

Chapter 8

The Victory Over Antichrist: Babylon, The Great Prostitute (Rev. 17-19)

The Woman on The Beast

17:1-2 One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters. With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries."

In Rev. 14:8, Babylon's fall is predicted. In Rev. 16:17-21, when the last bowl of wrath is poured out, Babylon the Great collapses. Now in chapters 17 and 18 of Revelation, the destruction of Babylon is described in greater detail.

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls promised to show John "the punishment of the great prostitute who sits on many waters." Who is this harlot? In the final verse of this chapter, the angel says: "The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth." In verse five of this chapter, the harlot is called "Babylon the Great." In the Old Testament, any idolatry or unfaithfulness to God was called spiritual adultery or harlotry; and the prophets often describe the apostate Old Testament church as a faithful wife who became a harlot. Thus we read, for example, in Isaiah 1:21: "See how the faithful city has become a harlot!" In the light of these considerations, it seems almost certain that the prostitute in this chapter is the apostate church - the church that has become unfaithful and has departed from the true faith.

The apostate church is described as "the great prostitute who sits on many waters." We are not left in the dark as to the meaning of this, for in verse 15 of this chapter the angel says: "The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages." Since "sitting" symbolizes established rule, the reference to the "many waters" on which the woman sits seems to tell us that the apostate church may greatly outnumber the holy, Christian Church, the communion of saints, which in Scripture is called "the little flock." (In this connection, we might be reminded and warned not to judge the faithfulness of the church by its size).

The angel further tells John that with this harlot "the kings of the earth committed adultery." In other words, the secular rulers of the earth supported the unfaithful church in her apostasy, This certainly was true in past centuries, and it still is true today, It is not unusual to see secular governments falling in line with and supporting the false teachings of apostate churches; nor is it unusual to see apostate churches approving and ratifying many of the antichristian measures of secular governments. Thus we have the prostitute and the kings of the earth involved in shameful adultery.

Furthermore, “the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries.” As we have heard previously, when Revelation speaks of “the inhabitants of the earth,” it is a reference to the unbelievers, whose only home is this earth. They have no citizenship in heaven. These people are intoxicated with the wine of the harlot’s adulteries. A person who has become drunk with wine cannot think clearly; his mind is unclear and confused. So the inhabitants of the earth cannot think clearly about the fundamental doctrines of Scripture and salvation, because their minds have become clouded and confused by the glamor and pomp of the many false teachings that are promoted by an apostate church.

17:3-4 Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries.

The angel carried John “in spirit” into a desert. In this state of spiritual exaltation, as we have mentioned previously, John was able to see and hear things which normally are not seen and heard by human beings.

In this particular vision, John saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast. This beast is the same beast from the sea that was described in chapter 13, - a symbol of civil government in its antichristian aspects, also often referred to as the secular antichrist. The beast is scarlet in color; and we know that scarlet is generally regarded as symbolizing sin. The beast also was covered with blasphemous names, perhaps referring to the fact that many governmental heads frequently assumed titles that robbed God of the honor and glory which belongs to Him alone. In a previous chapter, for example, we had mentioned that the Emperor Domitian demanded to be addressed as “Dominus et Deus noster,” - “Our Lord and God.” How utterly blasphemous! Finally, we are told that this beast had seven heads and ten horns, - the heads and horns representing kingdoms and nations that have followed the beast. This detail will be described more fully later on in this chapter.

The woman, whom we have identified as the apostate church, is described as being dressed in “purple and scarlet,” very expensive garments, and garments that were adorned with gold, precious stones and pearls. Thus the harlot is portrayed as a great queen in order to impress and entice the kings of the earth. The fact that she is clothed in garments of the same color as the beast is another way of telling us that the apostate church has assumed the color of the world and has entered into an intimate relationship with the antichristian forces in the various civil governments; and the fact that she “sits” on the beast would seem to indicate that the apostate church has great power and influence and that she often is the controlling force in her alliance with secular governments.

But truly, as we look back over the past centuries, we are compelled to say that the desires for wealth and worldly power have had a bad influence and extremely damaging effects on the visible church and the leaders of the church. In fact, the desire for wealth and power may very well be regarded as the cause of the apostasy of the church.

It is not surprising, then, that the apostate church is pictured as holding “a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries.” The golden cup is inviting and enticing, but it is filled with adulterated messages, - false doctrines designed to lure people from the narrow path that leads to eternal life, to the broad way which leads to death and destruction. Yes, instead of offering people the wholesome, nourishing truths of the Gospel that we are saved solely by the grace of God through faith in Christ Jesus, the apostate church, for the sake of material gain and worldly prestige, has corrupted these basic Gospel truths and is now making men “intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries.”

*17:5-6 This title was written on her forehead:
Mystery
Babylon the Great
The Mother of Prostitutes
And of The Abominations of The Earth. I saw that the woman was
drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore
testimony to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly astonished.*

Whether or not the word “mystery” is part of the title that was written on the forehead of the woman is difficult to determine. We are inclined to believe that this word is not a part of the title and that the first part of this verse probably should read: “This mysterious title or, This name of mystery” was written on her forehead. It was quite customary in days gone by for prostitutes to identify themselves by some kind of a headband.

The mysterious title on the forehead of the woman tells us and all men that this adulterous and powerful figure is “Babylon The Great,” the enemy of God’s people and the personification of the kingdom of Antichrist, or, in plain words, the apostate church. By being unfaithful to God’s Word, by committing spiritual adultery, the apostate church does unspeakable damage to the work of the true Church. Sad to say, the apostate church is not primarily concerned about the forgiveness of sins, life and eternal salvation. The apostate church is basically concerned about prestige and worldly power.

And because she has forsaken the Lord of her youth, the apostate church has become the mother of the world’s prostitutes and abominations. By teaching doctrines that are not in accord with Sacred Scripture, the apostate church actually encourages people to commit spiritual adultery by being unfaithful to God. And when the apostate church is called the mother of “the abominations of the earth,” it means that she definitely

is leading people into idol worship. That is not difficult to understand. When people depart from the teachings of Scripture, when they are led to believe that salvation is not through faith in Christ alone, but that it is dependent on good works, then, in reality, a false doctrine is taught and a false god is being worshiped. Spiritual fornication and idolatry go hand in hand. People may claim to be sailing under the banner of Christianity; but when they become unfaithful to the true God and His Word, they automatically adopt a form of worship that has the marks of idolatry.

John continues his description of the apostate church by saying: “I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.” We might imagine that, being seated on the beast and thus being in a position of control, the visible church would have employed governmental power and authority in advancing the cause of the Gospel of Christ. Not so, however. We are told that the woman who was seated on the scarlet beast was drunk with the blood of the saints. The apostate church, the kingdom of Antichrist, is intimately associated with antichristian civil government; and down through the centuries, even to our present time, the apostate church has used governmental authority in shedding the blood of saints and witnesses of Christ. The great amount of blood which she has poured out, either directly or indirectly, has caused her to be in a continual state of “inebriation.” No wonder that John was greatly astonished by the very horror of the woman’s aspect!

17:7-8 Then the angel said to me: “Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns. The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come.”

When the angel noticed John’s astonishment, he promised to give John an explanation of the woman and the beast with seven heads and ten horns.

There is every indication that the beast mentioned here is the beast who came out of the sea (Rev. 13:1). This beast, as we have repeatedly stated, symbolizes civil government in its antichristian aspects, the whole anti-christian power in the world, and is often called the secular antichrist.

Now, however, comes the part that is very difficult and mysterious. The angel says that this beast “once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction;” and at the end of this same verse, the angel again says of the beast: “he once was, now is not, and yet will come.” We ask: What is the meaning of the words: “once was, now is not, and yet shall come?” Various interpretations have been suggested.

Some say that this description of the beast is an imitation of the description of

God found in the opening chapters of Revelation. In Rev. 1:4, 1:8, and 4:8, God is described as the One “who is, and who was, and who is to come.” It is true, as we learn from 2 Thess. 2:4, that the beast seeks to rival God by sitting in the temple of God and claiming to be God, thus laying claim to divinity. However, there is this big difference. The beast “once was, now is not;” and although he may reappear from the Abyss, to the delight and amazement of the earth dwellers, yet he is doomed to destruction, Our God, on the other hand, is the One “who is, and who was, and who is to come.”

Others maintain that this description of the beast fits the Roman Empire, for *it is* upon the Roman Empire that the apostate church is sitting. Now, the Roman Empire at John’s time was a continuation of the ancient Roman world empire, *which was* in existence before the kingdom of Antichrist. Then in 476 A.D, the Germanic tribes conquered Rome, and the Roman Empire *was not*. Then, to the astonishment of the inhabitants of the earth, (the ungodly, whose names are not written in the book of life), Rome (the beast) arose once more from the Abyss, and *is present* to this day, but is doomed to eternal destruction.

Still others, referring to Rev. 13:3-4, say that the antichristian power, the beast “who *was*,” received a fatal blow when the Christ who was crucified rose on the third day and forty days thereafter ascended into heaven. With this fatal blow, the beast “*was not*.” There can be no doubt that Christ’s resurrection and exaltation were a terrible shock to the antichristian world power, and the antichristian world power at that time was Rome. Nevertheless, with the help of Satan, who gave his power and authority to the beast, the antichristian power was healed. This recovery led the earth-dwellers to believe that the beast was invincible, and to this day, they glory in the belief that the antichristian power is unconquerable, and they bow in willing submission to this agency of Satan. Little do the ungodly, whose names are not written in the book of life, realize that the beast, who had his origin in the Abyss, will ultimately go to his destruction in the Abyss.

17:9-11 “This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits, They are also seven kings, Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction.”

These are difficult verses, and wisdom certainly is needed to understand and explain them. God bless all of His children with wisdom from on high!

The seven heads of the scarlet beast are seven hills on which the woman is seated. This obviously is a reference to Rome. According to tradition, Rome was built on seven hills; and Rome has frequently been called “the city of seven hills.” In Rome especially do we find the embodiment of the apostate church.

But the seven heads “are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has

not yet come.” It is evident that this cannot be a reference to seven Roman emperors. Rather, this is symbolic of kingdoms that have been hostile to Christianity. The Roman empire, “the one who is,” is seen as the continuation of five ancient world empires, all of which were enemies of God’s people in Old Testament times. These five were Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, and the empire of Alexander, - all of which threatened the existence of the people of God.

The Egyptian Pharaoh was determined to destroy the Children of Israel. Assyria completely destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel, leading the ten tribes into a captivity from which they never returned, Babylonia led Judah into captivity. The Persian King Xerxes attempted to have all of the Jews exterminated. Antiochus Epiphanes of the empire of Alexander nearly succeeded in wiping out the worship of the true God among the Jews, These are the five that have fallen.

Now we come to “the one that is,” namely, the Roman empire, the secular antichrist at the time when John wrote Revelation. While it may have been comforting to the true Christians to know that in time the persecuting Roman empire would likewise fall, yet they were told that there was another to come and that “he must remain for a little while.” This could be a reference to the last world empire through which the antichrist will operate. Better still, in our opinion, this could refer to the establishment of the papal state. Though small as far as physical boundaries are concerned, yet the Pope’s dominion has extended far beyond the physical boundaries of his province, and to this day his influence and authority are evident in nations all over the world.

Finally, we are told that “the beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king.” This is a reference to the beast from the sea. Throughout the centuries, this beast from the sea, this secular antichrist, has been the key agent of Satan in his war against Christ and His Church. He is the eighth king, the eighth great enemy, the one who has worked through the seven kings, yes, “he belongs to the seven, and is going to his destruction.” The pattern in the history of the secular antichrist always reads: “He was, he is not, he will be, and he will go into destruction.” Perhaps we could state it thus: an antichristian government falls - thus the beast suffers a deadly wound - the wound is healed - the beast rises again from the Abyss of hell and continues to be the devil’s agent in persecuting the Church – eventually, however, he too will follow the seven and will go into eternal destruction.

17:12-14 “The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings - and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.”

In addition to the seven heads, John also saw ten horns growing out of these

heads. These ten horns represent ten more kings, “who have not yet received a kingdom.” Consequently, their reign lies in the future. The number ten stands for completeness, and here it represents all the future secular enemies of the Church. As the beast, the entire antichristian power in the world, receives his power and authority from Satan, so these remaining secular enemies of the Church likewise will receive their power and authority from Satan. But their reign will not be of long duration. “One hour” represents a short period of time.

Although they are numerous and although their reign is of short duration, yet all of these antichristian forces have but one purpose, namely, to oppose Christ and to wipe the Christian religion from the face of the earth. To that end, they unanimously use their power and authority in the service of the beast.

But how futile! In waging war against the Lamb, the defeat (and destruction) of all enemies is inevitable, – inevitable, because Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, is Lord of lords and King of kings. His victory is our victory! By defeating all of His enemies, our Lord Jesus simultaneously protects those who belong to Him, - those whom He has chosen, or elected, from all eternity, - those whom He has called by the Gospel, - those who now in true faith cling to Him and follow Him. It is as Jesus had promised during the days of His earthly ministry: “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” (John 10:27-28).

17:15-18 Then the angel said to me, “The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God’s words are fulfilled. The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth. ”

In our consideration of the first verse of this chapter, it was pointed out that the prostitute symbolizes the unfaithful church, who exerts her world-wide influence on “peoples, multitudes, nations and languages.” In’ her attempts to lure people away from the cardinal and basic doctrines of Scripture and to encourage them to make a god of materialistic values, the apostate church seems to have been highly successful. But now we behold a surprisingly different picture. The angel tells John that the ten kings and the beast, the powers that had been supporting the apostate church, will hate the prostitute, turn against her and destroy her. In a strange and mysterious way, it seems as though God permits evil to destroy evil.

We have something similar in the Old Testament. When Jerusalem became unfaithful to God and committed spiritual adultery with the heathen nations of Egypt, Assyria and Babylonia, God, through the Prophet Ezekiel, very firmly told apostate

Israel: “I will hand you over to your lovers.... They will strip you of your clothes and take your fine jewelry and leave you naked and bare” (Ezek. 16:39).

So here, God will permit the secular governments, with whom the apostate church had made an unholy alliance, to turn against the apostate church; and “they will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire.” Thus we see that the punishment which was inflicted on the apostate Israel in the Old Testament is the same punishment that is in store for the apostate church in the New Testament era.

It thus becomes evident that, to accomplish His purposes, God even utilizes the secular governments; He puts into their hearts to carry out the purpose He has in mind, namely, to punish the apostate church because of her spiritual adultery. Although the enemies are determined to oppose God and although they have no intention whatsoever to serve the Lord, yet God sees to it that their wicked plans must carry out His purpose and fulfill His Word. No matter what the outward appearances may be, God’s will is always going to be done.

In his closing remark to John, the angel once again identifies the woman as “the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.” As we have stated previously, this great city very obviously is Rome, the city in which we find the embodiment of the apostate church. She also is called Babylon The Great and the harlot. In line with what has been said concerning the ruin which the secular governments will inflict on the apostate church, we might add that many of the rulers of the world have already turned against the church of Rome, have stripped her of much of her wealth and power, and even now are “leaving her naked,” That very strip of land in Italy, which had been regarded as the Pope’s temporal kingdom, has been taken from him. We cannot but feel that God has put into the hearts of the beast and the ten kings to carry out what He has in mind, namely, to punish the apostate church because of her unfaithfulness and idolatry.

The Fall of Babylon

18:1-3 “After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. With a mighty voice he shouted: “Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries.”

The entire eighteenth chapter of Revelation deals with the fall of Babylon and all the enemies of Christ and His Church; yes, it reveals the final judgment of God against Antichrist and all the earthly agents of Satan.

In this vision, John says that he saw an angel descending from heaven who had great authority. In the light of his heavenly glory, which illumined the earth, he

announced the fall of Babylon, re-echoing the words of the angel in chapter 14: “Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!” The announcement is given in the past tense, as if Babylon’s fall had already taken place, thus giving us the assurance that this event will most certainly come to pass.

The cause of her destruction is now given. Because she had forsaken the Lord of her youth and had been unfaithful to her God, she had become a home for demons and evil spirits and unclean animals and birds. That is just the way it is. Where God’s Word is rejected and ignored, where the clear and fundamental teachings of Scripture are corrupted and defiled, there demons and evil spirits enter in and take control; and what had once been clean and wholesome now is foul and loathsome. Into such depths of detestable foulness and corruption had the apostate church plunged!

Furthermore, we are told that all nations drank “the wine of her adulterous desire,” that the kings of the earth committed spiritual adultery with her, and that the merchants grew rich through the abundance of her luxury. In a previous chapter, we had discussed in detail the spiritual adultery between the apostate church and the kings of the earth. It seems that Babylon’s one great objective was to use her seductive powers and earthly pomp to lure people from the worship of the true God to the worship of the beast. So apparently successful was the apostate church in achieving her objective that nations and rulers and merchants were led to believe her lies; they drank her wine; and they committed fornication with her. No wonder that Babylon was destined to fall!

18:4-5 Then I heard another voice from heaven say: “Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes,”

Before going into a detailed description of Babylon’s fall, John relates how he heard another voice from heaven, evidently the voice of Christ, saying: “Come out of her, my people.” God’s people must definitely come out and separate themselves from Babylon, the apostate church and seat of Antichrist, lest they have actual fellowship with the sins of this antichristian seduction. Those who identify with an apostate church share in her sins and will also experience her plagues. The call, “Come out of her, my people,” is a rather common warning and exhortation in Scripture. For example, in 2 Cor. 6:17, we read: “Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord.”

In issuing this call for separation, the voice from heaven says of Babylon: “Her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes.” Someone has said: “When the sins of a people reach up to heaven, the wrath of God will reach down to earth.” God’s remembrance of Babylon’s crimes implies the end of God’s long-suffering and the subsequent meting out of severe judgment; and those who refuse to “come out” definitely run the risk of perishing with Babylon.

Many of the first-century Christians may have been tempted to affiliate with

Babylon in order to escape bloody persecution and possible martyrdom. Therefore the warning is issued to remember the fate which definitely is in store for Babylon and all her followers. Even today, Christians face the constant danger of being taken in by the antichristian seduction which entices them and seeks to entangle them. Hence, God's call, "Come out and be separate," is a timely and necessary appeal for all Christians at all times. By heeding this appeal of God, we can rejoice in His promise: "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters" (2 Cor. 6:18).

18:6-8 "Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup. Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart she boasts, 'I sit as queen; I am not a widow, and I will never mourn.' Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her."

Babylon has defied God and has misled multitudes; she has martyred the saints and has lived in self-indulgence. Now the justice of Babylon's punishment is portrayed. The voice from heaven says: "Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done." Babylon is to be paid back "double." Why "double?" This same word is used also in the next sentence: "Mix her a double portion from her own cup," While the idea of a double punishment is not found very often in Scripture, it nevertheless is significant that we find it mentioned in the case of apostate Israel. In Jer. 16:18, the Lord says: "I will repay them double for their wickedness and their sin, because they have defiled my land with the lifeless forms of their vile images and have filled my inheritance with their detestable idols." Therefore, it seems very fitting that in the New Testament era a double punishment should likewise be meted out to the apostate church.

In her cup, the apostate church had mixed a drink for others. Since the cup is often symbolic of suffering, we might think here of all the suffering which the apostate church has brought to multitudes. Think of the great amount of anguish that she has poured into the hearts of men by obscuring, and even corrupting, the precious Gospel message and thus depriving men of real and abiding peace, comfort and joy, Think of the sorrow and the physical pain that she has caused by her persecution of the true Christians. There can be no doubt that she has caused the children of God tremendous suffering; and by her mistreatment of the faithful followers of the Lamb, she has made herself responsible for many tear-stained eyes and bleeding hearts. But now the time of retribution has come, and she will be repaid in double measure. This again is exact justice.

The same concept of justice is expressed also in the words: "Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself." The wealth, power and glory of the apostate church will end in torture and grief. The measure of her self-exaltation, so evident in her luxury, pride and boasting, will also be the measure of her abasement, pain and sorrow.

“I sit as a queen,” she boasts, “I am not a widow, and I will never mourn,” The claim of the apostate church even today is that she is the queen of the world and that she is the only saving church. But her very existence is a blasphemy of Jesus Christ. God calls her an unfaithful wife, an adulteress and a prostitute. Therefore in one day, she will be completely devastated; her plagues shall come suddenly and strike her down. Going back for a moment to the Old Testament Levitical laws pertaining to the priesthood, it is interesting and highly significant to note that if the daughter of a priest became guilty of fornication, she was to be put to death by being burned kings of the earth, so these merchants also will stand far off and will cry out: “Woe! Woe, O great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls! In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!” Thus they are forced to admit that the wealth and splendor of the world, which characterized Babylon, the harlot, is transient, fleeting and has no eternal value whatsoever.

As we journey through life, may God grant that we will never become so involved in the material things of this world that we lose sight of all eternal values; for “what good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?” (Matt. 16.26).

*18:17b-19 “Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, ‘Was there ever a city like this great city?’ They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out:
“Woe! Woe, O great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth, In one hour she has been brought to ruin!”*

Finally, we come to the third group of those who mourn Babylon’s fall. This group is made up of captains, seafaring men and sailors, who had delivered to Babylon the precious cargoes previously mentioned. Like the merchants, they, too, stand far off and lament, because Babylon’s fall means that no longer can they become rich through her wealth, As an act of sorrow and dismay, they throw dust on their heads. Their question, “Was there ever a city like this great city?” parallels the question regarding the beast in Rev. 13:4: “Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?” They had regarded Babylon, the apostate church, incomparable in greatness. But now, as they see “the smoke of her burning,” they are compelled to join the merchants in the woeful lament: “In one hour she has been brought to ruin!”

18:20 “Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you,”

In this exhortation to rejoice, we have the absolute antithesis to the lamenting and mourning of all the associates and supporters of the harlot. The inhabitants of heaven, - the saints and apostles and prophets, – are called upon to rejoice over the fallen city

because God has judged her for the way she treated them. Babylon, the whore, had done her utmost to seduce them. In Rev. 17:6, she is pictured as being drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs, From this we may well conclude that Babylon, either directly or indirectly, had caused the death of saints, the true believers in Christ Jesus. In the fifth verse of this chapter 18, we are told that God remembered all the crimes that she committed against the saints. And in the last verse of this chapter, we are told that in Babylon was found “the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth.” There can be no doubt, therefore, that Babylon is being judged and punished for her persecution of the true Christians.

The fact that Babylon is being judged for having mistreated and killed also the prophets, clearly tells us that the antichristian forces were active also in the visible church of the Old Testament. It is significant to note that most of the Old Testament prophets who were put to death suffered their martyrdom at the hands of Jews who had fallen away from the worship of the true God, and who had thus become the apostate Israel. For this reason Jesus had told the Jewish leaders of His day: “Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your forefathers who killed them. So you testify that you approve of what your forefathers did; they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs. Because of this, God in his wisdom said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.’ Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world.” (Luke 11.47-50),

These same Jews, who called themselves God’s chosen people demanded the crucifixion of Jesus and later on also called for the death of the apostles. Time and again did the apostate church thus show herself as the harlot sitting on the beast, urging antichristian civil governments (the secular antichrist) to sentence faithful believers to death. For all these unspeakably cruel acts against the people of God, Babylon will now pay dearly as she faces the final judgment of God. This final, decisive act of judging, which results in the burning of Babylon, is the reason why the saints and apostles and prophets in heaven are called upon to rejoice.

18:21-24 Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: “With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again, The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again. No workman of any trade will ever be found in you again. The sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again, The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again. Your merchants were the world’s great men. By your magic spell all the nations were led astray. In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth. ”

Finally, a voice speaks from the throne, - a voice that remains anonymous. Nevertheless, it is a voice which can address the multitude of saints and say, "Praise *our God*." This call to praise God is extended to all the servants of the Lord, both small and great. Yes, this call is extended to all the saved, - no one excluded or overlooked.

Praise for The Wedding of The Lamb

19:6-8 Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like the loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory. For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. " (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

Have you ever had the spine-tingling experience of listening to a mass chorus of several thousand voices singing the "Hallelujah Chorus" from Handel's "Messiah?" Usually such an experience is never forgotten. Yet, that is but a faint illustration of what John hears in this vision as the entire company of heaven bursts into song. Like the irresistible rushing of mighty streams of water, like the loud rumblings of thunder, the song of the saints and angels breaks forth to give praise to God: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns." They praise the Lord, because now He has taken over complete control.

With Babylon, the great prostitute, cast into the Abyss of fire and brimstone, the wedding of the Lamb can now take place. This long-awaited event likewise is an occasion of praise; and so we hear the inhabitants of heaven singing their hallelujahs and saying: "Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready."

In the Old Testament, God's chosen people often are spoken of as the wife of Jehovah. In the New Testament, Jesus, in the parable of the ten virgins, refers to judgment day as the time when the heavenly Bridegroom will take His bride to His eternal home; and the Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, also speaks of the Church as being the bride of Christ. And so, that for which the Church had longed and waited is represented here as being consummated in heaven. The holy Christian Church, the bride of Christ, is pictured as celebrating her marriage with the Lamb, her Savior and her Lord. What an occasion for the greatest possible rejoicing and the highest exultation!

For this event the bride of the Lamb has made herself ready, but not by doing anything of her own (as rationalists and synergists teach). We are told that clean, fine linen was given her to wear. It is extremely important that we recognize the fact that the bride's wedding dress was *given* to her, - the word "given" certainly reflecting the doctrine that salvation is solely a gift of God's grace. By faith, all true believers, who constitute the bride of Christ, become the recipients of the righteousness which Jesus, by His suffering and death, has earned and procured for them. And having thus been

declared righteous by God, for Jesus' sake, the believers are clothed in the only garment that will enable them to stand in the presence of the righteous and holy God. The "fine linen, bright and clean," which was given to the bride to wear, is identical to the robes mentioned in Rev. 7:13-15, - the robes in which the elect of God are clothed and which were washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. The Prophet Isaiah expressed this symbolism in the following words: "I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels" (Is. 61:10).

19:9 Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God."

Here we have the fourth of the seven beatitudes in Revelation: "Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of of the Lamb." The invitation, or call, here referred to is the effective Gospel call. All those who, by the power of the Holy Spirit, have acknowledged their sinfulness and who, with a Spirit-wrought faith, have accepted the wedding garment of Christ's righteousness and forgiveness, will be privileged to participate in the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Having spoken this blessing, the angel added that the words of this beatitude "are the true words of God." Since God has spoken, there can be no doubt whatsoever concerning the veracity of this promise. The Word of the Lord is eternal and stands firm in the heavens (Psalm 119:89). It is as the bumper sticker on the author's automobile states: "God said it - I believe it - that settles it."

19:10 At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

Overwhelmed at the prospect of participating in the marriage supper of the Lamb, John fell prostrate before the angel with the intent of worshiping him. However, the angel cautions John not to do so and forcefully commands him: "Worship God!" Although the angels are heavenly spirits and although we hold them in great respect, yet we must not forget that they, together with us and all saints, are servants and witnesses of Christ and therefore should not be accorded divine honor and worship, which belong to God alone.

Very important for us to remember on our journey through life are the closing words of this vision: "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." In other words, the testimony about Jesus is the very essence, the very heart, of prophecy. Yes, the Gospel of Christ is, and ever must be, the heart and center of all Christian preaching and teaching. And why? Because it is only when the Gospel message of the crucified and risen Redeemer is proclaimed in its truth and purity that men, women and children, by the

gracious power and working of the Holy Spirit, are made members of the Church, the bride of Christ, and as such will participate in the wedding supper of the Lamb.

The Battle; The End of The Two Beasts

19:11-13 I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God.

In this vision, John sees in the open heaven a rider on a white horse. There can be no doubt about the identity of this rider. The titles and names, as well as the attributes and deeds ascribed to Him, tell us at once that this is Christ, who, at the time of His final coming, is portrayed here as a warrior riding on a white horse.

He is called “Faithful and True.” He keeps all of His promises, and He is the very personification of truth. Consequently, He is absolutely reliable and can be trusted implicitly. No one will ever be disappointed for taking Him at His Word.

“With justice he judges.” It may not always appear so to us. There are times when we are perplexed and confused as we see the wicked prosper and the godly persecuted, and we are tempted to ask why the Lord permits it to be thus. Nevertheless, let us remember that He is faithful; and not only does He keep all of His promises, but He also will keep His threats. In the end, He will judge the world in righteousness, and it will become apparent to all that His judgment is always just and right.

Not only does He judge with justice, but with justice He also wages war. We can rest assured that the battle of our Lord against the forces of evil and the enemies of His Church is a war that is waged with absolute justice. Also this righteous judgment of the Lord will be revealed fully on the last day.

“His eyes are like blazing fire.” Whenever Scripture speaks of God’s eyes, it refers to the omniscience of God, namely, that He knows all things and that nothing can be hidden from Him. Christ’s eyes were so penetrating that, even during the days of His ministry on earth, we are told that He did not entrust Himself to men; for He knew all men, and He knew what was in man (John 2.24-25). Because Christ is all-knowing, and because He is faithful and true, we know that all of His judgments must be right.

“On his head are many crowns,” symbols of divine and universal rule. Although at this present time it may not appear to many people that Jesus is King, yet at His second coming all the world will have to acknowledge Him as the King of kings.

“He has a name written on Him that no one knows but he himself.” To give a person a name often is equivalent to describing what that person is. While we can understand in a way what it means when Jesus is called “Faithful” and “True,” yet there are many things about the person of Jesus that we cannot comprehend. For example, who can understand how the eternal Son of God could assume the human nature and thus become also the Son of Man? Indeed, that He is both true God and true Man is a mystery in the person of Christ which no one except Christ Himself can fathom.

“He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood.” While there are those who believe that this is a reference to the blood which Christ shed to atone for the sins of the world, yet, in the light of a messianic prophecy recorded in the Book of Isaiah (Is. 63:1-6), it appears that the blood on the Rider’s robe obviously refers to the blood of the enemies of God’s people. This entire description, therefore, symbolizes once again Christ’s decisive victory in the final battle with His enemies.

“And his name is the Word of God.” This name, known as “The Logos,” is applied to Jesus also in the opening words of John’s Gospel. In John 1:1 we read: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Then in John 1:14 we are told: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Just why Jesus is called “The Word” is rather unclear. Perhaps the best explanation is this: as we, by the use of words, communicate to others what we feel and think, so God, by sending Jesus, the Word, into the world, has shown us what is in His fatherly heart. Thus Jesus, the Logos, is God’s message of love to us, so beautifully expressed in John 3:16: “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

19:14-16 The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with an iron scepter. ”He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:

King of Kings And Lord of Lords.

As the Rider on the white horse goes forth, he is followed by the arm of heaven, dressed in fine linen, white and clean, and riding on white horses. Some say that these armies of heaven are the sum total of the glorified saints and martyrs. Others believe that these armies represent all the angels, since Jesus spoke of the angels accompanying Him when He returns to judgment. The analogy of Scripture leads us to favor the latter view, although it is entirely possible that these armies of heaven are composed of both, the angelic beings and the elect of God. Be that as it may, it is significant to note that these armies of heaven do not appear as armed for battle, but rather are dressed in white robes, - robes that are clean and not stained with blood. For one thing, this tells us that there can

be no doubt concerning the outcome of the battle. The white robes proclaim that from the very outset victory is certain. In the second place, this also confirms the truth expressed by Isaiah when he prophesied that the Messiah would tread “the winepress alone” and would win the victory single-handedly, without help from anyone.

To be sure, it is Jesus who fights this battle, - and He fights it alone. The sharp sword that comes out of His mouth is the Word of God. With this Word He strikes down the nations, smiting His enemies and overcoming all antichrists. This Word is not the Word of the Gospel; it is His terrible word of Judgment as expressed in the divine Law of God. That is the only weapon which Christ uses in this battle. With this Word He brings about the defeat and destruction of the unbelieving world.

This same message of judgment is expressed in Psalm 2, from which John quotes: “You (namely, the Messiah) will rule them with an iron scepter” (Psalm 2:9). To understand the full meaning of those words, we shall have to hear also the last part of Psalm 2:9, where we read: “You will dash the to pieces like pottery.” The time to strike with the iron rod for complete destruction has now come.

As a symbol of God’s judgment on the unbelieving world, we are told of Christ: “He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.” In days of old, the grapes would be cast into a winepress; and people would squeeze the juice from the berries by “treading” or walking on them. In like manner, Jesus will crush all enemies under His feet, thus manifesting the fury of the wrath of the Almighty God. All the enemies of Christ and His Church, even the most powerful, will be crushed; none will escape. What a day of terror that will be for all who have rejected Christ and have chosen to follow the beast! Then all men will know with utmost certainty that Christ Jesus indeed is the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

19:17-18 And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, “Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great. ”

In the first part of this particular vision, the judgment that would befall the enemies of Christ is described; in the second part of the vision, this judgment is carried out. John says that he saw an angel standing in the sun, thus occupying a commanding and a most conspicuous position. In a loud voice, this angel summons the birds flying in mid-air, - most likely, birds of prey, such as the hawks and vultures. He invites these birds of prey to “the great supper of God,” where they may feast on the flesh of the enemies of God. Since the number ten is a number of completeness, and since ten groups or classes of enemies are mentioned, we may say that this symbolizes the complete, or total, victory over all of God’s enemies. What a contrast this supper of God is to the joyful marriage feast of the Lamb! The invitation to this supper of God becomes all the more ghastly because of its finality. The destruction of the enemies of God is assured

from the very outset.

19:19-21 Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

The climax is rapidly approaching. John sees the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assemble to make war on the Messiah. The battle itself, however, is not described. The entire emphasis seems to be on the overwhelming victory of Christ. The beast and the false prophet are captured. That is about the only description that we have of the actual battle. From the very beginning, the attack of the enemies was destined to end in dismal failure.

It is clear that this beast is the first beast, - the beast from the sea, - the secular Antichrist. The false prophet is described as the one who performed miraculous signs before the beast and thus deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. It is evident, therefore, that this false prophet is the second beast, - the beast from the earth, - the ecclesiastical Antichrist. (Both of these beasts were described in detail in chapter 13).

After their capture, both beasts are cast alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur; they are thrown into hell. This implies, then, that every power that Satan ever used to delude and destroy men ends in hell, never again to appear outside of hell, never again to threaten the elect of God, who are safe in their eternal home.

As eternal punishment in hell is the final destiny of all enemies of Christ and His Church, so eternal punishment in hell is also the fate of those who follow and serve the two beasts. It is a gruesome picture that is held before our eyes: "The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the Rider on the horse." The sword that came out of the mouth of the Rider is the Word of the Lord, - not the sweet, inviting Word of the Gospel, but the Word of severe and just judgment: "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41).

Like all the other series of visions, so this series also comes to a close with a portrayal of the final judgment. The emphasis in this series was primarily on the judgment and destruction of the antichristian forces in the world. The two beasts are cast into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. Thus, only one enemy remains, namely, Satan; and his fate is portrayed in the next chapter.

Perhaps we ought to mention here that when the opponents of Christ were described in previous chapters, they appeared in this order: the dragon (Satan), the first beast, the second beast, and the harlot Babylon. But they are judged and condemned in the reverse order: the prostitute Babylon (chapters 17 and 18), the two beasts (chapter 19) and finally, the dragon (chapter 20). We must realize, however, that although they are pictured as being judged and punished individually, yet, in reality, their end comes at the same time, namely, at the appearance of Christ on that last great day.