come. That such interpretation is reasonable, can be judged from the other parallels between this chapter and chapter seven. The 144,000 as firstfruits and the innumerable harvest are clearly in both chapters, but a further reference is now apparent (55):"These are they who have come out of the great tribulation (downtreading); they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. "So the reference is yet another parallel between the two chapters.

Though a judgement is coming on the wicked in later chapters, the winepress of this chapter provides three messages about the future of the Church.

1) There will be a resurgence of the simple message of the cross in preaching. Paul preached the Second Advent to the Athenians (56) but had to provide a simpler appeal, that of 'Jesus Christ and Him crucified' to the Corinthians, with a much greater response (57).
2) This return to the Cross as a **pivot** of

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(54) Isaiah 63.3 (55) Revelation 7:14
(56) Acts 17:30-31 (57) 1 Corinthians 2:1-2

preaching (but not, of course, as the whole Christian Gospel)will be coincidental with the 'great tribulation', with the 'death and resurrection' of the witnesses. It will thus coincide with that final (seventh) trumpet blast which is aided by the Spirit of God and a return to the Spirit-gifted simplicity of the original Church. It will thus succeed in carrying out the condition of the Olivet prophecy (50) and carry God's witness to all men.

3) It will fulfil the conditions of the down-trodden witness, and complete the number of those for whom the blood of Christ was shed. Thus, the 'we' who are 'saved from wrath through Him' now becomes a complete number (58). The blood of the downtrodden, harvested community is not the only interpretation of the juice in the winepress. It is also, by comparison with Isaiah (54) a transformed symbol of the almost 'infinite' and far-reaching effects of the blood of the Lamb, of Christ, the True Vine, who was originally slain.

There have been many unsuccessful attempts to interpret the 1,600 stadia (sometimes translated 'furlongs') - the spatial extent of the 'blood' from the winepress. It is unsatisfactory to state that 1,600 is the square of 40, and that world-judgement will last for 40 years, because world judgement comes later in the book. This is a chapter of spiritual movements in the Church, and now the effects of the 'blood of Christ' have, so to speak, been completed. Further, why should a square number be used in the prophecy at all? The number serves not only to describe the length of the Holy Land, though the figure may be so used, for the

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(50) Matthew 24:14 (54) Isaiah 63:3
(58) Romans 3:25 & 5:10

equivalent of the 'Holy Land' in the Apocalypse is the Church, and the symbol can mean that the whole 'Church' is now covered with the blood of the wine-press for the number of the elect has been made up. It also describes the **distance** travelled by the Old Israel in their wilderness journey, and means, in effect, that every generation in the New Israel's wilderness journey from the first advent to the second advent has been successfully covered by that blood which expiates from wrath. It reaches even to horsebridles, which will become (59) in the words of Zechariah (60)'Holy to the Lord'. The world is now responsible, and in the following chapters, God will judge those who have not responded to the message of the Gospel - and save those who have responded. A 'stadium' is a course to be run each believer. (61)

Thus, God can now judge a responsible world (62), but this state of responsibility has come by different methods, introversion having been counterbalanced by extroverted preaching, and then by improved messages, those of doom of a miniature Babylon and of hell-fire being succeeded in emphasis by those of resurrection, the Advent, and the simplicity of the Cross. The chapter-sequence is thus a set of traffic-signs in the spiritual history of the Church, to prevent it going too far in any one direction.

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(59) Revelation 14:20 (60) Zechariah 14:20

(61) Philippians 3:14. The very measurement is associated with Christian striving

(62) Using the principles of chapter 1 of this book, based on Matthew 24:14

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE SEVEN LAST PLAGUES

The Time of Harvest: A Song of Deliverance: The First Plague: The Second Plague: The Third Plague and the Perverted Gospel: The Fourth Plague: The Fifth Plague: The Sixth Plague: The Seventh Plague

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The Time of Harvest

Though the harvest and the grape-trading of the previous sequence are associated with the perfecting of the number of the elect, and with the expiation from wrath, by the blood that was shed on Calvary, the symbols are not unassociated with judgement on the wicked, and with the type of harvest-scene described by Joel (1). The Cross is not only a means of salvation to those of mankind who accept it, but a means of condemnation to those who reject it (2) - and therefore, though the harvest of the fourteenth chapter is clearly the culmination of a sequence of sign-posts in the spiritual history of the Church, and the grapes trodden 'without the city'(3) remind us of Christ, who suffered 'without the camp' (4), this harvest is contemporaneous with a judgement on the world, for the world, at last, using the principle of the Olivet prophecy (5)is now clearly divided into two groups of people:

(a) those who have accepted salvation in Christ, have been washed by the expiatory blood in

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(1) Joel 3:13 (2) 1 Corinthians 11:29; Hebrews 6:6
(3) Revelation 14:20 (4) Hebrews 13:13 (5) Matthew 24:14

the winepress, and have been downtrodden; and

(b) those who have rejected salvation in Christ, and are now to suffer the seven universal plagues, which have, so to speak, been 'brewed' from the same winepress.

This identity of the two 'wines' with each other is attributable to two reasons:

(a) the Cross is a means of salvation to the one community, and a means of condemnation to the other community; and

(b) Babylon is later described as being drunk with the 'blood' of saints and martyrs (6) who are downtrodden in the process that ends with the completion of the elect community, measuring 1,600 stadia in the previous chapter.

The wine from the winepress of the previous vision is thus identical for both communities, but the effects are opposite of each other. Thus, the attempts of historical-school expositors to date the seven last plagues in the period following the French Revolution must now be regarded as anachronistic. These plagues must coincide with the end of the world - with the period immediately before the Second Advent.

In this interpretation, the seven trumpet-sequences have been associated with preaching activities. Six of these were imperfect and resulted in a partial testimony to the world, but the seventh is that full witness anticipated in the Olivet prophecy, which would (5) bring the Lord from heaven.

Given that the time of the seven last plagues can be deduced (i.e. as that immediately preceding the Second Advent), and therefore contemporary with the seventh trumpet sequence, there should now be some clues in the Bible for identifying detail. Some of these are outlined below.

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(5) Matthew 24:14 (6) Revelation 17:6

1) They are based on the ten plagues of Egypt, and thus (like some of the details of the trumpet-sequence) they can be interpreted using principles associated with the ten plagues of Egypt.
2) As in Psalm 79, they are judgements on those who (7) trample the Holy City. In the Psalm, the city of God is Jerusalem, and the prayer is directed against the national oppressors of Israel, but it requires little intuition to associate the downtreading of the Psalm with:
   (a) the downtreading of the true City of God by the nations during the testimony of the witnesses (8);and
   (b) the downtreading of the lives of those who have identity with the blood of Christ, through the 1,600 stadia of the Church's period of 'wilderness journey' or tribulation (9) .
3) The objects of the seven judgements are exactly the same as the objects of the seven trumpet-blasts. So the meaning of the objects must be similar to their meaning in the context of the seven trumpet-blast sequence.
4) As the ten plagues were directed at the ten major gods of Egypt, it can be anticipated that the seven last plagues are directed, somehow at the main 'gods' (or objects of worship) of the modern world.
5) The trumpet-blast judgements were partial in their effects (symbolically 'one-third') because the Church's testimony had been partial. Now the condition (5) of the Olivet prophecy has been fulfilled. Witness has been total, and

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(5) Matthew 24:14
(7) Compare Psalm 79:1-2 with v.12
(8) Revelation 11:2 (9) Revelation 14:17-20

thus the seven plagues affect **all** of each identity.

The following table illustrates that the identities against which the seven plagues are directed are the same as those against which the seven trumpet-blasts are directed.

The Trumpet Sequence	The Seven Last Plagues
1) 'One the **earth**'	1) 'One the **earth**'
2) 'Into the **sea**'	2) 'Into the **sea**'
3) 'On a third of the **rivers and fountains of water**'	3) 'Into the **rivers and the fountains of water**'
4) 'A third of the **sun was** smitten'	4) 'On the **sun**'
5) **Darkness** from the abyss	5) **Darkness** on the 'throne of the beast'
6) The **Euphrates** is forded but not destroyed	6) The **Euphrates** is 'dried up'
7) Loud voices in **heaven**, followed by partial **earthquake**	7) Poured out 'on the **air**' and followed by a total **earthquake**
(10)	(11)

This parallel between the identities on which the trumpet-blasts were sounded, and those on which the seven last plagues are to be poured provides a most valuable clue to the interpretation of the seven plagues. Before considering them individually, however, it is advisable to consider the introductory vision - that which occupies chapter fifteen of the Apocalypse.

A Song of Deliverance

The vision of the seven last plagues commences

(10) Revelation chs 8,9 & 11 v.15
(11) Revelation chapter 16

with a song of deliverance. This is not a 'prolepsis' (a preview of the millennium) as some expositors have suggested. Chapter fifteen must precede chapter sixteen historically. The sequence is deliberate, for it illustrates that the impact of the seven last plagues will be spiritual and that the people of Christ, though still' in the world' will be unaffected by them, 'and thus they can give thanks, in advance, as it were, for their deliverance.

These plagues are on the 'heart' of mankind, on the 'heart' of that section of mankind that, after the total witness of the Gospel depicted at the end of the previous chapter - has chosen not to be redeemed.

This principle may not be obvious from reading the Apocalypse itself but is clear from the Old Testament precedent. It may otherwise be wondered why the first of the seven last plagues should not be the first plague on Egypt, **blood** - but one of the later plagues, **boils**. The reason for beginning the seven last plagues in the middle of the Egyptian plague sequence is that the plagues that were poured on Egypt **after** the plague of boils were poured out on the heart of Pharaoh.

"For this time, I will send all my plagues on your **heart**" (12).

In this final hour of triumph for the elect, their spiritual status, though still in the world, is such that they become unaffected even by the 'total' plagues that are poured out on it.

There is a parallel with Egypt, for the plagues did not affect the land of Goshen, where Israel resided (13)but as the elect are even now not in a particular place, we can assume that their spiritual status acts as a kind of 'Goshen' for them during the final hour of deliverance. They do not have to be geographically 'separate', for their separa-

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(12) Exodus 9:13 (13) Exodus 9:26

tion is much more fundamental, and therefore more powerful. They have overcome:... "the beast, its image, and the **number** of its name." (14).

The **number** is powerful, not in some magical sense, but as was explained in chapter ten, because it signifies an attitude that reckons and values all things in terms of money, or mammon (15).

They have overcome the world, even though they may, even at this point in history, be most persecuted by it, just as their Lord had overcome the world, while being crucified by it (16).

Those who cannot be protected from the perils that are coming, as can the redeemed - (because of their spiritual standing, in Goshen - so to speak)- have unconsciously engineered their own downfall.

The Goshen analogy can be pressed. It is a useful one for illustrating that the redeemed are a protected people, **while** the seven last plagues are being poured out. In fact, the vision does not depict them as in Goshen, but: '**beside** the translucent sea' (17).

The symbolism is deliberately altered. Israel was spiritually protected but not redeemed when in Goshen, while the ten plagues were being poured out. In contrast, the elect, though protected as Israel was in Goshen (when the ten plagues were being poured out), have actually crossed the sea. They have been redeemed by Christ, and have thus spiritually crossed the sea, even though physically they are still in the world and the seven last plagues have not yet been poured out. In fact using the symbolism of the 1,600 stadia in the previous chapter, they can also be said to have completed the wilderness journey and be about to ford Jordan.

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(14) Revelation 15:2

(15) See my interpretation of the number of the beast in chapter 10 (16) John 16:33

(17) Revelation 15:2

Yet, this vision depicts a kind of 'middle picture'. They are not in Goshen, neither are they on the banks of Jordan. Instead they are 'singing the song of Moses - and the Lamb' on the wilderness side of the Egyptian Sea (18).

Why should the Apocalypse revert to the beginning of the wilderness journey at this stage, when the previous chapter has taken us to the end of it?

One reason has already been suggested. It is that the 'seven last plagues' on the 'Egypt' of the world cannot be introduced satisfactorily without first giving a picture of the fact that the people of God have been delivered from them, and this deliverance is best introduced by taking the New Israel back momentarily to the other side of the sea, where the Old Israel saw the culmination of the plague sequence - when Pharaoh's armies were swallowed by the 'sea'.

Another reason for the reversion is that this is an idealized picture of a people who have succeeded without wandering. The very concept of the wilderness journey is an illustration of the failure of the Old Israel. If Israel had been faithful when the spies were sent out from Kadesh Barnea, then there would have been no period of forty years' wandering in the wilderness. But the concept of human wandering is more fundamental than that. If Israel had been faithful at the very outset of the journey, after crossing the Egyptian sea, then there may have been no wandering at all, but a direct journey of a few weeks to the Promised Land. Instead, as soon as they crossed the sea, they wandered away from the Promised Land, south to Sinai. There is no hint in the text that they were actually led by God to Sinai, though in His foreknowledge, He knew that they would move in that direction and decided to speak to them there, as He had previously spoken to Moses.

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(18) Revelation 15:3

"Moses led Israel from the Red Sea,"

but "**they** went into the wilderness of Shur." (19).

Immediately Israel crossed the Egyptian Sea, they were virtually in the Land of Promise, but they wandered away from it to Sinai. Sinai was to be Holy, because God had spoken to Moses there, but they were never actually commanded to go to Sinai. God chose to speak to them there because they had gone in that direction. So, if it had not been for 'wandering' they would, perhaps, have remained not far from the Sea, and then entered the Promised Land on the Philistine (western) side, in triumph.

This wandering continued for many hundreds of years. Though it is associated (as a theme) with the forty years in the desert, it continued until the ark came to its rest in Solomon's temple, as is suggested in (20) Psalm 68. Yet despite these 'wanderings' through the period of the Judges, they had already emerged as a kingdom at the very time of their separation from Egypt for they were described at the time as a kingdom of priests (21). It is for this reason that some lines of their song are quoted from another psalm (22) which also talks of their being an everlasting kingdom.

The essence of this vision is that both the ideal state and-the actual accomplishment are condensed into one great fiat. The real 'Egyptian Sea' has been transcended, and instead of having to wander for many years they are already a' Kingdom'. So, in this case, the many centuries' wanderings are overlooked completely, and they stand outside an unopened temple, the counterpart of that temple where the ark finally came to its rest.

So, for the people of God, who have faith in their

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(19) Exodus 15:22

(20) Psalm 68:28-31

(21) Exodus 19:6 (22) Compare Revelation 15:3-4 with Psalm 145:10-17

ultimate redemption, the turbulence of life is transformed into a sea of calm, and the fire of tribulation is transformed into clear glass(23).No sooner have they left Egypt than they stand outside the unopened temple, a new heavenly temple, not made with hands, which is greater than the temple of Solomon.

They are alongside the sea, because they must not be identified with it, as they have, so to speak, come out from it. In Jewish Apocalyptic literature, heaven contained walls of fire and floors of translucent glass (24).In these apocryphal descriptions of heaven, God concealed Himself, rather than revealed Himself. But the redeemed have direct access to God, thus they are apart from apocryphal 'walls of fire' and 'floors of glass' which conceal. The theme of direct access to God in Christ is thus displayed:

(a) in their standing apart from the 'sea' with its apocryphal content; and
(b) in their being transported immediately into the 'kingdom', and the counterpart of Solomon's temple as soon as they have crossed the sea, without appearing to wander at all.

No sooner do they, in reality, cross the sea, than they sing the counterpart of Moses' song of deliverance. No sooner do they sing the song than the tabernacle of God opens in heaven. No sooner does this happen, than the tabernacle has itself been transformed into the true temple of God in heaven (25).

The message of the chapter is that, although the 'ultimate' Kingdom of God has not yet come, the

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(23) Revelation 15:1 & 2 (24) Enoch chapter 14
(25) Using the analogy of Psalm 68, which recounts the wanderings of the ark from the Exodus (v.17) to the Temple of Solomon (v.29) but **contrasting** with it.

redeemed have already in their own lives' overcome' to such an extent that they can overlook the whole of Israel's wanderings, at least from an 'ideal' standpoint, and walk out of the Egyptian Sea straight into the equivalent of the New 'Solomon's Temple' where the Ark of God is at rest, for they have full sanctuary there and are **spiritually** secure even though they may, in all other respects be insecure because of persecution.

The temple is now completed, as the winepress is full. The commission of Christ in the Olivet prophecy (5), has now been carried out. It is only the existence of evil in the world which prevents the temple from being used, and now the evil, unlike that of previous generations, is being perpetuated by those who have **chosen** to reject the Gospel, for the condition of the Olivet prophecy, that the Gospel must first be preached to all nations 'for a testimony' has, at last accomplished (5).

Thus, as far as the world is concerned, God is obscured by a cloud of smoke, but this smoke results from the bowls of wrath, and they are in turn associated with the winepress of the previous chapter. As was previously illustrated, the substance of the 'blood', 'wine' or 'fire' is the **same** for redeemed and for unredeemed. Christ's blood redeems all who accept it. It condemns those who reject it, and from it rises that cloud of smoke which obscures God - to those who have rejected it.

The cloud that led Israel through the wilderness was that which appeared later, when Solomon's temple was dedicated (26)(27).It leads to (28) the threshold of God's throne, and will obscure Him from the world - (though continuing to lead the redeemed) - until the world's evil has been destroyed. Now the world's evil can be destroyed in a much more universal sense than when the first

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(5) Matthew 24:14 (26) Exodus 40:34
(27) 1 Kings 8:10 (28) Isaiah 6:4; Ezekiel 44:4

outpouring of blood occurred at the Cross, when Jesus could say, in anticipation, of evil:

"Now is the judgement of the world,
now is the prince of this world cast out." (29)

For now the world is responsible. The trumpet blasts had been directed to people to whom the Gospel had been partially preached and who could thus be partially judged. Now all have received the Gospel, and all those who have rejected it can be judged.

If the beast, his image, mark and number have been correctly interpreted as the world, its 'image' in the individual, materialistic mammon and that commercialistic thinking which underpins human thinking much more than ever before - then it is reasonable to believe that the plagues are self-inflicted, in the sense that those who are affected by them are so afflicted because they have failed to overcome the above influences in their personal lives.

The First Plague

The first trumpet-blast sounded on the **earth**, which had earlier in this book been interpreted to mean the **land**(tēs gēs)of Israel, and first received the partial(trumpet-blast) preaching of the Gospel in the first century. It is reasonable that the first of the last plagues which is also to affect 'the earth', will also be poured out on that same 'earth' - or land of Israel.

Given this key to interpretation, we may now use the other important key, the ten plagues of Egypt. Both the first trumpet-blast and the first plague are associated with the **middle** of the ten-plague sequence. The first trumpet-blast introduced a plague of hail (30), and now this first of the seven last plagues is a plague of boils. However, in the

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(29) John 12:31 (30) Revelation 8:7

ten-plague sequence, the plagues of hail and boils come together in the **middle** of the ten-plague sequence.

There can be no doubt about the reference. Though in the text, the word is singular 'boil', it is a generic usage, and it is clearly a prophecy of a plague of boils.

The first trumpet-sequence had been the effect of Christianity on hard-hearted Judaea. It had resulted in judgement on the people who rejected Christ in the first instance, and in expulsion from their land. They had been hard-hearted to appeals of first-century Christians, just as Pharaoh had previously been. For this reason, the references to 'hardness of heart' (as applied to Jews, and as a danger to Jewish Christians) abound in the New Testament (31).

The reason that both sequences appear to start in the middle of the ten-plague sequence, instead of at the beginning (with a plague of blood) is that after the plague of boils, God said that he would send plagues on Pharaoh's heart (32). The parallel is therefore perfect. As the world has now, in total, 'hardened its heart' the effect is total also, for the effect is permanent.

The heart becomes stone in many senses. At the heart of the world is Jerusalem, and it is to become a 'burdensome stone for all nations'. But the 'heart' is in this sense also the 'heart' of society itself, and even here a number of different interpretations are almost equally legitimate. For the 'heart' may mean the mind or spirit of society, which now has a form of godliness but denies its power, or it may, with almost equal strength of probability mean those people who are at the 'heart' of society and determine its way of thinking. The interpretation possibilities do not even

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(31) Acts 19:9; Romans 2:5; 9:18; John 12:40; Hebrews 3:13 et seq (32) Exodus 9:14

exclude the Jews themselves, the 'people of the Book' as well as the land of Israel, which lies centrally at the 'heart' of the earth's landmass.

Boils are small eruptions on the body, which may result either from (a) contact with disease or (b) internal weakness (e.g. 'the heart is sick' in Israel's words (33)) or from both these causes. If the 'heart' of society is sick, combining all four possible interpretations of what the 'heart' of society means, then the body of society becomes much more prone to external attack by disease.

Isaiah speaks of the whole nation of Israel as a diseased body, smitten from head to foot, with sickened heart and head. The 'body' has a sickness in its 'heart', and this sickness results directly from the worship of the beast and its image. The worship of the beast and his image has already been interpreted as the worship of mammon, that money-orientated commercialistic materialism of the present-day world. It lies at the heart of society both (a) in its way of thinking, and (b) in dominating the decisions of those who are at the heart of society, with whom 'monetarism' is an in-world. Further, though the Jews (the people of the Book) cannot be exclusively blamed for the money-orientated way of thinking that currently dominates society - and have perhaps been overblamed for it - yet, it is true that much of the commerce of the Western world is Jewish-dominated. Thus, three of the four possible interpretations of 'heart' are consistent with the view that the worship of the beast and its image is the worship of the present evil world, and of its mammon-domination.

The eruptions may also result from external disease, from contagion. In this context, the original Egyptian plague resulted from:

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(33) Isaiah 1:5-6

'handfuls of ashes from the brick-kiln' (34)
which Moses was instructed to throw –
'towards heaven in the sight of Pharaoh' (34). The disease would thus thus start in the labour-camps or in whatsoever other places of labour-exploitation would exist. It would result in boils (i.e. minor eruptions) on society, that would in particular adversely affect those whose lives and decisions would be governed by mammon. Such eruptions would, in particular, affect the 'earth' or land of Israel.

An interpretation can now be suggested. **Most** social disease results from the worship of **wealth** both in (a) materialistic priority for all forms of wealth, and in (b) the worship of money in particular. This internal weakness engenders the need to protect one's wealth, and the strengthening of internal police-forces and external defences. These, together with the present craving for wealth are largely responsible for inflation in most economies.

From outside of each society comes the dust of the brick-kiln, the unrest that has itself resulted from exploitation. In all diseased societies throughout the world, the dust of political unrest combines with the weakness at the heart of a society among those that 'have', to cause eruptions. These eruptions may differ in the form they take. They may break out as protests and disruptions, as riots with looting, as strikes which penetrate the heart of society, as vandalism and hooliganism, as guerrilla skirmishes, and as minor wars, but the internal weakness of the body of society may itself be quantified by other measures such as its rate of inflation or its index of business failure. But all are symptoms of a society that is no longer constrained by its 'form of godliness' and has made mammon its 'raison-d-être'. All societies will

(34) Exodus 9:8

suffer these eruptions, but it must be noted that at the very 'heart' of the world is 'the earth' (i.e. the land of Israel) with the highest defence-spending and inflation rate of all, and thus likely to suffer the greatest eruption - an eruption that will lead to the final world conflict. But the principle of the plague does not only apply to Israel. Boils are all eruptions in society that result from the worship of mammon. They are evidence that society's heart has been weakened by mammon, and they come from dust of the brick-kiln - the camps of the exploited.

The ideals of communistic humanism are a parasitic growth on the tree of Christendom. The highest good of Marxist humanism is but a perversion of a pre-existent Christian inheritance, for at best the ideals of Marxism are, from the standpoint of social justice, only a shadowy image of the ideals of Christ. The 'Jewishness' of this particular plague has been stressed, for it will culminate in the great eruption in the land of Israel itself, just as the first trumpet blast was the initial preaching of the Gospel 'to the Jew first',(35)who were located in the land of Israel when the Gospel of Christ was first preached. Not only does the plague affect western commercialism, which is largely dominated by Jewish families, but the plague is itself of Jewish origin. Marx, Engels and Trotsky were Jews, and their teachings largely led to the eruptions denoted by this plague.

The Second Plague

The second trumpet-blast affected the Gentile world - the sea of nations. In that sequence, the blazing mountain of Sinaitic Judaism was cast into the sea along with the first century preaching of

(35) Romans 1:16

the Gospel to Gentiles and the dispersion of the Jews.

Now the sea of nations is differently affected for it becomes **as** a plague of blood, so that everything dies. The original plague of blood was a plague of **filth.** Pharaoh would first be affected by it when he went to the river to **wash** (36). In this case the sea is not necessarily transformed into blood, but becomes 'as the blood of a dead man' so that everything that lived in the sea now dies. The plague is a graphic description of both literal and spiritual pollution. The seas of the world have, of course, been poisoned with animal and with human filth, and are likely to be affected by oil and with chemical waste so that many living things will literally die of poison. However, any attempt to interpret the plague solely in a literal sense is short-sighted, for it overlooks the relationship between the second plague and the second trumpet-blast.

The description is a caricature of the sea of nations, as a society whose life-blood ceases to flow. The life-blood of society is its circulating currency. But this circulating currency is replaced by promises, by pieces of paper, many of which can be forgotten or overlooked. Bank accounts can be frozen and hard currency buried in vaults. After hyperinflation, paper money loses its value, becomes stagnant with consequent dysfunction and pollution of the 'body' of society.

Dysfunction is the precursor of large scale unemployment, and this, in turn, is the symptom of social 'death'. The 'death' of living creatures during the trumpet sequence was also interpreted to mean spiritual death. From a spiritual standpoint the society on which the bowls of wrath are poured is one to which a 'last chance' has already been given. Thus, the spiritual death of the society has

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(36) Exodus 7:15

already occurred. The blood of the winepress saves those over whom it extends, but condemns those who rejected it. Now, for them, it is **as** stagnant blood.

The Third Plague and the Perverted Gospel

The third trumpet-blast had affected the rivers and fountains of water - the spiritual springs of the gospel. They had been poisoned by the fallen star of Hellenistic Judaism. The 'root of bitterness' began to trouble the early church, because of false indoctrination. Just as the spiritual springs of the world had been poisoned by the doctrines of Hellenistic Judaism, now the watersprings are rivers of flowing blood, but in this case it is blood to drink. In the case of the Egyptian plagues the pollution of the river Nile was mentioned before the pollution of stagnant water. In this case, the reverse occurred. The pollution '**as** the blood of a dead man' occurred first, and this is followed by the pollution of the 'drinking water' of the world.

Water means spirit-sustenance. At the time of the third trumpet blast that spiritual sustenance had been poisoned by wrong doctrines, but the standards of the world's morality had been preserved, even though not observed, not only in Christendom but by the world's religious teachers generally. Now the situation is different. The third plague is poured out on the world's literature and other forms of communication and the pollution of the world waives all standards that were previously set. News media, literature, drama, arts, radio, television and all other forms of communication become polluted with violence. Further, such violence is now preached in the name of Christ, so that every act of terrorism is either excused or backed by reference to Christian teaching or to its misinterpretation.

Thus, those who have not accepted salvation in the blood of Christ, not only now become affected by that pollution which is 'as the blood of a dead man' but drink teachings that misinterpret **the** springs of the Gospel as a message of violence. To some extent, the trend is already apparent in Christian support for terrorist associations. But any present interpretation can only be a shadowy foretaste of coming violence in supposed adherence to Christ' s teachings, when what is supposed to be based on the Gospel of Christ will, in fact, be 'blood to drink' for a world that has shed the blood of Christ Himself and of many real Christians.

Paul writes of this period of human lawlessness:

> "For this reason God will send on them a strong delusion to make them believe what is false so that all may be condemned who did not believe the Truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (37).

Humanity will now be fed on the blood-tainted and polluted 'milk' of pseudo-socialism, and will be made to drink the waters of world revolution and reaction.

The Fourth Plague

The fourth plague affects the sun - as did the fourth trumpet-blast. In that case there had been an eclipse resulting in partial darkness. In this case, the darkness does not arrive until the fifth plague. Instead, the 'sun' is given power to intensify its activity, if only for a short while (38).

During the plagues of Egypt the sun was not smitten, but there was darkness shortly before the Egyptian Sea was dried up so that Israel could escape. In this case, the darkness precedes the 'drying up' of Euphrates, just as in the case of the

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(37) 2 Thessalonians 2:11 (38) Revelation 16:8-9

ten plagues the darkness preceded the 'drying' of the sea. It is logical therefore that the sun should be smitten to produce this darkness. It is less apparently logical that the smiting of the sun should produce intense heat in preparation for the darkness that follows later.

The interpretation of the sixth seal sequence and of the fourth trumpet sequence showed the sun to be one of the symbols of the pre-Christian religions. The sun was, itself, the major god of most pagan religions. When Christianity came into the world, the ancient pagan gods had been partially eclipsed, and this was represented by a 'third' (i.e. a part) of the sun being smitten. But now the sun temporarily revives so that it may be completely darkened in the next plague. It burns itself out quickly by intensely scorching with fire. The literal sun's activity is not constant, but cyclical. Periods of intense burning activity precede periods of very low activity .This is similar, but symbolic. The prophecy anticipates the resurgence of paganism in a new form, the worship of the State, which becomes the new Bel, the new fiery dragon.

The partial candle-light of Christianity will be obscured by the Gehenna-like flames of a perverted materialistic State, and the pernicious effect of an unchristian morality. The old 'sun' of paganism will re-emerge to intensify the effect of those very boils (eruptions) with which society has already been plagued. Fire is energy and light is knowledge. Men will be blinded and burned by the very light that knowledge has accumulated, and by the elusive energy and power that springs from it. The fire is, of course, the same fire as that of the sixth trumpet sequence and of the 'beast of the earth'. It is the fire from heaven that began with the renaissance and now matures in the nuclear age. This is not principally a picture of a superfluity of energy that will be followed by a

'blackout' though such a literal fulfilment is not out of the question. In despair of used resources mankind turns to nuclear energy. Human 'suns' generated by atomic fusion have already literally burned mankind, and solar power is also available as energy. If these resources are overused, dearth will follow.

But such literal applications are themselves limited. Here, the sun is symbolic. It is intensified as the sun of pagan learning that had been partially smitten by the Church. It is a 'sun' of a totalitarian State that takes the place of God, and 'pretends to be God' (39).It destroys the souls of men by the emission of arid heat and false light, by the emission of energy and knowledge that will be unnatural. The whole of creation will be scorched by the unnatural heat of human invention and blinded by the false light of scientific materialism. This would seem to be the spiritual and primary interpretation. Before moving to consider the next plague, it should be stressed that a secondary 'literal' interpretation is not out of the question. Power crises have usually produced their own solutions. Now the world could be faced by an irreparable dearth of light and energy through their overuse, even though much more energy may be available in the long run. So, the kingdom of the beast will be darkened both in symbol and in appearance.

The Fifth Plague

When light and energy run out, the world realises its weakness and desperate plight. In this situation there will be the panic at the thought of insoluble problems. This is the 'no way out' (40)" situation of which Jesus prophesied in

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(39) 2 Thessalonians 2:4 (40) 'aporia', see Luke 21:25 (translated 'perplexity')

the Olivet prophecy. The poor fund of human knowledge of divine things will now have run dry, because mankind has so often relied on imitations of spirituality and currently been burned by the unnatural sunshine of its own age of accomplishment. Human knowledge and inventiveness will have reached the end of the road.

The darkness of the fifth plague resembles the darkness that clouds the sun and air at the time of the fifth trumpet sequence. At the time of the fifth trumpet sequence it had been a 'pagan underground' working under an ecclesiastical cloak at a time when the teachings of Christ had partially smitten the main objects of pagan worship. Now the scene is different. A new 'paganism' has arisen and worn the mask of scientific accomplishment. With the power of a totalitarian State behind it in some countries of the world it has authority to scorch the souls of men.

Now, however, God accomplishes through the Church what the Church failed to do through the trumpet sequence, except at the last trumpet. The objective of the Church had been 'to punish the host of heaven' - (41) - to destroy the objects of pagan worship by the light of its own testimony. Now at last: "the sun is darkened, and the moon does not give her light" (42). Now at last, the darkness of unaided human knowledge becomes self-evident. The sun had been a worshipped pagan god when Christianity was first preached to the world. Now, it not only symbolises a revived paganism capable of producing heat and light, with the attractions of non-Christian power and knowledge. That knowledge itself has long produced the realization that the sun itself is only matter and energy, and thus the transformed symbol also includes the worship of matter and energy for the temporary benefits they

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(41) Isaiah 24:21 (42) Matthew 24:29 in real fulfilment of the objectives of Joel 2:28-31

afforded mankind.

Jesus said: "If the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"(43)The realization that human knowledge cannot solve all problems is a direct attack on the future of the religion of scientific humanism. The throne of Pharaoh was affected by the last two plagues, darkness and the death of the firstborn, but the second of the two was the greater attack on the throne of Pharaoh for it affected succession. In this case, the reference to 'darkness on the throne of the beast' combines the effects of the two plagues. Concurrently with the seventh trumpet-blast, with the resurrection of the witnesses and with the fullness of the winepress, Christian witness will be seen to be complete, and the throne of the beast will be 'impotent'. When the light of Christian witness is turned out, all other knowledge is shown to be darkness, particularly where such darkness reigns. The seat of the beast is not pagan Rome, or Moscow or any other world-city in particular. It is every city where Antichrist is resident. The picture is one of a world that is unable to meet its Lord, because it has been unwise, used its oil on non-Christian activities, and cannot through its bankruptcy display light for Him (44).

There was darkness on the earth before Jesus cried:

"It is finished." (45).

Now the 'travail' of His soul (46)has been accomplished. He has justified many (47) and the foolish darkness (44) of the remainder has become apparent.

The Sixth Plague

This plague is poured on the river Euphrates. The

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(43) Matthew 6:22 (44) Matthew 25:1-12

(45) John 19:30 The verbs translated 'finished' are non-identical, but the thought similar

(46) Isaiah 53:11 (47) Isaiah 53:10-12

symbol is not political though the interpretation has its roots in the politics of Israel. Thus, attempts by the historical school expositors to identify the river with the power of Turkey in the nineteenth century were not founded on any Biblical precedent. The river Euphrates was the boundary of the land that God convenanted to Abraham and his descendants (48). It was also the river of Babylon. In the case of the sixth trumpet sequence the river was breached and forded. Now the river becomes non-existent.

If the interpretation of the sixth trumpet sequence is to be reapplied consistently, the river Euphrates is not the geographical river flowing through Iraq. The two principles of interpretation must be followed:

(a) it was the boundary of the land of promise, but
(b) Babylon spanned the river, and existed on both sides of it.

If Babylon represents the world, in contradistinction to New Jerusalem which represents the ultimate Church, the society of the redeemed, then there is a clear sense in which the 'city of the world' has spanned the artificial boundary between the present Church (or covenant land) and the rest of the world. The 'world' as an influence often exists almost as much in the nominal 'church' or 'churches' as outside them, just as:

(a) Babylon spanned both sides of the artificial boundary; and
(b) Babylonian influence existed in Israel, whose actual boundaries very rarely reached the Euphrates (except in Solomon's time), and never as far as Babylon.

During the sixth trumpet sequence, the forces of scientific materialism made inroads into Christendom, which weakened its power. This was the fording of the river. Now the very separation between the

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(48) Genesis 15:18; Deuteronomy 1:7

'holy land' and the world evaporates temporarily. That city Babylon which has appeared in both ecclesiastical and pagan guises, which has sprawled on both sides of the nominal boundary, now appears as a united city opposed to God, from which the people of God must emerge. No longer is there such a nominal boundary, for the number of the elect has been made up, and they have, in a spiritual sense, already abandoned Babylon.

The real river Euphrates was dried up on several occasions so that the city of Babylon could be invaded, particularly when it was besieged by the Assyrians, and later by Cyrus (49).The 'drying up' is, in this case, symbolic. It means that for a short time the nominal distinction between the Church and the world will cease to exist. No longer will there be even a pretended distinction between Christian and non-Christian in what is left of the world. This temporary 'death' of the Church is probably contemporaneous with the 'death' of the two witnesses in an earlier prophecy. It is a period in which those aided by the Spirit will have performed the final testimony, and be feared by all, but the rest of the Church will be dead, having allowed itself to have been made the instrument of State politics and State control in the communist-governed world, and having made overtures to other religions and to guerrilla-aided movements in other parts of the world. The kings of the East are poised like vultures ready to devour the carcass (50) of the institutional Church. They are like Parthians who assaulted pagan Rome. They are those ten kings who will give power to the beast for one hour (51).

But as the river-bed is dry, there is not only scope for the ten kings to overthrow Babylon. There is also scope for the captive people of God to es-

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(49) Herodotus, Book 1:191 (50) Matthew 24:28
(51) see the interpretation of Revelation 17:16

cape. Hence there is the call:

"Come out from her, my people!" (52).

Hence, there is not only a parallel with the Persian invasion of Babylon, but with the Exodus from Egypt. The dry bed of Euphrates is the way for the kings of the East to invade Babylon. It is also the way for the people of God to escape, just as when the Egyptian Sea became dry - when Israel escaped from Pharaoh. The sea that receded to give Israel the chance to leave Egypt, also returned to submerge Pharaoh, just as Babylon will now be submerged 'like a millstone in the sea' in its final downfall (53).

Though united as one city from its two halves on each side of the river, Babylon will shortly be divided into three parts, in accordance with the state of Gospel-witness to it. Up until this period of total witness of the Gospel, the world could have been said to be divided roughly into three parts:

a **'pagan* (dragon)** third, that never received the Gospel of Christ;
a **'beast'** third, that had nominally responded to the Gospel; and a 'false-prophet* third, that received the Gospel but rejected it as superstition.

From each of these 'thirds' of the world emerge voices that accentuate its division, and are 'unclean' just like the frogs that plagued Egypt. They are the differing 'gospels' of hate that have emerged from 'mouths' of each sector, and yet are associated with the dry bed of that river that had previously divided Christendom from the rest of **the** world - all perversions of Christ's Gospel as it affected 'underdeveloped', 'Christian Western' and Marxist sectors of the world. These are all gospels of hate that help to produce the final conflict at

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(52) Revelation 18:4
(53) Revelation 18:21

Armageddon, literally, the 'hill of plagues' (54). The drying of the river is the last intermeddling of the nominal Christian sector of the world with the rest of it. It has a logical parallel in that last intermeddling of Josiah with Egypt and Assyria (55) before the final collapse of the Kingdom of Judah. He tried to resist Egypt and fell at Megiddo. The future parallel is when what is left of the nominal Church falls before overwhelming odds, but when witness has been total, when the number of the elect has been 'made up' and the Advent of Christ is about to occur.

The Seventh Plague

This plague is poured into the air, and the words: "It is finished." (56) are uttered a second time.

These words had been uttered by Christ from the cross, when the literal veil of the temple was torn to show that the division between man and God could be ended. Real (total) union between mankind and God can only be collectively achieved with the downfall of all human institutions, and this has now been accomplished.

The Church's objective has now been achieved. The Gospel has been preached to all mankind at this point in the prophecy. It is contemporary with the end of the seventh trumpet-blast. When the words 'it is finished' (56) were first uttered, a man was crucified so that God may be glorified in Him. Now the institutions of man have been truly crucified, so that God can be glorified. The earlier trumpet blasts were only a partial fulfilment of judgement following partial preaching and partial respon-

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(54) Revelation 16:16 compare 2 Chronicles 35:22

(55) 2 Chronicles 35:20-27

(56) Compare Revelation 16:17 with John 19:30, though the verbs are different.

sibility. Now the climax of total judgement has come.

Before Jesus was crucified, His words: "Now is the judgement of this world; - Now shall the prince of this world be cast out" (57) were a description of a personal conquest at the crucifixion, but anticipated that second and greater conquest of the world by all who are truly Christ's. The climax of this judgement is now about to occur in the Book.

Hailstones fall from the cloud that had previously obscured the glory of God, and it in turn has partly resulted from the evaporated waters of the divided city. This is an interesting way of saying that the defences that divide men are now used against them, and that the dry river bed of Euphrates will signal salvation for the redeemed and destruction for Babylon, just as the Egyptian Sea opened for Israel but retracted to submerge Pharaoh's armies. Each hailstone is a talent. It is a misused talent, for it has resulted from a divisive and defensive use of human skill. The world's own divisive waters are, so so to speak, evaporated, condensed and used against it.

This would seem to be a major principle of divine judgement. God uses modern civilization, with its misuse of His own power, to destroy those vices that it contains. These judgements are a 'surgery' for the world. They are a medicine by which the causes of the world's ailments can become its own cure. They are a sanctifying act, whereby an unclean world can be made to see the glory of God.

Soon there will be a 'highway' for mankind to return from the Babylon of its own making through the wilderness to a new temple in which all surviving mankind can worship.

"The glory of the Lord shall be revealed and
all flesh shall see it together
-for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it." (58).

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(57) John 12:31 (58) Isaiah 40:5

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE CITY OF THE WORLD

Babylon's Identity: Reasons for the Interpretation: Babylon and Euphrates: The Beast of the Abyss; The Seven Hills: The Seven Kings: The Seventh Head and the Downfall of Babylon: A Lament over Babylon

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Babylon's Identity

The account of the seven last plagues is followed by the vision of Great Babylon and her downfall. Political identifications of Babylon have differed, and they have largely resulted from the need of a given exposition to be consistent. Thus, preterist expositions either identified Babylon with pagan Rome or with Jerusalem of John's day, that was destroyed in A.D.70. Expositions written by members of the protestant historical school associated Babylon with Papal Rome. Futurist expositions associate Babylon either with Rome, Jerusalem, the 'Western world' or with the 'Soviet bloc'. All such expositions are inconsistent with the framework of this interpretation, for they seek to make Babylon represent only a portion of humanity. It should be clear from the logic of the book, that if New Jerusalem is the ideal ultimate City of God to be peopled by those whom God has saved, then Babylon must be its converse. It must be the City of the World, peopled by those whom God will ultimately condemn.

Babylon has already been previously mentioned in the Apocalypse

(a) in chapter fourteen, where the quotation indicated a city-state form, or microcosm of Babylon, and a hint of restricted interpretation as an ecclesiastical system (1) ; and
(b) in the previous chapter, where it is clear that the plagues are total, and that the reader is being slowly taught to think of Babylon as the world in general (2).

Though not specifically mentioned as such, it is also reasonable to suggest that Babylon was the first head of the seven-headed beast (3). As such, it was the lion's head, and its deadly wound was healed. Though there are seven heads in this spiritual 'conspiracy' of the world against the people of God, it is clear that Babylon's 'lion-head' is the active head. Thus also, it is the 'mouth of the lion' that slanders the people of God.

Though it is logical to think that Babylon represents the world in general, as the spiritual enemy and persecutor of the people of God, there are problems in doing so, for the prophecy contains hints of an existing 'Roman' application, and this has to be explained.

The obvious reason for such identification with Rome is that Rome was the centre of the world of John's day. But unlike other cities, it could offer citizenship to the inhabitants of other cities. Being a 'Roman citizen' did not involve living or having originated in Rome. But it was bestowed on favoured inhabitants of other cities, just as the citizenship from heaven was bestowed on members of the (4) Church. It was to Philippi, where Paul shamed authorities by arguing his own Roman citizenship,

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(1) Revelation 14:8 with reference to Isaiah 21:9
(2) Revelation 16:19 (3) Revelation 13:2 - see Daniel 7:8 & 2 Timothy 4:17
(4) Philippians 3:20

that Paul wrote, stressing the importance of the citizenship that is from heaven (5) . Though some Christians, like Paul, were Roman citizens, they could not behave as citizens of the world, but in Paul's day one could not have all the privileges of the citizenship of this world without also being a Roman citizen.

The second reason for the use of obvious Roman references in this vision derives from the fact that the Apocalypse appears to have been written as an answer to the Jewish apocalypses that circulated at the time of the writer. Their current theme was that the enemy was Rome, and readers had to be weaned from thoughts of a political enemy, to think of the world in general. So, although the prophecy is against a 'Roman' Babylon, it does not relate to a city on the banks of the Tiber whose armies had broken the siege of Jerusalem. Instead, it relates to the' citizenship of the world' as the direct opposite of the 'citizenship that derives from heaven' (4) (5).

The evidence that Jews had used the cipher 'Babylon' to mean Rome at the time is quite overwhelming. The Jewish 'Sibylline oracles' used (6) Babylon in this context. In the Apocalypse of Ezra a feathered eagle (7) is introduced and explained as being the fourth of Daniel's 'kingdoms'(8). The context suggests that the writer identified the fourth of Daniel's kingdoms with Rome. Prophecies against Edom had been applied by some apocalyptic writers to Rome, because of a similarity in writing the words in Hebrew, and because Herod's kingdom (that of an Idumaean, or Edomite) had been upheld by Rome. There had also been cryptic references to 'Kittim' associated with Rome. Both names were, of course, associated with Babylon. The Edomites had

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(4) Philippians 3:20 (5) Compare (4) with Acts 16:12 & 38 (6) Sibylline oracles 143; 159
(7) See 2 Esdras chapter.'12 (8) Daniel 7:7-14

conspired with the enemy during the (9) Babylonian captivity, and thus, the cipher 'Edom' became equated with Babylon as an indicator of Rome. The use of 'Kittim' derived from the Habakkuk commentary (10). The original Habakkuk prophecy wrote of the 'Casidim' (Chaldeans) but the Hebrew word is similar to 'Kittim'-a Biblical name for people living in the Mediterranean area, and for Romans, in particular. Thus, there is little doubt of a prior 'political' identification of Babylon with the actual city of Rome by Jewish apocalyptists, but that is not the message of Revelation. It is directed against a spiritual 'city' of Rome which, like Roman citizenship, was to be found everywhere when the Apocalypse was written.

Reasons for the Interpretation

The first reason for believing that the city of Babylon means the spirit of Rome associated with the citizenship of the world generally is that Babylon and Rome were insidious and pervasive. Babylon survived all attempts at conquest. It fell to Assyrians, Persians and Greeks but remained a cultural centre for many centuries afterwards. The area of Babylon was even a source of civilized learning when the old city had been replaced by the city of Seleucia. With the impact of the 'stone' of Christianity on the 'image' of Babylon, to use the analogy of Daniel, the pagan colossus that it represented was shattered, but the whole world is littered with the rubble of Babylonian civilization, and in John's day the city with the largest

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(9) See Obadiah and Psalm 137 & interpretations in the War document and Habakkuk commentary in the Dead Sea Scrolls

(10) Habakkuk Commentary (Dead Sea Scrolls) 1:6. "I raise up the Chaldeans (Babylonians)... This refers to the Kittim (Romans)"

number of 'citizens' of that world whose very relevance was shattered at the crucifixion was Rome, though the actual city only housed a small proportion of them.

> "Now is the judgement of the world; Now shall the ruler of the world be cast out." (11).

Secondly, it is clear that the descriptions used (when applicable to Rome) related to pagan Rome, and would be quite irrelevant to the present world, if Rome were not itself a symbol of the world generally. The spiritual meaning of Babylon had, in other words, to be explained to contemporaries in terms of an existing enemy identified by the Jewish apocalyptic writers. At the time of writing, some Jews expected Nero to return at the head (12) of a confederacy of ten Parthian satraps to destroy the existing city. Nero was the 'sixth' emperor of Imperial Rome. Five emperors had already fallen. After Nero, three emperors reigned for very short periods, but never obtained full control of the empire. Then Vespasian ascended the throne, and Jewish apocalyptists appeared to recount the emperors (excluding Caesar) to make Vespasian a 'sixth'. When Titus ascended the Imperial Throne, many Jews believed that he would rule for a very short time because of his 'crime' in destroying Jerusalem. Thus Nero was expected to return as the 'eighth' king in the sequence.

Revelation had already been shown to have quoted at times from the apocalyptic literature of its day, which it was intended to counteract. Charles (12) has shown that some of the seventeenth chapter contains evidence of quotation from a Hebrew (or Aramaic) source. The source may have been written at the death of Nero, when after the 'short while',

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(11) John 12:31

(12) See particularly R.H.Charles: Revelation (I.C.C.) Vol II pp68-72 & 76-87

as originally applied (i.e. A.D. 69) he would return to storm Rome. But this did not happen, nor was the modified prophecy fulfilled - for the Greek version of the book was probably completed at the time of Domitian when Titus would have reigned sufficiently long to have proved the local fulfilment (to Roman emperors) to have been entirely false. The myth of Nero's return (as envisaged in the pseudo-apocalypse from which John quoted) must have therefore been used with something different in mind, something that would remain relevant for many centuries to our own time - long after the expectation of Nero's return had faded from people's minds.

A third reason for extending the symbol beyond Rome to the whole world is that the description does not completely satisfy the description of the literal city of Rome. While it is true that the figure of a seven-hilled city is used, one used elsewhere to describe Rome (13), the figure is only used because Rome was at that time the head and centre of the civilized world. Thus, the description is not only of -

(a) a seven-hilled city; but -

(b) a city on many waters (14).

The phrase 'on many waters' is, of course, taken from Jeremiah's (15) description of the original city of Babylon, which spanned two rivers, contained many canals, and had access via the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean to the largest 'ocean' in the world. But Rome, as a city, was not 'on many waters'. Literally, Rome lay (and lies) near the mouth of the Italian Tiber, through which alone there is access to the Mediterranean - a relatively small sea.

Fourthly, Rome never has had or will have hegemony over all nations. In the prophecy the

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(13) Horace: Carm. Sec 7, Virgil, Aenid 6:782, Ibid: Georgics 2:534 (14) Revelation 17:1

(15) Jeremiah 51:13

City 'Babylon' is depicted as holding a cup, of which all nations are made to drink. This is an allusion to Jeremiah's prophecy against the original Babylon (16) but in that prophecy many of the nations who were to receive God's wrath had not been captivated by Babylon. Here, the two symbols are brought together. Babylon's hegemony 'over many waters' is to be described of Jeremiah's 'all nations' who would drink the wrath of God. No nation has had universal dominion. Thus, the symbol can only mean the world as a whole.

The fifth reason for the universal interpretation of the symbol is similar. Babylon is described as: 'mother of harlots and abominations of the earth' (17). This implies that Babylon would be the source of all the world's moral corruption. The description was not a true picture of the original city of Rome. The Romans had been comparatively puritanical, but were corrupted by the abominations and harlotries of the orient, via that Hellenistic' amalgam of East and West that followed the conquests by Alexander. Further, the harlot-symbol of this prophecy is not simply an Old Testament description of Babylon. It is also used by Isaiah against Tyre (18). Thus Apocalyptic Babylon would seem to be an 'amalgam' of all the corrupt cities of the world.

Finally, Babylon is said to have shed:

> 'the blood of prophets and saints –
> and of **all** who have been slain on the
> earth' (19).

This description extends beyond the original description:"... the blood of the saints, and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" (20).
It must not only include the latter description,

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(16) Jeremiah 25:15-16 (17) Revelation 17:5
(18) Isaiah 23:17
(19) Revelation 18:24
(20) Revelation 17:6

but also the blood of those Old Testament prophets who were slain by unredeemed Israelites, and of **all** who have ever been murdered. This can make Babylon nothing other than a cipher of the **whole** of unredeemed mankind.

Thus Rome and Babylon are both ciphers for the City of the World, the City of the Unredeemed. Babylon means the whole of the 'image' of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, shattered in theory when (21) Christ overcame the world by His faultless life, and splintered it into in fragments, flung far and wide. It rides on a sea-beast that is the amalgam of all this world's authority. Yet, it is also 'Rome' in the sense that worldwide Roman citizenship was, in the days of John, the nearest approach to the citizenship of this world. Not all 'Roman citizens' were necessarily citizens of Babylon, for some, like Paul, had already 'come out from her' (22). A citizen of Babylon is **any** un-redeemed citizen of the world - **any** person who cannot claim citizenship from heaven (23).

Babylon and Euphrates

The river Euphrates was the literal boundary of the covenanted land. As the covenanted land re-presented the spiritual 'territory' of the New Israel, it is logical to regard Euphrates as the boundary of (24) that spiritual territory, the 'nominal' dividing line between the institutional Church and the world. On the one side of the river, so to speak, are those bodies that claim to be Christian, while on the other side of the river are those that do not claim to be Christian. It is significant that as the literal city of Babylon spanned the river Euphrates, and influenced both sides of it, so the spiritual city of Babylon (the

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(21) Daniel 2:34-35 (22) Revelation 18:4
(23) Philippians 3:20 (24) Genesis 15:18

world of the unredeemed) also spans the technical and nominal distinctions that may exist between Christian and non-Christian. In other words, Babylon spans both the 'Christian' and non-Christian banks of the river. Its perversion of human life, morals and religions has no respect for what appears to be Christian and what does not. Whether professedly Christian or not, most of the 'kings of the earth' (the rulers of the world) have been tainted with the prostituting influence of human civilization.

West of Euphrates, in the land convenanted to Israel (but never completely owned it) was the Arabian Desert - the wilderness. This is also appropriate in the analogy between Israel and the Church. For the 'wilderness' is associated with unredeemed Israel, whose corpses fell there, who could not enter the 'promised land' because of unbelief. Great Babylon thus dwells 'in the wilderness', for her 'west-bank' territory would be associated with this wilderness, and nominally include it. In a broader sense, Babylon dwells 'in the wilderness' because she disregards, to a large extent, the boundary (Euphrates) between what is nominally Christian and what is not.

Thus, to summarise, Babylon dwells in the following places.

1) She dwells 'on many waters' as having rivers and canals including Euphrates and access to the sea.
2) She dwells 'on many waters' representing 'peoples, multitudes, nations and tongues' (25).
3) She dwells on 'Euphrates' ignoring the technical distinction between the 'Israel' of the New Covenant (the Church) and the uncovenanted land (the world).
4) She dwells 'in the wilderness'(26) because she disregards the distinction between

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(25) Revelation 17:15 (26) Revelation 17:3

'Christian' and non-Christian, to the extent that many claiming Christ are ultimately unredeemed - because she spans the river.

5) She dwells 'in the wilderness' because on the covenanted side of Euphrates is the great Arabian Desert, and a part of this wilderness is itself associated with those who were nominally members of Israel, but 'fell in the wilderness', an apt symbol of the unredeemed Christians.
6) She also rides the 'beast', the whole unredeemed world, the oppressor of the people of God - the composite of all those political enemies that trampled the Old Israel (27).

The Beast of the Abyss

There is some distinction between the beast of this chapter and those of chapters twelve and thirteen. They are a triad, representing, in symbol, the whole 'enemy of the saints' during the pre-Christian, Christian and post-Christian periods. The beast of the abyss is in essence, the whole composite political mechanism that has been the spiritual enemy of the people of God throughout history. Thus, Babylon rides the devil. She is seated on the reality behind the mythical Babylonian seven-headed sea-monster. This beast of the abyss is thus also universal through time and space, as far as human history is concerned. The beast is said to be a source of wonderment to:'..... **all**

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(27) Combining all the elements of the beasts of Revelation chs 12 & 13, which, in turn, combines all the elements of all Daniel's beasts in Daniel chs 7 & 8. Thus, this beast becomes a cipher for all the world's political authority, in and throughout all time.

whose names have not been written in the Lamb's Book of Life' (28). For the whole of mankind, there are only two alternatives. The choice is between the 'lion-head' of Babylon and the Book of Life of the Lamb, who is also the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Thus, the writer takes us beyond the scope of his immediate present. He gives a new spiritual meaning to the Jewish apocalyptic myth about the fall of pagan Rome, for he makes the beast of the abyss, on which Babylon rides, involve the whole world. The body of his beast affects:'...**all**... whose names have not been written in the Lamb's Book of Life'.

Though the beast of the abyss has affinity with all three of the beast phrases (dragon, sea-beast and false prophet), and is a composite of them, it most closely resembles the sea-beast of Revelation 13, and thus contains characteristics nearest to those of the 'sea-beasts' of Daniel 7.

He is the antithesis (contrast) of Christ Himself, and is therefore antichrist.

Christ 'lives, was dead, but is alive again' (29), whereas the beast is described as one:'...who was, is not, but shall ascend out of the abyss'(30) in a parodied replication of the life, death and resurrection (and hinted ascension) of Christ.

This enigma is similar to that which was explained when dealing with the sea-beast. In His life and death, Jesus not only 'bruised the (31) head of the serpent' in fulfilment the Genesis prophecy, but in (32) theory dealt a death-blow to the 'lion-head' of the Babylonian serpent. For His first Advent, and the advent of Christianity into the world crumpled an existing order of pagan godlessness of which Babylon was the head. From the time of His very resurrection He received:" all

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(28) Revelation 17:8 (29) Revelation 1:18
(30) Revelation 17:8 (31) Genesis 3:15
(32) Revelation 13:3

authority...in heaven and in earth"(33). Thus, even though 'Babylonian' paganism had only been partially smitten by the influence of Christ's teaching, its type of rulership ceased to be relevant. Jesus put an end to the delegated authority of 'the kingdom of man' by changing its emphasis. He instituted a Kingdom, which is' not of this world' (34). But though Christianity destroyed the 'Babylon' of pre-Christian civilization, as represented by the image of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, its shattered remains survive, as a whole world which has set itself in opposition to Christ, though it has, in theory, been conquered by Him already. In John's day, the 'world' of Antichrist had received its death-blow at Calvary. The pre-Christian world died at the same time as the last vestiges of Babylon's bricks were deteriorating in the city of Seleucia. As a city, it was no longer to be important, because of the greater power of Christ. Yet Babylon was to rise again, as the revived Babylonian head of the seven-headed beast. Both Babylon and its political conqueror were to find their counterparts in the post-Christian era. These strands of interpretation identify the beast, but do not explain the riddle of the seven heads of which:".. five are fallen, one is and another is not yet come" (35). This statement cannot be interpreted unless the meaning of the seven-hilled city is reconsidered and enlarged, for the Apocalypse associates the seven heads with the seven hills of the city.

The Seven Hills

The reference to the seven hills of the city has already been considered because it was necessary to identify the city, and to show that, although it is a general cipher, meaning the city of the world,

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(33) Matthew 28:18 (34) John 18:36
(35) Revelation 17:10

it had association with Jewish apocalyptic literature about pagan Rome. We have already considered some of those apocalyptic references. They appear to regard the major enemy of Israel as the literal (geographical) city of Rome. It had already been shown that the cipher Babylon is much more extensive and refers to the whole city of the unredeemed world. But what of the seven hills? They had been used by other writers to identify Rome, as we have already seen (13), but it does not necessarily follow that even this reference, so obviously an allusion to Rome, is an exclusive reference to the city itself.

The writer of the Apocalypse of Enoch had used the figure of a seven-hilled city in two ways. First (36) it was a description of Paradise, where the Tree of Life was kept. On the middle of the seven mountains of Enoch's city of Paradise was the throne of God, and except in respect of the seven mountains (an obvious comparison with Rome)-all other parallels in Enoch's vision of Paradise are with the New Jerusalem, which appears at the end of Revelation (37).

Secondly, the writer of Enoch also (38) alluded to seven large stars which burned like seven mountains, and said that they depicted those angels that were alleged to have sinned. Thus, in a strange paradox, the writer of Enoch not only used the seven-hill figure to describe Paradise, but also to depict the evil that drove mankind to debase it.

In this respect, the Apocalypse not only answers Enoch's paradox, but extends it. The seven-hilled city, as an extended figure, is the world - which was intended to be Paradise. But the world has left its true husband like an unfaithful woman and been

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(13) Horace: Carm. Sec 7, Virgil, Aenid 6:782, Ibid: Georgics 2:534 (36) 1 Enoch chs 24-39
(37) 1 Enoch 24:3-6, compare particularly with Revelation 21: & 22:1-5 (38) I Enoch 21:1-6

cursed. Wherever mankind has dwelt, the resources of the 'Paradise' of the world have been abused and depraved.

Thus, though the seven-hilled city is clearly an allusion to pagan Rome, as a cipher of the 'present evil world', the very apocalypses which the true Apocalypse was intended to counteract, testify to a much more extensive interpretation. Babylon is the whole depraved world of the unredeemed, and thus includes all false religion and its systems, and extends to that 'wilderness' of those who may profess Christianity but be unredeemed.

The Seven Kings

The seven 'hills' have thus been interpreted using an existing apocalyptic precedent which widens the symbol from the literal seven hills of Rome to include the whole world of the unredeemed - the seven-hilled Paradise-gone-wrong. But this does not explain why there are seven, except by reference to the literal hills on which the city of Rome was constructed.

Why then are there seven hills? The explanation in the vision is:'...the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated:- they are also seven kings' (39).

Thus, by the very construction of the passage, the reference to seven hills is only partly an interpretation, an explanation of the seven heads of the beast in terms of the literal mountains on which Rome was built. The explanation as phrased could also suggest that the seven mountains **are** seven kings, and, if the use of 'kings' (40) to mean 'kingdoms' in the original reference to the seven heads of the four beasts of Daniel is correct, then

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(39) Revelation 17:9-10

(40) Daniel 7:17 uses 'kings' but this is clearly explained in Daniel 7:23 to mean 'kingdoms'

the seven hills and seven heads represent the kingdoms described as the heads of the beast of the abyss.

Such an interpretation of the seven-hills symbol is not unreasonable. Mountains are often used to represent kingdoms in the Old Testament. For example: Babylon is described as a 'destroying mountain' (41) and 'the mountain of the House of Yahweh' (42) in Isaiah clearly means the Kingdom of God.

Thus, the seven hills are themselves symbolic, and they with the heads represent seven kings, or Kingdoms. As was suggested earlier, there is evidence that Jewish apocalyptists of the time expected an eighth king to arise, to succeed the first seven Caesars, and to head a Parthian confederacy against Rome. It is reasonable that the Apocalypse should have quoted this expectation as the basis of its prophecy of the beast's heads.

However, it is unreasonable that the seven kings should mean the first seven Caesars, since the seven heads of the beast of the abyss (as of the sea-beast) are clearly a composite of the seven heads of Daniel's four sea-beasts. Given that the Babylonian 'head' would be revived at some future time, however in the context of chapter thirteen, the lion-head (Babylon) could not be said to have fallen. Thus, the logic of the description of the kings(heads)'five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come'(43) suggests that Babylon cannot be one of the fallen heads, and that thus they must be in a different order from that in which they appear in Daniel 7. As none of the five heads can be the Babylonian (lion) head, it follows that the lion-head (Babylon) must either be:

(a) the head, 'that is'; - or

(b) the other head that 'is not yet come' (43)

From these two, it is more appropriate to suggest

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(41) Jeremiah 51:25 (42) Isaiah 2:2 (see also Micah 4:1) (43) Revelation 17:10

that Babylon (the lion-head) is the head on which the woman 'Babylon the Great' is seated. This suggests an interpretation which inverts the order of the heads so that both the lion-head and a subsequent head are revived, for the lion-head had already been revived in chapter thirteen: it is the most appropriate head on which the woman can sit.

Before suggesting the only logical order of the heads, it should be made clear that there is no eighth head of the beast, though expositors have suggested so, in apparent ignorance of the genders of the words used in the passage. The vision is consistent, not confusing.

Thus:

(a) the Greek word translated 'eighth' is in masculine form; but

(b) the Greek word translated 'head' is feminine (44).

It is thus clear that the word 'eighth' does not apply to 'heads' but to 'kings'. The beast has only seven heads (which are seven kings). The beast itself is an eighth king as the passage expressly states (45).The beast (eighth king) will rise after the seven kings (seven heads) have fallen. The ten horns are incidental to the vision, and patterned on the ten horns of Daniel's fourth beast, but not necessarily identical with them. They try to control the beast at the expense of the heads, just like those of Daniel's fourth beast.

Thus, we need not be overconcerned about an eighth head, and the seven existing heads (whether categorised as 'fallen'. present or future) should be identifiable by reference to the four beasts of Daniel. The first of Daniel's two beasts are clearly Babylon and Persia, and though there are alternative explanations of the third beast, it should be quite easy to identify it with Greece, because of the comparison between the four heads

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(44) Revelation 17:11 (45) Revelation 17:10-11

of this beast and the four horns of the he-goat of chapter 8 of Daniel. The corresponding heads and horns of the two visions clearly represent the four major divisions of Alexander's Empire after his death (46).The fourth beast is undefined: it is not described as a replica of an identifiable animal, e.g. lion, bear and leopard. This is a clue that it should not be defined by reference to an existing nation. It represents the Hellenistic world into which Christ was born. It was mainly dominated by Rome, but not entirely identified with it. Given this explanation of the four beasts of Daniel, the heads of the sea-beast and the beast of the abyss in Revelation must be identified by reference to the following:

1) Babylon
2) Persia
3 - 6) Greece
7) The Roman-dominated 'Near-East' of Christ's day.

It is logical that the revived Babylonian head should not be included among the 'five fallen', and it is also reasonable to assume that the Greek heads should be taken together, and therefore must be included among the five fallen heads.

Give these two constraints on the 'interpretation, the only four possible orders are as shown in the following table.

Position	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Five fallen	Persian & Greek heads	Persian & Greek heads	Greek heads & 'Fourth beast'	Greek heads & 'Fourth beast'
One that is	'Fourth beast'	Babylon	Persian head	Babylon
One not yet come	Babylon	'Fourth beast'	Babylon	Persian head

(46) Compare Daniel 7:6 with Daniel 8:22 & 11:4

Of these four possibilities, it is more logical that the head that 'is' (on which Babylon is seated) should be the Babylonian head revived. It is inconsistent with the meaning of the prophecy that it should be the head of the 'fourth beast' which contains the very ten horns whose counter-parts will destroy the city, and though the Persian head is a possible candidate as the 'one that is', there is nothing in the vision to indicate the probability of this explanation. Thus, from the above table we have eliminated possibilities 1 and 3, but 2 and 4 are left. Though possibility 2 is attractive, for the ten horns are to destroy and consume the harlot, they would represent domination by insurrection - if my interpretation of Daniel 7 is correct. In the Message of Daniel these were explained (47) to mean the Asmonean line, which influenced the near-eastern world of the time. The last three members of this line were deposed and slain by the authority of Herod, the original 'little horn'. This interpretation was explained and justified in the earlier discussion of the woman and the dragon of Revelation 12 (48). The first Babylon was not deposed by that kind of insurrection. Primarily, the city was invaded by the Persians with their Median and other allies. Further, the beast is itself to be an 'eighth' king(dom) to be associated with the ultimate destruction of civilization by revolution, and thus with the ten horns.

It thus follows that the seventh head (to endure a short while) must be a latter-day counterpart of Persia - a destroyer of Babylon revived. There is thus astonishing similarity between the three sets of heads and the three earlier 'beasts' or phases of the 'beast of the abyss'.

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(47) D. Pitt-Francis: The Message of Daniel (Lectures 1969/70)

(48) See chapter 9: A New Beginning

Position	Heads involved	Beast-Phase
'Five are fallen'	The Greek and Roman – dominated world into which Christianity made its greatest inroads	The 'dragon'. The 'world' partially conquered by Christian testimony
'One is'	Babylon revived. The persistence of the 'un-redeemed' world	The 'sea beast'. A perpetuation of pagan influence, superstition in the 'world' of the Christian era.
'The other is yet to come'	A counterpart of 'Persia'. Modern inroads on religion. The breaching of the nominal 'boundary' of the Church	The two-horned beast and the trans-Euphratean forces of the sixth trumpet sequence. The ultimate 'drying' of the Euphrates.

The Seventh Head and the Downfall of Babylon

It is consistent that the seventh head of the 'beast of the abyss' should be associated with the 'Persian' head of Daniel's four beasts for the vision anticipates a short-lived power, other than the horns that would destroy Babylon, as Persia conquered the first Babylon. It is also interesting that the Persian dynasty, of all dynasties, was about the last to survive, and that later rulers of that country could claim descent from the original imperial dynasty, whereas kings of Babylon, Greece or Rome would find it impossible to do so. This fact is not cited to indicate that the seventh head is Persia, but to illustrate that it would have been incorrect, in any case, to list the Persian head among the 'five fallen'. It is not Persia, but a modern counterpart. If so, what can it represent? The clues have already been provided in the study of the sixth trumpet sequence and of the two-horned beast. The seventh head is identical

with the false prophet. It is the 'trans-Euphratean' power of a revived paganism, a latter-day Persian equivalent. It is totalitarian, and materialistic and will exist for a short while. It cannot exist for long, because the very ideologies which it helped to foster, challenge the existence of all authority. An obvious 'national' candidate would be the Soviet Union, because the 'bear', which Daniel used as a symbol of Persia, is also a modern symbol of Russia. Russia asserted authority by fostering revolution, but the very spirit of revolution turns against Russia, as is apparent in Poland and Afghanistan while the present edition of this book is being written. But such a clear-cut identification debases the currency of the Apocalypse, for it reduces it to a political canvass. It is more accurate to identify the seventh head with the modern world, and with the 'anomos' (or lawless one) of Paul's writings, (49) with that anti-authoritarian 'spirit' which is self-destructive. It ends with a violent nationalistic spate of terrorism, likely to bring about the downfall of the whole civilized world.

The 'ten kings' are not necessarily 'ten'. The symbol is copied from that of Daniel. They can be taken to represent the revolutionary elements in the world, which follow the seventh head and destroy its (49) short-lived 'anti-authoritarian' authority. I suggested elsewhere (48) that the ten horns of the original fourth beast of Daniel represented the Asmonean line of revolutionaries. They were not 'kings' of the royal line of David, nor were they 'priests' of direct descent from the high-priestly line, though Levites. In the Roman-dominated Hellenistic near-eastern world which followed the Greek empires, they were the only successful nationalistic rebel system to exist. They

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(48) See chapter 9: A New Beginning
(49) 2 Thessalonians 2:9

had broken free of the oppression of Antiochus Epiphanes. In Daniel, they represented a line of 'kings', of which the last three were deposed and destroyed by Herod the Great, who by marriage became one of them. In the Apocalypse the 'ten-horn' symbol is transmogrified to mean all rebel, terrorist, nationalistic systems, which cause the downfall of the 'lawless one' (49).Among these **many** 'kings' who assume authority in the destruction of authority (the 'many' symbolized by the number 'ten'), Israel must itself be listed as one among many nations that employed terrorist methods to assert authority before counteracting the terrorism of its enemies.

In general, though, the horns are a representation of the world's nationalistic systems, born of reaction to a perverted communism, but with a mind that tries to carry communism to its logical conclusion, and thus fragment and destroy the social fabric of the world. Such systems are perhaps illustrated in Albanian communism, which denigrates Soviet politics as an intermediate Marxist-Leninist phrase in the full implementation of communist ideals. This is the 'one mind' of the text (50). It tries to assign all existing authority to the burning flame in repetition of the parallel in Daniel 7 (51).

Thus, the ten horns are those nationalistic systems of the world, founded on terrorism, which will destroy the very basis of their civilization and then make war on the Lamb. The procedure is thus:

(a) the 'ten horns' destroy the commercialistic

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(49) 2 Thessalonians 2:9 (50) Revelation 17:16-17. This is implicit in the 'headless' nature of the beast at this stage. The eighth king is the beast itself, who dominates the horns. There is now no 'head' (authority) but the doctrine that denies all authority.

(51) Compare Daniel 7:11 with Revelation 17:16 'harlot' in her last phase, the monetary

'mammon' phase of the earth-beast (52); and

(b) the 'ten horns' make war on the Lamb(Christ)but He overcomes them, for He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords' (53).

The chapter thus has a logical order, which is consistent with the somewhat debased parallels in the Jewish apocalyptic writings of its time. Babylon is human civilization. It is the whole unredeemed 'world'. It has been prostituted since Paradise, and has dominated the earth by means of commerce, and by those imperialistic, authoritarian systems, of which Daniel's four beasts were representative (54) but no more than typical. This domination reaches its height in the East-West struggle to dominate the world by commercialism or by revolution, and by allegedly Christian or by professedly scientific means. Hence there is a conflict between Babylon and a pretended successor, but this successor lasts a short while. Then revolution begets revolution, and each nation plays a part in a worldwide insurrection which destroys the very fabric of society. At this stage, the Lord appears and the Kingdom of Christ is victorious.

A Lament over Babylon

The following chapter needs little explanation for it is a synthesis of Old Testament prophecies against various nations, compounded and conflated into one lament to illustrate that Great Babylon is itself a compound symbol of fallen unredeemed man in all political guises.

The words:

"Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great" (55) and

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(52) Revelation 17:12 & 16

(53) Revelation 17:13-14

(54) See The Message of Daniel, chapter 5 pp.42ff

(55) Compare Revelation 18:2 with Isaiah 21:9

"the dwelling-place of demons" (56)
are taken from prophecies against the original non-imperial city-state of Babylon, to show that it was in **the city** that unredeemed civilization had its origin, but that all human constructions are ruinous and ghastly if man is astray from God.

The cry: "Come out from her my people, lest you take part in her sins" (57) is evidently taken from prophecies in Isaiah and Jeremiah against imperial Babylon, and illustrates that the Christian is a member of a New Jerusalem, and therefore cannot also be a citizen of Babylon. To do so is similar to attempting to serve God and mammon (58).

These are clear Babylonian references, as are the words: "...her sins have reached to heaven" (59) which is an allusion to the intended height of the Tower of Babel. Yet, this city of the world must contain the whole of unredeemed mankind. For this reason, those unredeemed members of the covenant community, whether old Israel or its successor the Christian Church, must be included.

The Old Israel was described by New Testament writers in comparison with Edom, and thus the language of Isaiah's prophecy against Edom is captured in the early verses of the chapter (60). The New Israel is an intended 'New Jerusalem', but many claiming to belong to it will not have truly escaped the captivity of the 'Babylon' of this world, and thus not belong to the ultimate City. Thus, words against unredeemed Jerusalem, whether 'old' or 'new' are echoed in the lament:

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(56) Compare Revelation 18:2 with Isaiah 13:21
(57) Compare Revelation 18:4 with Jeremiah 51:45 and with Isaiah 48:20; 52:11; and Jeremiah 50:8 & 51:6 & 9. The first (Jeremiah) reference is the nearest to being a direct quotation (58) Matthew 6:24
(59) Compare Revelation 18:5 with Genesis 11:4
(60) Compare Revelation 18:2 with Isaiah 34:13-14

"Repay her double for her deeds" (61).

The Old Babylon had traded much more by land than by sea. Yet the universal description and meaning of Babylon must include trade by sea. The dirge is directed against all civilizations. The Old Israel had been told to conquer the land of Canaan but had failed to do so. It had, in particular, left the area on which Tyre later prospered. The Church was told to teach all nations, but failed to do so, and the 'earth-beast', the lawless one, prospered because of a vacuum left by the Church. The words of Paul about the lawless one are thus taken from Ezekiel's prophecy against Tyre. Indeed, Tyre is - to a greater extent than Babylon itself - a symbol of modern godless commercialism. But even this godless commercialism perpetuates the influence of Babylon. The sixth head does not fall **because of** the seventh, as the other five heads fell. Instead modern lawlessness **perpetuates** Babylon's influence.

Thus, the writer uses material from prophecies against Tyre, to stress that the modern commercialistic and godless world is the vacuum of an unconquered Canaan. The 'world' has dominated its inhabitants and mastered all nations by taking commercial advantage of parts of it. Now, the sea is becoming as blood of a dead man, clotting and failing to function. The life-blood of Tyre's fortification recedes and the city of the world is destroyed. The remaining quotations in the lament are taken from prophecies against Babylon, Tyre and Jerusalem. As in the case of Tyre, merchants lament over their loss of trade through cargoes. In Hebrew, the word for 'merchant' is structurally similar to Canaan.

As the merchants lament, saints, apostles, prophets and martyrs of all ages can rejoice.

Words from the prophecy in the latter part of

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(61) Compare Revelation 18:6 with Isaiah 40:2

Isaiah are quoted:

"A queen I sit - I am no widow" (62).

The quotation has added meaning in this context. In the context of the original quotation it meant that the city-state of Babylon had overcome the Assyrian conquest by becoming the centre of an Assyrian, neo-Babylonian dynasty. In this context, however, Babylon has said that even though her structure had been destroyed, her influence had remained throughout the Christian period. But now even this is to be destroyed. The whole civilized world, the amalgam of land-trading Babylon (63) and sea-trading Tyre will now have been destroyed by the factional influences of their subjects.

The remainder of quotations in the chapter return to Babylon itself. They are selected from Isaiah and Jeremiah (64), but even at this stage contain hints of prophecies against Tyre. Music and craft are (65) mentioned together because they originated, in the Genesis account, with sons of Lamech who was seventh in a 'kingly' line from Adam (66) through Cain. Cain was said to have built the first of all cities and to have incurred the first (sevenfold) judgement (67). Even these early Biblical symbols are spiritually transformed in the chapter because all saints and all prophets of all time are now being 'avenged' just as righteous Abel (68).The world is finally ready for the victory of the Lamb, for a renewal of society, and for the

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(62) Compare Revelation 18:7 with Isaiah 47:7-9

(63) Ezekiel 26:16-17; 27:12, 13, 22, 31 and compare also with Ezekiel 26:13 & 21 & 27:26-34 generally. Also Isaiah 23:13-18. The 'harlot' is usually a description of Tyre rather than Babylon (64) Isaiah 44:23 & 49:13, Jeremiah 51:49, but see Isaiah 24:8, Ezek 26:13

(65) Genesis 4:19-24 (66) Genesis 4:17-19

(67) Genesis 4:17

(68) Genesis 4:15-24 compare Matthew 23:35

restoration of Eden, which some apocalyptists had described as a seven-hilled paradise (69). If the City of Babylon no longer occupies those apocalyptic seven hills, Eden can be restored.

(69) 1 Enoch chs 24-39

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE FINAL JUDGEMENT

The Judgement Interval: The Song of Rejoicing: The Conquering Word: The Millennium and the Judgement

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The Judgement Interval

Chapters 19 and 20 of the Apocalypse provide an interval between the vision of the City of the World, and the final splendour of the City of God. The world must be judged before the City of God can appear on earth in its full glory. It is thus reasonable that this interval should contain, among other things, descriptions of the judgement of the world. Though this is the main theme, the judgement of the world is not the only necessary topic to be included in this interval. The bridge between the City of the World and the City of God must be well-constructed. As there has been a dirge over the fall of Babylon, it is appropriate that this should now be compensated with songs of rejoicing from the redeemed company.

Thus, in summary, the judgement interval contains the following:

(a) a song of rejoicing (1) to compensate the lament by the merchants of Babylon;

(b) a description of the respective deaths of the beast, false prophet and dragon (2) who emerge as separate entities after the composite 'beast' of the abyss has been destroyed; and

(c) a threefold picture of the last judge-

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(1) Revelation 19:1-10 (2) Revelation 19:11-21

ment, to account for the final destruction of the dragon (3) and to introduce a partial description of New Jerusalem.

The partial description is a logical prelude to the enlarged description of the City of God, which spans the final chapters of Revelation and will be considered in chapter 15.The threefold analysis of this interval, with the third section containing three visions of judgement, demonstrates that there is a progressive sequence, though it does not necessarily follow that this sequence is in chronological (time) order.

The Song of Rejoicing

The vision of rejoicing by the redeemed is an antiphony to the dirge over Babylon in the previous chapter (4). It is also in logical order. Unlike most human music, the song **commences** with a great **chorus** and then the antiphony moves inwards and upwards, for:

(a) it commences with a great multitude in heaven (5); and then
(b) the rejoicing is continued by the presbyters , representing the Church who are redeemed (6);
(c) the living ones (7), who represent the whole of visible nature, continue the hymn of praise; and then
(d) God Himself, Who is beyond visible nature, rejoices and sends His Son (8), after a renewed chorus from the multitude.

It is unnecessary to repeat the reasons for the above interpretations for these were explained when considering the first heavenly vision in the

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(3) Revelation 20, containing vv.1-6; 7-10; 11-15
(4) Revelation 18:19-24 (5) Revelation 19:1-3 (6) Revelation 19:4 (7) Revelation 19:4-5
(8) Revelation 19:6-8

Apocalypse (9). It is preferable to consider the sequence and the quotations which the sequence contains. The death of the City of the World involves the eradication of all its unsavoury aspects, so that the City of God can be realized on earth, and Eden can be restored. The 'generation' of Babylon resembles the 'generation' in Israel, whose corpses fell in the wilderness. The picture is appropriate, for Babylon is partly 'in the wilderness' and contains not only non-Christian mankind, but those unredeemed who may profess Christianity - those whose 'corpses' will fall in the spiritual wilderness, using the analogy of the Epistle to the Hebrews (10). Thus, a perishing generation is destroyed, to make way for a new generation, as in the wilderness analogy. In this case, the fallen generation are the inhabitants of 'Babylon', while the new generation are the inhabitants of Jerusalem, most of whom will be raised from the dead (11).

This analogy has been explained, because it explains why the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy is quoted by the multitude in heaven. The words of Moses are:

> "Praise His people, 0 you nations,
> for He avenges the blood of His servants,
> and takes vengeance on His enemies,
> making expiation for the land of His
> people" (12).

In Revelation, these words are quoted as:

> "He has judged the great harlot
> who corrupted the earth (land) with her
> fornication, and has avenged on her the
> blood of his servants" (13).

Moses' words were not simply sung to a new generation, who would take the place of the old

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(9) Revelation chapter 4
(10) Hebrews chapters 3 & 4 (11) Daniel 12:1 & 2
(12) Deuteronomy 32:43 (13) Revelation 19:2

generation, that had been promised the inheritance but failed to obtain it. They contained, as Hebrews suggests, all those warnings to the Old Israel that God would punish backsliding, even when Israel entered the land, and avenge the land of crimes. Now the whole earth is to be avenged of Babylon's crimes, but this, of course, includes those of the New Israel - the Christian Church, the logical successor of Israel.

To show that even this logical right of inheritance could be set aside, the Song hints at the Pauline 'Edom-Israel' analogy in a subtle, and almost unnoticeable way.

Paul used Jacob and Esau as types of the spiritual and natural heirs of the promises of God. He did so, to show that God would set aside a natural right of succession, such as primogeniture, and give the inheritance to 'whom He will' (14). Later, both the analogy of Jacob (15) and Esau, and that of Isaac and Ishmael were extended, so that:

(a) Isaac and Jacob became figures of the Christian Church, which obtained the inheritance by promise (16); and

(b) Esau and Ishmael became figures of those, such as Jews, who thought that they could claim the Divine Inheritance by right, because of natural descent, and without reference to the promises of God (17).

In the Apocalypse of Ezra, the writer progressed in another direction. He had used Esau and Jacob as a figure of the present world and the (18) Messianic Age, stating that as Jacob clutched the heel of Esau and was born quickly after him, so the

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(14) Romans 9:6-13 & v.18 (15) Compare (14) with Galatians 4:21-31 and Hebrews 12:12-17

(16) Using above compare Galatians 4:26 with Hebrews 12:22 (17) Again using above compare Galatians 4:25 with Hebrews 12:18-20

(18) Compare II Esdras 6:8-10 with Genesis 25:19-26

Messianic Age would come quickly after the present one. The writer's analogy was, of course, imperfect, for it did not also state that the present age, Babylon - the fallen generation - takes the characteristics of Esau, and the Messianic Age. New Jerusalem, contains the characteristics of Jacob. How could the Apocalypse reconcile these two uses of the analogy in which Esau could now mean the whole disinherited generation of the 'present evil world' and Jacob mean the whole new generation of the 'world to come'? The answer to the question is ingenious. It was to use material from two companion prophecies of Isaiah. Isaiah had written of the destruction of Edom in language similar to that of the destruction of the whole world. He immediately afterwards painted a picture of a paradise that would replace the wilderness, a redeemed world in which the rose would even bloom in the wilderness (19).

Hebrews uses both chapters from Isaiah in its final exhortation to the Christian Church (20). Here, there is a specific reference to the earlier prophecy.

"The smoke from her arises for ever and ever (21)".

The present world is thus compared with an Edom - with a wilderness in which the present generation will fall. The words are not chosen randomly. There is a set of implied references to the following:

(a) the parable of Ezra about the comparison of Edom with the present world (18);
(b) the 'last-day' flavour of Isaiah's prophecy against Edom (19);

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(18) Compare II Esdras 6:8-10 with Genesis 25:19-26
(19) See Isaiah chapters 34 & 35
(20) See particularly Hebrews 12:12-17
(21) Compare Revelation 19:3 with Isaiah 34:10

(c) the generation that fell in the wilderness, a wilderness partly (20) associated with Edom; and
(d) the fact that Babylon, among other things, occupied a wilderness - the wilderness of unredeemed mankind(21).

The apocalyptic language of Isaiah against Edom and his promises of the new age, are thus extended to their full. The whole of the unredeemed world is seen to be a smoking desert compared with the glories of the coming age.

The order of events is a significant one. First, the old world is destroyed by the fragmenting canker of its own wickedness. Then, there is a progressive sequence in which the heavenly armies (22), the Church on earth, and the whole creation call for the consummation of the new order. So Christ is married to that New World. His bride is the New Jerusalem, the ultimate redeemed, compounded from a Church of living and resurrected beings.

Now it is therefore necessary to complete the conquest of a self-judged and self-fragmented world. Man must abandon his idolatry and worship none other than God. The categories of idolatry have been considered earlier, when dealing with the results of the sixth trumpet sequence (23). All idols, whether those of superstition, or of pseudo-scientific invention or man himself, must now be abandoned. God alone must be feared.

Thus, after the echoes of praise from the twenty-four presbyters and the four living ones, the voice from the throne cries in the words of the psalms:

> "Praise our God all you His servants,
> You who fear him small and great!" (24)

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(20) See particularly Hebrews 12:12-17
(21) Compare Revelation 19:3 with Isaiah 34:10
(22) Revelation 19:1-8 (23) Revelation 9:20-21
(24) Revelation 19:5

These words echo the great psalm against idolatry, Psalm 115.They (25) address a new generation of 'godfearers', or proselytes. The original psalm was a call to Gentile 'godfearers' to abandon their idols. Now the call has run its full course. The marriage of Christ to New Jerusalem will ensure that the whole world continues to learn of Christ. Unlike those comparatively few proselytes of the psalm, the proselytes of the present quotation include the whole unrejected world - those to be taught the ways of Christ. They will be the 'godfearers' and proselytes of the millennial age. This matter will be studied in detail in the next chapter, for it may seem that as all have been given the chance to accept or reject Christ before He comes, it will be difficult to find those who belong to an unredeemed but unrejected category.

The multitude now echo the peals of thunder from the Throne, with words from an associated psalm:

> "...let us be glad and rejoice for the marriage of the Lamb has come."(26).

These words are quoted from a psalm often associated with Passover - one which has overtones of 'Palm Sunday', of Christ's entry to Jerusalem, and with freedom for all under-privileged and oppressed people, whether the Exodus from Egypt, at which the typical 'Lamb' was slain or those children who cried Hosanna before the Lamb of God died (27).

This psalm recounts the deliverance of the 'godfearers'. They were (28) weak when 'compassed' by 'all nations', but now gates of righteousness are opened, so that they can enter Jerusalem. The message is extended to the 'ultimate' proselytes - to that section of mankind which will form the 'new

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(25) Psalm 115:13 (26) Revelation 19:7

(27) Exodus 12:26-27; Matthew 21:14-16 & v.42, quoted from Psalm 118 (28) Psalm 118:4 'godfearers' v. 10, v. 19 & w. 22-23

generation' to be taught by entry into 'New Jerusalem'(29).As chastened people, the 'godfearers' of the future age will enter the 'gates' into New Jerusalem to become part of the Bride, the Lamb's Wife.

Thus, the Passover liberation chant: "This is the day that the Lord has made," (30) - becomes transformed to take into account a final 'liberation'

"for the marriage of the Lamb has come" (31).

There is thus a fresh beginning. The Apocalyptic drama now compensates for the fact that the Church had not faithfully carried out its commission to 'make disciples of all nations'. Up to this time (32) the Book has recounted the results of partial attempts to bring the world to the knowledge of God, so that it may be made responsible to His judgement and the Second Advent occur. Now that the world has finally been made accountable with that full seventh trumpet-blast, and the fullness of the winepress, there is need to consider the casualties of the whole process, including that number of children who, like the children of the Israelites during the wilderness journey 'had no knowledge of good and evil' (33) at the time their parents rebelled.

It is not unreasonable, on the precedent of texts already quoted (27) (28) that these casualties and children will constitute the 'godfearers' - the ultimate 'proselytes' of the future age. Thus Psalm

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(27) Exodus 12:26-27; Matthew 21:14-16 & v.42, quoted from Psalm 118 (28) Psalm 118:4 'godfearers' v.19 & vv.22-23

(29) Compare Psalm 118: vv.19-20 with Revelation 21:12-14 (30) Psalm 118:24

(31) Revelation 19:7 (32) Consider the discussion in chapter 1 of this book and the explanation of the seven trumpet sequences

(33) Deuteronomy 1:39

118, which is also partially addressed to 'proselytes' is given new meaning by its quotation in this context (34).

At the end of this first section of the interval, an interesting gesture (35) follows. Let us first consider why it is made at the correct time, and then examine the reason for it.

The very angel who invites the redeemed to the marriage of the Lamb refuses homage from John, and then describes himself as (36):

"a fellowservant with you and your brethren
who hold the testimony of Jesus."

This gesture is made at the correct time in the book. The description does not necessarily distinguish the angel from the others that participated elsewhere in the book. Angels participate in the apocalyptic drama in different ways. Earlier they represented death and hell, both in the case of the fourth seal sequence, and as Apollyon, the destroyer, in the case of the fifth trumpet sequence. They represented leaders of forces from 'beyond Euphrates' in the case of the sixth trumpet sequence.

As angels, they are not different from each other, but are distinguished by the roles they play in the drama of the book. This angel refuses worship because he is a 'ministering spirit', a 'fellow-servant' just like John. The prophecy depicts a time when he can be regarded as one of John' s 'brethren', for the writer will himself then be made like the angels, 'to die no more' (37).

Until the point in time to which this prophecy relates, there has been no 'affinity' between the human elect and the angels, for they have had different natures. But the marriage of the Lamb has arrived, and now both the human redeemed of all

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(34) Psalm 118:4 (35) Revelation 19:9-10
(36) Revelation 19:10
(37) Matthew 22:29-33 and Luke 20:27-40

ages and the angels themselves can be regarded as 'brethren' in the service of God.

As the consummation of this marriage is to take place, the angel must stress that however glorious angels appeared to be in the past in the service of God, as His representatives to men, they are of a nature that all God's people will share. From now on, humans and angels are immortal 'brothers' in the scheme of things, for even heaven and earth, in the language of 'Ephesians' will have become one family (38).

Thus, the gesture is timely, for it comes at a point in the book, which represents the time when human beings and angels become 'brothers'. Now let us examine the more important reason for the gesture itself. The Apocalypse was written to provide a Christian answer to Jewish and Gnostic apocalyptic literature. One of the failings of this contemporary literature was that it tended to exalt angels, and to encourage their worship. Paul alluded to this perversion of true worship when writing both to Galatians and Colossians (39).The writings of pseudo-Enoch, pseudo-Ezra and the Assumption of Moses show how important the adoration of angels had become in the Jewish scheme of things. They had become so important in contemporary thought that the worship of angels became a major topic (40) of the epistle to the Hebrews, where the writer took pains to explain that the Gospel of the Son of God is so much greater than the words of angels, even before stating that Christ transcended the Law of Moses. Paul had even stated that it was possible that people in the Church would quote the words of angels (41) in support of 'some other gospel'. Those who believe that Jesus is the only means of access

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(38) See Ephesians 3:14-21

(39) Compare Galatians 1:8 & Colossians 2:18 with Enoch 20 (40) See particularly Hebrews 1

(41) Galatians 1:8

to God must therefore abandon the adoration of angels, and their alleged words.

Thus, the gesture occurs for two reasons. Its place in the prophecy assures us that the exposition has reached the time when the elect will be: "...made like the angels, to die no more" (37), **and** it is consistent with one of the main objectives of the book, to show the superiority of Christ over apocalypses that claimed worship for the angels of God.

The Conquering Word

The first span of the bridge is complete. The rejoicing over Babylon has finished. Now the nations that temporarily liberated themselves by dethroning the Whore must be brought under the authority of Christ. The vision's details are there to highlight the success of the Second Advent in doing what the Church had failed to do during its period of partial testimony. Thus:

(a) heaven opens, as it did in the earlier vision, but the Word of(42)God rides the white horse, and proceeds from heaven; and

(b) there is no longer the circular course of the sixth chapter, for the white horse is not followed by those horses that seemed to indicate the deterioration of successive churches after initial conquest and maturity.

Now the white horse carries the Word of God as the head of a community of deathless beings. They will complete the destruction of the three components of the Antichrist beast, on which fallen mankind has been riding. The Word of God is an appropriate name for the rider. It is not simply (43) a

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(37) Matthew 22:29-33 and Luke 20:27-40

(42) Compare Revelation 19:11 with 4:1 & 6:2

(43) As in Matthew 13:18 or Ephesians 6:17, for example.

reference to the message of the Gospel, or to the Logos of John's (44) writings. It also contains a reference to the unpronounceable 'Memra' or 'name' (lit. 'Word') of God of Hebrew tradition - that which no one knows except the one on whom it is inscribed. In Jewish tradition, this was in the nature of a secret (or magical) word of power. In the Apocalypse, the idea of such a word is transformed to mean something much greater. It becomes, as in the earlier promise of the 'white stone' (45) an indicator of the very nature of immortality, which is 'nameless' and 'indescribable' to all except those who receive it.

There is more in the sequence than that. The writer skillfully combines a passage from the book of Proverbs (46) with a later (apocryphal) passage in the Wisdom of Solomon (47) where God's omnipotent Word is described as:

"leaping down from heaven"

- to bring judgement on God's enemies.

The Word of God is not simply omnipotent, but also omniscient. Thus, a later passage in Hebrews (48) describes it as being sharper than any two-edged sword in its omniscient discernment. In this case, the sword combines both features of the Word of God, omniscience and omnipotence, for omniscience is the most powerful weapon available.

It was shown earlier that this passage is the antithesis of the cycle in the early chapters, after which the Church commenced to preach its partial testimony. Two comparisons have already been made. They were:

(a) the **heavens open**, but the white horse proceeds from heaven; and

(b) the rider is seated on a **white horse**,

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(44) John 1:1-18 (45) Revelation 2:17

(46) Proverbs 8:22-36 & 9:10

(47) Wisdom 18:15

(48) Hebrews 4:12 & 13

A further element in comparison between the two sequences is the 'eagle', the fourth of the living ones of chapters 4-6, who introduces the 'death' sequence, represented by the £ale (green) horse. This was an allusion to the Olivet prophecy:

> "Wherever the (dead) body is, -there will the eagle (vultures) be gathered together" (49).

In this sequence, all the birds that fly in mid-heaven (i.e. overhead and therefore, in general, birds of prey) are invited to partake of the flesh of world-leaders and army captains. This invitation transforms the warning of the Olivet prophecy about the potential 'death' of the Church into a prophecy about 'death' of this present evil world. To do so, the quotation has to be combined with another quotation from Ezekiel about the destruction of Israel's enemy, Gog (50), and his multitude.

The quotation from Ezekiel is also appropriate. The reference to the birds of heaven being invited to eat corpses of the great of this world is a conflation of the two passages. The Ezekiel reference is (50)used because of the reference to the destruction of the great enemy of the people of God, except that in this case it is no longer localised to a confederacy of nations under Gog, but comprises the whole world. The Olivet reference is there because all those unredeemed, whether (49) nominally members of the Church or not, suffer the consequences of ignoring its warnings.

Thus, to study the Old Testament background in greater depth, the visions of Ezekiel about the final conflict between the nations and Jerusalem are transformed into a greater prophecy about the final battle between good and evil - and between heaven and earth. Thus, the pictures of the birds of heaven about to consume the unredeemed are not simply taken from Christ's warning to His Church

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(49) Matthew 24:28 (50) Ezekiel 39:17-20

(a) in the Olivet prophecy, (b) in the vision of the rider of the pale horse of death and(c) in the picture of the 'eagle' in midheaven introducing the trumpet-blasts of woe(51).The Ezekiel reference is clearly in mind (50).

This may be difficult to explain in view of the fact that the next chapter describes a conflict between the people of God and 'Gog and Magog' which takes place after the 'thousand years' (53) in which Christ reigns. The reason for this apparent double-reference to Ezekiel in different contexts is that the Apocalypse regards Ezekiel's 'Gog' as a complete symbol of the 'City of the Unredeemed' whether dragon, beast or false prophet. When the ten kings arise against Babylon, a fragmentation takes place.

In the language of the last plagues:"...the great city (Babylon) was divided into three parts" (52), while in the language of the Babylon vision, the 'beast of the abyss' returns to its three constituents after the destruction of the woman Babylon. These are the dragon, beast and false prophet. But the conflict against them lasts for the thousand years of Christ's reign, for although the beast and false prophet are destroyed at the beginning of that period, the dragon is not destroyed until the end of it (53). Thus the conflict with the counterpart of Gog and Magog spans the thousand year reign of Christ, in the sense that it is halted by it but not completed. In the first (pre-millennial) part of the conflict the beast and the false prophet are destroyed, while in the second (post-millennial) part of the conflict the dragon (or devil) is destroyed.

The first part of the conflict is mainly directed at responsible humanity, represented by two

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(50) Ezekiel 39:17-20 (51) Revelation 8:13
(52) Revelation 16:19
(53) Compare Revelation 19:20 with 20:8-10

'phases' of Babylon:

(a) the 'beast' phase, analogous to the
(b) 'world' of the Christian era, those who may have casually accepted Christ; and
(c) the 'false prophet' phase, analogous to the 'world' of the post-Christian era, those who have heard the Gospel but rejected it.

The remainder of the world is, of course, analogous to the 'dragon' phase of the beast on which Babylon rides, and corresponds to those people who have remained pagan, and never heard of Christ. This would seem the most logical division of humanity, to be consistent with the interpretation of the dragon, beast and false prophet in chapters 12 and 13 of the Apocalypse.

Who are the 'remainder' against whom the first (pre-millennial) part of the conflict is not directed? We are left with the nations 'who did not come against Jerusalem to battle'- to quote a reference from the Old (54) Testament prophecy of Zechariah. There are those who have been left out of the conflict, even though it involves 'all nations'. This consists of a kind of 'third world' with those nations, who had not heard the Gospel of Christ until the words of the Olivet prophecy (55) about the Gospel being testified to all nations had been fulfilled. They are the non-responsible, or least-responsible section of humanity.

It is too much of a generalization to say that the 'beast' represents Western bloc countries, the 'false prophet' the rejecting anti-Christian 'Eastern bloc' countries, and the 'dragon', the parts of the world that have remained pagan until modern times, because such definitions are political, and can be misleading. It is best to 'beast' and 'false prophet' that they should be regarded as all the evil influences that have worked among responsible

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(54) Zechariah 14:16-19 (55) Matthew 24:14

humanity, so that it failed regardless of whether it rejected Christ's teaching or paid lip-service to it. At this time of judgement all such responsible people who have failed will be judged and condemned whether alive at the time or raised from the dead (56).

The remainder of humanity never knew of Christ. They had no opportunity to reject or accept Him. They corresponded with the 'dragon' in the analogy. They are 'all that are left of nations', that did not, spiritually speaking, oppose New Jerusalem. The millennial reign of Christ is for such people. Like the 'children' who would constitute a new generation to emerge from the wilderness, when their parents were dead (57), so these: "who knew not good and evil"(57) must be led as 'wayfaring men'(58) along the 'way of holiness' through the wilderness (59) to spiritual Zion, the camp of the elect, the New Jerusalem.

In the language of the book, assuming that many of its remaining prophecies will shortly be fulfilled, the world of humanity has been divided into three parts, and there is a corresponding 'millennium' for each of these parts. It will have taken approximately 2,000 years to bring the 'two-thirds' of mankind in the categories of 'beast' and 'false prophet' to a state of responsibility, from which the redeemed will constitute the nucleus of New Jerusalem. It is reasonable that a further 1,000 years should be assigned to witness to the remainder of mankind - to those casualties of the period(and perhaps of all ages),who constitute the less-responsible 'third world'. Of course, the three 'thirds' are not mathematical quantities. They are spiritual categories. The task may seem too simple to occupy a whole thousand years, but who knows

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(56) Daniel 12:1 & 2 (57) Deuteronomy 1:39
(58) Isaiah 35:8 (59) Compare the wilderness analogy with Isaiah 34 and with 40:3

whether those to be evangelized during this third period will not include many who have never previously had the chance of hearing the Gospel of Christ, or of responding to it? It is impossible to over-estimate the love, mercy and justice of a God, who gave His Son to be a ransom for **all** (60).

The Millennium and the Judgement

The millennium has been assumed to be a literal 'thousand-year' period in the above analysis. We can be confident that it is approximately (if not exactly) correct, unless it is some way of describing a time value larger than that of the longest-living man, according to the Bible (61).If the symbolism of the Protestant-historical school of interpretation were used in this case, the period of 1,000 years would have to be taken to mean 360,000, using the day-for-year principle. Yet, it is ludicrous to suggest that it would take such a long time to convert the remainder of humanity.

The actual sources of the Apocalyptic narrative should be taken into account. If the source had been Old Testament symbolism in prophecy then it would have provided us with a clue to the meaning of the symbols. In this case, the source is different. The reference is to a psalm (62) about the shortness of human life, where a thousand years are regarded as 'yesterday' in God's sight. The psalmist does not, in this case, mean a precise period of a thousand years, necessarily, but most certainly does not also mean 360,000 years. The words are a poetic approximation. This quotation from the Old Testament suggests that it will take about a thousand years to bring the rest of mankind to Christ, and to consummate the ultimate Kingdom. There is a

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(60) 1 Timothy 2:6 (61) that is, 969 years. See Genesis 5:27, or nearly 1000 years

(62) Psalm 90. See particularly verse 4

relationship between the source and the reference. The psalm asks God to be gracious to man for the remainder of his days. The reference uses 1,000 years as the rest of the days of mankind generally. The Millennium is patterned on the Christian era, but carries the principle of testimony and conversion to global dimensions. In other words, it does what the Christian era failed to do. In the Christian era the 'lives' (63) of those slain for Jesus' testimony 'reigned' over a large part of Christendom, and this led to a misguided over-reverence of the saints in some cases. When this 'reign' of the 'lives' of the saints ended, the forces of the 'false prophet' attacked Christendom from beyond 'Euphrates', and the Church's imperfect model of the City of God came to an end, signified by the death of the witnesses (64).

Now the process is being repeated with a perfect City of God. Instead of the imperfect City of God, there is a perfect one, in which those who have been resurrected in the first resurrection:

> "live and reign with Christ a thousand years" (65)

Instead of the onslaught on the church by the forces of the trans-Euphratean earth-beast, the forces of materialism, there will be an ultimate conflict on the ideal City of God by a final enemy associated with current materialism by the use of the same symbol, 'Gog and Magog' (66).Then the City of God is threatened once again, but on this occasion God is totally vindicated, and Gog destroyed.

The reference in the previous section to the two stages of the conflict with Gog (pre-millennial and

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(63) In the sense that 'saints' were venerated by the Church, particularly in the mediaeval period (64) See the earlier interpretation of Revelation 11 (65) Revelation 20:4

(66) Revelation 20:8

post-millennial) and the comparison between the Church (as an imperfect model of the City of God) and the millennial City of God can now be taken together as an explanation of the use of 'Gog and Magog' to describe a conflict scheduled to take place after the millennium. It is plain from the comparison between the related sections of the chapter that this final Gog-Magog conflict is the explanation of the words:

> "after that, he (the dragon) shall be loosed for a short season" (67)

and that there is no question of understanding the Gog-Magog conflict of this chapter to mean the pre-millennial conflict, simply by reference to Ezekiel's prophecy against Gog(68)even though some expositors have done so. Nor is it reasonable to suggest that both John's and Ezekiel's references to Gog and Magog are post-millennial, for Ezekiel's description of the conflict suggests an international war on Israel, and the primitive nature of Ezekiel's descriptions could hardly be (69) applicable to nations after a whole millennium of Christ's civilizing influences. Thus, Ezekiel's conflict is evidently pre-millennial, and has, of course, already been quoted in the previous chapter, where the birds of heaven are invited to devour the slain (50).

The only method of reconciling the two references is to suggest, as has already been done - that the conflict against Gog is in two phases and is interrupted by the millennium. Ezekiel's original prophecy (70) was written in a political context in which Gyges, king of Lydia would become confederate with the Assyrian Empire and the barbarous Scythians (Gomer) against Israel. The whole

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(50) Ezekiel 39:17-20 (67) Revelation 20:3

(68) Ezekiel chs 38 & 39 (69) See, for example, Ezekiel 38:5 (70) See, for example Bury: History of Greece pp. 111-2

Ezekiel conflict is transmogrified by John. The civilized west, godless Assyria and the uncivilized Scythians have their respective counterparts in the beast, the false prophet and the dragon respectively. Instead of fighting against Jerusalem, this new universal confederacy fights against the Holy City of God. In this new battle against a universal confederacy, the millennium is but an interlude. If this is appreciated, then it is reasonable that there should be quotations from the Ezekiel prophecy against Gog relating to both pre-millennial and post-millennial stages of the same conflict.

The redeemed of previous ages form the nucleus of the New Jerusalem which acts as the 'witnessing Church' of the thousand-year reign of Christ. Thus, the new witnessing period is like the old one, but with differences. In the 'Christian' period, a church of mortal imperfect beings witnessed to an ignorant mortal world, from which Christ was personally absent, though present in Spirit (71). For nearly all this period, the witnessing is 'partial', and thus, until the period immediately preceding the Second Advent, the world's responsibility is also partial. In the millennial period, on the other hand, a new Church of resurrected immortal beings testifies to the whole of mankind that has remained ignorant of Christ, (and may include the 'ignorant' of previous ages).These are 'judged' by their works, and allowed to enter through the gates into the City (community) . When the testifying is complete, all outside the City (who will finally war against it) will be those who have wilfully rejected the Gospel of the Son of God. Viewed in this way, the witness of the Millennial Church will be an extension of the witness of the present Church, with infinitely better and universal results.

Thus, the City of God will be a revived (and

(71) Matthew 28:20

resurrected) Church in which Christ and His resurrected martyrs will(72) actively participate. The world could be forcibly subjected to Christ, and some Psalms suggest this if they are read out of their context (73).But this has never been God's way of dealing with men. The 'knowledgeable' may be subjugated (and condemned) with a 'rod of iron' (73) but this remainder of mankind will be taught by the gentle witness of the City of God, in which Jesus and His 'saints' will participate. During this transitory stage, there (74)will be death and some disease. There will also be a few bad harvests. Thus, despite the 'miracles' of that age, there will still be a need for 'faith' to compensate witnessing, just as there has been in the past; as, for example, when Israel was nurtured on miracles for forty years in the wilderness. The Bible does not even state that during this period Jesus and His redeemed will openly manifest themselves to the 'unredeemed' world, even though all will see Him when He comes (75). It is most likely that He will be seen by those who enter the 'City' or 'company of the redeemed' during the period, and as the whole of mankind will be invited to enter the gates of the City and take their place among the redeemed during the millennium, it is reasonable to suppose that as the millennium progresses, the City's population will become larger, and the world's 'unredeemed' population will become smaller, though multitudes will remain in: "the four corners of the earth" (76) - even at the end of the millennium. It is reasonable to assume that the two opposites:(a) City(Jerusalem) and (b) four corners

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(72) Compare Revelation 20:4 with 20:11

(73) Psalm 2:9 and 149:8 (74) Isaiah 35 does not presuppose an end of all illness. See Isaiah 65:20 and Zechariah 14:16-19

(75) Revelation 1:7 (76) Revelation 20:8

of the earth - are not spatial, but spiritual opposities. In other words, the City is the company of the redeemed during the millennium, and the 'four corners of the earth' house the spiritual opposities, that is, those furthest removed from Jerusalem, those who reject the invitation to enter the City.

The latter community will not be swamped by evidence, but given sufficient to match the invitation to join the City by entering its gates. It is unreasonable to believe that the unredeemed population of the world will live by sight, rather than by faith, even during the millennium. The millennium is a period in which the witnessing 'church' of the period, New Jerusalem, obtains the confidence of the rest of the world, by invitation, but keeps its secrets for those who choose to enter it. It will, of course:"...rebuke strong nations afar off" (77) while the process of separation between the remaining good and evil of mankind is being accomplished. When the remaining 'good' people of the unprivileged world have been allowed to enter, by invitation into the City, it will be besieged and then **harassed** by the rest of mankind who will, at that time, be 'unredeemed' by choice. Thus, the ultimate Gog-Magog symbol will apply to the whole of the remaining unredeemed world. It is logical that the 'Gog and Magog' of this chapter should be transformed symbols. It is impossible to identify the descendants of Gog today with much accuracy. Far less will it be possible to do so at the end of the Millennium. As was stated earlier, in Ezekiel's time Gog (Gyges) had been a king of Lydia who had carried on a conflict with the barbarous Scythians and with Assyria. In Ezekiel's prophecy, however, all three nations are united, with others, to invade Israel. The prophecy is thus a signpost (in quotation) to represent all

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(77) Isaiah 2:1-4

world-wide confederacies against the people of God. Just as there' were essentially three sets of powers in the Ezekiel prophecy, so there are three in this case, dragon, beast and false prophet. In this case, the forces are separated, and the identification 'Gog and Magog' is reserved for the remnant of the confederacy, those 'dragon' people, who will form the ultimate enemy of the City of God. It should be clear from this comparison that the paragraphs comprising w.1-3 and w.4-10 are historical parallels, and this suggests that the remaining section of the chapter, vv. 11-14 may also be parallel with the other two. Let us place them alongside each other.

Time	vv. 1-3	vv. 4-10	vv. 11-14
Pre-millennial	'Dragon bound'		'Earth & Sky' flee
Millennial	'until the thousand years were ended'	"I saw thrones ….lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years'	"I saw the great white throne. ….death and hell gave up the dead. All were judged according to their works.'
Post-millennial	"loosed a little while"	"Satan loosed…" …the Gog-Magog rebellion. Dragon destroyed	Death and Hell destroyed

The table suggests that the judgement from the great white throne will, like the war on Gog, span a thousand years, in the sense that the thousand years, in which the conflict on Gog is halted, will be a period of judgement for the whole of the remnant of 'mankind' whether living or dead, in which people are taught the ways of God, and judged according to their works.

Note that the final conflict threatens the existence of the New Jerusalem, the Lamb's Wife or City of God. This suggests that the City of God will already be in existence during the Millennium, having been 'married' to the Lamb, at the beginning of it. Such a view agrees with' the concept of an invitation to the wedding at the beginning of the Millennium, as described in the previous chapter (78).It is therefore unnecessary to ask whether chapters 21 and 22 describe a situation which is millennial or post-millennial for the City that exists while the earth is being redeemed, is exactly the same city as that which will continue to exist when the process of redemption has been completed, and death and hell have been destroyed. In other words, chapters 21 and 22 are a description of the City of God, made without reference to time. That City begins to exist on earth at the beginning of the Millennium, and continues through time afterwards.

Thus, New Jerusalem begins to exist at the beginning of the Millennium and extends its influence over the earth until it is complete, when the last rebels are destroyed at the end of the Millennium (79). The reason for withholding the detailed description of New Jerusalem to the two final chapters is that it is first necessary to examine the criteria for entering the City.

This picture of the last judgement seems to be post-millennial by its position in the chapter, but this is only because the process of judgement is not completed until death and hell are destroyed at the end of the Millennium. The table on page 396 shows that the great white throne vision resembles the other two visions, in that it spans the whole of the Millennium. Structurally this narrative is similar to a passage in the Apocalypse of Ezra (80)

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(78) Revelation 19:7 (79) Compare Revelation 20:9 with 20:14

(80) 2 Esdras 7:28-32

in which the Messiah appears, then reigns for four hundred years, and then dies. His death is followed by a general resurrection, and judgement. The Apocalypse has already corrected the misconception that all are raised at the end of Christ's reign, by mentioning a 'first resurrection' at the beginning of the Millennium (81). As this passage is parallel (in time) to the previous two passages in the chapter, it is reasonable to conclude that both resurrection and judgement **span** the Millenium so that the disadvantaged 'dead' can be taught the Gospel of Christ during that period, then invited to enter the City, and finally judged by reference to whether or not they have entered it. In this way, death and hell are emptied of their contents, so that they can be destroyed at the end of the period. Thus, the gates of the New Jerusalem are opened as soon as Christ is 'married' to it, but the picture of judgement is a necessary antecedent to the description of the Celestial City.

It is imperative that Christ's own people should be raised at the beginning of the Millennium, so that they can rule with Him. But the Bible is silent on subsequent orders of priority in the final judgement and on how long it will take. Peter states that judgement must:"...begin with the household of God" (82).The description of the great white throne is an obvious parallel in time with:" I saw thrones and they sat on them" (83).It is also a synthesis of Old Testament passages which plainly talk of a judgement when Christ comes again, as in the case of Daniel 7. Yet (84) though the facts that:

(a) the vision is a quotation from Daniel's prophecy of Messiah's advent; and
(b) the description of heaven and earth flee-

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(81) Revelation 20:5
(82) 1 Peter 4:17 (83) Revelation 20:4
(84) Daniel 7:9-10

ing **are** references to the present world, (85)
are clear indicators that the vision commences at the beginning of the Millennium, the words: "..death and hell were cast into the lake of fire" (86) are a clear reference to the end of the Millennium.

It is thus impossible to escape the conclusion that the 'great white throne' spans the Millennium, and is therefore the millennial 'throne' of Christ, the centre and collectivization of the other 'thrones' of the previous sequence.

This is not to say that a thousand years are needed for judgement. God can dispense with time, and judge whole lives in seconds if He so wishes. But very large populations never came within the scope of the Christian message, and Christ died for all men. Whole populations, such as those of Tyre and Sidon, and of Sodom and Gomorrah are to be judged (87) as are the men of Nineveh. Whole nations are to stand before God when Christ comes to sit on His throne in glory (88). This process may indeed continue while the redeemed are winning the existing world to Christ. Though the Scriptures do not, of course, teach that there is a second chance for those who have rejected Christ, it is equally clear that Christ died for the whole of mankind. Thus, the Millennium could well provide opportunity for the countless people who have never had a previous chance, and thus rectify the anomalies of previous history, so that Christ reigns (89) until He puts all enemies under His feet, including the anomaly of apparent injustice to the 'unreached'.

Finally, the constituents of New Jerusalem will be complete, and all who have ever lived will be

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(85) See by comparison with 2 Peter 3:7 & 13 and Hebrews 1:10-11 (86) Revelation 20:14
(87) Matthew 10:15; 11:20-25, Luke 11:29-32
(88) Matthew 25:31 (89) 1 Corinthians 15:25

judged, won or lost. They will be judged according to their works (90), and won or lost according to their responsiveness to the Gospel. At the end of the Millennium, there will be no remaining anomalies. God could have condemned all men to die without opportunity, but He sent Jesus to die for all men. The apparently unjust charge that God has allowed men to die without their being reached by the Gospel is based on a continuing anomaly - that multitudes have died without ever having been reached by Christ. This anomaly has, to an extent, resulted from the 'partial' nature of the Church's preaching in previous ages, but is an 'enemy' of the justice of God, and Christ will put this 'enemy' 'under His feet' (91) during the Millennium.

At the end, the saying will be accomplished that: "Death is swallowed up in victory" (92).
If 'death' is taken to mean the 'place' or 'state' which contained all the dead of history, as in this chapter, then it can only be made redundant and empty if it holds no-one who has not either become eligible for the divine grace of Life in Christ, or sentenced to the perpetual destruction of the 'second death' (93).

As the people of the Millennium become progressively righteous and holy, they will be allowed to enter the gates of New Jerusalem, the 'camp of the saints' (94) either by transformation or by death and subsequent resurrection. In the end the group of malcontents who remain outside its gates (95) in the 'four corners of the earth' will do so by choice, and they will finally perish by means of the fire that descends from heaven (96). Thus, the world becomes God's dwelling with men.

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(90) Revelation 20:13 (91) Psalm 110:2
(92) 1 Corinthians 15:54 (93) Revelation 20:14
(94) Revelation 20:9 (95) Revelation 22:14
(96) Revelation 20 compare v.9 with v.14

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE CITY OF GOD

A Continuing City: New Heaven and New Earth: No More Sea: The New Jerusalem: The City's Dimensions: The Gates of the City: Jewelled Foundations: Paradise Restored

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A Continuing City

The Book of Revelation ends with the greatest vision in the whole Bible, the picture of the ultimate City of God. Expositors sometimes differ about the time period in which this vision is intended to be realized. Its position in the book after the vision of the millennium

1) suggests that it should be regarded as post-millennial. Yet, there are reasons why this cannot entirely be the case:
   (a) mention is made of those who are outside the City (2); and
   (b) the vision describes the 'healing of nations' (3) implying that the process of healing mankind has not yet been completed.

There is no reason why the vision should not be regarded as both millennial and post-millennial. It does not primarily relate to a period of time. It is about a city. The city is married to the Lamb at the beginning of the millennium, but it grows in

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(1) That is, in chapter 21 and 22, which are **after** chapter 20 (2) Revelation 22:15
(3) Revelation 22:2

size and importance until, at the end of the millennium, it finally contains all the inhabitants of the world, and the whole of redeemed mankind, and thus it remains for ever afterwards.

The first eight verses of chapter 21 are a summary of the whole vision and this summary is expanded in the remainder of the chapter, and in chapter 22. This is best demonstrated by the following table.

Description	Summary Account	Detailed Account
New Jerusalem, the bride of the Lamb	21:1-2	21:9-21
God's tabernacle with men	21:3	21:22-23
Healing for mankind	21:4	21:24-27
All things mad new, and the fountain of the water of life is opened	21:5-6a	22:1-5
Christ, the Alpha and the Omega blesses the redeemed, with words that are 'trustworthy and true'	21:6b-7	22:6-13
Warnings are evoked against various classes of immorality	21:8	22:14-15 & 18-19

New Heaven and New Earth

With this systematic tabulation of the details of the vision, it will be possible to consider the general features of it first, and thus, by dealing with the summary, consider much of the material in the more detailed description which follows.

The vision of a 'new heaven and a new earth' is based on a quotation (4) from Isaiah, which also includes the description of a Jerusalem as 'a rejoicing, and her people, a joy' (5).

In context, the Isaiah prophecy is clearly a description of the Messianic Age, and thus the

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(4) Isaiah 65:17-25 (5) Isaiah 65:18

earlier assumption that the chapters **include** the millennial period is again justified from the quotation. Other Old Testament prophecies are blended into the 'Isaiah' framework. In Hebrew and Greek, 'new earth' and 'new land' are identical phrases, and thus, by implication, there is reference to the prophecy in the earlier part of Isaiah, where 'rejoicing' also occurs. In Isaiah, the prophecy against Edom, with its apocalyptic figure, was compensated by a prophecy of Zion in the new age. But as we have seen earlier, the figures of Edom and Israel are not simply figures of unredeemed and redeemed in the Apocalypse. They are also, as a correction of Pseudo-Ezra, figures of the pre-Messianic and Messianic ages, of the present world and the 'world to come' (6).

The similarities may be tabulated thus.

Isaiah	Revelation
Prophecies against Edom, in which the Apocalyptic 'sword of god' is unsheathed (7)	Prophecies against the present age, in which the (11) 'sword of God' is unsheathed
'Smoke ascends for ever and ever (8)	'smoke…for ever and ever' (12)
An earth (land) produces water – springs (9)	'new earth' 'fountain of life' (13)
A highway to Zion (Jerusalem) for the 'holy' wayfaring men to be taught the ways of God (10)	'New Jerusalem for the 'nations' to enter the gates into the City (14)

(6) 2 Esdras 6:8-10 (7) Isaiah 34: particularly vv.1-4 (8) Isaiah 34:10 (9) Isaiah 35:6-7
(10) Isaiah 35:8 (11) Revelation 19:11-16
(12) Revelation 19:3 (13) Revelation 21:1 & 22:1
(14) Revelation 21:22-27 (15) Revelation 21:1

No More Sea

In John's vision, there is no more sea (15). Earlier in the book, the sea represented turbulent nations, those Gentiles who were completely unfamiliar with the ways of God. The evangelizing at the end of the Christian era will have removed this condition, for "the Gospel must be preached to all nations for a testimony - and then the end shall come" (16).

No longer will there be a turbulent, ignorant mass of people, for the people of God have been witnesses to all nations, and Christ will (16) have returned, and now the 'casualities' of the whole process are under the instruction of the people of God. They will be, technically speaking 'outside the City', as proselytes or 'godfearers' (17) but there will be both wheat and weeds (18) among them, just as in the Church of the present age. If they:"...wash their robes" (19); or to use an alternative reading - "do His commandments" (19) - they can enter into the City, through its gates - but, if on the other hand, they belong to any of the prohibiting categories of the chapter (20) and remain so, then they will remain outside the 'City' and perish in the final conflagration at the end of the millennium.

Thus, the end of the millennium is an incidental to the description of the City. It is simply the point in time when none will be left outside the City for: (a) those who have 'washed their robes' will

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(16) Matthew 24:14 (17) Psalm 118 ultimately applied following the invitation by quotation of Psalm 118:24 in Revelation 19:7

(18) Using the parable in its final sense, see Matthew 13:24-43 (19) Revelation 22:14 alternatively translated

(20) Revelation 21:8 & 22:15

be judged worthy to enter into it; and (b) those who obstinately remain outside it will have perished in the ultimate insurrection of mankind (21). Thus, in a symbolic sense, there is no more sea. Even the nations are now 'godfearers' and 'proselytes' working and waiting for entrance into the City, though there will be some 'weeds' among the 'wheat' of this period who will perish in the 'lake of fire' outside the City (22).

This is the primary sense in which the words 'no more sea' should be understood. But the sea is also a symbol of separation. It was that which separated John on Patmos from all that he loved, whether the visible Church, or the city of Old Jerusalem. In that age, there will be no more separation of that kind, for all things will have been 'gathered into one' (23).

Thus, the words 'no more sea' indicate that barriers will be removed, and this may also relate to the privileges that that time may bring to those who have been disadvantaged because of the failure of the people of God in all previous ages in the history of mankind. Earlier in this chapter, it seemed appropriate to classify them as the final 'wayfarers' who would tread the 'way of holiness' to New Jerusalem. This is not inappropriate, for Isaiah's contrasting pictures of the destruction of Edom, and the rejoicing blossom of New Zion are similar to those that introduce the second 'half of Isaiah, where the voice cries:

> "In the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, Make straight in the desert a highway for our God,
> Every valley shall be exalted,
> And every mountain and hill made low" (24)

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(21) Contrast Revelation 22:14 with 22:15 and see 20:10, 11 & 14. (22) Compare Revelation 20:9 with 10, 11 & 14 (23) Ephesians 1:10 (24) Isaiah 40:3 & 4

(25) Psalm 87, particularly verse 7

The themes are similar, for they relate to the removal of all obstacles .John was separated from Old Jerusalem by the sea. The 'wayfarers' of Isaiah 35 were separated from Zion by the wilderness. In the case of the exile of chapter 40, the separation took the form of 'mountains and hills'. In each of the cases there is a barrier of some kind that prevents the 'refugee' from escaping from the 'Babylon' of the present evil world. Now the barriers of the previous ages have vanished.

The New Jerusalem

The old city of Jerusalem was associated with the 'deep', for the wellsprings that issued from the site of the city were reputed to have come from the primordial abyss itself, and thus, the psalm could state: "All my springs are in thee" (25).When Jesus originally invited those who thirsted to come to Him and (26) drink of the living water, He did so at a rite, in which the words of the psalm were quoted together with a passage from Isaiah (27):

> "Ho, every one who thirsts,
> come to the waters;
> and he who has no money,
> come, buy and eat!" (27)

There is a contrast with the passage from the Psalms. Instead of (28) waters coming up from the deep, and welling from Jerusalem, they come down from the throne of God, and the Lamb (29). This is also true of New Jerusalem itself. It does not 'well up' from below, but descends from above. For God is its founder and fountain-head. He is its builder and maker (30).

The voice from heaven says:

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(26) John 7:37-39 (27) Isaiah 55:1
(28) See Psalm 87:7 and Zechariah 13:1 & 14:8
(29) Revelation 22:1 (30) Hebrews 11:10 & 16

"Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, "and then-
"He will dwell with them" (31).

These words are a parallelism in which the initial thought is developed - not simply by enriching their meaning in the usual poetic sense - but also in an historical way. In the Old Testament times, the glory of God was concealed in the Most Holy of the Tabernacle. This glory would only be seen by the high priest, when he entered the Most Holy once a year. When God tabernacled in Jesus (32) there was a complete contrast. The glory of God in Christ, the Word made flesh, full of grace and truth, could be seen by all. In other words, a glory that was secret in previous ages, revealed only to one person per year, became revealed explicity in Christ (33).

Yet, despite the fact that the way into the Holiest of All was opened by Christ at the crucifixion, this 'Way' has often been shrouded through the Christian era by the effect of Sinaitic Judaism on the thinking of Christendom, with its repetition of the concepts of 'holy' and 'most holy' in the construction of churches. In the age to come, the dwelling of God (the new tabernacle) appears in reality.

In the tabernacle of the Old Testament, the Most Holy was a perfect cube, which measured 10 x 10 x 10 (cubits) (34). Now, it is another perfect cube, for it will have been replaced by a City of staggeringly greater dimensions, measuring 12,000 x 12,000 x 12,000 (stadia) (35). But it is still the Most Holy Place. In the Christian era, the 'holy place' (sanctuary) of the tabernacle has been removed, for

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(31) Revelation 21:3 (32) John 1:14. The Greek word for 'dwelt' in this case should literally be translated 'tabernacled'
(33) 2 Corinthians 3:12-18 (34) Exodus 26
(35) Revelation 21:16

it represented that part of the tabernacle appropriate to the age of the Law of Moses. Thus, only the cube remains, that which was 1,000 cubic cubits, and is now 1,728,000,000,000 cubic stadia. The remainder of the tabernacle has no place because it represented the gulf between God and man that has now been abolished. Only the 'Most Holy' remains, and this is the Holy City - it is the dwelling of God with men (36).

Before considering the dimensions, it is appropriate to consider the picture of the 'new tabernacle', for it is, together with the picture of the city, partly quoted from the prophecies of Ezekiel. My earlier hypothesis that prophecies against Edom are used in Revelation to mean the 'old world' generally is again confirmed in the Apocalypse's use of Ezekiel.

In Ezekiel, God's promises to 'tabernacle' with His people Israel follow a series of prophecies against Edom (37), described as 'Mount Seir'. This promise to 'tabernacle' with Israel is then expanded in Ezekiel, after providing prophecies of the downfall of Gog and Magog. In Ezekiel, a new 'earthly' city of Jerusalem is described, whereas John describes the spiritual City of Jerusalem, the ultimate community of people among whom God dwells. Nevertheless, much of the description of John's City of God, such as the picture of the river, with trees on each side of it, is taken from Ezekiel's vision of the restored temple and city. It is appropriate that Second Isaiah's picture of a 'New Jerusalem' from which other relevant detail in the Apocalypse is taken, such as the quotation: "There shall be no more weeping", as "there shall be no

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(36) Compare Revelation 21:3 with w. 15-27

(37) Note the sequence: Ezekiel 35, then 37:27, then chapters 40-48

more pain" (38) also comes from a series of prophecies, which first includes the destruction of Edom, as a figure of the 'old world' (39) quite distinct from the earlier series in Isaiah, which was examined earlier.

The City's Dimensions

The comparison with the Most Holy place of the tabernacle may explain the 'cubic' nature of the City, but does not explain its dimensions, which are even greater than those of Ezekiel's City and Temple. Ezekiel's Temple is a square of 4,500 cubits, but the Celestial City is a cube of 12,000 stadia (1,500 miles).The measure, 12,000 stadia, is itself important. The 'firstfruits' of the great harvest of God were 144,000 - a number based on the 12,000 faithful (40) in Israel who were selected to perform a mission on behalf of Moses. The great harvest of God must, of course, be larger than the 'firstfruits' for it denotes:

> "myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands." (41)

The best expression of such a number, consistent with its being based on 12,000 is $12{,}000^3$, or 12,000 x 12,000 x 12,000.

The measure used for this and the following measurement are described as, 'according to the measure of man'. This provides the most valuable clue that the measurement is intended to define the countless number of people that the city contains. The other clue that the measurement relates

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(38) Again the sequence Isaiah 63, then 65:19, just as earlier the series was Isaiah 34, then 35:10 (39) In each of these cases there are prophecies against 'Edom' i.e. Isaiah 34, 63 and Ezekiel 35, before the pictures of the new age, and the New Jerusalem from which the Apocalypse quotes.

to people, not to distance is in the use of the word 'stadium', for this word, translated 'furlong' in earlier English translations, need not have been used, as the Roman 'mile' was larger. It was used because the word 'stadium' was associated with a completed 'course' of a race, and in the case of every one of the redeemed, the 'course' has been (42) completed, the race has been run. Thus:

(a) the City is cubic after the pattern of the Most Holy of the Tabernacle, for it is the Tabernacle of God with men;
(b) its dimensions are based on 12,000 as the measure of those whom God originally selected out of Israel to 'avenge' Midian;
(c) the cubic nature of the City makes the number 'countless' and a symmetrical description of 'myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands', which is itself based on 12,000; and
(d) the 'stadia' are not essentially a measure of distance, but of completed lives - completed 'races'.

Though the above summary provides what would seem to be the most satisfactory symbolic explanation of the City's dimensions, there are other (secondary) reasons for them.

1) Though the stadia are not essentially a measure of distance, it is interesting that if the description of the land covenanted to Abraham and his descendants is interpreted as extensively as possible, it includes the whole of the Arabian peninsula. Such an interpretation would involve a territory of about 1,500 miles square, or 12,000 x 12,000 stadia. The land, convenanted

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(40) See Numbers 31:5 compared with Revelation 7:1-8 (41) Revelation 7:9 and 5:11
(42) Acts 13:25;'1 Corinthians 9:24; Hebrews 12:1

2) to the Old Israel is typical of the ultimate extent of the redeemed. Thus, the dimensions are based on that distance. The text is, in essence, saying "As broad and long as the greatest possible limit of the land of promise, but as high as well" (43).
3) The City is 'foursquare', just like Ezekiel's City and Temple, but so much greater than, for example, Ezekiel's description of the city of Jerusalem, which, though foursquare, was only 4,500 cubits (44) in breadth and length. Thus, the text is also effectively saying: "So much greater than Ezekiel's Temple".
4) According to Herodotus, Babylon was 120 stadia square at the time of its greatness (45), and at that time Jerusalem was a comparatively small city. Effectively, the the text is showing us that the position has now been reversed. Babylon has been destroyed, and Jerusalem is 100 times as great as Babylon was, both in length and breadth, and considerably greater in height.

Despite these factors that enhance the meaning of the City's dimensions, there is no doubt that the dimensions are essentially symbolic, and should be taken to mean the vast number of people that the City will contain. It is for this reason that its height is as great as its other dimensions, suggesting that in Christ there is no differentiation between these measurement-directions, as Paul also indicated in his epistle to the Ephesians (46).

The Gates of the City

The great high wall has three gates per side,

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(43) Interpreting Genesis 15:18 extensively
(44) Ezekiel 48:30-35 (45) Herodotus: History 1:178
(46) Ephesians 3:14-19

just like the wall of Ezekiel's Temple (47). There is also a hint in the vision of other sources, such as Enoch's description of the twelve gates of heaven, from which winds were released to blow on the earth (48).

The Apocalyptic City contrasts with these sources, however, for:

(a) Ezekiel's twelve gates only admitted the twelve tribes of Israel, whereas, these gates admit the nations of the world; and

(b) Enoch's gates released influences on mankind, whereas these gates are for the admission of mankind into the City of God.

Indeed, the gates are not barriers. If the remainder of mankind:

"wash their robes," or
"do His commandments"(49)

- they are admitted through the gates into the City.

There are twelve gates, and twelve foundations of the **wall** of the city. The most obvious interpretation, given that there are twelve gates, and that there are twelve foundations to the **wall**, not to the City (50), is that the gates are at intervals between the foundations, and that the wall of the city is built over the gates and foundations, spanning each of the twelve pairs. The following diagram illustrates the plan of such a city.

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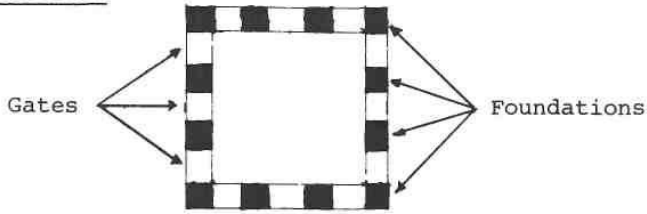
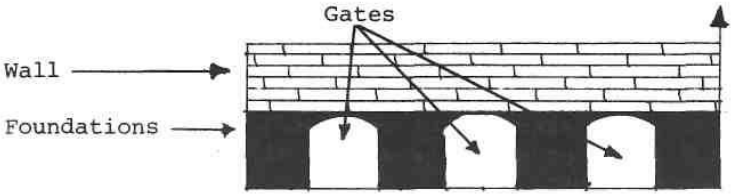
(47) Ezekiel 48:30-35
(48) 1 Enoch 76 & 34:3
(49) Revelation 22:14
(50) Revelation 21:19

1. The Plan



From the side, one of the walls would appear as illustrated below.

2. An Elevation



In the previous vision, those who had been martyred for Christ were depicted as sitting on thrones (51), and of them it was written:"...they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years" (51).In the early city-states, judgement took place often at the gates of a city. This practice is illustrated in the narratives of Ruth (52) and Samuel.
Thus, the picture of the 'twelve apostles:'.. sitting on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (53) would itself be associated with the gates of the New Jerusalem.

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(51) Revelation 20:4
(52) Ruth 4:1-2; Joshua 20:4; 1 Samuel 4:12-13; Genesis 22:17 (53) Matthew 19:28

But this picture is transmogrified in two ways.

(a) Though the gates are named after the twelve tribes of Israel in quotation of Ezekiel's prophecy (47) they are no longer the province of those twelve tribes, but for all nations; and

(b) The words 'apostle' (one sent out), and 'angel' (messenger) indicates that in that age, ruling will be equivalent to service, as Jesus Himself came "...not to be served, but to serve" (54).

The second feature in the transformation is illustrated by the facts that (a) **angels** stand at the gates of the City, and (b) the foundations are named after the twelve **apostles** of the Lamb.

The narrative effectively tells us that in that age, judgement will be blended with invitation. As in this age, the angels are:"...ministering spirits sent to serve those who are to be heirs of salvation" (55) - so in that age, judgement (52) at the gates will be blended with rulership, and with the invitation to be worthy, and enter into the City. The use of the angel-figure, combined with the concept of the apostles at the gates of entry, judgement and rulership indicates that these features are a combined and continuing function of those who 'rule' with Christ, and yet continue to judge, preach, invite and serve with Him.

Thus, the lives of the apostles are the foundations of the walls of the City. They maintain that standard on which the very remaining 'boundary' of the City is built, but the apostles themselves, with all others who have been redeemed, are now angels placed at the 'gates', not only to rule and judge (so that entrance to the City can be admitted) - but also as ambassadors to the remainder of man-

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(47) Ezekiel 48:30-35 (52) Ruth 4:1-2; Joshua 20:4; 1 Samuel 4:12-13; Genesis 22:17
(54) Matthew 20:25-28 (55) Hebrews 1:14

kind who are now being invited into the City, so that these who have been apostles, elect and martyrs of previous ages are now 'angels'. They are now also 'ministering spirits' sent to minister to those who are to be heirs of salvation in the future age.

Thus, the pictorial lesson in the wall of the City is a perfect one. The City's 'defence' is the foundation of well-ordered past lives, principally the lives of the apostles themselves, who with earlier men of faith:

> "... looked forward to the City that has foundations; whose builder and maker is God" (56).

But on the other hand, the 'gates' indicate that:

(a) there is still invitation to enter the City from the 'angels' who sit at the gates, who are also ministers, rulers, apostles and judges; and

(b) that the wall is not a barrier, for the gates are 'gaps' that remain to be filled by the good foundations of those that will(57) enter the City, and they are never closed until the City is complete.

All who love the New Zion, whether Israelite or not, are on pilgrimage to the City. Of them it can be said:

> "Our feet have been standing, within your gates O Jerusalem
> - Jerusalem, built as a City, having firm foundations; ...There thrones of judgement were set, - the thrones of the House of David" (58).

Jewelled Foundations

Having given some evidence to show that the

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(56) Hebrews 11:10 (57) Revelation 21:25
(58) Psalm 122:3 & 5

thrones of the previous chapter are in the gates of the City, and that the rulers are themselves not only judges but ministers (servants), we must consider its foundations. The precious stones adorn the foundations, indicating that these foundations are not buried (somewhere below the ground) but are, as we have suggested, alongside the gates of the City. Further, there is no reason for supposing that the foundations are placed in sandwich fashion like strata on top of each other. To interpret the chapter in this alternative way would suggest that each foundation could not fulfil its function fully. The association of the twelve apostles with the tribes of Israel suggests that the gates and the foundations are on the same horizontal level, and this is consistent with the teaching that in Christ all are on the same level, that is that none is higher or lower than any other. Yet there is an order in which the precious stones associated with the foundations are enumerated, and this order must be examined shortly. Before doing so, it should be stated that the reference is a synthesis of quotations from the Old Testament and the Apocrypha. The foundations are not solely associated with the apostles, for each of the precious stones were associated with one of the tribes of Israel in the breastplate of the high-priest under the Mosaic dispensation (59). Together with this reference to the high priest's breastplate (or breast-piece, as distinct from the usual military breastplate), there are two clear pictures of a jewelled city

> "0 afflicted, storm-tossed and not-comforted
> Behold I will set your stones in antimony
> and lay your foundations with sapphires
> I will make your pinnacles of agate,
> your gates of carbuncles
> - and all your wall of precious stones" (60)

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(59) Exodus 28:17-21
(60) Isaiah 54:11-12

Clearly, some of the description has been changed in the Apocalypse, just as the earlier statement: "Its gates shall not be shut day or night" (61) -becomes in the Apocalypse: "Its gates shall not be shut by day - and there shall be no night there" (62). The gates are of pearl in the Apocalypse, and the foundations are of dissimilar stones. The nearest similarity between Isaiah and the Apocalypse is in the words:" - and all your wall of precious stones" (60), which suggests the foundations of twelve jewels at the base of the walls as suggested in the previous section.

The second passage is from the book of Tobit:

"For Jerusalem will be built with
sapphires and emeralds,
her walls with precious stones
and her towers and battlements with pure gold.
The streets of Jerusalem will be paved
with beryl and ruby and stones of Ophir
all her by-ways will cry 'Hallelujah'!" (63)

The most significant contribution which this passage makes to the Apocalyptic description is its mention of gold in the description of towers and battlements. There are no towers and battlements in the ultimate City, for it must be a city of peace. Thus, in Revelation the street of the city is paved with gold instead, for this is associated with the towers and battlements in the parallelism of the Hebrew poetry on which Tobit's description is based.

Having seen that both these references (Isaiah and Tobit) are transformed in the Apocalypse, let us turn to the use that is made of the twelve stones of the high-priest's breastpiece in this book.

First let us tabulate the stones, signs and tribes, using the clearest association with the signs of the Zodiac, but **reading upwards.**

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(61) Isaiah 60:11 (62) Revelation 21:25
(63) Tobit 13:16-18

				Breastplate Order		
Stone (64) (65)	**Sign** (64)	**Tribe** (66)	**Hebrew** (64)	LXX	Heb	Eng
Amethyst	Ram	Manasseh	Ach'lamah	9	9	9
Jacinth	Bull	**EPHRAIM**	Sh'vo	4	8	7
Chrysoprase	Twins	Benjamin	Leshem	7	7	4
Topaz	Crab	Issachar	Iach'lom	2	6	2
Beryl	Lion	**JUDAH**	Shoham	11	11	11
Chrysolite	Virgin	Zebulon	Tarshish	10	10	10
Sardius	Scales	Asher	Odem	1	1	1
Onyx	Scorpion	**DAN**	Pit'dah	12	2	6
	Eagle	**LEVI**				
Emerald	Archer	Naphtali	Bareqeth	3	3	3
Agate	Goat	Simeon	Nophek	8	4	8
Sapphire	**Waterman**	**REUBEN**	Sappir	5	5	5
Jasper	Fishes	Gad	Iash'pah	6	12	12

Note that the order in which the precious stones occur reverses the normal order of the Zodiac. It commences with Pisces (fishes) and ends with Aries (ram). Imagination would suggest that the order is reversed because this is more consistent with progress in Christ. One starts by being rescued by water (fish) and progresses upwards through the table to association with the ram, the Lamb of God. The association of stones with tribes is provided not only because it depicts the Israelitish association of lion, ox, eagle and man (waterman) with the four camps of Israel, but because it associates these divisions with the whole of nature, as I suggested earlier in the book when discussing the meaning of the four living ones.

The Zodiac is usually ordered downwards through the table. This is the human order. It is the natural order, and it traces man's journey from

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(64) See Charles Revelation II (I.C.C) pp. 164-169 for the basis of the association with the Zodiac (65) Exodus 28:17-21 (66) Numbers 2

God. The Bible moves round the walls in the reverse direction depicting an ascension upwards through the table, for it traces the order of the 'Zodiac' in reverse, the order of progress back to God. The remaining columns are supplied:

(a) to give the Hebrew equivalents of the names of the stones; and
(b) to show that each of three orders of the stones of the high priest's breastpiece is imperfect, compared with the Apocalyptic order.

Only one of the three orders is, of course, correct. All three could not have been correct in the original Exodus text. But whichever order was correct was not perfect. Further, the stones were not even arranged in the order of the ages of the various sons of Israel, though, if the Septuagint order is to be regarded as correct, Reuben and Simeon, the two eldest, would appear in the middle of the breastpiece, and the other sons of Israel arrayed around them.

However, the Exodus order does not generally appear to be a systematic one. Perhaps this is because human nature is inconsistent. The high priest wore the names of the sons of Israel on his heart, but he wore the names of a disorderly and 'irregular' people. Because this order was imperfect it was not too important. Thus, it has come down to us in three different arrangements. We are presumably being told that the arrangement of this disorderly people did not matter, in comparison with the perfection of the new order, depicted in the foundations of the true City of God.

Thus, in contrast, the Apocalyptic order is a perfect one, for the New Israel are a perfect people whose names are written on the constellations of heaven. Not one of them is out of place, and in combination they are the perfect circle of the redeemed, all at equal altitudes and between the gates and under the protecting walls of the City.

The very use of the Zodiac carries the meaning of the City's constituents outside that set of twelve tribes for which the stones originally stood. For the use of the Zodiac indicates the universal scope of the celestial City, but the reversal of its usual order indicates the reversal of all that is natural. It is significant that the Living Ones do not appear as such in these chapters, for they represented that natural order of things that obscured God from man (67). They are no longer necessary in their 'guardian' capacity. God is no longer obscured, for nature has been redeemed. Instead of the four living ones there is the expanding millennial City in which God will be all in all (68). There is now no need for sun and moon. As objects of worship they (69) have long been 'punished' and 'confounded' in the earlier symbolism of the book. Now the City receives the light that proceeds from God and the Lamb, and as 'God' and the 'Lamb' appear in combination in the following chapter as the source of the water of life, we must conclude that the water of life and the light of God are two symbols with similar meanings.

Paradise Restored

The river of water of life that proceeds from the throne of God and of the Lamb is an extension of the promise of the 'fountain of water of life' in the introductory summary (70). It is a transformation of all previous pictures of paradise found in the Old Testament and in apocryphal writings. The four living ones do not appear in this Paradise, for there is no need to guard the Tree of

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(67) See the discussion of chapters four and five of the Apocalypse and Genesis 3.24 and Ezekiel 1 (68) 1 Corinthians 15:28

(69) Isaiah 24:21-23

(70) Revelation 21:6

Life by obscuring it from the insincere (71). The vision differs from those of Enoch and Ezekiel to which the text refers by quotation. Enoch (72) identified Eden as a seventh mountain of a seven-hilled city, where the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was described as a physically desirable tree, without any spiritual meaning to the vision. In the case of the Apocalypse it is clear that as both water (73) and fruit (74) are for healing, the meanings of both these materials are spiritual and that although some of the material of Enoch may be quoted, it has not its original literal meaning.

This is also true of the Ezekiel references, which are based on a tradition mentioned by Joel, that in the New Age living waters would proceed from Jerusalem (75). The Ezekiel references are clearly to be understood literally. The Apocalypse bases its symbolism on them, but is to be understood figuratively, for it combines the Genesis account of the Tree of Life (76) with Ezekiel's account of trees on each side of the river, that would be used for medicine (77). The original Tree of Life was forbidden (76). Many trees have edible fruit, but leaves that are not edible. Some produce at different times of the year. It is unusual for a tree to produce edible fruit and edible leaves, and to be fruitful at all seasons. The vision is a figure of the availability of the Word of God for the remainder of mankind in the future age. No longer are there the constraints of spasmodic production,

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(71) Using the meaning of the four living ones, to depict the natural order of things, which shows God exists, yet obscures Him

(72) Enoch 17-36 See my explanation of Babylon in chapter 13 (73) Revelation 21:6

(74) Revelation 22:2 (75) Joel 3:18. See also Zechariah 14:8 (76) Genesis 2:9 & 3:24

(77) Ezekiel 47:11-12

illustrated in the parable of the sower - and of the wheat and weeds (78) .The Word of God will be consistently available. The stream of water from the throne will be constant. The light of God and the Lamb, depicted by Malachi (79) as the healing beams of the Sun of Righteousness, will be continual.

In Ezekiel's vision the waters divided as they issued from the thresholds of the gates of the sanctuary (80). Given that the angels at the gates of New Jerusalem are ambassadors and teach all nations, the figure of water issuing from the Throne via the gates is an appropriate one. But in Revelation there is a difference. For Ezekiel's waters divide as they emerge from the gates (81). But these waters do not divide. In this respect they do not only contrast with Ezekiel's vision (81)but also with the Genesis picture of Paradise, where the river that proceeded from Eden divided into four distributaries. The kind of division in both these Old Testament reference is different. Eden's rivers did not all move in different directions, for Hiddekel and Euphrates were parallel to each other, while in Ezekiel's case the river from the temple divides and each of the distributaries moves in a different direction (81).

The Apocalyptic river contrasts with those of Eden and Ezekiel. The river that flowed from Eden parted to include two distributaries that flowed in the same direction and therefore watered some of the land outside Eden more than other lands. That river of Ezekiel and Zechariah, which flowed after its division in two opposing directions, can be taken to represent division and opposites. In this case, the river is undivided, and yet the witnessing and teaching are for nations that come

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(78) Matthew 13:1-43 (79) Malachi 4:2
(80) Ezekiel 47: compare verse 3 with verse 12
(81) Ezekiel 47:9 (Hebrew 'two rivers')

from all directions, so that, in a sense, although the river is undivided (the pure stream of Eden)it flows, by a strange paradox, in every direction, as the light of God, in which all nations can bathe, and 'wash their robes' (82).

Thus, the river of life is the light of God. It is a pure stream of light that moves in all directions from the Throne. Yet, again in paradox, though moving in every direction, it has only one real direction for its objective is to give enlightenment and eternal life to the remainder of mankind.

When this objective has been accomplished, the very light of the City (which is both 'fire' and 'water') will consume all that is inglorious outside the City, and death itself will be consumed in that lake of fire which is the second death (83).

For the fire that descends from heaven to consume all those who, by choice, remain outside the City at the end of Millennium, is identical with the lake of fire, and those outside the City will be destroyed by their own inability to stand the perfect glory that streams from a Perfect City, against which they alienated themselves and rebelled.

Thus, when the final destructive fire destroys the final rebels(84)and all who remain are members of the City, after the last millennial mortal has entered it, the dwelling of God will be complete, and God will be 'all in all' (85).

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(82) Revelation 22:14 - alternative reading
(83) Taking Revelation 20:9, 10 and 14-15 with 21:8 and 22:15 for reasons suggested earlier
(84) Compare Revelation 20:9 with 21:8
(85) 1 Corinthians 15:28

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

REFLECTIONS

The Themes: The Method: Relevance for Today

The Theme

Thus ends the most amazing of all messages. It was written in an age of apocalyptic writings, when people expected an ultimate battle in which God would save Israel from the nations. It does not deny that such a battle may occur, but serves for all time as an answer to a method of thinking that degrades that Day of the Lord to a physical combat and imagines that its nearness can be measured simply by reference to the frequency of signs of the times. Its nearness can, indeed, be measured, but not by reference to 'outward appearance'(1)-The best indicator of its nearness is the Church's success in a more essential battle - that of communicating the Gospel to the whole world, to make it accountable so that it may be judged without anomaly at the Second Advent. In the words of Jesus:

> "The Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached to the whole world for a testimony - then the end shall come" (2).

The Olivet prophecy had been given as the answer to 'sign-watching', yet its real message had been overlooked, and a greater answer to the tendencies of Jewish apocalyptic thinking had to be provided. Hence, the Revelation was given, as a true coin

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(1) Luke 17:21 (2) Matthew 24:14

among the comparatively counterfeit coins of apocalyptic literature that abounded in that age.

The message stressed that the greatest victory of all had already taken place. The Lamb had prevailed to open the 'scroll'. But God would not judge a world where a measure of responsibility had not been reached. To do so would be a travesty of the very justice of God. Thus, there was one task necessary, that of enlightening the world with the Gospel (2). This task did not even involve converting it. If the Church had carried out this task in the first century, the conditions of the Second Advent would have been present even at that time.

The horsemen sequence showed us that the natural processes of conquest, maturity, decay and death apply to all organizations and the very act of communicating can involve loss of vitality. Thus fresh starts are made; martyrs groan in patience for the process to be completed.

The great earthquake in the seal sequence is not simply an historical 'sign' of the victory of Christ over Roman paganism. It is a way of saying that all such 'earthquakes' in the progress of the Gospel are untimely if they are indifferently regarded as signs, and not grasped as opportunities to carry out the commission of the Olivet prophecy (2), and take the message of the Scroll to the ends of the earth.

Communication endeavours to express concepts in the 'medium' of the world, and thus the very process of communication can involve loss of purity. The seal sequence continues with a vision of puritanical separation in partial response to a 'sealing' instruction. But even this human set of failures will have positive results, and save an innumerable multitude in the end.

The trumpet sequences show that when the coverage of the Gospel is partial, there can only be

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(2) Matthew 24:14

partial judgement. The Church is effectively compared with the Old Israel, who by failing to conquer the land completely and by tolerating idolatry, brought judgements on itself. In this case, partial success of Christian testimony can produce a spiritual (or better, an unspiritual) invasion. The Church is invaded by the forces of superstition, and by a resurgence of paganism in a more knowledgeable and powerful form.

The comparison of the Church with the two kingdoms of Israel is continued in the drama of the two witnesses, the parable of the divided Church, trying to carry out the ministry of Christ, but using all the methods of Old Testament prophets. Finally, the institutional Church dies, and receives a revival which enables it to complete the terms of the Olivet prophecy, and to carry its message to the ends of the world, thus completing the conditions necessary for the Second Advent to occur.

In the second part of the book, similar themes occur in different ways. The remnant of the woman's 'descendants' are the uncompleted work of Christ. The war with evil (the dragon) must continue until the elect's 'number' has been made up. The triad of beasts in the Apocalypse may be based on prophecies against the political oppressors of Israel in the Old Testament, but in the Apocalypse the whole battle is fought on a different plane. The beasts are three phases of the world as a **spiritual** force, and as opposed to Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the creation, salvation and completion of the Church as the nucleus of the ultimate Kingdom of God.

The vision of the heralds is an account of the opposing dangers with which the Church has been faced, and although the sequence can be interpreted as an historical sequence, this could have taken a longer or shorter time than it did, for the prophecy is not intended merely to be a prediction, but a prescription. The Church may contain those who

search for purity and abandoning the world, sing a song that no one is able to understand - or it may simplify its message to win the largest number of people to Christ. The first of these extremes may result in a failure to communicate the Gospel, while the second may involve the loss of purity that simplification can sometimes produce. Yet, ultimately the winepress will be full, and the world will be ripe for the judgements of God. In the final section of the Apocalypse there are two fundamentally different pictures of the world. The first is Babylon, and it is also perverted Eden, as the seven-hilled figure illustrates. The second picture is that of New Jerusalem. It is also a picture of Eden restored.

The Method

The Apocalypse is a mould into which every conceivable reference is poured. It contains quotations from Old and New Testaments, from the writings of pagan Greeks and others, from the Jewish Pseudepigraphia, the Apocrypha, and the very antecedents of the Nag-Hammadi library of Gnostic literature that was to follow. Yet, its level of communication is unique, for there is never any concession to those writings. Their symbolism is transformed, and teaches a new and spiritual view of the world, which many expositors have tended to debase by their very attempt to use them in explaining the Apocalypse without reference to the non-national and non-literal character of Apocalyptic symbolism.

This is particularly true of Babylon and Jerusalem. The city of New Jerusalem is truly non-national and 'universal', to the extent that it represents all who have successfully availed themselves of the offer of life in Christ, irrespective of their race or nation. If this is true, then the antithesis must also be true, and Babylon must also

be universal. It must represent the whole of unredeemed mankind. The very conclusion that Babylon cannot represent Rome, or old Jerusalem or some other evil city must transform our understanding of the **other** symbols of the book. It is inconsistent to think that the two cities New Jerusalem, and Babylon the Great can represent the whole of the redeemed and unredeemed sections of mankind respectively, and then suppose that the smaller entities, such as beasts and witnesses can be interpreted by reference to some single city, nation, race or sect. Sections of mankind occur in the book, but these entities are not defined by their race or colour or political persuasion. They are defined by reference to their reaction to the message of Christ.

Relevance for Today

Nearly two thousand years have passed since John was given his message. It tried to answer contemporary 'nationalistic' apocalypses by producing an Apocalypse to end all apocalypses, a sublimation of all apocalyptic symbols. It tried to counter-act sign-seeking by stressing the Church's role in bringing about the conditions necessary for the Second Advent to occur. But, just as the sign-seeking readers would ignore the essential condition of the Olivet prophecy, that the Church must preach to all nations before the end could come, so they would also interpret the Apocalypse as a serial set of political prophecies, and ignore its essential lessons which relate to the interaction between the Church and the world. Before the ink was dry on the parchment, men were beginning to identify the villains of the book with pagan Rome, and later they identified these same villains with papal Rome, the Saracens, the Turks, Russians, Jews and Arabs.

Such treatment ignored the Book's own warning

not to add or subtract from its message (3) , and gave its enemies an opportunity to treat it like any of the Jewish apocalypses written during the period, and even accuse John of copying not only their symbols but their partial and nationalistic message.

In this book I have attempted to stress the spiritual realities underlying the Revelation and thus do something remotely similar to what John attempted to do in the first century. In his day, when political and nationalistic apocalypses were raging, the Revelation was written to divert the minds of the elect from the politics of national conflict to that greater battle between the Church and the world. But after his days, its message was so often nullified by those who applied to it the same canons of interpretation as were applied to Old Testament prophecy, particularly Daniel, and to those apocalypses written in the period between the testaments. Thus, in the twentieth century, when there is a market for horror, and when futuristic expositions of the Apocalypse are as abundant as were 'political' apocalypses in John's time, the whole purpose of the Apocalypse could be missed if its spiritual message is debased to a set of horrific signs that will precede the Second Advent, for such debasement endangers it to be regarded as just one more Jewish apocalypse, though it indeed originated from the Lord Himself! This interpretation has tried to stress its spiritual character - as an Apocalypse to end apocalypses, with a message much different from them, but which political interpreters have disgraced by identifying it with them - in suggesting literal, racial, national and local interpretations.

I trust that I have tried to raise the character of interpretation by showing that the book's character is not political, but spiritual, and that

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(3) Revelation 22:18-19

it is an account of the age-old battle between the spiritual forces of good and evil, reapplied to the conflicts of the Church in its testimony to the world. Thus, the book is prescriptive rather than predictive. For its prescriptiveness lay in showing the Church of John's day what must be done, before the Second Advent could occur.

In the first chapter I compared the Apocalypse with the burning bush. Just as the burning bush was similar in appearance to those many other bushes that burned in the wilderness, so the Apocalypse has a similarity of appearance with all other apocalypses that 'burned' during John's time. But appearances are not to be trusted. Just as the other wilderness fires were 'consumed' and the one burning bush that captured Moses's attention carried on burning, so the Christian Apocalypse has fired the imagination of all generations, while the apocalypses of the period have generally burned themselves to cinders, and have (with the possible exception of the Apocalypse of Ezra) received little attention until their rediscovery in relatively modern times. Throughout this time the Christian Apocalypse has kept burning and has not been consumed, because of the presence of the One within. Who calls us to testify to a greater Egypt (4) so that its final judgement can come, and the true exodus of the people of God can be completed.

Ultimately, the fires of this human wilderness will have done their work, and the Tree of Life will become all important, together with those waters that flow alongside it. But before that can take place, we must be impelled by this Christian equivalent of the Burning Bush. For the Apocalypse is Christ's Revelation to us, as the burning bush was God's Revelation to Moses - and the purpose of this revelation is not that we should simply be fascinated by its fiery character. Nor is it that

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(4) Exodus 3:5. See also Revelation 11:8

we should linger, as Moses did, listening to the Voice and excusing our own inability to carry out its instructions. It is that we should be Christ's ambassadors to the world, as Moses was God's ambassador to Egypt.

We cannot convert the world, for only the Israel of God will respond and be converted, and leave the bondage of Egypt. But we can inform and enlighten the world, just as Moses informed and attempted to enlighten Pharaoh.

Finally, Moses returned from Egypt to Mount Sinai with the great company which he helped to save. We also shall return to Mount Zion (5) with the redeemed of the Everlasting God. For our destiny is not the mountain that burned with fire, with its darkness, gloom and tempest. Instead, it is the celestial city of Jerusalem, descending from heaven - from God (6). It is the heavenly Zion, with its innumerable company of angels, and with those of all ages, who looked for that City, having foundations - whose builder and maker is God (7).

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(5) Isaiah 35:10
(6) Hebrews 12:18-24 and Revelation 21:2
(7) Hebrews 11:10

Bibliographical Note

This book would normally have included an extensive bibliography of all expositions and other material consulted in writing it. To have done so would have unnecessarily increased its size and cost at this stage. It is intended to publish the bibliography independently at a future time. Meanwhile, the footnote references will partly compensate this deficiency.

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