

## **The Vision of Various Personages and Events (Rev. 12:1 - 14:20)**

### **The Woman and The Dragon**

*12:1-2 A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth.*

Chapter 12 of Revelation holds before our eyes three distinct scenes: (1) the futile efforts of Satan to destroy Christ while Christ was here on earth; (2) the equally unsuccessful efforts of Satan to destroy the Church of Christ; and (3) the desperate attempts of Satan to destroy the individual members of Christ's flock. We must realize that in the first six verses of this chapter we do not see future events. In a symbolic manner, John gives us a brief glance of Christ's life here on earth from His birth to His ascension; and that life appears before our eyes like a flash. We see Him born, and the next moment, as it were we see Him ascending to heaven.

“A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven,” indicating an unusual spectacle or event. It is a breathless scene that John is privileged to behold, - “a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head.” Since twelve is the number of the Church, and since the woman wears a crown of twelve stars on her head, there can be no doubt that the woman symbolizes the Church; and John here sees the Church in her real glory. The heavenly splendor of the Church is symbolized by the fact that she has the sun as a robe and the moon as a footstool, expressing the influence she exerts in the rule of the universe.

We are told that the woman “was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth.” No; this woman is not the Virgin Mary. As we have just mentioned, the woman represents the entire Church, - all true believers in both

the Old Testament and the New Testament. God's faithful people in the Old Testament yearned for the coming of the Savior, just as a pregnant woman yearns for the birth of her child. Indeed, the cry of travail fills the Old Testament. Like the venerable and aged Simeon, there were many who anxiously were "waiting for the consolation of Israel" (Luke 2:25).

Someone else also was waiting for the birth of the Child, but for an altogether different purpose, as we shall see from the next verses.

*12:3-4 Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born.*

There can be no doubt that the "enormous red dragon" is Satan. He is depicted as a fierce monster, possessing a beastly cruel power. Red, the color of blood, is also a hellish color, and it may symbolize the fact that Satan is a murderer. He is described further as having seven heads and ten horns, indicating his wisdom and great power. The seven crowns on his heads are not crowns of victory, but "diadems."

The "diadem" was a ribbon, bound around the head as a mark of royalty. It was worn by some of the Roman emperors, who demanded to be regarded and worshiped as gods. That Satan is here pictured as wearing such "diadems" is significant; for certainly, Satan strives to usurp and arrogate to himself the power and dominion which alone belongs to God. The Apostle Paul refers to Satan as the "god of this world." Indeed, the devil desires to be God and he would have all men bow down before him. He even took Christ "to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.'" (Matt. 4:8-9).

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We are told furthermore of Satan: “His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth.” This could be a reference to Jude 6: “The angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home...” Scripture does not tell us very much about the original fall of the angels. However, it is an accepted fact that Satan, the leader of this rebellion, drew other angels with him. The fact that these angels lost their home in heaven is perhaps expressed in the words: Satan “flung them to the earth.”

This dragon, the devil, “stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born.” After the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, God said to the serpent, the devil: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Gen. 3:15). To avoid this fatal blow, Satan was determined to destroy the Child as soon as He would be born.

*12:5 She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne.*

Here we have the incarnation in Revelation. The pregnant woman is the Church, - pregnant with the promise of the coming Messiah. At the proper time “she gave birth to a Son.” There can be no doubt that this male Child who is born is the Christ. The inspired Prophet Isaiah, speaking to and for the Church in his day, stated it very beautifully when he said: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Is. 9:6). This “male Child” will “rule all nations with an iron scepter.” The iron scepter symbolizes the strength of the Messiah’s reign. Since the heathen rage against the Lord and His Anointed One (Psalm 2), they are treated to an iron rod; and with this iron scepter the Messiah rules over the raging heathen and their leaders throughout the New Testament era.

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However, in this birth of the Child, we must not only think of the event that took place in Bethlehem of Judea nearly two thousand years ago. We must include in this birth the entire life of Christ on earth, from His incarnation to His ascension, - His ascension being expressed in the words: “Her child was snatched up to God and to his throne.”

The main point that is emphasized in these verses, however, is the fact that throughout Christ’s life here on earth, - from His Birth to His ascension, - the devil’s primary objective was to destroy Christ and to undermine His work. How clearly this is brought out in the Gospel records. Think of the satanic attempt to destroy the Christ-child when Herod issued the command “to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi” (Matt. 2:16). Think of the experience that Jesus had at the very beginning of His public ministry when He was tempted by the devil in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11). Recall the extremely large number of demon-possessed people with whom Jesus came into contact, and see how He cast the devils out of these afflicted people. Recall also how Satan worked through Jesus’ disciples in an attempt to prevent Jesus from accomplishing His mission. When Jesus on one occasion told His disciples of His impending death and resurrection, “Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ‘Never, Lord!’ he said. ‘This shall never happen to you!’ Jesus turned and said to Peter, ‘*Get behind me, Satan!* You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men’” (Matt. 16:22-23). Or think of how Satan prompted Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus (John 13:2).

Certainly, it is comforting to know that Satan was unsuccessful in every one of his attacks against Christ. Although Satan perhaps boasted of being victorious when the Son of God bowed His head in death, yet that death on Calvary’s cross was the blow that crushed the serpent’s head. Very appropriately, therefore, does Scripture say of Jesus: “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work” (I John 3:8). Christ Jesus is the Victor! The devil is the defeated foe!

*12:6 The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.*

The brief statement concerning the woman, who symbolizes the Church, is described more fully in the concluding verses of this chapter (v. 13-17). You will observe that when Jesus ascended into heaven, the Church was not snatched up to God and to His throne. The Church must remain on earth to fulfil her God-given mission; and we are reminded of these words of Jesus in His high-priestly prayer: “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified” (John 17:15-19).

“The woman fled into the desert.” In a certain sense, we might say that the Church is in exile. This earth is not her real home; her real home is in heaven. The “desert” need not necessarily imply a wasteland, but rather a place of refuge. Here she will “be taken care of for 1,260 days,” or, in other words, throughout the entire New Testament era.

With the Lord as her Care-taker and Provider, the Church need have no fears. As God provided manna for the Children of Israel in the wilderness, as God sent ravens to feed Elijah at the Kerith Ravine, so the Lord will nourish and sustain His Church throughout the New Testament era with His life-giving Word. In addition, He will guard and protect her so that Satan will never be able to destroy her. Vicious attacks may be made against her, and the storms of persecution may rage in all their fury; but we can be absolutely certain that the Church will never starve or die during her stay in the “desert.”

*12:7-9 And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down - that ancient*

*serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.*

As a brief summary of these verses, we might say that the war described here does not refer to the original fall of the angels, which occurred prior to the fall of Adam and Eve. The song of victory that followed this war seems to indicate that there was a great struggle in which Michael and the good angels fought against the dragon and the evil angels. In symbolic language, John is telling us that the devil has been defeated and that he has lost his ability to accuse the Christians before the throne of God. That, briefly stated, is the meaning of this “war in heaven.”

While there are some differing views regarding the identity of Michael, yet from Dan. 10:13 we conclude that Michael was an angel of superior rank. We know that the angels of God are interested and concerned in the redemptive work of Christ. A multitude of the heavenly host appeared in the sky on the night that Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea (Luke 2:13). After Jesus had overcome the temptations of the devil in the desert, we are told that angels came and ministered unto Him (Matt. 4: 1 1). When Jesus prayed so ardently in the Garden of Gethsemane, “an angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him” (Luke 22:43). At the time that Jesus was arrested, He said that He could have had at His disposal “more than twelve legions of angels” (Matt. 27:52). Angels were present at the resurrection of Jesus and also at the ascension of Jesus into heaven.

In 1 John 3:8, we are told expressly that Christ Jesus appeared in the flesh to destroy the works of the devil. It was a terrific battle. Jesus endured unspeakable agony, suffering and death by crucifixion; but thus He destroyed the works of the devil, He crushed the serpent’s head. The war which John saw in his vision, - the war of Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon and his angels, - is a representation of the battle in which Christ decisively defeated Satan and deprived him of any right to accuse or condemn us before the throne of God.

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In addition to being called “the dragon,” this arch-enemy of God and man is also called (1) the “ancient serpent,” because he was the “serpent” who tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden; (2) the “devil,” because he is a slanderer, a liar and the father of lies; and (3) “Satan,” a word which means “accuser.”

Furthermore, he is characterized as the one “who leads the whole world astray;” and certainly, it is pathetic to see the many ways employed by the devil to deceive people and to lead them astray. Think of the many religions in our day that have no room for Christ and His atoning sacrifice, but teach instead that man can save himself by his own good works and upright life. Think of how the seriousness of sin is ignored and how people are led to believe that each generation has a right to establish its own standards of morality. Think of the desperate attempts on the part of individuals and entire nations to eradicate Christianity from the face of the earth. Think of the numerous cults that have mushroomed throughout the world, many of them advocating Satan-worship. Think of some of the legislation enacted today, - legislation that is designed to undermine certain Biblical truths. Think of how the worldly life is pictured in glamorous terms, while the Christian way of life is scorned and ridiculed.

Nevertheless, because of the death, the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus, the devil is truly a defeated foe. We are told that “he was not strong enough,” - that he and his angels “lost their place in heaven,” - that “he was hurled to the earth and his angels with him.”

The great effect of Christ’s enthronement is that Satan no longer has the ability or power to accuse us before God. In Rom. 8:1 we are told: “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” And again we read: “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?” (Rom. 8:33).

The great dragon was “hurled down” or “thrown out.” Speaking of His impending death, Jesus had said: “Now is the time for the judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be *driven out*” (John 12:31). On another occasion, when Jesus told the seventy disciples to rejoice because their names were written in heaven, He prefaced His remark by saying: “I saw Satan *fall* like

lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18), his power to accuse us and to prevent our names from being recorded among the blessed being gone forever.

The fact that Satan no longer can accuse the people of God undoubtedly will explain his intense hostility against God’s people in the last days. “He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.” These words describe Satan’s defeat as decisive, absolutely complete.

*12:10-12 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.”*

The loud voice from heaven confirmed what was said concerning the defeat of Satan and the significance of that defeat. Since Satan has been “hurled down,” and since he has lost his ability and power to accuse the people of God, we can now rejoice in the fact that there is nothing to prevent the coming of God’s salvation and God’s power and God’s kingdom; nor is there anything that can restrict or limit the authority of Christ.

“For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.” These words very definitely portray Satan as a relentless prosecuting attorney. By day and by night he appears before the throne of God to bring charges against God’s elect. It is rather ironical that he who tempts people to fall into sin is the same one who accuses them before the bar of divine justice and demands their punishment; but that is characteristic of Satan, that is the way he operates. How thankful we ought to be, therefore, that by His death on Calvary’s cross, Christ defeated Satan and deprived him of his power as



a prosecuting attorney. The mouth of the great accuser has been stopped. Salvation indeed is complete!

It is true, as long as Christians live here on earth, they still daily sin much; but Satan can no longer successfully accuse them. They have overcome him because of “the blood of the Lamb.” Here we come face to face with the central teaching of Scripture, namely, that “the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Because the Son of God shed His holy, precious blood as full payment for all of our sins, Satan no longer can accuse us. How beautifully this is expressed in Paul’s Epistle to the Romans: “If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died - more than that, who was raised to life - is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us” (Rom 8:31-34).

Christians have overcome Satan also because of “the word of their testimony,” namely, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The sum and substance of the Gospel is that God, for the sake of Jesus, forgives all of our sins and declares us just. Every one who accepts this Gospel message in true faith is in possession of this divine pardon. Having thus already been acquitted by God, it follows that Satan can in no way bring further charges against us.

Furthermore, we are told of the “brothers,” the people of God: “They did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.” Indeed, many Christians in John’s day chose to suffer martyrdom rather than to deny their Lord and Savior. The Gospel of Christ Jesus, which offered them complete pardon and the gift of eternal life, was far more precious to them than their physical life. Even today, true Christians value their spiritual life and the certainty of eternal life more highly than their physical life. While we pray that God would preserve us from bloody persecutions, yet, if these persecutions should come, we are convinced that the true people of God would not love their physical lives so much that they would refuse to suffer death for the sake of their Savior and His Gospel.

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The devil is a vanquished foe! His accusations against God's people are of no avail! "Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them!" We, too, who have our citizenship in heaven, have every reason to rejoice. Freed from the power and the accusing voice of Satan, knowing assuredly that we have been cleansed from all sins by the blood of Christ, and having the divine promise that a place in God's heaven is awaiting us after the days of our earthly sojourn are done, we certainly have every reason to rejoice and give thanks to our great God and Savior.

"But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short." Judgment day has not yet come; and while Satan has lost his power to accuse those who are in Christ, he has not as yet been cast into "the lake of fire." We still are living in that period of 1,260 days during which the holy City is trampled by the Gentiles; and the devil is determined to take as many people as possible with him into everlasting damnation. Hence, "he is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."

Having been thoroughly defeated in his battle against Christ, and knowing that the end of all things is at hand, the devil now levels his attacks against the Church on earth. This is brought out in the remaining verses of this chapter.

*12:13-14 When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach.*

The sixth verse of this chapter already told us that after Christ's ascension into heaven, the woman, who symbolizes the Church, fled into the desert, where God had prepared a place for her, and where she was nourished for 1,260 days, or, throughout the entire New Testament era. Beginning with verse 13, we now learn more about this feature.

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“When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth,” that is, when Satan realized that Christ, by His death, resurrection and ascension into heaven had gained the victory over him, he directed his attacks against the Church of Christ, pursuing “the woman who had given birth to the male child” in order to destroy her.

But God protected the woman (the Church) by giving her “the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert.” The phrase, “wings of an eagle,” symbolizes God’s protective care for His people. We are reminded of God’s words to the Children of Israel: “You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you *on eagles’ wings* and brought you to myself” (Ex. 19:4). As the people of God in the Old Testament suffered persecution in Egypt, the land of bondage, so the Church of Christ on earth, until the end of days, will be attacked by Satan and his allies. But as God granted deliverance and protection to His people of old, so even today He protects His Church, preparing for her a place of safety “out of the serpent’s reach,” and providing her with the spiritual manna, the “Bread of Life.” We would emphasize once again, however, that the Church, symbolized by the woman, is the whole number of true believers in Christ (the invisible Church), and is not to be confused with any visible church organizations.

The Church is taken care of in a place prepared for her in the desert. This ought to remind us Christians once again that we are but pilgrims and sojourners here upon earth, and that here we have no permanent dwelling place. Heaven is our real home, and, as we sing in one of the hymns, “earth is a desert drear.” Nevertheless, throughout the “time, times and half a time,” that is, throughout the New Testament period, the members of Christ’s Church need never succumb to fear; for the Lord is ever-present to take care of His Church, to nourish her, to protect her, and to grant her divine help against the wiles of the devil.

*12:15-16 Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and*

*swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.*

The devil does not give up; nor will he give up until the time when he shall be cast forever into the lake of fire. Here we are told that “the serpent spewed water like a river” from his mouth in an attempt to sweep the woman away. This river of water is symbolic of the waves of delusions and false doctrines that originate with Satan and by which he would cause the Church of Christ to be moved from the solid foundation of the Word of God. But the eagerness of the ungodly inhabitants of the earth to drink in all these demonic teachings actually helps the Church to recognize and evaluate these false doctrines for what they are, namely, delusions of Satan.

As one example, we might mention the satanic theory of evolution. While this demonic doctrine has been accepted with great eagerness by the inhabitants of the earth, it has not been able to destroy the faith of the true believers in Christ. If anything, it has strengthened their faith in these opening words of Scripture: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1).

St. Paul describes the gullibility of the people of the earth in these words: “For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths” (2 Tim. 4:3-4). But in spite of it all, the true Church will continue to stand on a solid foundation, - “on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (Eph. 2:20).

**12:17**      **Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring – those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.**

The devil had failed in his attempt to defeat and destroy Christ; he had failed in his attempt to sweep away the Church of Christ; now, enraged at the

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woman, he “went off to make war against the rest of her offspring,” that is, against the individual members of the Church.

The children of the Church are described as “those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.” The “testimony of Jesus” is the Gospel of Christ Jesus. True Christians are people who, by the power of the Holy Spirit, have accepted the Gospel in true faith and thus know that all their sins are forgiven, that God is their loving Father, and that heaven is their eternal home. Having thus become God’s children by grace, through faith, they also, by the power of the selfsame Spirit, strive to obey God’s commandments in order to show their love and gratitude to Him who has done so much for them.

The devil knows full well that, as he could not destroy Christ, so he cannot destroy the Church of Christ as an organism. Consequently, until the end of days, he will now have as his targets the children of the Church, the individual believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, doing his utmost to destroy their faith and thus cause them to forfeit their membership in the Church of Christ.

How important it is, therefore, that each and every member of the Church heed well these words of the inspired Apostle Paul: “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests” (Eph. 6:10-18).

### **The Beast Out of The Sea**

*13:1-2 And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority.*

Concerning the two beasts that are described in this chapter, - the beast coming out of the sea and the beast coming out of the earth, - we can make the following positive statements: both beasts receive their power from the devil; both beasts are agents of the devil and serve the devil's purposes; and although both beasts are powerful enemies of the Church, yet they will be unable to inflict any permanent damage on God's elect.

We feel very strongly that the beast which John saw coming out of the sea is a symbol of secular government. This vision of John is very similar to the vision which came to the Prophet Daniel in the Old Testament. Concerning his vision, Daniel said: "Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea" (Dan. 7:3). Then the prophet proceeds to give this description of the four beasts: "The first was like a lion;" a second beast "looked like a bear;" a third beast "looked like a leopard .... This beast had four heads, and it was given authority to rule;" the fourth beast "had ten horns." Since the third beast in Daniel's vision had four heads, it is evident that the four beasts had a total of seven heads.

The characteristics of these four beasts mentioned in the Book of Daniel are combined in the beast that John saw coming out of the sea. John states that this beast "resembled a leopard;" that he had "feet like those of a bear;" that he had "a mouth like that of a lion;" and that he had ten horns and seven heads. What an amazing similarity we have in the vision of Daniel and that of John! But what does it all mean?

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Concerning the four beasts in Daniel's vision, we are told very definitely: "The four great beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth" (Dan. 7:17). On the basis of chapters two and eight in the Book of Daniel, these four kingdoms are rather easy to identify. (1) The lion symbolizes the neo-Babylonian empire, also known as the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar. (2) The bear symbolizes the Medo-Persian empire. (3) The leopard represents the empire of Alexander the Great. After Alexander's death, his empire was divided into four kingdoms; and these very likely, are symbolized by the four heads of the third beast. (4) The fourth beast, un-named, seems to point to the Roman empire; and the ten horns of this beast may refer to the many kingdoms that arose from the ruins of the powerful Roman empire.

Since there is so much similarity in the visions of Daniel and John, and since the beasts in Daniel's vision are symbolic of earthly kingdoms and secular rulers, we are led to conclude that the beast which John saw coming out of the sea is a symbol of secular government as it is used by Satan in attacking the elect of God. This beast is described by John as having "ten horns and seven heads." In the previous chapter, the "enormous red dragon" was described as also having "seven heads and ten horns" (Rev. 12:3). Thus we note the close union existing between the beast and the devil.

On his horns the beast had ten crowns, - as though he operates with Christ's royal powers. And indeed, down through the centuries and to this present time, secular governments all too often have attempted to usurp the authority of God and to set aside God's divine commands and ordinances. As an example, we usually are quick to point to communistic governments that in our day seek to dethrone God and eliminate Christianity from the face of the earth. However, we must not lose sight of the fact that even democratic governments in our day often ignore God's specific commands and enact legislation that is in direct violation of the Laws of God, thus again showing the coalition that exists between the beast and the devil.

"And on each head," we are told, the beast had a "blasphemous name," - very likely a blasphemy directed against God, an arrogant title insulting to God.

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We know that many of the ancient Roman emperors assumed titles of deity and demanded for themselves the honor that belongs alone to God. The Emperor Domitian, for example, demanded to be addressed as “Dominus et Deus noster,” - “Our Lord and God.” What horrible blasphemy!

We indicated before that, even today, secular governments often are guilty of usurping the prerogatives of God; and when true Christians see how easily the power of civil governments can be enlisted in the service of the devil, they are inclined to become afraid and to be filled with a feeling of helplessness and utter disgust. We could mention many examples, but a few will suffice.

We know that the government readily tolerates the teaching of evolutionistic theories in public schools, but at the same time seeks to forbid the teaching of the account of creation as it is recorded in the Book of Genesis. Profanity and immoral scenes are permitted on television shows, but children in public schools are denied the privilege to address their God in prayer. Sexual promiscuity is condoned, but many, yes millions, of unborn children are deprived of their right to live. Indeed, it has almost come to the point where it is an impossibility for a staunch and true Christian, who stands firmly on the foundation of God’s Word, to be elected to a high governmental office.

Certainly, it requires no stretch of the imagination to see how civil governments, not only in our country, but in countries throughout the world, have become instruments of Satan. This fact is emphasized also in these words of St. John: “The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority.”

*13:3 One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was astonished and followed the beast.*

It is difficult to identify the fatal wound which one of the heads of the beast is said to have suffered, but from which a recovery was made. Since we have concluded that the beast which came out of the sea is symbolic of civil



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government, it is evident that at some time in history the civil government suffered a death-blow, from which it later recovered.

Some say that this occurred when the emperor Constantine was converted and Christianity became the religion of the empire; but the “healing” or “recovery” was the resulting state-church system, - a system which eventually proved to be a great enemy of orthodox Christianity. Others refer this mortal wound, and the recovery from the same, to the fall of the Roman empire and the resulting rise of the Roman papacy. Still others claim that the anti-christian power of civil government was dealt a death-blow when Jesus died on Good Friday, rose from the dead on Easter Sunday and forty days later ascended into heaven.

We are inclined to accept the third view. Christ’s death, resurrection and ensuing ascension into heaven certainly constituted a death-blow to all enemies of Christ, including all anti-christian world powers. Nevertheless, the final judgment did not immediately follow Christ’s ascension into heaven. True, Satan was defeated and was “hurled to the earth” (Rev. 12:9); but he and his ally the beast, the anti-christian civil government, are permitted by God to linger on throughout the New Testament period. In that sense, the fatal wound has been healed.

In the final analysis, however, there is in this connection only one thing that we can say with any degree of certainty. The mortal wound inflicted on one of the four heads tells us that at some time or other the civil government, in carrying out its service to Satan, suffered a staggering blow, which nevertheless was only temporary. With the healing of the wound, we can expect the civil government to continue to be active in persecuting the Church and in utilizing the power granted to it by Satan.

“The whole world was astonished and followed the beast.” The phrase, “the whole world,” denotes the unbelieving children of the world, also referred to in Revelation as “the inhabitants of the earth.” These unbelieving children of the world admire power and pursue it enthusiastically, - even if it is anti-christian

power. In fact, the world is thrilled whenever civil governments attack the Church and the members of the Church. This is something which we Christians must expect on our journey through life.

13:4 Men worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, “Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?”

In admiring the anti-christian power of the civil government, the children of the world in reality worship Satan, because it is Satan who has given his power and authority to the beast. The worldlings admire and adore this father of theirs although, of course, they do not call him the “dragon” or the “devil.” But the fact that they deny that they are the children of the devil doesn’t change the picture one iota. Recall what Jesus told the unbelieving Jews of His day, who asserted: “The only Father we have is God himself” (John 8:41). Jesus said to them: “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire” (John 8:44). It is an inescapable truth that in extolling and adoring the anti-christian power of earthly governments, the children of the world become worshipers and servants of Satan.

Blasphemously, they also ask: “Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?” The world, in wonder and admiration, regards the beast as invincible and incomparable in his greatness. Since the beast has the dragon’s power and authority, the children of the world are convinced that no one can wage a successful war against a government that is engaged in rendering homage and service to Satan.

To the true children of God, this may be a frightening thought. The Church may seem to be doomed to defeat as Satan continues to impart his power and authority to earthly governments. With quivering hearts and trembling lips we are inclined to ask: “Will the Church suffer a total defeat?”

Will Christianity be wiped from the face of the earth?” But although the outlook at times is very dark and foreboding, we nevertheless are assured that the

ship of the Church can never sink. And so, when the inhabitants of the earth proudly and blasphemously ask, “Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?” we confidently respond: There is a power that is greater than the power of Satan; there is an authority that is superior to the authority of anti-christian civil governments. “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress” (Psalm 46:1-7).

*13-5            The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months.*

As the tool and ready servant of Satan, the anti-christian power, - the godless governments of the earth, - utter “proud words and blasphemies,” arrogantly contradicting God and His Word; and the children of the world, in their admiration and worship of the beast, eagerly “drink in” all these blasphemies.

Since, as we have heard previously, the forty-two months denote the entire New Testament period, and since we are told that the beast will exercise his authority for that length of time, it is evident that the children of God will have to suffer the blasphemies, the indignities and the dangers accompanying the beast’s blatant power until the end of days. Here on earth the members of Christ’s Church will not have an easy time of it.

*13:6            He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven.*

Continuing the thought expressed in the previous verse, we are told further that the beast uses the mouth given to him “to blaspheme God, and to slander his

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name.” God’s name is God’s revelation about Himself in His holy Word. Therefore, to deny God, to reject the Holy Trinity, to pervert God’s attributes, to treat the Sacred Scriptures with mockery and disdain, to ridicule God’s grace in Christ, - that is blaspheming God and slandering His name.

The beast’s blasphemy is directed also against God’s “dwelling place and those who live in heaven,” or, more literally, against “God’s temple, those who live in heaven.” It is a well-known teaching of the New Testament that all true believers constitute the temple of God. In his letter to the Ephesian Christians, the Apostle Paul writes: “Consequently, we are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (Eph. 2:19-22). Consequently, “those who live in heaven” are God’s chosen people, all true believers, all who have their citizenship in heaven (Phil. 3:20), yes, all who are members of the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints.

Thus we are told in this verse that the beast, who symbolizes all the anti-christian governments in the world, directs his blasphemy, not only against God, but also against the Church. Because the Church insists that God is supreme and that, when forced to make a decision, we must obey God rather than men, - because the Church refuses to compromise the teachings of God’s inspired Word, - because the Church brands every violation of God’s moral Law as sin, - because the Church calls upon the people of the earth to repent and return to the Lord, - because the Church insists that Christ Jesus is the only Savior from sin and that He is the only hope for this life and for the life to come, - yes, for these and other reasons the Church is severely criticized and condemned and has become the object of the beast’s slander, blasphemy, scorn and ridicule. Inveigled by Satan, the anti-christian governments of the world see no good whatsoever in the Church and the precious doctrines of the Church.

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*13:7 He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation.*

In chapter 12 of Revelation we saw how the devil had failed in his attempt to destroy Christ, and how he had failed also in his attempt to sweep away the Church of Christ. Enraged, he then “went off to make war against the rest of her offspring,” that is, against the individual members of the Church. In the verse before us, we are told that Satan continues his attacks on the individual members of the Church by giving power to the beast “to make war against the saints and to conquer them.”

This war which Satan empowers the civil government to wage against God’s children, and which seems to result in the defeat of the saints, certainly is a reference to the brutal treatment which was accorded the Christians when large numbers of them were persecuted and killed, while others were forced to seek refuge in catacombs. However, that is not all. Down through the centuries, there always have been civil governments in various parts of the world who have injured, suppressed and killed those who refused to deny Christ or surrender their faith in Christ.

The text says that the beast “was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation,” thus denoting the apparent world-wide success of the godless earthly governments in waging war against God’s people. The banners of the beast seemingly fly high while the saints are but a small and over-ridden flock in this world. However, the apparent victory of Satan and the beast over the saints cannot be final, for Jesus has said: “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). What an assurance for all the saints of God amid the fiery attacks of Satan and his beast!

*13:8 All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast - all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.*

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We will agree that the NIV text note is a much better translation of this verse. Accordingly, we shall accept the following translation: “All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast - all whose names have not been *written from the creation of the world in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain.*”

Those whose names are written in the book of life are God’s elect. From eternity God has chosen them unto the adoption of children, and no man shall pluck them out of His hand. This truth is set forth most beautifully in Eph. 1:4-5, where we read: “For he chose us in him *before the creation of the world* to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.” And faith in the Lamb who was slain for us is proof that we are of the elect and that our names are written in the book of life. (To have our names written in the book of life is a symbolical way of saying that we belong to the elect of God.)

“All inhabitants of the earth,” that is, all the unbelievers, - “all whose names have not been written in the book of life,” - will worship the beast. They will bow in willing submission to the antichristian world power of the beast, the agency of Satan.

All of this kind reminds us that it is an “either... or.” Either we are in the kingdom of God, or we are outside of the kingdom of God. If we are in the kingdom of God, sincerely believing that the blood of Jesus Christ has cleansed us from all sins, then our names are written in the book of life, - the book which belongs to the Lamb who was slain. This grant us, dear Father in heaven! All those who reject Christ and His cleansing blood, and whose names accordingly are not in the book of life, are in the kingdom of Satan. They are among “the inhabitants of the earth” who worship the beast. From this preserve us, dear heavenly Father!

*13:9-10 He who has an ear, let him hear. If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with*

*the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.*

On our journey through life, it is so important for us Christians to know that God foresees all events and that He has planned our journey step by step, assuring us that all things will work together for our good. Even when the faithful are smitten with severe calamities, they are to know that God is in full control of all events.

Consequently, “if anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed.” Although imprisonment and execution would seem to indicate the victory of the beast over the saints, yet the faithful in all ages are to have the confidence that all of these calamities, though concocted by Satan and the beast, are used by God to bring His own to the heavenly mansions above. Jesus Himself, during the days of His earthly ministry, had predicted difficult times for His followers when He said: “You will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me” (Matt. 24:9).

However, knowing that they are the elect of God and that eternal life is theirs, the true children of God are able to endure with patience and faith whatever calamities befall them, even if these calamities involve imprisonment and martyrdom. To his brothers Joseph said: “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good” (Gen. 50:20). With patience and confident hope, we can speak those same words to those who in any way would persecute us because of our Christian faith and testimony. It is here that the patience and the faith of the true believers come into their own.

### **The Beast Out of The Earth**

*13:11 Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon.*

Having considered the characteristics and activities of the first beast, - the beast out of the sea, - our attention is now focused on the second beast, the beast out of

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the earth. Like the first beast, so this beast out of the earth receives his power from Satan, serves the purposes of Satan and is a powerful enemy of the true Church.

The two phrases, “like a lamb” and “like a dragon,” state the resemblances to Christ and Satan in an unmistakable way; for we know that Christ is the Lamb of God and that Satan is the dragon out of the Abyss. In other words, this beast from the earth takes on the appearance of Christ and seems to be lamb-like, completely harmless. However, his speech is dragon-like, for the message that he proclaims is the message of the devil. This beast out of the earth cooperates with the beast out of the sea in an attempt to deceive the saints of God. Thus we have antichristian power and antichristian deceit working side by side, and hand in hand, in opposing God’s Word.

The Lutheran Confessions call this beast from the earth the great Antichrist and identify him with the Roman papacy. It might be well at this point to hear once again the description of the Antichrist as it is recorded in 2 Thess. 2:3-12: “Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God. Don’t you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.”



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This description of the Antichrist is reinforced by what John here writes concerning him. It is interesting to note that in Koine usage the Greek preposition “anti” does not necessarily mean “against” or “opposed to” but almost always means “instead of.” This information is important in describing and identifying the Antichrist. He is not one who openly shows that he is against Christ (though, indeed, he is opposed to Christ), but rather gives the impression that he is like Christ, a “substitute” Christ, or, as Catherine of Siena called the Roman pope, “Jesus Christ on earth.” Doesn’t this fit well with what our verse says: “I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns *like a lamb?*” Indeed, down through the centuries, with but few exceptions, most of the popes have given the impression of being “like a lamb,” resembling Christ.

However, do not overlook the next words: “he spoke like a dragon.” The beast’s message, in reality, is the message of the devil; and, while many may be inclined to disagree, yet the great message of the devil is this, that we can earn eternal salvation by our own works.

The chief doctrine of Scripture pertaining to eternal salvation, the doctrine by which the Christian Church is distinguished from all false religions, the doctrine which gives all glory to God and enduring comfort to penitent sinners is the doctrine that we receive the forgiveness of sins and are justified before God, not by our own works, but by the grace of God, for Christ’s sake, through faith. Very emphatically is this stressed in Eph. 2:8-9: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.”

This cardinal teaching of Sacred Scripture the Church of Rome, in the canons and decrees of the Council of Trent, officially condemns. Yes, and the Roman Church even consigns to hell all those who teach that we are justified by faith alone and that good works are not necessary for salvation. Isn’t this exactly the message of the dragon? Small wonder, then, that many orthodox Christians identify the Roman Church and the papacy with the lamb-like beast from the earth. Turning the Gospel into a new law, - calling faith, contrition and prayers good works which must be performed by individuals in order to receive

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forgiveness and salvation, - may on the surface seem Scriptural and Christ-like; but this is all false doctrine, designed to deceive men and to rob Christ of His glory. And that is precisely what is being done by the Roman Church and the papacy.

However, there are many other heresies that are promoted by men whom Jesus describes as false prophets, who come in “sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves” (Matt. 7:15). These, too, may appear to be lamb-like, but their message is the message of the dragon. We have in mind such heresies as are promoted by the Mormons, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the humanists and many others. Sad to say, even many preachers and teachers in Protestant denominations are leading parishioners to believe that salvation, to a greater or lesser degree, is dependent on human character and human effort. Therefore, in a broader sense, we may say that this beast from the earth is symbolic also of all doctrines which undermine the Gospel of Christ Jesus and thus promote Satan’s hopes and aspirations.

*13:12 He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed.*

It is evident that the beast from the sea (antichristian civil government) and the beast from the earth (antichristian deceit) work hand in hand in opposing God’s Word. We are told that the beast from the earth “exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf.” The beast from the earth is under the authority of and serves the purposes of the beast from the sea; and the beast from the sea, in turn, is under the authority of and serves the purposes of the devil. Thus we have here the trinity of evil: Satan, antichristian civil government and apostate religion.

The “authority of the first beast” is a reference to the power and authority that civil government receives from the devil, such as, the power to demand homage from the inhabitants of the earth; the power to ridicule the Scripture, to utter great blasphemies and to persecute the Christians; and the power and authority to remain in existence until the end of the world. All these powers, which the first

beast received from the devil, are also exercised by the second beast. This, then, immediately brands the second beast as a great enemy of the Church. As we have stated previously, it may be true that, in a broader sense, the beast from the earth represents all false prophets and all false teachers.

Nevertheless, when it comes to exercising the authority of the first beast, this is nowhere as evident as it is in the Roman papacy. Consider the following facts: (1) The supremacy of the pope, even in temporal matters, is a claim that no pope has ever repudiated. (2) The fundamental doctrine of the christian religion, justification by faith without the deeds of the Law, has been officially cursed by the Roman Church. (3) The Church of Rome has employed political power for the extension of its rule and will endure until the end of the world. (4) The pope claims for himself prerogatives which belong to Christ alone and blasphemously calls himself the vicar of Christ on earth. (5) The papacy has relegated the Bible to an inferior position as a source of revelation. (6) Through its doctrine of the Mass, penances and purgatory, the Church of Rome denies the sufficiency of Christ's atonement for sin. These and many other facts serve to identify Rome and the papacy with the beast from the earth who exercises all the authority of the first beast. And by setting up its own visible kingdom, the papacy resembles an earthly government and thus actually encourages people in their inclination to regard worldly rulers as invincible and incomparable in greatness. Thus does this second beast make "the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed."

*19:13-14 And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived.*

In the days of His earthly ministry, Jesus had something to say about the "great and miraculous signs" performed by the false prophets. He issued this warning: "False Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and

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miracles to deceive even the elect - if that were possible. See, I have told you ahead of time” (Matt. 24:24-25).

On the one hand, it would be foolish on our part to ascribe all the so-called miracles that are performed by false prophets to superstition. If permitted to do so by God, rest assured the devil knows how to use the forces of nature to accomplish his purposes. On the other hand, we must remember that the devil’s great weapon is *deceit*. On Mount Carmel, the Prophet Elijah prayed to the true God, and fire descended from heaven to consume the sacrifice; and the people fell on their faces and cried out, “The Lord - he is God! The Lord - he is God!” (1 Kings 18:39). There was nothing deceitful about that miracle! That was genuine! The beast, however, seeks to imitate this miracle; and with this and other miraculous signs which he is enabled to perform by virtue of the power given to him by the first beast, he deceives “the inhabitants of the earth,” the unbelieving children of the world. The Apostle Paul describes this activity of the Antichrist in these words: “The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved” (2 Thess. 2:9-10).

In addition to deceiving “the inhabitants of the earth” with these “counterfeit miracles,” we are told that the beast “ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived.” Since the first beast symbolizes antichristian civil government, we are inclined to ask: “How can an image of antichristian civil government be made?” We must not lose sight of the fact that we are dealing here with symbolic language. It simply means that the apostate church orders all inhabitants of the earth to give idolatrous worship to the antichristian civil government. Thus, in reality, we have the apostate church and the antichristian civil government joining their forces in an attempt to destroy the people of God (which, of course, is the devil’s foremost ambition). Turning back the pages of history, we see many instances where the apostate church persuaded civil authorities to execute individuals who had been condemned by the church as being heretical. In symbolic language, this same truth is expressed again in the next verse.

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*13:15 Me was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed.*

We are told that the lamb-like beast, the Antichrist, was enabled to give breath to the image of the first beast so that the image could speak and pronounce the death penalty upon all who refused to worship the image.

There was a time when it seems to have been the task of the apostate church to enforce and maintain emperor worship. In later persecutions, we know that Christians often were permitted to make a choice between death or burning incense before an image of the emperor. With the second beast working in close conjunction with the first beast, John in his vision, saw the apostate church encouraging the death penalty for all who refused to worship the antichristian civil government. What monstrous tyranny is manifested by the lamb-like beast!

We might add that throughout these many centuries the apostate church has worked hand in hand with godless governments to destroy the true Church. Therefore, let us pray God to keep us steadfast in the true faith. May we ever be on our guard lest we be drawn into soul-destroying beliefs through the deceit of the false prophet. Remember, his deception is so subtle because his appearance is that of an innocent lamb.

*13:16-17 He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.*

In chapter 7, God's elect are marked with a seal on their foreheads, indicating that they belong to God. Here we are told that the beast requires all classes of men, the small and the great, the rich and the poor, the free and the slaves, to

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receive a mark on their right hands or on their foreheads to indicate that they belong to him.

During the Hitler regime in Germany, all Jews were required to wear the star of David. This identified or marked them as Jews. Just what the mark of the beast is, we cannot tell. The fact that a person is to receive this mark on such a prominent place as on his right hand or on his forehead indicates that he is to show in a clear and unmistakable way that he is a loyal worshiper and follower of the antichristian civil government.

The purpose of the mark is to exercise economic control over people and to make them feel that they are dependent on the government for their existence. It gives them the right to buy or sell, - the right to engage in commerce. At the same time, this is an economic boycott against all faithful believers, because the believers refuse to commit idolatry by worshiping the antichristian civil government. Consequently, down through the centuries, many Christians were deprived of the necessities of life, and for many other Christians it meant death. Even today, especially in communist countries, refusal to openly and publicly show allegiance to an atheistic form of government will most likely deprive Christians of the right to be active in business, as well as in politics. In fact, very often their very lives are in jeopardy.

*13:18 This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666.*

The last verse of this chapter indeed "calls for wisdom," for there have been many and varied interpretations of the number 666; and we shall not even attempt to list all of them.

In Revelation, the number 12 is a symbol of the Church; the number 10 is a symbol of completeness; the number 4 is a symbol of the world; and the number 7 is a perfect number and is a symbol of God's dealing with man.

Now, then, if we accept the number 6 as an incomplete number, a number implying evil, we may arrive at the following suggested solution: the Antichrist may attempt to seat himself in the temple of God; he may try to counterfeit Christ by displaying demonic power; he may claim for himself divine prerogatives; he may demand to be worshiped; but he will always be number 6, evil and incomplete, each digit falling short of the perfect number 7. His number, 666, indicates that he is doomed to failure. Try as he may to usurp God's power, he always falls short. His name is "triple failure."

The three sixes may also symbolize the "unholy trinity" or the "trinity of evil." The fact that 666 is a man's number may indicate that the Antichrist is a human being, that he will never be divine, and therefore certainly does not deserve to be called "His Holiness" or "The Holy Father."

Now, two concluding remarks on this chapter. (1) In his attempt to destroy the Church, the devil has two powerful allies: the antichristian civil government and the apostate church. (2) Hence, it behooves us to be on our guard and at all times to heed the exhortation of our Savior: "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation" (Matt. 26:41).

### **The Lamb and The 144,000**

**14:1      Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.**

What a contrast between this chapter and the preceding one! In the previous chapter we had a picture of the terrible damage done by the devil and the two beasts, - the "trinity of evil." In this chapter we have a breathtaking view of the redeemed in heaven, thus reassuring the believers in all ages of the ultimate triumph of Christ and His Church over all enemies.

In his vision John looked, and there before him was the Lamb, - our Savior Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He was

standing on Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the eternal dwelling-place of God and His people, where the “unholy trinity” will no longer be able to afflict and torment the people of God. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews has stated it very beautifully in these words: “But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven” (Heb. 12:22-23). What a picture!

What a view it must have been also for John as he saw the Lamb standing on Mount Zion, “and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads.” The 144,000 represent the entire invisible Church, the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the sum total of all the redeemed. We do not know how many there are. God knows. He knows them all by name. Because of God’s protective sealing, not a single one of them is lost during the violent persecutions and tribulations on earth. Each one is present and accounted for; not one is missing. The Church Militant has become the Church Triumphant!

The 144,000 did not bear the mark of the beast. Instead, they have the name of the Lamb and His Father written on their foreheads. The meaning of this symbolism is significant. It denotes eternal ownership by the Lamb and His Father. At the same time, it reminds us that no one comes to the Father except through Jesus. In John 14:6 Jesus says: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Neither can anyone come to Jesus unless the Father draws him. In John 6:44, we have these words of Jesus: “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”

*14:2-3 And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.*



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The music which John heard must have been extremely inspiring and beautiful. Try and imagine it, if you will. A multitude of harpists playing their harps in perfect harmony, - at first, perhaps, imitating the sound of rushing waters, similar to a waterfall; then gradually increasing in volume until it resembles a loud peal of thunder. It might be interesting to note that harps are mentioned three times in Revelation, and always do they accompany the singing around God's throne.

And so here, to the accompaniment of the harpists, John hears the multitude of the redeemed sing "a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders." It is called a "new song" because it can be sung only by the redeemed, the forgiven sinners. There can be no doubt that the theme of the song is gratitude to God for the deliverance and salvation which they, the redeemed, have received from their God and Savior. Only the true believers in Christ know what it means to be saved; and consequently, only they are in a position to sing the song of salvation. God grant that we are included in their number!

*14:4-5      These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as first-fruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.*

We have here a more detailed description of the elect. The true believers "did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure." In Scripture, spiritual apostasy (unbelief, falling away) is often referred to as adultery. The 144,000, the full number of all the elect, have kept themselves pure from the apostasy of the world. In 2 Cor 11:2, St Paul says to the Corinthian Christians: "I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him." Indeed, Christ is the Bridegroom, and the Church is His bride.

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As the bride of Christ, the true believers refuse to receive the mark of the beast, they refuse to participate in idolatrous worship and practices, they refuse to be unfaithful to God and the Lamb. Instead, they remain faithful to Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom.

Furthermore, as the bride of Christ, the true believers “follow the Lamb wherever he goes.” We are reminded of Jesus’ words in John 10:28-29: “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.” Be the way easy or hard, the true believers, without questioning and without hesitation, “follow the Lamb wherever he goes.” They know that the Lamb’s path led to the cross and then to heavenly glory. So the true believers deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Jesus, knowing that Jesus’ way leads to eternal bliss.

“They were purchased from among men.” This does not mean that Christ paid the price only for the elect, and that the unbelievers have not been redeemed. No; Christ died for all; Christ redeemed all sinful mankind. However, in this verse John is permitted to see all the true believers in heaven. Therefore, in their case it is evident that Jesus not only paid the price of their redemption, but that He also claimed them as His possession and has taken His possession home.

And, says John, they were “offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb.” In the Old Testament, the firstfruits designated that part of the harvest which was brought to the temple of God as an offering to the Lord; and so the true believers constitute that portion of mankind that is brought into the temple of heaven. Hence, the word “firstfruits” here refers to and includes all those who have the seal of God on their foreheads, all members of the Invisible Church, the full number of the elect, yes, all the true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. John sees them all as sharing in the bliss of heaven. Throughout eternity they belong to God and the Lamb.

Finally, it is said of these elect: “No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.” Contrast this with Rom. 1:25, where we read of the unbelieving

children of the world: “They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator.” In this connection, we are reminded also of these words in 1 John 1:6-10: “If we claim to have fellowship with him (God), yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.”

The elect of God do not participate in the hypocrisy that sings the praises of the Lamb and at the same time does the work of the dragon. They have nothing to do with the lying and the falsehood of the Antichrist. They are pure and blameless, not by any works of righteousness which they have done, but by virtue of the cleansing blood of Christ. O Lamb of God, You who takes away the sin of the world, rant that at all times we may be faithful and true to You!

### **The Three Angels**

*14:6-7 Then I saw another angel flying in mid-air, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth - to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.”*

In these next verses (v. 6-13), we are given a message of comfort, assuring the elect of God that false preachers and false teachers will never be able to silence the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The three angels represent the preaching of God’s Word throughout the entire New Testament era.

“Then I saw another angel flying in mid-air, and he had the eternal Gospel to proclaim...” In the previous chapter we heard how the beast and his

antichristian deceit came “out of the earth,” - from beneath. Here John sees the angel with the eternal Gospel “flying in mid-air.” He and his message are from above, - from God.

The Gospel is the good news of our salvation through the blood of Christ. It is for all people and will be proclaimed to the end of time. Our Lord has promised: “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:14).

It is the eternal, changeless Gospel; and it must ever remain thus, - ever the same and never changing. Very forcefully does the Apostle Paul write to the Galatian Christians: “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!” (Gal. 1:8-9). As previously stated, this Gospel is to be preached in all the world, to every creature, yes, “to every nation, tribe, language and people.”

In a loud voice the angel pleads: “Fear God and give him glory....” The appeal here is not so much to be afraid of God (although the impenitent sinner has every reason to be afraid of God and His wrath), but rather to revere and respect Him. “And,” says the angel, “give him glory.” To give God glory means to acknowledge all the divine attributes of God, including especially His indescribable love and mercy in Christ Jesus.

“Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come.” The work of redemption has been completed. What remains to be done is the work of judging. “The hour of his judgment has come,” - it has already begun and is even now in progress. Jesus emphasized this very fact when He said: “Whoever believes in him (the Son) is not condemned, but whoever does not believe *stands condemned already* because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son” (John 3:18). Of course, this judgment of God will reach its completion on the last day. Then the believers will stand before God in joyful awe; the ungodly will appear before Him in abject terror.

Finally, the angel calls upon men to “worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.” After all, to whom does worship rightfully belong except to the Creator? The God of creation is the only true God, who is above all and over all. And, as the Psalmist says, “Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, the maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them - the Lord, who remains faithful forever” (Psalm 146:5-6). It is our prayer that at all times we will fear and glorify and worship the Triune God. That is the true religion.

**14:8 A second angel followed and said, “Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.”**

In John’s day, Babylon became a name for Rome, the center of opposition to God and His people. Previously in Revelation it also was called “Sodom” and “Egypt” because of its immorality and cruel oppression. Here it is called “Babylon” because of its pride and idolatry. Perhaps it is best to regard Babylon as symbolizing all the enemies of the Church, - the entire antichristian empire throughout the whole New Testament era, including both pagan Rome and papal Rome.

“Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!” The verb form used here is prophetic and speaks of a future event as of something that is already in the past. So certain is the fall of Babylon that the angel speaks of it as having already happened. Much more will be said about the fall of Babylon in chapters 17 and 18.

Babylon is described as a city “which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries,” that is, the wine of her adulterous desire. In Biblical terminology, unfaithfulness to God and His Word is called spiritual adultery or fornication. Speaking in figurative language, Babylon, the prostitute does everything in her power to seduce men to join her in her adultery. In other words, Babylon the Great, symbolizing the apostate church, is determined to lead

people away from the true worship of God and plunge them into the dark depths of false religion.

In the Old Testament, the Prophet Isaiah wrote: “Babylon has fallen, has fallen!” (Is. 21:9). At that time, the fall of Babylon meant the end of captivity for the Children of Israel and a return to their homeland. So here, the fall of Babylon the Great is a message to the New Testament Church that the tribulations which the idolatrous city has inflicted upon God’s people will ultimately come to an end and that then the church will be at home forever in the heavenly Jerusalem.

*14:9-11 A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: “If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name. ”*

God “wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). Accordingly, He sends forth His Gospel into all the world to tell men everywhere that Christ died for them and that through faith in Christ they receive full and free forgiveness of all their sins and have the assurance of eternal salvation. But if anyone refuses God’s love, if he willingly and maliciously worships the Antichrist, if he willingly yields to having the mark of the Antichrist fastened upon him, then he shall feel the full wrath of God; he shall be made to drink the cup of God’s wrath. To drink the cup of God’s wrath means to experience God’s punishment. And, - let no one forget it, - the wine of God’s fury has been poured full strength into this cup. We repeat, the full force of God’s wrath will strike all who worship the beast and his image rather than the God who made heaven and earth.

The next words describe the eternal agony and suffering of the damned. They “will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast.” The Savior used similar language when He gave His account of the final judgment. We read in Matt. 25:41: “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’”

The term “burning sulfur” vividly describes the torments of hell. We recall that the immoral cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by a rain of burning sulfur. In Psalm 11:6 we read: “On the wicked he will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur.” In the Scripture, fire is regularly associated with hell. It is useless to speculate concerning the nature of this fire. Scripture frequently employs human expressions to describe what is beyond our ability to comprehend. Suffice it to say that hell is a place of endless torment, for the remark that “the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever” certainly indicates that this punishment in hell is eternal torment. There is no support here whatsoever for the doctrine of the annihilation of the wicked, namely, that ultimately after so much punishment the wicked will be completely annihilated. Oh, no. Scripture says “the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever,” - to eternity. Just as the believers will have a never-ending existence in heaven, so the unbelievers will have a never-ending punishment in hell. It will be one or the other.

We might make a few remarks yet on the statement that the worshipers of the beast “will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb.” Quite often we hear people make the remark that they cannot accept the teaching that the unbelievers will have to suffer eternal punishment in a place where they will find no rest by day or by night. They claim that such punishment is not at all compatible with the truth that our God is a God of love and mercy. We must bear in mind, however, that our God is not only a God of love and mercy; He is also a just Judge. He has issued His warning that those who refuse to believe in Christ will be eternally damned.

Divine justice demands that that verdict is upheld. The fact that this punishment is administered “in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb” certainly shows that the angels of God and the Lamb are in full agreement with God’s perfect justice and the necessity of God’s judgments.

Since the angels and our Savior concur whole-heartedly in God’s judgment, it behooves the saints of God to do likewise. Let us rest assured that our God makes no mistakes and that He does all things well. He offers life and salvation to all; but if men scorn His gracious offer, if they insist on going their own way, if they choose to worship the beast instead of the true God, then they must expect to take the consequences. If they are eternally damned, they will have no one to blame but themselves. Therefore, let us never find fault with God’s justice. Rather, let us praise Him for His grace and mercy toward us.

*14:12 This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.*

The dark future which is in store for those who reject Christ and follow the Antichrist should encourage the saints to endure patiently whatever burden is placed upon them. Even though they are confronted with persecution and violent death, yet the beautiful scenes of heaven and of the rejoicing saints in heaven, as well as the ultimate defeat of the enemy and the punishment imposed on the ungodly, should encourage the saints to endure with patience everything that an antichristian government might do to them.

These saints are described as obeying God’s commandments. Saints are people who are cleansed of all sins by the blood of Jesus Christ; and because they have been cleansed, they love the Lord who first loved them, and they strive to obey His commandments. While their obedience will never become perfect in this life, they nevertheless strive to live their lives in obedience to God’s commandments, *not to be saved, but because they are saved*. Their life of obedience is a fruit of their faith, a proof of the fact that they are saved.



The saints are described also as those who “remain faithful to Jesus,” - as those who keep their faith in Jesus. Faith in Jesus has made them saints; for as Scripture says, “it is by grace you have been saved, through faith” (Eph. 2:8). Through faith we appropriate to ourselves the forgiveness that Christ has procured for us; and it is this faith or confidence in Jesus that makes patient endurance possible.

*14:13        Then I heard a voice from heaven say, “Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Yes, ”says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.”*

This is the second of the seven beatitudes in Revelation: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” What a comfort this must have been for the Christians who were threatened with death because of their faith and, indeed, what a comfort for all Christians at all times! Those who die as believing children of God will experience eternal happiness and blessedness from the moment of their death. Yes, from the moment that their eyelids close in death, they will be freed from all the labors, trials and difficulties that are ours as we journey through life.

Not only will they experience deliverance from the toils and cares of earthly life, but the Spirit also says: “Their deeds will follow them.” True, their good works will not save them; but they will serve as evidence of the faith by which they were justified, and the Lord will use these evidences in the public judgment on the last day, as He Himself tells us in Matt. 25:34-40: “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?

When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'"

### **The Harvest of The Earth**

*14:14-16 I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one "like a son of man " with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.*

There can be no doubt that we have here a representation of the final judgment.

We look first at the Judge, who is none other than our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He is pictured as seated on a white cloud, - white being a symbol of holiness. He is described as one "like a son of man." While Scripture teaches that Jesus is both true God and true man, possessing both the divine nature and the human nature, yet in the passage before us we are told that the Judge on the last day will be Jesus, a human being. This is in accord with other passages of Scripture. In John 5:27, we read: "And he (the Father) has given him (Jesus) authority to judge because he is the Son of Man." In Acts 17:31, we have these words of Paul to the Athenians: "For he (God) has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by that man he has appointed." Speaking of the last day, Jesus Himself said: "They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory" (Matt. 24:30); and to the high priest, Jesus said: "In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matt. 26:64). It ought to be a comfort

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to us to know that He who will judge us is not only “true God, begotten of the Father from eternity,” but also “true man, born of the Virgin Mary.”

The Judge is further described as wearing “a crown of gold on his head,” - the crown being a symbol of His kingly power and authority. The head that once was crowned with thorns now wears a crown of victory and glory. And in His hand He had a sharp sickle. In days gone by, the sickle was the main instrument that was used in the harvesting of grain.

Then an angel appeared out of heaven, that is, from the presence of God, who does the commissioning, and announced to Christ, the Judge: “Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.” Every farmer knows that when the grain is dead ripe, it is high time for him to do the harvesting. To delay may result in a loss. So here, the harvest is “dead ripe;” all the elect have been brought into the kingdom; there must be no delay; it is time for the wheat, the true believers, to be gathered into the heavenly granary. “So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.” Thus, in this part of the vision, John not only sees the Lord Jesus appearing as Judge, but he also sees each and every one of God’s elect safe at home in heaven. Yes, he sees the harvest gloriously completed.

*14:17-20 Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, “Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth’s vine, because its grapes are ripe. ” The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God’s wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia.*

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While verses 14-16 refer to the harvest of the elect, verses 17-20 refer to God's judgment on the wicked.

In Psalm 1:4 and in Matt. 3:12, the ungodly are compared to the chaff in the grain harvest; and we are told that this chaff is burned with unquenchable fire. In this vision of St. John, however, the wicked are compared to clusters of grapes, the berries of which have reached their prime of ripeness.

We would imagine, perhaps, that this grape harvest would be conducted by the same "son of man" who conducted the grain harvest. However, we are told that "another angel came out of the temple in heaven," that is, out of the presence of God, to conduct the grape harvest, reminding us, nevertheless, that the judgment of damnation is also an act of God's holiness. This angel, too, had a sharp sickle.

Then a third angel, "who had charge of the fire," - perhaps the same angel who is described in Rev. 8:3-5, - "called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle" and told him to proceed with the harvest of the grapes. Note well, it is God who gives the authority to declare when, according to His will, the judgment is finally to come upon the wicked.

So "the angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath." Thus John sees the great day of the Lord, the final judgment, the day of wrath, as having come. The grapes, symbolizing all the wicked and ungodly, "were trampled in the winepress outside the city." The trampling of grapes was a common Old Testament figure of speech, signifying the execution of divine wrath.

In Revelation, the word "city" usually is the name for the church. Thus in chapter 11, we are told that the unbelievers trampled the holy city (the church) underfoot for forty-two months. Now John sees the unbelievers "trampled in the winepress *outside the city*," signifying the eternal separation of the believers from the unbelievers. This is eternal death for the unbelievers. Outside of the city, outside of the Church of Christ, is the place of wrath. There the grapes, the

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ungodly, are pressed out in the wine press of God's wrath. The blood of the enemies flows out of the press, "rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1600 stadia," the equivalent of approximately 180 miles. In Revelation, the number four is associated with the earth; ten is the number representing completeness. The multiplied squares of four and ten produce the number 1600, thus signifying that this is the final judgment of the whole world. The Lord's victory is complete; His righteous wrath punishes the unbelievers with eternal punishment, - everlasting damnation.

As we contemplate the terrible fate of the ungodly, we turn to the Lord with the plea that He will graciously keep us in the true and saving faith, so that when the last day dawns, we may hear the gracious words of our Savior: "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world" (Matt. 25:34).