

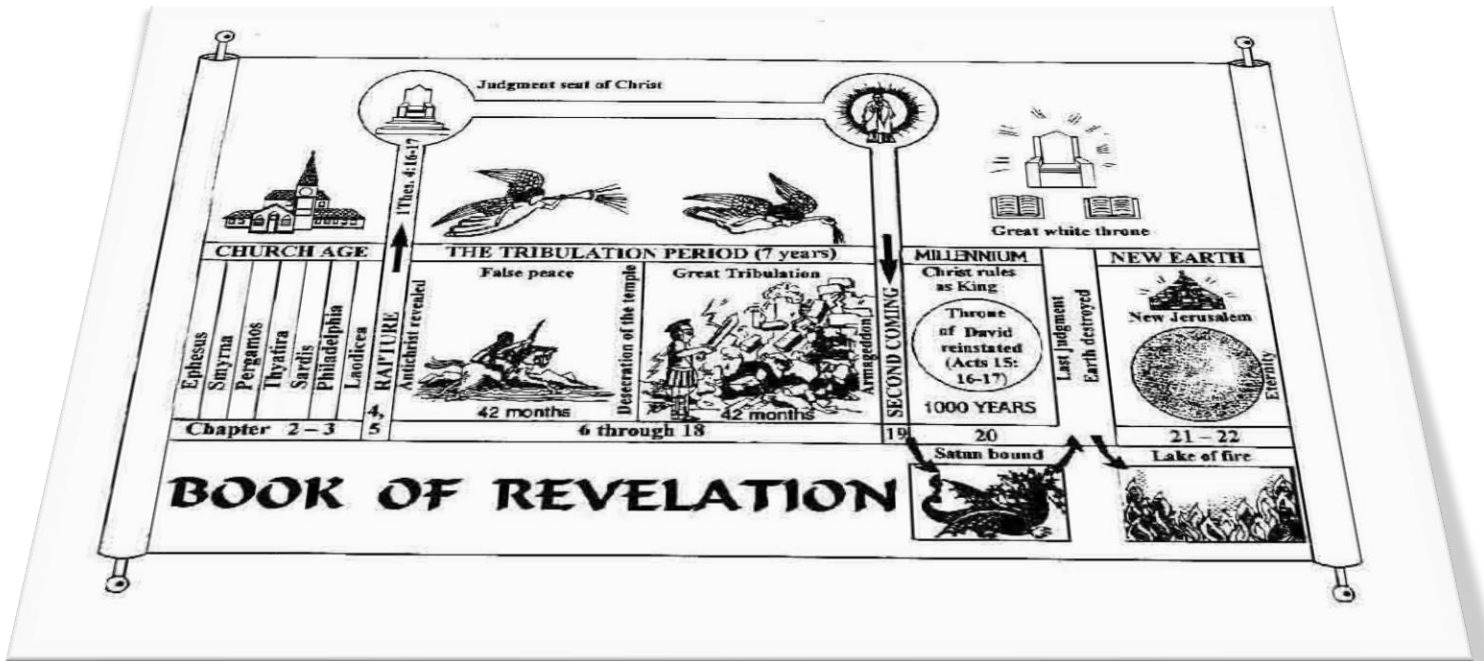
A dramatic sunset over a beach. The sky is filled with vibrant orange, red, and yellow clouds, with a bright sun low on the horizon. The ocean reflects the colors of the sky, and a large flock of birds is seen in flight over the water. The foreground shows the sandy beach with some small rocks and debris.

# The Day of the Lord

A Commentary on Revelation

Johan Malan

# The Day of the Lord: A Commentary on Revelation



*Prof. Johan Malan, University of the North*

**Abstract:** A chronological study of Revelation from a premillennial and pretribulation rapture point of view.

Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version, unless otherwise stated. Quotations from the King James Version are designated **KJV**, from the Amplified Bible **AB**, from the Living Bible **LB**, and from the New International Version **NIV**.

## Preface

The Revelation of Jesus Christ contains prophecies on the future, which Christ signified by His angel to His servant, John. It is, therefore, not “The Revelation of John” but “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.” He is the central theme of the book: “For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19:10). He is the only door to the eternal glory that He is preparing for those who love Him. He is the One who will judge all who despised His saving grace as they loved darkness rather than light. People will be surrendered to the Antichrist because they did not accept the authority of the true Christ in their lives. The Lord Jesus will also return to restore the throne of David in Jerusalem and manifest His kingdom on earth. Every knee will bow before Him and every tongue confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

While on the barren island of Patmos, John said: “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day” (Rev. 1:10). Suddenly he was in the Spirit, lifted by the supernatural into the heavenlies. He soared on prophetic wings of ecstasy, and travelled across unborn ages to witness the unfolding plan of God in the tremendous events attending the great and terrible Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord is a period of a thousand years when the Lord Jesus will reveal Himself in a very special way to mankind. He will reward His saints, judge the wicked and rule over the earth for a thousand years.

Unfortunately, many people view Revelation as a sealed book and do not take trouble to study it. They even discourage other people from reading the book and investigating its prophecies. By doing so, they are acting contrary to a clear command: “Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand” (Rev. 22:10). On the other hand, a blessing is promised to those who read the book: “Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book” (Rev. 22:7).

The Lord Jesus calls His disciples to live vigilant and prayerful lives: “Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man” (Lk. 21:36).

**Prof. Johan S. Malan**



# Contents

## Preface

1. Introduction to the book of Revelation
2. Revelation of the glorified Christ (Rev. 1)
3. The church on earth (Rev. 2-3)
4. The church in heaven (Rev. 4-5)
5. The judgement seat of Christ (Rev. 4-5)
6. The seven seals (Rev. 6)
7. Salvation in the hour of darkness (Rev. 7)
8. The seven trumpets (Rev. 8-10)
9. The temple and the two witnesses (Rev. 11)
10. The escape of Israel (Rev. 12)
11. The Antichrist's reign of terror (Rev. 13)
12. Characteristics of the Antichrist (Rev. 13)
13. The false prophet (Rev. 13)
14. The seven bowl judgements (Rev. 14-16)
15. Religious and political Babylon (Rev. 17)
16. Economic Babylon (Rev. 18)
17. The Second Coming of Christ (Rev. 19)
18. Christ's reign of peace (Rev. 20)
19. The final judgement and the new creation (Rev. 20-22)
20. A strategy for survival

# 1. Introduction to the Book of Revelation

Revelation is important because it is the last divinely inspired Bible book that was written. It is rightly positioned as the Bible's final book. As the New Testament opens with the four Gospels relating to the first coming of Christ, so the book of Revelation closes the New Testament with the general theme of the Second Coming of Christ.

According to Profs. Walvoord and Zuck (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*) the book of Revelation is also the climax of many lines of revelation running through both testaments, and it brings to a conclusion the revelation of many prophecies yet to be fulfilled.

In Revelation, the Second Coming of Jesus, and the seven years of the tribulation period immediately preceding it, are revealed more graphically than in any other book of the Bible. In the book of Daniel the period between Daniel's time and the first coming of Christ is described in detail, while less detailed references are also made to the Antichrist, the great tribulation, and Christ's reign on earth after His Second Coming. In Revelation, however, the great end-time events are elaborately revealed, while the prophetic perspective is extended to include the creation of a new heaven and a new earth. Revelation, therefore, expounds upon and gives the final unfolding of future events that are described in Daniel and other prophetic books of the Bible.

## Authorship

In Revelation 1:1 it is clearly stated that the book was written by the Lord's servant, John. Most evangelical scholars accept the fact that the apostle John is the author of the book. When John received these visions he was in exile on the isle of Patmos. He was deported by Caesar Domitian who ruled as a tyrant in Rome from 84 to 96 A.D. Domitian was a second Nero who tried to completely obliterate Christianity. He demanded the worship of Caesar. Christians who refused to submit themselves to this practice were gruesomely tortured and killed.

This Caesar exiled John to Patmos who, as an old man, ministered to the congregation in Ephesus. That is how John landed on the small, rocky island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea between Asia Minor and Greece. He stayed there until the death of Domitian in the year 96, after which he was allowed to return to Ephesus. The book of Revelation was written in the year 95 or 96 on this island.

The burning question that must have troubled John was most probably: "What will happen to the church of Christ in the midst of all the persecution?" In answer to this question, he received from heaven visions of future events while on this lonely island. In these visions not only Satan's great battle against the kingdom of God is revealed, but also the final triumph of Christ over the powers of darkness. The glory and dominion of God is sharply contrasted with the rebellion, judgements and condemnation of sinners and their deceivers – the Devil, the Antichrist and the false prophet.

## The purpose of the book

The purpose of the book is to reveal things that will occur shortly before, during, and directly after the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. In accordance with this purpose, the greatest part of the book is devoted to the events of the last seven years before the Second Coming of Jesus, as described in chapters 4 to 18. The Second Coming itself is dramatically depicted in Revelation 19, followed by the millennial reign of Christ in Revelation 20, and the final judgement at the end of it. In Revelation 21–22, the eternal state is revealed.

The book of Revelation consummates the prophetic themes discussed in other books of the Old and New Testaments, particularly the book of Daniel and the prophetic discourse of the Lord Jesus. Important theological pronouncements are made – not only on the subject of eschatology (the doctrine about end-time events), but also on the doctrines of justification, sanctification, dedication, works of faith, and the perseverance of the saints in the face of fierce struggle and persecution in a degenerating world. Knowledge about God’s end-time program, as well as the future expectation of the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom, is given as a strong incentive towards holy living and an unwavering commitment to Christ. Peter says:

“Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God” (2 Pet. 3:11-12).

### **The day of the Lord**

The visions which John received are clearly placed in the context of **the day of the Lord**. He says: “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day” (Rev. 1:10). This expression refers to the experience in which a person is transformed into a state in which God communicates with him personally in a supernatural way. That was also the experience of Ezekiel (Ezek. 2:2, 3:12, 14), Peter (Acts 10:10-11, 11:15) and Paul (Acts 22:17-18).

There are people who wrongly associate the expression “the Lord’s day” with a Sunday or even with the Sabbath. Nowhere in the Bible is a Sunday described as “the day of the Lord,” but always as “the first day of the week” (cf. Mt. 28:1, Mk. 16:2, Lk. 24:1, Jn. 20:1 and 19, Acts 20:7, 1 Cor. 16:2).

The expression “the day of the Lord” clearly has an end-time (eschatological) meaning. Several of the Old Testament prophets referred to it. The visions which John received on Patmos are clearly also related to the coming day of the Lord. John speaks of the day of the Lord as the time when He will pour out His judgements over the wicked. Panic-stricken people will call on the mountains and rocks, saying: “Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand? (Rev. 6:16-17). In Revelation 16:14-16 the battle of Armageddon is described as “the battle of that great day of God Almighty.”

Isaiah says in chapter 2:12 that on the day of the Lord everything proud and lofty will be brought down and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day (v. 17). In chapter 13:6-9 he says that the day of the Lord will come as destruction from the Almighty. This day will be cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and the Lord will destroy its sinners from it. In chapter 34:8 he calls the day of the Lord a day of vengeance and a year of recompense.

Joel says in chapter 1:15 that the day of the Lord shall come as destruction from the Almighty. In chapter 2:11 he says: “For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; who can endure it? In chapter 3:14 he says that in that day there will be multitudes in the valley of decision.

In Zechariah 14 the great wars that will be waged in and around Jerusalem during the great tribulation are specifically associated with the day of the Lord. In this chapter the Second Coming of Jesus is also described, when His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4-5). He will be followed by a heavenly host and enter into judgement with His enemies.

Malachi says in chapter 3:2: “Who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears?” In chapter 4:1, 2 he says: “For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly, will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts... But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings.”

In 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 Paul refers to the day of the Lord that will come like a thief in the night. Peter makes the same reference in chapter 3:10-12 of his second Epistle.

It is clear that the expression “the day of the Lord” always has an end-time meaning, and in most cases refers to the judgements of God that are described in the book of Revelation.

### **Dispensations in the Bible**

To clearly understand the time-frame of the Day of the Lord one needs to be acquainted with biblical dispensations. In the Bible, the divine history of humanity is ordered within the framework of seven dispensations. It commences with the creation of Adam and Eve in Eden and culminates in the new heaven and new earth where an eternal, perfect existence will prevail. The 7 dispensations are:

1. The dispensation of innocence in Eden.
2. The dispensation of the conscience after the Fall.
3. The dispensation of the law in the Old Testament.
4. The dispensation of grace in the church age.
5. The dispensation of the Antichrist’s reign.
6. The dispensation of Christ’s millennial kingdom.
7. The dispensation of perfection in eternity.

The beginning and end of a dispensation are always marked by dramatic events associated with the unfolding of a new aspect of God’s plan for the ages. They are also accompanied by intensified demonic activities as Satan then tries everything in his power to upset God’s plan. The main characteristics of the seven dispensations are as follows:

#### ***1. The dispensation of innocence***

The very first dispensation in which Adam and Eve found themselves was that of innocence in Eden. God had forbidden them to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and warned that they would surely die should they eat of its fruit (Gen. 2:17). They were innocent, as they had no knowledge of good and evil and were not ashamed of their nakedness (Gen. 2:25). With great cunning Satan deceived Adam and Eve into rebelling against God by disobeying Him. They foolishly heeded Satan’s advice and yielded to his evil influence, thus becoming sinners. Spiritual death immediately set in, while they also physically became mortal. The dispensation of innocence ended with the Fall, which was the result of Satan’s deception.

#### ***2. The dispensation of the conscience***

For a long time after the Fall humanity had no law and could only distinguish between good and evil by way of the voice of conscience. Various people pursued righteousness in accordance with their inner convictions and whatever personal revelations God gave them. Some of them, like Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph became preachers of righteousness. At times during this dispensation evil was so intense and pervasive that God’s anger was kindled against humankind. During the Flood all but eight people were

destroyed. Through the calling of Abraham, God started to prepare a special people of His own, the nation of Israel, to live in accordance with His laws.

At the end of the dispensation of the conscience, when Israel were about to receive the law of God and move into a new dispensation, Satan launched an incredible attack against them from the kingdom of darkness. He employed all his powers of deception to avert the next unfolding of God's divine plan for humanity. While Moses was on Mt. Sinai to receive the law, Israel were deceived into rebelling against God by practising idolatry, thereby rendering them unfit to receive God's law. God threatened to destroy them, but Moses interceded for Israel. He was so shocked at the sight of the golden calf that he broke the tablets on which the law was written, but God graciously wrote them again.

### ***3. The dispensation of the law***

With the introduction of the dispensation of the law a much clearer distinction was made between good and evil. Not only in the Ten Commandments, but through a great number of other laws and decrees, God defined righteousness and sin. Satan concentrated on Israel to induce them to sin, in an effort to subvert and nullify their calling as a special people of God. His efforts were greatly intensified when the time came for the Messiah to be born. Satan must have been extremely infuriated with the announcement from heaven that the Messiah's Name would be Jesus and that He would save His people from their sins (Mt. 1:21). Satan then took possession of Herod and incited him to massacre all male children under the age of two years in an effort to destroy Jesus. When this evil plan failed Satan then tried to tempt Jesus to sin in the wilderness and afterwards relentlessly attacked Him through the hostile leaders of Israel. He wanted to eliminate Jesus and obliterate the gospel of the kingdom of God. But the devil's plans backfired on himself because, through His death, Jesus destroyed "him who had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14). God's divine plan proceeded unaltered.

### ***4. The dispensation of the church***

With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit the church age was ushered in. The Holy Spirit was given to guide people into all truth, to convict them of sin and righteousness, to regenerate them, and also to endue them with power from on high to serve Christ in a spiritually dark world. The knowledge of good and evil was increased through spiritual discernment (we have enlightened eyes of the mind), but still not to its fullest extent: "For we know in part, and we prophesy in part" (1 Cor. 13:9). Despite Christians now having a strong weapon against Satan, his efforts to thwart God's plan intensified as, for many centuries, he has conducted an all-out war against Christ's church using Roman emperors, the medieval Roman Catholic Church and, later, secular humanism, communism, the inter-faith and new age movements, in an attempt to destroy it – which has also failed.

We are at the very end of the church dispensation and it is once again a time of increased demonic activity with a great falling away in many churches: "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils" (1 Tim. 4:1). Satan intends to pervert the

church of Christ, tries to prevent the virgins getting oil (type of the Holy Spirit) in their lamps and lulls them to sleep before the Bridegroom comes at midnight. (Mt. 25:1-13) By establishing a false church (an ecumenical alliance between degenerate Protestantism, Catholicism and the non-Christian religions), as well as the promotion of a culture of sin (including abortion, homosexuality, drunkenness, and immorality of all sorts), a climate is created which is conducive to the appearance, acceptance and worship of the Antichrist as universal messiah and "man of sin." (2 Thes. 2:3)



### ***5. Dispensation of the Antichrist's reign***

When the one who withholds – i.e. the Holy Spirit indwelling the true Church – has been taken out of the way during the rapture, the Antichrist will be revealed (2 Thes. 2:6-12). Strong delusion will prevail on earth and the masses will blindly believe the lies of the Antichrist. Evil will develop to its fullest extent and there will be no limits to blasphemous and sinful conduct. The second half of the Antichrist's reign of seven years will be a time of unprecedented demonic activity: "Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time" (Rev. 12:12). Towards the end of the seven years of tribulation the Antichrist and the false prophet will, under the instigation of Satan (Rev. 16:13-14), muster a great multinational force to fight against Christ when He descends to Jerusalem to defend and rescue Israel at His Second Coming. This battle will not be a long one as the Antichrist and the false prophet will be captured and cast alive into the lake of fire. The devil will be chained and confined to a bottomless pit for one thousand years (Rev. 19:19–20:3).

### ***6. The dispensation of the millennial kingdom***

During the Millennium the glorified believers will rule with Christ. They will have perfect, immortal bodies, perfect joy and perfect knowledge. But the end of this dispensation will also be characterised by tremendous demonic activity. Satan will be let out of prison to make a last desperate attempt to thwart the completion of God's master plan. He will then act as a catalyst to the rebellious, unsaved people (and there will be many) living during the Millennium, whom he will deceive into joining him in his final battle against the kingdom of light. This vain effort will lead to the final doom of Satan, his hordes and all unsaved people of all dispensations on the Day of Judgement (Rev. 20:7-15).

### ***7. The dispensation of eternity***

This dispensation will be endless. In the new heaven and on the new earth "there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of life" (Rev. 21:27). The lake of fire where Satan, his demons and all lost people will be confined, will also exist for all eternity.

## **Methods of interpretation**

The prevailing confusion among many Christians about biblical dispensations results from using wrong methods of interpreting Scripture, which often do not recognise the true meaning of the prophetic word. By so doing, they relegate many of the clear pronouncements about the future to the status of mere symbols and abstract concepts with no literal meaning, so spiritualising *literal* prophecies.

The thousand year reign of peace that will, according to Revelation 20, be instituted after the Second Coming of Christ is, despite the evidence that has been cited, still a subject of great controversy. In terms of their divergent views, Christians are grouped in different doctrinal schools. Those who interpret the book of Revelation in a literal, dispensational way, are called **millennialists**. This term is derived from the Latin word for *thousand* which is *mille*. It refers to Christians who believe that there will be a *literal* thousand year reign of peace on earth after the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. A synonym for the term **millennialist** is **chiliast**, which is derived from the Greek word for a thousand, *chilios*. People who do not believe in a literal thousand year reign are called **amillennialists** or **antichiliasts**. They are also inclined to change the meanings of many other biblical statements and concepts by spiritualising what is clearly meant to be taken *literally*.

Because of these controversies a number of different principles of exegesis (interpretation) are applied in regard to the book of Revelation. Some of them deviate so far from the basic meaning of the text that it seriously compromises the divine inspiration of the book. The following are the four most common ways of interpreting the book:

**1. *Historic premillennialism (AD 33-400)***

Until about the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, this was virtually the only view of end-time events. It held that a literal Antichrist would emerge in the end-time and that the church would go through the tribulation period. This would end with Christ's Second Coming, at which the just dead would be raised and raptured to heaven with living believers. They would immediately return to earth with Christ to rescue the repentant Jewish remnant who had accepted Him as their true Messiah. He would then destroy Antichrist with his hordes and establish His kingdom of one thousand years on earth. All but one of the church-fathers who wrote on prophecy held this premillennial view, and in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century Justin Martyr wrote that to teach otherwise was heretical!

**2. *Amillennialism (AD 400 to date)***

This is the practice of the extensive spiritualisation of biblical statements. It is a form of interpretation that was devised by the Alexandrian school of theology in the third and fourth centuries and which regards the entire Bible as an allegory to be interpreted in a non-literal sense. This interpretation of the Bible was later restricted largely to end-time prophecies by Augustine, who interpreted Revelation as a chronicle of the spiritual conflict between God and Satan, being fulfilled in the present church age. A liberal variation of this view in modern times considers Revelation simply as a symbolic presentation of the concept of God's ultimate victory.

Theologians who follow this approach do not believe in a literal Millennium; consequently they are described as amillennialists. By spiritualising a biblical concept it is deprived of its face value, after which another meaning is read into it. This method of interpretation is also called *replacement theology* in terms of which Israel can be taken to mean the church (a claim made by many churches), Jerusalem can become anyone's home-town, Babylon can be applied to America, baptism can be equated with salvation and the 144 000 saved Jews of the tribulation can be applied to the millions of Christians of the entire church dispensation. Certain other concepts, such as the rapture, are simply argued away without replacing them with anything else.

**3. *Postmillennialism (mid AD 1600's to date)***

According to this school, the world will progressively become a better place through Christianisation, thereby ushering in the Millennium of the church age. At the end of the "golden age" of a Christianised world, Christ will return for the final judgement. There will, according to the postmillennialist interpretation, be no further dispensation of the kingdom of God on earth with Jerusalem as world capital.

**4. *Modern, dispensational premillennialism (early AD 1800's to date)***

J.N. Darby (born 1800 in London) was an eminent British theologian who is credited for re-establishing dispensationalism in the church. In the book *When the Trumpet Sounds* (p. 127-8), Prof. Floyd Elmore of Ohio, USA, says that John Darby had the greatest impact upon the study of biblical prophecy in the last 150 years, and that he was a choice servant of God who was used to impact the church's understanding of biblical prophecy. He says that, "Darby is the acknowledged father of systematised dispensationalism and a key modern developer of the pretribulational rapture."

This approach is followed by conservative scholars who hold the view that everything described from Revelation 4 to the end of the book are future events. The contents of Revelation 4-18 describe the last seven years preceding the Second Coming of Christ and particularly emphasise the great tribulation, occurring in the last 3½ years before His coming. After the Second Coming Satan will be bound and the millennial reign of Christ established on earth.

Because Christ returns before the Millennium, this view of prophecy is termed “premillennialism”. We are not now in the Millennium, and Satan is, quite evidently, not yet confined to a sealed pit – not even in a symbolic sense! Premillennialism honours the literal meaning of Scripture, except when the context clearly shows that a particular concept must be interpreted symbolically. An example of symbolism is the red dragon with seven heads, which the Bible itself identifies as the Devil. However, when the Bible speaks about Israel, the great tribulation, the Antichrist, the false prophet, the battle of Armageddon, the binding and incarceration of Satan after the Second Coming, there is no justification whatsoever for explaining away the meanings of these concepts through allegorising or spiritualising them. The golden rule is: *When the plain sense of the word makes common sense, then seek no other sense.*

### **Evaluation of the different approaches**

To the amillennialists and postmillennialists, the prophetic message of Revelation has lost its literal meaning and relevance as a result of spiritualisation. The chronology of the book is not recognised since the one thousand year reign of Revelation 20 is regarded as a symbolic expression of the church age between the first and second comings of Christ. Hence, they say the tribulation took place in the church age, either in the first century or during any other time. They say that the devil, though bound, is not totally contained and is still able to move around and do his evil business. Some amillennialists and postmillennialists maintain, quite unrealistically, that the devil is completely bound and no longer a threat to be reckoned with! On the extreme fringe there are those who believe that there is no devil and no hell – these concepts should, according to them, also be spiritualised!

Furthermore, the amillennialists and postmillennialists do not believe in the physical and spiritual restoration of the people of Israel according to Old Testament prophecies. In terms of replacement theology, they regard the church as the new Israel, or the spiritual Israel. Many of the end-time prophecies are allegorised and in a doubtful way relegated to historical periods when they are said to have been finally fulfilled. As far as they are concerned, the prophetic message of Revelation has become largely inapplicable to our generation because of its alleged historical fulfilment.

In the same vein, important signs of the times such as the institution of a cashless monetary system, the ecumenical alliance of world religions and the emergence of the new world order of the Antichrist are played down as biblically insignificant. The result of this attitude is often that church members lose their ability to spiritually discern the fulfilment of end-time prophecies and consequently abide by a secular assessment of contemporary affairs. Under these circumstances the expectation of the soon coming Bridegroom and a heavenly vision of Christ as “the bright and morning star” (Rev. 22:16) fades into the background. However, it must be said that some amillennialists are exemplary Christians despite their particular view of prophecy.

Premillennialism places a strong emphasis upon the basic truths of the Scriptures and fosters a clear concept of God’s divine plan for future events. Christians who hold this view interpret current affairs in the world in the light of the prophetic word, and, therefore, have the spiritual ability to see a biblical pattern in contemporary events. They avoid the typical amillennial pitfall of complacency that arises from the self-imposed assumption that the devil is either partly or completely bound, that Christians are taking over the world for Christ, that they will soon be able to sit back and enjoy the benefits of the kingdom and that Christ’s coming for the final

judgement is only a far distant prospect. Instead, they view themselves as strangers and pilgrims in a world that “lies *under the sway of the wicked one.*” (1 Jn. 5:19) They therefore expect an intensified struggle between the powers of light and darkness.

Premillennialists are also aware of the solemn hour in which we live, and are convinced that the dispensation of the church is rapidly running out. Under these circumstances, they make the best use of their time to warn others to prepare themselves to meet the Lord. Greater evangelistic zeal is thus encouraged as opportunities for giving effect to the Great Commission will soon end. Furthermore, the prophetic word urges people to continuously conduct their lives according to biblical standards of holiness, in preparation for the return of Jesus. They also long for the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom, who will take them to their heavenly mansions which He has prepared for them.

### **Views of the church-fathers**

To confirm that the Millennium is not merely symbolic, but a *literal* period of future history, it may be helpful to establish what John taught about his visions when he was released from Patmos and proceeded with his ministry in Asia Minor. Early church-fathers who were his students clarify the matter and indicate that this subject was often discussed. The following are some of the statements of church-fathers on the Millennium and related matters:

Papias, the bishop of Smyrna, was a student of John and learned firsthand about the author’s own interpretation of the book of Revelation. The teaching of this church-father is very important as he is the link between the millennialist view and the apostles. Papias taught that after the resurrection of the dead there will be a reign of Christ on earth for a thousand years when He will personally sit on the throne. The earth will experience a time of unprecedented fertility and there will be great prosperity under Christ’s beneficent rule with His saints. Early in the second century, Justin Martyr wrote: “A certain man among us, whose name is John, one of the apostles of Jesus, prophesied in a revelation that he had that those who believe in our Lord Jesus Christ will be in Jerusalem for a thousand years.”

Another church-father, Polycarp, who was one of the youngest students of the apostle John, was a very devoted Christian who also died as a martyr. On the authority of John he taught that the earth will be very fertile during the Millennium and yield abundant crops. Another view of significance is that of Irenaeus who was a student of Polycarp. He said that the reward of the just would be that they will be resurrected from among the dead when the world is renewed and made fertile. His view was that each of the six days of creation indicates a thousand year period, and that after six thousand years of world history have expired it would be followed by the seventh day, which would also be a thousand years.

This last-mentioned view was entertained by various church-fathers, among them Cyprian, Barnabas and Lactantius. In this regard, the Schaff-Herzog Encyclopaedia says that the general view of the church-fathers was that the Lord will appear at the end of the sixth millennium to establish His kingdom on earth. The general view was that this kingdom, which correlates with the Sabbath of Creation, will continue for one thousand years.

### **Persistence of the allegorical interpretation**

Despite the clear testimonies of the apostle John, the early church-fathers and the Bible’s own, very obvious message, the allegorical interpretation of biblical prophecies has permeated virtually the entire church. Theologians have deprived churches of the literal message of the Bible by wrongly interpreting it. Hamilton, an amillennialist himself, admits this problem in his book, *The Basis of Millennial Faith*: “Now we must frankly admit that a literal interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies gives us just such a picture of an earthly reign

of the Messiah as the premillennialists picture.” The critical question is not whether the Bible teaches such an earthly kingdom – because it clearly does – but how the relevant prophecies should be interpreted.

McDonald (*Dictionary of the Christian Church*) defines an allegory as follows: “The use of language to convey a deeper and a different meaning from that which appears on the surface.” An allegorical interpretation must be clearly distinguished from a symbolic interpretation. The Bible often makes use of symbolic language – also in the prophecies. A symbol always has a literal anti-type as it is used to explain something about a specific person or event. From the way in which it is used, it is clear that a symbol means something else. Examples of symbols to describe certain characteristics of Christ are the Lamb, the Lion, the light of the world, the bright and morning star, the true vine, etc.

In cases of allegorical interpretation, the relevant Scripture has a clear and obvious meaning, but the reader decides that he wishes to read something else into it, thereby assigning a figurative meaning to the Scripture. The allegorical interpretation, therefore, does not subject itself to the authority of the Bible by deriving its meaning *from* it, but approaches Scripture with a preconceived idea by reading something else *into* the Bible.

Angus & Green (*The Bible Handbook*) also refer to this danger when they say: “There is an unlimited scope for fancy, if once the principle be admitted, and the only basis of the exposition is found in the mind of the expositor. The scheme can yield no interpretation, properly so called, although possibly some valuable truths may be illustrated.”

Bernard Ramm (*Protestant Biblical Interpretation*) adds to this caution: “To state that the principal meaning of the Bible is a second-sense meaning, and that the principal method of interpretation is spiritualising, is to open the door to almost uncontrolled speculation and imagination. For this reason we have insisted that the control in interpretation is the literal method.”

O.T. Allis, who also spiritualises the Bible, is keenly aware of the negative results that it may yield when he says: “Whether the figurative or spiritual interpretation of a given passage is justified or not, depends solely on whether it gives the true meaning. If it is used to empty words of their plain and obvious meaning, to read out of them what is clearly intended by them, then allegorising or spiritualising is a term of reproach which is well merited.”

One of the great proponents of allegorical interpretation was Origen (born AD 185). He was strongly influenced by the Greek philosophy of Plato and tried to synthesise the Bible with abstract philosophical thinking. He identified the following three levels of interpreting the Bible:

The somatic or literal interpretation, which is sufficient for the simple-minded.

The psychological or moral interpretation for more advanced people.

The pneumatic or allegorical interpretation for those who have wisdom.

People with wisdom should find their way through all the symbols and ascend to the level of the mysterious. This approach paved the way to various kinds of deception and metaphysical speculation. In terms of this premise it is obvious why Origen did not believe in a literal kingdom of Christ on earth. With this approach he became the founder of allegorical exegesis and amillennial thinking. Like Augustine almost two centuries later, he regarded the church age as the dispensation of the kingdom.

Augustine (AD 354 to 430) perpetuated the serious exegetical and amillennial errors of Origen in his *Confessiones* and his book on the kingdom of God – *The Civitate Dei*. He also studied and accepted neo-Platonist thought. Augustine has the doubtful honour of having been highly regarded by prominent reformers such as Calvin and Luther, while also being venerated as the most eminent Christian scholar by the Vatican. The latter celebrates a feast to his honour on 28<sup>th</sup> August every year!

The modern church is still profoundly influenced by the heathen (Platonist) philosophy of the inter-testamental period and also by its similarly mistaken interpretational methods of spiritualising and allegorising the Bible.

### **The literal method of interpretation**

Fortunately, there is a growing group of evangelical scholars in modern times who are reverting to sound principles of interpreting the inspired and inerrant Word of God. Dwight Pentecost (*Things to Come*) gives the following definition of the literal method of interpretation:

“The literal method of interpretation is that method that gives to each word the same basic meaning it would have in normal ordinary customary usage, whether employed in writing, speaking or thinking. It is called the grammatical-historical method to emphasise the fact that the meaning is to be determined by both grammatical and historical considerations.”

The strongest proof of the literal interpretation is the way in which the New Testament makes use of the Old Testament. Good examples are the many prophecies about the birth, life, work and death of Christ that were all *literally* fulfilled in the New Testament.

Despite this overwhelming evidence about Jesus as the promised Messiah, the Pharisees and scribes decided to suppress the truth and lie to the people. Why did they do that? Hal Lindsey says that any person who does not realise that his most important problem is an inward, spiritual problem, prefers a political above a spiritual saviour.

It is still the same today. Many churches openly disregard the Bible’s literal message and engage in an ecumenical process of uniting church to society – inadvertently preparing for the world’s false political ‘saviour’, the Antichrist. The spiritualisation of biblical prophecies is clearly a trick by Satan to make people forget about the great spiritual Saviour of the world, Jesus Christ (Jn. 4:42), who will soon return to save the remnant of Israel and the nations (Mt. 24:30) and establish His millennial reign on earth.

At Christ’s *first* coming most Jews, especially the hierarchy, ignored the many prophecies about Him, so failed to recognise their true Messiah. Israel paid dearly for their neglect of prophecy: “For *the* days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation” (Lk. 19:43-44). Christ’s prophecies have and will all come true – *literally!*

A similar situation prevails concerning His *Second* Coming. Literal prophecies of His coming are either ignored or wrongly interpreted, thus depriving Christians of their proper future expectation – often leading to some focusing attention on political and social ideals. Jesus Himself said it will be as in the days of Noah and Lot. Those not truly born again will pay a very heavy price in tribulation and divine wrath by being left behind to endure the Antichrist’s reign of terror after Christ comes to take away His bride at the rapture.

To those who remain true to the Lord Jesus and expect His coming imminently, there is the real hope of returning to this troubled world with Christ when he establishes His millennial reign on earth after the tribulation period.

## 2. Revelation of the Glorified Christ

### *(Revelation 1)*

The very first verse of Revelation confirms the fact that the contents of this book do not constitute an incomprehensible allegory of future events, but a *revelation* of things to come which God intends us to read and understand with the Holy Spirit's help. The term *revelation* or *apocalypse* means *unveiling, uncovering, or the opening of something which is concealed*. The name of the book corresponds with the command of Christ in Revelation 22:10 where He says: "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book." The message of the book is intended to be understood and proclaimed.

The origin of the prophetic message of Revelation is clearly stated in the opening verse:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants – things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified *it* by His angel to His servant John (Rev. 1:1).

Please note that it is not the Revelation of John. He is the author of the book, but Jesus is the Revelator! It is also important to note that the title of the book is in the singular form and not in the plural. It is not the *Revelations* of Jesus but the *Revelation* of Jesus. The book is focused on the *coming, the appearing, or the revelation* of Jesus Christ.

John says that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. 19:10). The prophecies and judgements of the great tribulation must therefore also be related to Jesus. Even the unsaved people will be aware of this connection. When the powers of heaven are shaken they will exclaim that "the great day of the wrath of the Lamb has come, and who is able to stand?" (Rev. 6:17).

### **Purpose of the book**

The Lord says that the purpose of these revelations is "to show His servants things which must shortly take place" (Rev. 1:1). The word *servant* can also be rendered *slave*. True Christians belong to the Lord Jesus because He redeemed them with His blood (1 Cor. 6:20; 1 Pet. 1:18-19). If the book of Revelation is still a closed book to many church-goers it is probably due to the fact that they are not yet blood-washed servants of the Lord. In Revelation 5:9-10 the elders in heaven not only testify of the redeeming power of the blood, but they also know that they will reign on earth as kings after the Second Coming of Christ! They *know* what the future holds for them.

Through this book the Lord gives a prophetic perspective to His children. He asks them to heed and understand its message. In Revelation 2 and 3 the command is often repeated: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). It was never the intention of God to conceal or veil this message for His children.

By writing it down, John ensured that this important message would find its way to the entire church of Christ. In verse 2 he states that what he has described is an accurate record of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. He is therefore merely a messenger of that which God Himself wishes to address to the church through Jesus Christ. Peter also plainly states the importance of the prophetic word:

“So we have seen and proved that what the prophets said came true. You will do well to pay close attention to everything they have written, for, like lights shining into dark corners, their words help us to understand many things that otherwise would be dark and difficult. But when you consider the wonderful truth of the prophets' words, then the light will dawn in your souls and Christ the Morning Star will shine in your hearts. For no prophecy recorded in Scripture was ever thought up by the prophet himself. It was the Holy Spirit within these godly men who gave them true messages from God” (2 Pet. 1:19-21 LB).

The prophetic lamp has shone through the ages and lightened up the pathway of devoted pilgrims in a dark world. Abraham sojourned in tents in a strange land. Because he had a vision of a city whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:10), he lived by faith as someone whose citizenship is in heaven – in the new Jerusalem. We must clearly realise that the narrow and the broad way will shortly reach their final destination. In Revelation, these two destinations are vividly contrasted with one another. The narrow way is heading for eternal glory in the new heaven, the new earth and the new Jerusalem, while the broad way is heading for the judgements of God in an eternal night of terror in the lake of fire.

In Revelation 1:1 it is also emphasised that the Lord wishes to show His servants things that must *shortly* take place. Many people wrongly conclude that these prophecies were to be fulfilled shortly after they were made known. The meaning of the text is rather that these events will rapidly follow one another once they start to unfold after the church dispensation. The word *shortly* is not a correct rendering of the Greek word *tachei*, which means quickly. Our word *tachometer* is derived from the Greek *tachei* and refers to a speedometer or a rev counter. The implication is that when the end-time events are activated by the catching away of the true church in Revelation 4, they will be fulfilled very rapidly.

For many centuries God was patient and long-suffering with humanity. Peter says:

“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is long-suffering towards us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9).

The moment will come when God's patience and long-suffering with a corrupt and unrepentant human race will be over. Then He will reveal Himself in wrath and anger. At that time, His judgements will follow one another in quick succession.

### **The promise of the book**

Apart from the judgements of the seven seals, the seven trumpets and the bowl judgements, there are also seven promises or Beatitudes recorded in Revelation. They are:

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near (Rev. 1:3).

Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works follow them (Rev. 14:13).

Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame (Rev. 16:15).



Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb! (Rev. 19:9).

Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years (Rev. 20:6).

Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book (Rev. 22:7).

Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city (Rev. 22:14).

It is important to take these beatitudes to heart and to comply with the conditions for them. We must hide them in our hearts, often meditate on them, and order our lives accordingly. The Lord wishes us to realise that the time is short. Don't push the book of Revelation aside and argue that it is still a very long time before these things will occur. In so doing, you will deprive yourself of great blessings apart from exposing yourself to dangerous complacency.

The people who lived in the time of the early Christian church, or during the Middle Ages, equally needed to live in the light of the Second Coming by preparing themselves to meet their God. They also needed a heavenly perspective to enable them to look beyond the temporal and secular things of this world to their eternal home in heaven. Paul reminds the Thessalonian Christians that they had "turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God and to wait for His Son from heaven" (1 Thes. 1:9-10). Only then will your priorities as a Christian be correctly determined by keeping your garment clean and pursuing things with eternal value. In so doing you will gather treasures in heaven you cannot be robbed of. Even if you die as a martyr, your works of faith will follow you to the judgement seat of Christ where rewards to faithful servants of the Lord will be given. The promise of the Second Coming should also motivate you to persevere in the midst of severe trials and persecution. You know that you are on your way to the marriage feast of the Lamb, and that you will enter the new Jerusalem through the pearly gates to inherit your eternal home in heaven.

Are you expecting the imminent Second Coming of the Lord Jesus and does it motivate you spiritually? John says that he who has this hope in Jesus purifies himself, just as He is pure (1 Jn. 3:3). Strive for doctrinal purity by studying the Word (Rom. 6:17; 2 Jn. 9), and moral and spiritual purity by cleansing yourself from all filthiness of the flesh and the spirit (2 Cor. 7:1).

### **Christ and His Church**

The message of Revelation comes from the Triune God. It includes letters addressed to the seven churches in Asia Minor. Since seven is the biblical number of fullness, and is often repeated in the book of Revelation, this message is addressed to the entire church of Christ through the ages.

The excellence of the Lord Jesus as Head of the church is extolled in a moving and lofty way. He is the One who loved us and washed us from our sins with His own blood. He is the One who is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him. He is the Alpha and the Omega. *Alpha* means He is the beginning of the creation of God and of the plan of salvation for mankind. As *Omega* He is the One who will bring the Divine purposes to completion and through whom we shall obtain entrance into our final eternal home in glory.

John beholds Jesus as He is during the present dispensation of the church – moving among the golden lampstands, being intimately aware of everything that happens. The various congregations are depicted by the lampstands, as they are the vessels into which the oil of the Holy Spirit is poured. When the members of the churches are filled with the Holy Spirit, they will be shining lights in a dark world.

Jesus is portrayed in all His glorious appearance. He is clothed with a garment right down to His feet, and girded with a golden girdle, thereby emphasising His priestly and royal dignity. His hair, white like wool, symbolises His wisdom, while His eyes that are as a flame of fire, witness to His incisive judgement and omniscience. Nothing is hidden from His sight. His feet like fine brass as if they burned in a furnace, depict His absolute holiness and purity. Because of our sins, He went through the fire of God's judgements; through Gethsemane, Calvary and the grave, without flinching. Consider the great sacrifice that He made to walk this path. He left the glory of heaven to be rejected on this earth – despised, mocked, beaten and executed with criminals:

“His face *and* His whole appearance were marred more than any man's, and His form beyond that of the sons of men” (Is. 52:14 AB). “He is despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief: and we hid, as it were, *our* faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows: yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He *was* wounded for our transgressions, *He was* bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him; and by His stripes we are healed” (Is. 53:3-5).

Paul likewise writes about the humiliating death that Christ died for our sins, but also refers to the indescribable honour and glory that was bestowed on Him in heaven:

“Christ Jesus..., being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:6-11 KJV).

It is the glorified Christ whom John sees in the midst of the lampstands. He, when He was on trial, offered no plea in His defence, He opened not His mouth (Is. 53:7), but now He speaks with a great voice as the sound of many waters. No one can dispute it, argue against it or challenge its authority. His words are like a sharp sword out of His mouth – it causes division, justifies and judges. His countenance is like the sun that dispels all the darkness, yet blesses and warms the hearts of all His own with His beneficent rays. His special witnesses are as bright shining stars in His right hand. They must cause the light of the Sun of Righteousness to shine upon a world shrouded in darkness. His feet are like brass as if they burned in a furnace. Likewise, His disciples must aspire to a holy walk in life and be purified through suffering.

Jesus Christ is the One around Whom the entire book centres. From the beginning people reacted differently to Him. Shortly after His birth, Simeon said to Mary: "Behold, this *Child* is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against" (Lk. 2:34). During the past 2 000 years Jesus has indeed been the cause of the rising into a new life for millions of people. On the other hand many have rejected Him, having loved the darkness more than the light, so have fallen under God's wrath and into eternal punishment.

According to these two characteristics, the book of Revelation depicts Jesus Christ as Redeemer and as Judge. In the first place He is revealed as Redeemer and Head of the Church, as He walks in the midst of the lampstands. He speaks words of comfort to His faithful servants, reprimands the stubborn ones and calls to repentance the unsaved church members who only have a form of godliness. The glorification of the church and the everlasting kingship of Jesus are closely connected to His work of redemption.

In the second place, He is revealed as the Judge who exercises judgement over all those who have rejected Him. Until the last moment He offers them the opportunity to accept Him as Redeemer. Finally, when the fullness of

time is reached, He passes judgement over all the followers of the Antichrist and the false prophet with the sword that issues from His mouth.

In righteousness, in glorification as well as in judgement, the determining factor is the relationship that every person has with Christ: *for* Him or *against* Him. This is what prompts John to state in Revelation 19:10 that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy". He is either the Saviour of your soul, or He will be the Judge of your soul. In the great tribulation a Christ-rejecting world will be brought to trial and get a last opportunity to repent and accept Jesus as Saviour.

### Sequence of prophetic events

The glorified Jesus addresses John directly, but the apostle is so overwhelmed with fear and humility that he falls like a dead man at the feet of Jesus. Shortly before the destructive end-time judgements are announced, the Lord lays a reassuring hand upon His servant and says: "Fear not". He has overcome the last enemy, death, and therefore he who truly belongs to Him, has no cause for fear; he "...shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (Jn. 5:24 KJV).

In Revelation 1:19 John is commissioned to write the things he has seen, the things that are and the things that shall be hereafter. The manner in which Jesus has formulated this commission, is an important key to an understanding of the book of Revelation, since three series of events are distinguished.

- First, John must record the things he has seen, that is, the glorified Jesus amidst the seven lampstands.
- Next, he must report the things that are. The year 95 AD, when John received the visions on Patmos, was within the dispensation of the church. At present, we still find ourselves in the same dispensation. John lived in the early years of it while we find ourselves very close to the end of the church age.
- The main part of the message of Revelation deals with the things that shall be hereafter, and includes everything that will happen after the consummation of the church age.

Viewed from this angle, it is evident that the book of Revelation has been written in a chronological order with regard to the clearly defined categories of events, i.e.:

- the glorified Christ, in chapter 1.
- A review of the dispensation of the church on earth, in chapters 2 and 3.
- The heavenly vision, featuring also the glorified church, in chapters 4 and 5.
- The seven years of tribulation, in chapters 6 to 19:10.
- The Second Coming of Jesus, in chapter 19: 11-21.
- The thousand year kingdom of peace, in chapter 20:1-6.
- The final judgement, in chapter 20:7-15.
- The new heaven and the new earth, in chapters 21 and 22.

It is clear that most of the events described in this book – from the revelation of the Antichrist in chapter 6 until the end of his career at the Second Coming of Jesus in chapter 19 – occur within a period of only seven years. This time-frame ties up with Daniel 9:24-27 in which 70 year-weeks of Israel's history since their return from the Babylonian captivity are described. Every week represents a period of seven years. Of the 70 year-weeks, 69 expired at the crucifixion of Jesus when God's clock for the divine history of Israel as a nation stopped. The times of the Gentiles then commenced, in which the gospel message was to be proclaimed to all the nations on earth.

However, according to Daniel 9:27 one year-week still remains to be fulfilled in Israel's divine history. At the consummation of this week an end will be made to sin, while everlasting righteousness will be established and prevail in Israel according to Daniel 9:24. During this seven year period, Israel will be tried, tested and purified so that a remnant may be preserved and reconciled to the Messiah. On the day that Israel concludes a covenant with the false messiah, the count-down will commence for the last seven years before their national conversion takes place. Daniel 9:27 states clearly that this week will be divided into two halves of 3½ years each – that is 42 months or 1260 days each. In Revelation 11:2-3 and 13:5 reference is made to these two periods.

First, the church dispensation of Revelation 2 and 3 will be reviewed, which will be terminated by the unknown hour of the rapture. After that, the count-down of the seven years of the tribulation will start with the revelation of the Antichrist.

### 3. The Church on Earth

#### *(Revelation 2 and 3)*

Seven letters of encouragement and admonition were sent by Christ to the church of the New Testament. At a time when more than a hundred congregations had been established, He selected seven that reflected the typical characteristics representative of the entire church in the current dispensation. There is no hidden reason, therefore, why most of the congregations did not receive letters. Each church, as well as every individual Christian, can identify with one or more of these congregations and take the message therein to heart.

Revelation 2 and 3 furnish a vertical as well as a horizontal perspective of the Christian church. Should a vertical 'cutting' be made of the Christian church at any stage, it would reveal seven different layers. Such were the characteristics of the early church when these letters were written, and the same seven categories remain the distinguishing marks of the end-time church as well. All denomination fit into one or more of these groups.

Besides this perspective, a horizontal division can be made of the church in successive periods. Although these church types were all in existence throughout the entire dispensation, the general characteristic of the Christian church has, with the passing of time, followed the course of these seven types. In terms of this view, there are seven distinctive periods in church history. We currently find ourselves in the period of Laodicea, the last of the seven churches. While certain denominations still display characteristics of the first six types, the end-time church can be described as predominantly Laodicean.

As will be evident from the discussion that follows, there is a great difference between *the Church of Christ* and *the Christian church*. The former includes those who sincerely belong to Christ because they have been washed from their sins in His blood. The latter includes all those who belong to Christian churches – including the nominal Christians who are not yet saved. In the spiritually degraded situation that is rife in all the major

denominations, many if not most of the members are nominal Christians who have a mere form of godliness. It is with them in mind that the Lord sends messages to five of the seven churches calling for repentance.

### **1. Ephesus – The backslidden church**

Ephesus was a prosperous seaport in Asia Minor (the present Turkey) with about 225 000 inhabitants. The city was famous for its impressive temple of Diana. The people were loyal worshippers of their goddess Diana and bought silver images of her to exhibit in their houses. The silversmiths who made these images had a thriving business (Acts 19:24).

#### *A good start*

On his third missionary journey in about the year 53 A.D. the apostle Paul established a congregation here. In spite of fierce opposition he continued for more than two years to conduct meetings here and to train disciples. (Acts 19:8-10) God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul. (Acts 19:11) A significant breakthrough was also achieved among people who were involved with magic. They repented to God and publicly burned all their books about occult powers. (Acts 19:19) Idolaters also repented to the Lord.

Since the day of its inception this congregation caused a big uproar in the city and the people were very conscious of its existence. The income of the silversmiths decreased as fewer people bought their works of art. For the first time the worshipping of the goddess Diana met with serious opposition. A mass meeting was held, and for about two hours the people shouted: “Great is Diana of the Ephesians!” The city clerk had to intervene to calm the people (Acts 19:23-41).

The opposition did not discourage this young congregation. Undaunted they fearlessly exposed and rebuked the abominations and false religions of their day. This they did in a spirit of true love towards Christ and the brethren. When the time came for Paul to leave he had a long meeting with the church council in which he encouraged the elders, but also exhorted and warned them against deception. He knew that the great adversary of the church of Christ is not asleep, and that he would wait for the right opportunity to infiltrate the congregation with false teachers in order to seduce and confuse them. Paul said to the elders:

“For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears” (Acts 20:27-31).

#### *Commendations*

About 40 years after Paul left Ephesus, and 35 years after he wrote his epistle to them, John received the command on Patmos to write a letter to this congregation. In the letter they are commended for their tireless efforts, their patience, and for the fact that they rejected false apostles, and also hated the activities of the Nicolaitans.

The Nicolaitans were hated by God. They strove to attain positions of religious power, and also wished to be honoured and followed by people, but they lived immoral lives. In accordance with the Old Testament pattern they endeavoured to institute a priestly order of men who would enjoy privileges and rights above the ordinary members of the congregation who were to be regarded as laymen without any status or rights. They did not want to be *shepherds* to the flock but *lords* over the congregation (1 Pet. 5:2-3). This attitude of superiority and

domination is also reflected by the name of the Nicolaitans, which is derived from *nico* (to subject) and *laos* (the laity or people).

This structure was foreign to the New Testament pattern as it would inhibit the exercise of faith, witnessing, and spiritual gifts by ordinary members. Active Bible study and participation in the proclamation of the gospel by 'laymen' would be restricted, and under conditions such as these the church would never succeed in its calling to actively evangelise the world. An elevated hierarchy of priests, bishops, cardinals and other office-bearers would assert unjustifiable authority over members and even become self-imposed mediators between man and God. As such they would be stumbling-blocks to the proper functioning of the church of Christ.

### ***Spiritual backsliding***

All the commendations that the congregation in Ephesus received were heavily outweighed by the serious charge of spiritual backsliding against them. Jesus Himself said:

“Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love” (Rev. 2:4).

The word “agape” is used here, which denotes a divine standard of love. This lack of true love is in sharp contrast with what Paul wrote to them earlier:

“Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love (*agape*) for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers” (Eph. 1:15-16).

Now it was 35 years later and the congregation consisted mainly of second generation Christians. Although they still maintained doctrinal purity and were diligent in their work, there was a serious lack of commitment towards Christ. They served the Lord with their lips, but their hearts were far from Him – their love for Him had grown cold.

It is not acceptable at all to the Lord Jesus that His church on earth should degenerate into an organisation with only a form of godliness, in which He is only nominally worshipped but, in effect, has been pushed aside by office-bearers, ecclesiastical structures and human organisation. He clearly expresses His dissatisfaction with this state of affairs and says that if they persist with their backsliding He will remove their lampstand from them:

“Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works; or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place – unless you repent” (Rev. 2:5).

The lampstand symbolises the light of Christ in the congregation and its witness to the world outside, while the oil refers to the Holy Spirit who is able to fill the lives of members to make them shining lights in a dark world.

The Lord calls on the church to repent from the situation into which it has lapsed. Humanly-motivated works done for the church by its members are not acceptable to God. A buoyant church is one in which the members serve God under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The congregation is called to return to its *first works*, i.e. those done out of love for the Lord Jesus. Should they not do so, Jesus says He will remove the lampstand from them. As an organisation controlled by human beings they could continue to survive, but they would no longer be a mouthpiece for Christ. He will raise another church, or congregation, that will be prepared to serve Him in Spirit and in Truth.

Ephesus not only lost their lampstand, but the congregation itself ceased to exist after the 5<sup>th</sup> century, as did the city also. The entire surrounding area became part of the Muslim world.

### *Personal application*

What the Lord says to each of the seven churches He also says to you and me: “I know your works.” He is the One who walks among the seven lampstands and is intimately aware of our works – yes, even the intentions of our hearts. He sees everything and knows our thoughts afar off. What is the motivation of your service to the Lord – to be seen and honoured by others and to be recognised by men, or because you truly love the Lord Jesus? He is not satisfied with an outward form of godliness that emanates from a cold and impure heart. If your heart is not perfect with the Lord, then pray the prayer of David:

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties: and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps. 139:23-24).

What is the true nature of your Christian experience? Do you serve the Lord under moral or social pressure and with your own effort, or does the Holy Spirit inspire you to proclaim the excellence of your Redeemer? Let your light therefore so shine that all may see it and in this way be drawn closer to Him.

The Lord is not only aware of wrong motivation and carnal works, but also of the works of true dedication to Him. It is often with great effort and sacrifice that something is achieved for the kingdom of God, but people may not see or appreciate it. In your heart you may be deeply hurt because of the ignorance and insensitivity of others but you should find comfort in the words of Jesus: “I know, I see, I know your works!” Your lonely labours and sacrifices may be unnoticed by other people but not by Jesus. He said: “Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work” (Rev. 22:12). Isaiah also referred to these rewards when he said: “Behold, the Lord God shall come with a strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him; behold, His reward is with Him” (Is. 40:10).

To the faithful members of Ephesus, who did not forget the Lord Jesus and were not carried away by the strong current of dead formalism, the following promise is given:

“To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7).

The condition of the church in Ephesus is characteristic of the early Christian church until around the year 100. The comments apply equally to their initial love for the Lord and to their subsequent spiritual deterioration.

## **2. Smyrna – the persecuted church**

Smyrna is a large seaport city about 60 kilometres north of Ephesus. It still exists today. During the Roman era it was one of the flourishing cities of Asia Minor. It is an attractive and well-planned city built on the slopes of the Pagos in a curved bay. The inhabitants were loyal allies of the Roman Empire. Since 195 B.C. the city was an important centre for Caesar worship. A large statue of Caesar Tiberius was erected here. The city also had a number of heathen temples for the gods Zeus, Apollo, Nemesis, Aphrodite and Bacchus, amongst others.

### *The persecution of Christians*

*Smyrna* means *bitterness*, and is indicative of the ruthless persecution and acute suffering of the church under the Roman yoke. There was hardly any conceivable method of humiliation, persecution and martyrdom that was not used against the Christians. Public scorn, derision and heavy fines, discharge from employment, and

expropriation of property numbered among the lighter forms of persecution. More generally, imprisonment in musty dungeons under situations where hunger, disease and torture prevailed, as well as execution on charges of heresy, was the order of the day for thousands of Christians. At times the prisoners were let loose in the large arenas to be torn by lions and other beasts of prey. No value was placed upon their lives, and during the public executions callous spectators even derived amusement from these tragic and macabre scenes in the arenas.

It was also in Smyrna a criminal offence to be a Christian. They were mercilessly persecuted, oppressed, deprived of their possessions, and also killed. Many of them became beggars. With reference to their misery the Lord says to them: “I know your works, tribulation, and poverty – but you are rich” (Rev. 2:9). Although the congregation was materially poor, they were spiritually rich because they shared in the riches of Christ:

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9).

Are you a partaker of the spiritual riches of the Lord, and are you still gathering riches in heaven through a life of dedication and service to the Lord? During a big depression a wealthy Christian lost all his possessions. During his time of affluence he made big financial offerings for the work of the Lord. During his subsequent loss the question was asked to him whether he didn't regret the big offerings that he made for the kingdom of God. “No,” he replied, “that is all that I still have!” That investment can't be taken away from him. The church in Smyrna also experienced the same situation. They lost everything that they had on earth, but they were rich in heaven because they suffered as Christians and bore His reproach in a godless world.

There is also another meaning hidden in the name *Smyrna*. It is derived from the Hebrew for *myrrh*, which is a bitter herb. When it is pulverised it releases a sweet fragrance. When Jesus suffered persecution and His body was bruised and wounded on the cross, He blessed people and prayed for the transgressors. When Stephen was stoned he ask the Lord to forgive his murderers. How do *you* react when you are subjected to persecution, insults and slandering? Do you return the insults or do you spread the fragrance of His knowledge in every place?

Persecution for the sake of Christ will be rewarded in heaven. The Lord promises the martyrs the crown of life. In the sermon on the mount He promised the following blessing:

“Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven” (Lk. 6:22-23).

Peter said: “If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter” (1 Pet. 4:16).

### ***The martyrdom of Polycarp***

Polycarp, one of the martyrs in Smyrna, was a dearly loved preacher of the congregation. He was one of the students of the apostle John who believed in a literal thousand year reign of peace on earth, and also proclaimed it. He loved the Lord Jesus and refused any form of compromise with the non-Christian religions. In the year 155 A.D., when Polycarp was 86 years old, he was executed on the stake for refusing to deny Christ and worship Caesar.

Polycarp could have fled if he wished to, but the Lord prepared him in a dream for what was awaiting him. His servant succumbed to severe torturing and told the police where Polycarp was. When they traced him, he had a



meal prepared for the police and asked them one hour for prayer. The police pleaded with him: “Only say: ‘Caesar is God’. That is not so bad.” But he politely refused.

When Polycarp was escorted into the stadium, the crowd was already incited to a level of insanity. They shouted: “Away with atheists! Away with Polycarp!” The proconsul put him before a choice by saying: “I respect your age, but curse Christ and worship Caesar, or die in the flames.” His answer was: “I served Him all these years and He never harmed me in any way. How can I blaspheme my King, Jesus, who saved my soul?”

A stake was quickly prepared. Polycarp refused to be tied with ropes, and he prayed while he was burned alive: “O God Almighty, Father of your beloved and blessed child, Jesus Christ, God of angels and powers, and of the whole creation and all the righteous people, I worship You!” While the flames ascended around him and enfolded him, he clung to the Lord Jesus and gave glory to the God of heaven.

### *The way of suffering*

The Lord cherishes an intense sympathy for these martyrs because He, too, walked the path of suffering and drank the bitter cup of persecution to the last drop. To this church He introduces Himself as the One who was dead but is now alive. He urges them to take a firm stand in the midst of suffering, because they will be rewarded with the incorruptible resurrection life if they remain faithful. Jesus says to the martyred church:

“Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life... He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death” (Rev. 2:10-11).

The ten days probably refer to the persecution of Christians during the rule of ten successive Roman emperors – from Nero in 64 AD, until Diocletian in the year 305. With the commencement of the Smyrna period the persecution had already started, and it would take its course for the next two centuries. The last two years under Diocletian were the bloodiest. This tyrant, like most of his predecessors, deified himself. He even took a step further and expected people to fall on their knees at the sight of him, to kiss the seam of his garment and exclaim: *Dominus et Deus!* (My Lord and my God!). In the year 305 he proclaimed an edict by which Christians should all be divested of their possessions and civil rights, and in terms of which all Christian churches were to be closed. The accompanying persecution is considered the bloodiest of all Christian persecutions. After the abdication of Diocletian in 305, the campaign to eradicate Christianity continued until the year 312.

### **3. Pergamos: the compromising church**

Pergamos, about 30 km. inland from Smyrna, was a large and popular city that was for about 400 years the capital for the region. It was such an influential centre for heathen religions that the Lord calls it *the throne of Satan* (Rev. 2:13). From the following five points of view this was a very suitable description for the city:

#### *(1) Zeus worship*

A large altar for Zeus was built on top of a hill. It was 13 metres high and from a distance it resembled a throne. Zeus was the supreme god in the Greek Empire. In the Roman time he was commonly called Jupiter. To the Romans he was the supreme god of the heavens and of thunder, the highest ruler of the universe. He was worshipped in many cities and countries. In Acts 14:13 we read about an occurrence in Lystra: “Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice

with the multitudes.” Zeus was honoured as the patron, or protector-god, of the cities where his imposing shrines were erected. As such he was a type of the devil who rules over a fallen world.

### *(2) The temple of Asclepius*

A large temple for the god Asclepius was also erected in Pergamos. He was the god of healing and was represented by a snake. Many people served the snake, which is also a disguised form of Satan-worship. The symbol of the snake is still used by some medical organisations.

### *(3) Caesar worship*

There was also a temple in honour of Caesar Augustus in the city. In the Roman Empire, like the other Caesars, he was the god of this world who demanded the worship of his followers. Refusal to do so was punishable by death. In his capacity as religious head of the empire Caesar was a type of the Antichrist who gets his power from Satan to rule the world, to promote idolatry, to outlaw Christianity and to try and eradicate this religion and its followers as they will not bow before images of Caesar or any other gods.

### *(4) Babylonian religion*

In ancient times, during the fall of Babylon, the Chaldean priest-king and his followers took refuge in Pergamos. Because Babylon was an important centre for pagan religions, one of the thrones of Satan was, because of this turn of events, transferred from Babylon to Pergamos. The unbiblical tradition of affording political status and domination to religious leaders, thus became established in the city. Prompted by the Babylonian institution of an order of priests headed by a priest-king, a priestly hierarchy of men, who also aspired to secular leadership, was introduced to the Christian church. Besides this, the Babylonian tradition of homage to the sun-god and the queen of heaven with her darling son, exercised their influence upon Christian circles. It eventually led to the veneration of the Madonna and her Child and the deification of Mary, mother of Jesus. In this way, the throne of Satan was transferred from Pergamos to Rome. In the coming tribulation period, under the reign of the Antichrist, the “throne of Satan,” which refers to the power of a false world religion, will be transferred back to the rebuilt Babylon.

### *(5) Doctrines of demons*

There is another reason why Pergamos acquired the title of “the throne of Satan,” and that is the heathen philosophy that formed the basis of its educational system. The city boasted of a university with a collection of 200 000 books, mostly inclined towards the Greek philosophy. Polytheism (a belief in many gods) was promoted, as well as Plato’s metaphysics which gave rise to a belief in undefined supernatural forces, including witchcraft. This philosophy and empty deceit was the contributing factor to the spiritual decadence of the dark Middle Ages. It gave Satan a firm grip over the nations of the world.

The church was thus assailed and misled on a variety of fronts.

### *The doctrine of Balaam*

With the exception of a small core group of Christians who remained true to the Word of God, the congregation of Pergamos became theologically liberal and started compromising with the heathen religions around it. Most of them adopted the attitude of Lot, by saying: “I want to be a Christian but I also want to accept what the world offers me.”

The compromise that the church made with the secular world has inevitably given rise to disloyalty and infidelity among members. The emergence of this situation is also reflected in the name *Pergamos*, which means *marriage*. During the reign of Constantine, the church and state contracted a marriage, but in the eyes of God an attachment of this nature amounts to spiritual adultery:

“Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (Jas. 4:4).

The Lord refers to this compromise as "the doctrine of Balaam who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality." (Rev. 2:14) According to Numbers 22 to 24, Balaam was hired by Balak, king of the Moabites, to pronounce a curse upon Israel. However, Balaam refused to do so and persuaded Balak not to resort to curses and military confrontation, but to tempt Israel by means of compromise to partake in the feasts of Baal.

This strategy brought success, and we read in Numbers 25 that Israel accepted an invitation to attend a feast for Baal in Moab. Passion prevailed and soon this new friendship induced the Israeli men to commit sexual immorality with the daughters of Moab, and to pay homage to their idols. This provoked the Lord's anger against Israel and He caused a plague to come upon them in which 24 000 people died. Balak exulted over this tragedy since he had succeeded in bringing the wrath of God upon Israel. Afterwards Moses expressed his resentment against Israel's discarding of principles through their permissiveness. In Numbers 31 he said:

“Have you kept all the women alive? Look, these *women* caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD” (Num. 31:15-16).

In modern times, the same change in strategy by the enemies of God has also wreaked havoc among believers. By adopting the strategy of *compromise* in place of *confrontation and persecution* large sectors of the Christian church have been lured into various practices of fornication with the non-Christian religions, and with the world. Severe persecution couldn't destroy the Christian church in Communist countries. However, in the Western world Christian churches have, with a few exceptions, apostatised and become so worldly-minded that they have largely forfeited the favour of the Lord. Instead of spiritual blessings, they are bringing the wrath of God upon themselves because of their fornication and compromise with an evil world.

Those who would not compromise or associate with the heathen traditions of Pergamos, or worship the Emperor, were persecuted and became martyrs for their faith. Like Antipas, they paid the highest price for refusing to compromise with unbiblical beliefs. Antipas was executed in a hollow bronze calf under which a fire was made, causing him to burn to death inside. The calf had an open gullet, allowing the horrifying screams of the dying martyrs to be heard by the amused crowds. But Antipas didn't open his mouth while he was dying. In this letter, the Lord Jesus Christ commends Antipas as *My faithful martyr* (Rev. 2:13). *Antipas* means *Against everything*. In the godless city of Pergamos, Antipas had little choice but to denounce just about everything from Caesar worship to the godless educational system.

The Lord Jesus reveals Himself to this congregation as the One who has the sharp two-edged sword (Rev. 2:12). The sword of His Word clearly separates righteousness and unrighteousness. It quickens the conscience of mankind by helping us to distinguish between right and wrong:

“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb.4:12).

The Word of God is not only meant to create certain impressions in the heart of a person; the Gospel of Christ is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16). James says: "...receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls" (Jas. 1:21). But this word is also related to the judgements of Christ upon the wicked. Included in this group are the apostate compromisers in Christian churches. In Revelation 19:21 we read that the enemies of God will be killed with the sword that proceeds from the mouth of Him who sits on the horse." His name is: "The Word of God" (Rev. 19:13).

### ***Prophetic application***

The church of Pergamos can prophetically be applied to the church period between 312 and 606. An important turn of events occurred in 312 AD when the Emperor Constantine brought to an end a long period of the persecution of Christians by the Roman Empire, by recognising and accepting the Christian faith. It is believed that while on one of his wars of conquest he saw a cross in the sky, as well as the following words: *In hoc signo vinces* (In this sign you will find victory). After this experience he achieved significant military success, and because of it he adopted the Christian faith. Through the Edict of Milan in 313 he granted equal rights to Christianity on the same level as all other religions (freedom to all religions). However, his personal commitment to Christianity is in doubt. Though he ended Emperor worship he did not condemn the heathen religions, and was baptised only shortly before his death.

At any rate, the change in the religious sphere was enormous. Suddenly the persecuted church had to fling open its doors to high-ranking officers and prominent citizens, including the Emperor. All of them were prompted to become 'Christians' for the sake of expedience without proof of genuine faith. The requirements of the gospel were scaled down to make the message more popular and acceptable with the new audiences. Large sums of money were voted to the clergy by the Emperor, and with this generous financial aid they erected imposing church buildings.

At the Council of Nicea in 325 AD, a body of bishops obtained control over the church. This opened the way for the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, harking back to the church at Ephesus, to be introduced. The initiative for ordinary members to operate independently was gradually suppressed, and in due course everyone had to conduct themselves according to the directions and rules laid down by the bishops and priests. In this way the hierarchy of the church encroached upon the priesthood of all believers, the authority of the Word of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers.

### ***Promise to the overcomers***

To His faithful witnesses in this godless city, Jesus said:

"To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it" (Rev. 2:17).

The hidden manna refers to Jesus Himself as the true bread of life (Jn. 6:32). He is the Word that became flesh to dwell among men on earth to offer to them eternal life. Everyone who seeks the Lord will find Him and experience satisfaction for the spiritual hunger of their souls.

The white stone was something special during the time of John. In the palace of Caesar the holder of such a stone was entitled to come to the palace every day to have all his needs fulfilled free of charge. The Lord Jesus also gives such a stone to His disciples, with the promise: "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you" (Jn. 15:7). That is our wonderful privilege if we truly belong to Him!

Another use of stones was in court cases. Members of the jury each received a white and a black stone so that they could indicate their verdict by producing the appropriate colour stone. The black one indicated that the accused was guilty and therefore condemned him if it was produced. By the white stone he was declared innocent and discharged. The Lord Jesus gave to every blood-washed child of His a white stone which indicates his acquittal. His debt has been paid and he is accounted righteous (Rom. 4:5). On this stone a new name is written. It was common practice in biblical times to give to believers new names in order to indicate their new status and identity as children of God. In this way, Abram became Abraham, Jacob became Israel, Saul became Paul, and Simon became Peter. Every person on earth who is saved, becomes a child of God. He is called a Christian because he is a new creation in Christ. Has the Lord made you a new person?

#### **4. Thyatira – the apostate church**

The longest of the seven letters is directed at Thyatira which was the smallest and most insignificant city of the seven. It is situated on the road between Pergamos and Sardis. Despite its small size it was a flourishing commercial centre in which the most important products of trade were purple dyestuffs, wool, textiles, rope, ceramics, leather, linen, and copperware. A person had to belong to a guild, or trade union, which, apart from its industrial function, was also associated with the worship of a heathen god. To the Christians, this religious connection posed a big problem. They were confronted with the choice of either going along with the guilds and their veneration of idols, or to break with them and suffer economic loss as a consequence.

However, people were not so fanatical about their gods as was the case in Pergamos and Smyrna. They did have a number of heathen temples, but apart from the conditions attached to the membership of guilds there was no strong coercion on people to worship idols. The persecution of Christians, therefore, occurred to a much lesser extent.

The first person who was saved in Europe, came from Thyatira. It was Lydia, the seller of purple (Acts 16:14). She probably had a big share in establishing the local Christian congregation.

Jesus Christ introduces Himself to this church as “the Son of God who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass” (Rev. 2:18). A letter that starts in this fashion will most definitely not be filled with comforting thoughts. We are here confronted with the holy Son of God who speaks with great authority to a congregation that was grossly at fault. His eyes are like a flame of fire and can see through every covering and disguise. He sees deep into the hearts of all, He knows the mistakes of the congregation, and He is aware of the most hidden thoughts and motives of every individual. They all stand unmasked in His holy presence. His feet like fine brass allude to the furnace of God’s judgements. He cannot tolerate sin – least of all in His church! The works of Jezebel must be exposed and condemned.

#### ***The backsliders***

A woman, who was accepted by the majority of the members, introduced serious spiritual deception to this church:

“I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and to eat things sacrificed to idols” (Rev. 2:20).

The woman, Jezebel, proclaimed false teachings in the church. She was a prominent woman with a strong personality, who simply took over and deceived the congregation. It spread like leaven and had disastrous consequences in the lives of people. In conflict with the ruling of 1 Timothy 2:12: “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man,” Jezebel was tolerated and accepted. The Lord strongly reprimanded the

congregation because of this. They were also warned that this false religion and its followers are heading for great tribulation:

“Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds” (Rev. 2:22).

There are striking similarities between Jezebel of Thyatira and Jezebel of the Old Testament who was notorious for her harlotries (2 Kgs. 9:22), and who also influenced Ahab her husband to worship Baal (1 Kgs. 16:31).

### ***The faithful core group***

Jesus sees the faithful core group in the church and commends them for their works, their love, their service, their faith, and their patience. In the midst of all the deception and backsliding He sees this group that remains loyal and faithful to Him. They are encouraged not to follow the majority in that which is wrong, by refraining from exposure to the depths of Satan through involvement with sexual immorality, the occult and idolatry. (Rev. 2:24) They should persevere in holding fast the truth and abstaining from evil despite the possibility that they may become outcasts. The future expectation of a government of righteousness in the millennium was offered to them. Here they will not be a despised minority group but co-rulers with Christ:

“But to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, and who have not known the depths of Satan, as they call *them*; I will put on you no other burden. But hold fast what you have till I come. And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations – *He shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the potter's vessels they shall be broken to pieces* – as I also have received from My Father. And I will give him the morning star” (Rev. 2:24-28).

The morning star is Jesus Himself. In Revelation 22:16 He says: “I am the Root and Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star.” After the present night of sin and unrighteousness Jesus will return to usher in a new day of righteousness in His millennial reign on earth.

It is noticeable that the Lord tells the faithful few to hold fast until He comes. The Thyatira aspect of the professing church on earth will, therefore, continue at least until the rapture – as indeed will all the other church types. The prophetic application of each church type indicates its period of dominance in the church history.

### ***Prophetic application***

Thyatira depicts the deceiving of the Christian church during the Middle Ages. In the year 606 Boniface III was crowned as universal bishop. This occasion commenced a long period of Roman Catholic domination. During the dark Middle Ages the church was ruled by a power-hungry hierarchy of priests, bishops, archbishops, cardinals and popes. The authority of the church was elevated above that of the Bible, and the claim of infallibility was applied to the pope's *ex cathedra* pronouncements. The position of Christ as Mediator was phased out as a result of this reform, and eventually people were forced to confess their sins to the priests.

As a result of the Babylonian influences absorbed into the Roman Catholic Church through a number of avenues, serious theological divergences and compromise with pagan customs occurred. Among these is the worship of Mary, which is merely a Christian replica of the Babylonian queen of heaven, Semiramis. Mary was deified in the year 381, based on the assertion that she had ascended to heaven. This view is still maintained by the Catholic Church, and the present pope declared the period from 17 July 1987 to 15 August 1988 as a special year for the veneration of the Madonna. She is called *the sinless Mother of God* as well as *the heavenly Mother of the Church*.

Various reports were published in *Marian Update* (1994) of appearances of 'Mother Mary' to her special devotees in Italy, Switzerland, Kentucky, Arizona, and the Ukraine. In these supernatural appearances she allegedly said, amongst other things, that the Roman Catholic Church should be heading an ecumenical alliance of world religions.

It is obvious that Jezebel has returned in the guise of Mary to perpetuate her false teachings. The religious falsehoods for which Thyatira and the church of the dark Middle Ages were notorious are again strongly revived in the end-time. Jezebel and her deceived followers will have to bear the consequences of their religious falsehoods in the coming great tribulation.

The Thyatira period continued throughout the Middle Ages up to the Protestant Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

### **5. Sardis: the dead church**

Sardis was the capital of Lydia and a very prosperous commercial centre. But the city was captured by the Persians and robbed of its treasures. The invaders also confiscated the weapons of the inhabitants and left them defenceless. In 17 A.D. Sardis was virtually destroyed by a big earthquake. The city was never restored to its former glory. In the time when John wrote his letter to the local congregation, Sardis had already greatly deteriorated and was economically and politically of very little significance. It only had a name and its past glory to boast about.

The same deterioration also occurred spiritually in the local church. The Lord said to them: “..you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.” (Rev. 3:1) The congregation was probably quite active, and outwardly created the impression that they were a dynamic and lively group. But this was a misleading perception. According to His evaluation, the Lord Jesus did not find their works perfect before God (Rev. 3:2). They were merely human works and not works done through the power of the Holy Spirit; that is why He could not accept it. We cannot please God if we serve Him in the power of the flesh, even though our organisation or church may outwardly appear to be successful and alive. Jesus is the One who can fill us with His Holy Spirit to equip us for service in His kingdom. Without the anointing with power from on high our works will never be acceptable to Him or perfect in His sight.

The congregation of Sardis was not denounced because of idolatry or compromise with the world, but because of the deadness of their outward form of godliness. A dead church is just as unacceptable to the Lord as a false or worldly church. Before the members are truly born again and filled with the Holy Spirit they are of no advantage to the kingdom of God. They are spiritually dead and need something more than the reputation and good name of the founders of the congregation to be successful from God's point of view.

The Lord Jesus said: “Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able” (Lk. 13:24). A person must get to the end of himself by discounting the spiritual value of his own virtues, remembering that unless he is truly born again “all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags” in God's sight (Is. 64:6). He must repent, lay down the burden of his sins at the foot of the cross, and stop trusting in his own works and past achievements before he will be able to pass through the narrow gate. After he has passed through the gate of salvation the Lord will endue him with the power of the Holy Spirit to do works that befit salvation.

### ***Prophetic application***

The prophetic application of this letter indicates that the Sardis period refers to the church of the Reformation. To describe this church as a dead church, is apparently a paradox. Yet, the Lord says: "I know your works, that

you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead" (Rev. 3:1). During this period only a sector of the church was theologically reformed, as Roman Catholic errors were exposed and the concept of justification by faith through grace was reinstated. However, despite these necessary changes much of the trappings, formalities and hierarchy of Rome had been retained and real godliness was still lacking in the church at large. The reform movement did not reach out to all levels of church activities since dynamic, growing churches that could evangelise the heathendom around them, had not been established. The Lord reproaches them for their indifference about this serious matter: "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die; for I have not found your works perfect before God" (Rev. 3:2).

Christ introduces Himself to this church as *the One who has the seven Spirits of God*. This attribute of the Lord has a direct bearing on their problem, as they did not display the zeal for evangelisation that may be expected from a Spirit-filled church. They made a good start, but they still needed the experience of full surrender to the Holy Spirit to get the power and motivation to rid themselves of the 'baggage' carried over from Rome and to fulfil the mission of the New Testament church.

History confirms the tragic fact that during the 200 years of its existence, the church of the Reformation did less evangelistic work than was undertaken within a mere 20 years in the succeeding Philadelphia period. This lack can be attributed to theological formalism without the required devotion and commitment to the One who has sent His Spirit to endue the church with power from on high. There were, however, also the exceptions. Many of the reformers faced tremendous personal threats, and they were prepared to defend the stand they had taken by stating their convictions in public. To them the assurance is given:

"You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy" (Rev. 3:4).

## **6. Philadelphia – The evangelising church**

Philadelphia is the youngest of the seven cities that are mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3. It was established by Attalus, the ruler of Pergamos. He had such a great love for his brother that his nickname was *Filadelfos* – He who loves his brother. Because of this, the new city was called *Philadelphia*, which means *Brotherly love*. The church in Philadelphia, together with the one in Smyrna, are the only two that were not rebuked by the Lord because of sin, dead formalism, idolatry, worldliness, or a lack of love. They are encouraged to persevere with the proclaiming of the gospel message despite their small numbers, their lack of influence and their meagre resources. Through the ages it has always been the small groups of dedicated disciples who were used by the Lord to do His work. They are deeply dependent upon Him and also faithful to His Word. The Lord Jesus promises to them that He will give to them an open door that nobody can close:

"See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name" (Rev. 3:8).

Throughout the church dispensation it has been a feature of evangelical Christians that they do not deny the Name of the Lord and always honour His Word. They believe in the inerrancy and divine inspiration of Scripture, and also accept its promises in faith. They venerate the Name of the Lord, they confess and proclaim the virgin birth and Deity of Christ, and desire to know more of His wonderful attributes that are revealed in the Bible.

Because they are faithful in the fundamental aspects of their relationship with the Lord, He blesses and encourages them, and open to them doors of opportunity in His service. How different it is today, with so many theologians and pastors who do not accept the Bible as the inspired Word of God. To compound their sins they



also deny the Deity and virgin birth of Jesus. But such were not found in the church of Philadelphia – they would more likely be encountered in Thyatira, Sardis, or Pergamos. Those in Philadelphia truly loved the Lord *and* the brethren, and they also honoured the Word of God.

### *Promises*

The Lord encourages His servants, who labour under difficult circumstances, to endure and not to become weary along the way. He also gave them the most wonderful promises:

“Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God...” (Rev. 3:10-12).

The faithful servants of the Lord are encouraged to prevail to the end by guarding against despondency, backsliding and the cooling of their love for the Lord. They must hold fast what they have, that no one may take their crown. The devil is the robber who subtly influences Christians to relax their vigilance, and ultimately to backslide and lose their rewards of grace. Before John was exiled to Patmos, he admonished the Christians by saying: “Look to yourselves, that we do not lose things that we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward” (2 Jn. v. 8).

Paul said: “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart” (Gal. 6:9). Let us therefore persevere to the end and stand immovable on the Rock, Jesus Christ. And may He find us busy with His work when He comes. His faithful disciples will reign with Him in His kingdom, therefore He will say to them: “Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities” (Lk. 19:17). Unfaithful servants who were not motivated by love to work in the kingdom of the Lord, will stand empty-handed on that day. They will be seriously reprimanded and saved yet so as through fire (Lk. 19:20-26; 1 Cor. 3:15).

### *Prophetic application*

The brotherly love of Philadelphia manifests the love of God that was poured out in the hearts of His children for their fellow brethren, but also for a lost world. It was the force behind the revival meetings and global missionary endeavours that were undertaken between 1750 and 1900. Filled with the Holy Spirit, men of faith became pioneers in carrying the light of the gospel to the unknown regions of Asia, Africa, South America and the islands of the sea. Badly equipped and often in danger of their lives owing to hostile heathen, tropical diseases and wild animals, these missionaries accepted the difficult challenge that faced them. Indigenous languages were learned with the greatest devotion. Translations of the Bible were made, schools were started and medical services rendered with the meagre means acquired from congregations and missionary friends in their countries of origin. Despite these problems they persevered with the work because the Lord was in it.

Among the heroes of faith who in their time set the world on fire with the message of Christ, were great men like George Whitefield, John Wesley, Charles Finney, D.L. Moody, Hudson Taylor, C.T. Studd, William Carey, Andrew Murray and many others.

Some of these revival preachers were rejected by the large denominations of their time because they were strongly outspoken against the deadness of the outward form of godliness that prevailed, and challenged the complacent members to put their lives right with the Lord. These preachers had to trust the Lord for their financial and other needs, and often suffered because of meagre resources. Also when they were faced by closed

doors they could only call on the Lord in prayer. It is He who promised to His faithful disciples: “See, I have set before you an open door” (Rev. 3:8).

Evangelical congregations like the one in Philadelphia were very common until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But as this century progressed, dead formalism and apostasy greatly increased while the Laodicean period of church history was established. But in spite of this general trend there will be evangelical Christians who remain true to the Lord right to the end of the church dispensation. They have the promise that they will be kept from the hour of trial that shall come upon the whole world. The hour of trial refers to the coming tribulation period under the rule of the Antichrist. The promise of escape is also given in Luke 21: 36: “Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

These promises confirm the premillennialist conviction that the private coming of the Lord for His church, the rapture, will precede the advent of the Antichrist and the tribulation period. The true church restrains the coming of the Antichrist.

### **7. Laodicea – the church of human rights**

The prosperous industrial and commercial city, Laodicea, was situated about 65 kilometres south-east of Philadelphia on the road to Colosse. In 60 A.D. great destruction was caused by an earthquake, but because of the wealth and entrepreneurship of the inhabitants the city was completely rebuilt. They relied on their own ability to do things, to the extent of being arrogant and boastful about their own achievements. The Laodiceans argued that they did not need anyone’s assistance as they were the masters of their own destiny.

The same spirit of pride, arrogance, and self-reliance prevailed in the church of Laodicea. They confessed the Name of the Lord with their lips, but in their hearts they were full of themselves and gloried in their own excellence. That was humanism in its most extreme form, as also implied by the name *Laodicea* which means *Human rights*. Their attitude and condition was so repulsive to the Lord that He completely dissociated Himself from them:

“So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth. Because you say, I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing – and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked” (Rev. 3:16-17; also see 1 Tim. 6:7-12).

Laodicea is the only one of the seven congregations that does not receive a single word of commendation from the Lord Jesus and He is unable to praise them for any aspect of their religious lives. They were as loathsome to Him as lukewarm water in one’s mouth. The Laodiceans understood this symbolism because the water for their city came through a pipeline of a few kilometres from Hierapolis. By the time the water reached Laodicea it had become so much heated that it was repulsive to drink it before it had cooled down. The Lord wants His disciples to be burning with zeal in His service, i.e. to be ‘hot’. If they are not, they should rather be ‘cold’ towards Him, like Paul on the road to Damascus, and thus candidates for salvation. But for His professed followers to be unenthusiastic about Him and even apathetic towards Him because they are more interested in their own virtues and achievements, is nauseating to Him. He spews them from His mouth.

Although Paul was never in Laodicea, their arrogance and lack of true godliness came to his attention and brought great grief to him. He prayed God that they, together with the Colossians, would search for God’s hidden spiritual riches instead of only pursuing the secular prosperity, wealth and humanism that was so important to them:

“For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ” (Col. 2:1-2).

### *Admonition*

The Lord gave to this congregation a very explicit solution to their serious problems:

“I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see” (Rev. 3:18).

The spiritual asset that the Lord offers to them is a genuine faith which is more precious than gold that is tested by fire (1 Pet. 1:7). That is a form of wealth which the prosperous economy and rich Laodicean banks could not offer to them. They are also counselled to obtain a robe of righteousness from the Lord. That was something which the weave and textile industry of the city could not supply to them. This industry was known for a black garment which they made of black wool. The garment that Jesus offers to them is made of pure white linen. The Lord Jesus also says that He can give to them eye salve that will restore their spiritual vision by giving them enlightened eyes of the mind. For their spiritual blindness, the eye ointment supplied by the Laodicean medical school in the temple of Asclepius, where the snake of healing was worshipped, is of no avail.

So there is a clear solution for this dead and self-satisfied church. First of all they must be made aware of their shortcomings because they do not even know that they are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. They need to be zealous and repent. Jesus is ready with the solution, that is why He is knocking at the door of this church, offering to save any individual who will open his heart to Him.

### *Prophetic application*

The smug, lukewarm, self-centred and spiritually bankrupt congregation of Laodicea is typical of the church in the twentieth century, and as such it reflects the last period of church history. As in the previous periods, some elements of all seven churches can be recognised, but the dominant type is that of Laodicea. An alarming situation prevails in this church. As a result of their humanistic orientation they only have a horizontal view of religion which focuses on human rights as well as the political, economic and social aspects of life. The vertical, man-God relationship receives virtually no attention as man occupies the supreme position in the humanist philosophy as the master of his own destiny. That is why he allows himself the freedom and self-imposed right to denounce the Bible as an imperfect human book and to openly challenge the virgin birth, the Deity and the expected personal appearance of Christ at His Second Coming.

Satisfied with their outward form of godliness, they continue on a course of formal worship while being unaware of their spiritual poverty. In spite of their prosperity and well-organised activities, Christ is not worshipped with a sincere heart. His name is frequently used, but there it also ends. The Lord dissociates and withdraws Himself from such a man-made religion that is only based on intellectual arguments, secular norms, and material achievements. He also plainly states the reasons for rejecting this useless, corrupt and hollow human organisation that presumptuously refers to itself as the church of Christ.

The prosperity gospel of Laodicea, in terms of which they say: “I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,” is founded on self-justification and a comfortable earthly life, but it is characterised by spiritual bankruptcy. The preaching by equally materialistic and puffed-up preachers is only aimed at pleasing their unsaved audiences who have itching ears that have already been turned away from the truth of God’s Word

(2 Tim. 4:3-4). The result of this worldly attitude and spiritual decline is that the younger generation are largely mastered by a Laodicean spirit of self-exaltation and the gratifying of their lusts. Within the humanist theological framework the matter of sin has become irrelevant as the desires of the self take precedence over the precepts of the Bible. The god of this world, who is also called Mammon, sways his sceptre over the wayward Laodicean church that Christ spewed from His mouth. Mammon deceives the modern generation into pursuing material wealth, popularity, success, and a worldly self-image. In this liberal life-style there is ample room for arrogant self-exaltation, boasting about one's own achievements, and the liberty to give free rein to one's carnal craving for liquor and all the other sins that emanate from the present evil world.

The self-satisfied modern man who fulfils his own needs doesn't readily recognise his dependence on God and will not easily bow the knee before Him. The church as an institution stands in the service of humanity, and assigns itself with the supreme mission of reforming society even further along humanistic lines, with the result that only a vague form of godliness remains.

The gulf between the human rights ideology and the gospel is unbridgeable. Humanists start from the premise that man is inherently good and any wrongdoing is the result of negative external factors for which he is not to blame. To the contrary, the gospel of Jesus Christ clearly states that all people are spiritually depraved, being sinners by nature. They must be spiritually born again and, as a result, inwardly changed before they can be called children of God. This view of human beings is completely unacceptable to humanists, who are strongly offended by it.

Laodicea portrays the image of rational man without faith. He argues everything with his mind. Consequently, his religion is limited to an intellectual knowledge of the Bible. The real experience of faith, involving the acceptance of God's promise of a rebirth, is foreign to him. With his allegorical and relativistic interpretation of the Bible he can bypass these basic spiritual imperatives and teach his followers to do the same. This approach leads to the establishment of a nominal Christianity and churches that evaluate themselves solely according to human standards. In terms of their academic parameters, they regard themselves as exceptionally good. Another aspect of this self-deception is the triumphalism of the signs and wonders movement who believe they are going to take over the world for Christ!

Self-deception of this nature has very serious consequences. People with self-assumed righteousness without a spiritual rebirth, do not belong to the Lord. Should they suspect that there may be some shortcoming, they either rationalise about their faith or take refuge in some church ritual such as baptism or Holy Communion, or the excitement of signs and wonders that makes them feel good, or even to psychological counselling and self-hypnosis. In this way they further drift away from the truth, as there is no substitute for true faith (Heb. 10:38).

Although the Lord Jesus dissociates Himself from the hollow Laodicean worship, He is much concerned about these self-deceived people. He even refers to His love for them and earnestly calls them to repentance. It is for this reason that He stands at the door of the twentieth century church and knocks, that those people inside may realise their spiritual hunger and accept His invitation to a life-giving feast:

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” (Rev. 3:20).

Except for some churches and congregations that can certainly not be classified as Laodicean, it is a fact that most of the leading churches are compromising with the world. They are engaged in concerted efforts to seek solutions for the deepening political, economical and social problems of our time. The theological decline and shallow spiritual values that accompany this process of secularisation, will continue until the Lord appears to take the faithful ones away.

Because of its self-centred attitude and heavy involvement with secular affairs, the church of the end-time is spiritually bankrupt and prophetically without vision. The rapture of the true believers will therefore come as a tremendous shock to theologians, ministers and church members alike. It will be a supernatural event that will defy rational explanation and force people to make an honest re-evaluation of fundamental biblical facts. Blessed are those who turn to the Bible for answers, and are reconciled with the Saviour. The others will continue on the path of deception and become members of the false world church of the Antichrist.

If you are unsaved or in a lukewarm state spiritually, and have not yet taken seriously the Lord's admonitions and calls to repentance, you are heading for a tremendous spiritual disillusionment. Whether you realise it or not, condemnation and eternal darkness are awaiting you. The dispensation of the church is drawing to a close and soon we will all have to give account of our faith, or lack of faith, and of our obedience, or lack of obedience. Rather follow Isaiah's advice in times like these:

“Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near (Is. 55:6).

### **End of the church dispensation**

In the last days perilous times will come on earth and people will only have a form of godliness (2 Tim. 3:1- 5). Because iniquity will abound, the love of many will grow cold (Matt. 24:12). In the latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils (1 Tim. 4:1).

Clear discernment is needed when interpreting the signs of the times. Certain signs will only be fulfilled during the seven year tribulation period after the church dispensation. The signs that point to the end of the church relate to the consummation of the present dispensation, the moral, spiritual and social deterioration, the restoration of Israel, and preparations for Antichrist's appearance and rule on earth. Although these signs are very evident, they cannot be fitted into a rigid time frame. They may unfold faster or slower, and there is always the possibility of more developments before the time is finally ripe to lower the curtain on this dispensation.

As shown in the list below, two sets of signs are given which indicate the end of the church age. The one set is related to the end of the existing order, and the second set indicates the restoration of Israel and the rise of a new world order in anticipation of the coming of the Antichrist. He can only appear after the stage has been properly set.

We are now witnessing the decay and collapse of the existing world order. The signs of decay cover a broad spectrum and include all walks of life:

- Economic decay is evident in collapsing economies, poverty, unemployment, and rampant inflation.
- Political decay is seen in the acceptance of humanistic constitutions, anarchy, chaos, and violence.
- Social decay leads to disintegrating social structures and the breakdown of marriages and the family.
- Religious decay is responsible for the increased darkening of peoples' minds, immorality and spiritual confusion.

From the ashes of the old order, the global structures of a new world order will arise. They will constitute the framework for the global society, global economy, global religion, and global government of the Antichrist:

- A centralised global economy will be established in which PIN numbers for electronic funds transfer will be issued.
- Political unity in the form of a world government and a global peace-keeping force will emerge.
- Social unity among the internationalised planetary citizens will give further expression to the ideology of globalism.
- Religious unity will be based on the deceptive idea that all religions worship the same God.

Another form of build-up that must occur towards the end of the church dispensation is the re-establishment of the people of Israel in their own land, including the re-establishing of Jerusalem as the capital of the Jewish state (Lk. 21:24). In 1948 when Israel became an independent state, biblical Jerusalem (the Old City, i.e. the City of David) was still under Jordanian control. The Old City was recaptured during the Six Day War in June 1967, and the entire Jerusalem was finally restored as modern Israel's capital in August 1980. These development set the scene for the last generation of the church dispensation.

<i>Deconstruction of the old order</i>	<b>Build-up to a new world order</b>
The old order is deconstructed and boundaries between all groups removed.	Final establishing of a new world order of international unity.
Widespread moral depravity, violence and break-down of family life occurs.	Humanistic freedom within a new charter of human rights.
Christian values and moral norms are rejected in the traditional Christian world.	A multi-religious orientation is promoted in all countries.
Excessive democratisation promotes anarchy as it undermines strong rule.	Nations lose their power and are ruled by a world government.
Individuals become free, permissive and unruly while demanding more liberties.	Mixed Babylonian societies emerge everywhere in the world.
Corruption and the abuse of power become general trends in all societies.	Military power is used to enforce the new world order internationally.
Crime and normlessness become a way of life in 'liberated' communities.	Crime is contained by force without instilling strong values.
Decline in biblical teaching on Satanism and occult practises.	Rejection of the Bible and an openness to occult practises.
The nations undermine their sense of cultural identity and emphasise globalism.	National cultures become submerged in an eclectic world culture.
Gender differences are denied in society and radical reforms are instituted.	Gender equality is enforced and homosexual rights constitutionally protected.
Israel is criticised and the hatred of Jews allowed to flair up everywhere.	Wars in the Middle East to enforce the new world order on Israel.

## 4. The Church in Heaven

*(Revelation 4 and 5)*

The next scene described in Revelation is in heaven, around the throne of God. The introductory phrase *After this* appears often in Revelation and is a definite indication that the information is presented in a chronological order. When John in Revelation 4:1 says: "After these things...." (in Greek *meta tauta*) it is to convey that what he is about to describe, follows on the previous scenario of the church on earth. From chapter 4 onwards we are, therefore, dealing with future events after the consummation of the dispensation of the church. Two parallel series of events are described in Revelation, i.e. events around the throne in heaven where the glorified church finds itself (Rev. 4 and 5), and the awful events on earth during the seven years of the tribulation period (Rev. 6 to 19).

To obtain a glimpse of the glorious destination of the church, John was called to heaven in his vision. He had heard a voice like the sound of a trumpet, that said: "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this" (Rev. 4:1). Soon the faithful will hear a voice similar to this when Christ comes to take them away:

"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be **caught up** together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thes. 4:16-17; emphasis added).

The *catching away* or *rapture* will occur "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Cor. 15:52). The *rapture* is the way in which the church will be transformed and transferred from its earthly existence in Revelation 2 and 3 to its glorified position around the throne in Revelation 4 and 5.

### **The promise of escape from the disaster area**

The promise of the rapture is of critical importance for a correct understanding of Revelation. This subject has become so controversial because of the modern theological decline that we need to make clear what the Bible teaches about it. The word *caught up* in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 (*harpazo* in Greek) means *to be snatched away quickly*.

The allegation by certain theologians that the word *rapture* doesn't occur in the Bible is very ill-conceived and misleading. The word *harpazo* can be translated as *rapture*, *catch away*, or *snatch away*. This term is also used in Revelation 12:5 in which the woman refers to Israel and her male Child to Christ: "And she [the woman] bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was *caught up* to God and to His throne" (Rev. 12:5 KJV).

Apart from the glorious destination to which the bridal congregation will be taken by way of the rapture, this promise must also be related to our *escape* from the judgements of the tribulation period:

"Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to **escape** all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Lk. 21:36).

According to W.F. Arndt & F.W. Gingrich In: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian Literature*, p. 246) the word *escape* (Greek: *ekfeugo*), as used in Luke 21:36, means "to escape tribulations."

From the viewpoint of circumstances on earth, the rapture will constitute an *escape* for Christians from the tribulations that are to follow. The period immediately preceding the rapture will be a particularly dark time of spiritual deception during which evangelical Christians will be despised and ridiculed. They will be branded as

prophets of doom when they warn people against the impending judgements that will occur during the reign of the Antichrist. They will also be regarded as rebels because of their refusal to co-operate with the ecumenical unification of all faiths. If they remain faithful and true to the end, the Lord will take them away just before the revelation of the Antichrist and the beginning of the tribulation period.

In its blind, headlong pursuit of pleasure, self-glorification, and wealth the end-time world population does not recognise the signs of the fast approaching end. They are also deceived by the expectation of a new world order of peace and safety. But Christians who watch and pray can see that real danger is imminent. They prepare themselves spiritually to be worthy to escape the coming tribulation period and to stand before the Son of man. "I tell you, on that night two people will be on one bed; one will be taken and the other one left. Two women will be grinding corn together; one will be taken and the other one left" (Lk. 17: 34-35).

### **The withholder**

The Bible clearly indicates that the Antichrist can *not* be revealed until he who withholds him has been taken out of the way:

"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 splendour of his coming" (2 Thes. 2:6-8 NIV).

Those who subscribe to the false, humanistic peace plans of the New Age Movement which is paving the way for a unified New World Order under the reign of the Antichrist, will *not* escape the great tribulation:

"For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labour pains upon a pregnant woman. **And they shall not escape**" (1 Thes. 5:3; emphasis added).

From the above verses it is evident that there will be a group of people who will escape the tribulation, while the others who did not turn to God will suddenly and unexpectedly be overcome by it. All these promises are in full agreement with the basic assurance given in John 5:24 that those who believe in the Lord Jesus do not come into judgement, but have passed from death into life.

### **A repetition of the time of Noah and Lot**

Although the rapture is a unique occurrence, there are examples in the Bible of times when God poured out His wrath, but provided an escape route for the true believers as they were not the objects of His wrath. In the time of Noah, God announced His judgements upon a wicked and perverted generation: "And God said to Noah, The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark..." (Gen. 6:13-14). Shortly before the commencement of the judgements the eight believers escaped the disaster area by entering the ark. God Himself closed the door behind them before He judged the wicked (Gen. 7:13-23).

In the time of Lot the believers were also rescued. The night before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah they were ordered to evacuate the city and flee to the mountains. The angels emphasised that they could do nothing as long as Lot and his family were still among the wicked. Fire and brimstone rained down from the heavens shortly after their departure. The cities with all their inhabitants were destroyed (Gen. 19:12-25).



The Lord Jesus Himself said that there is a clear correlation between these events of Old Testament history and God's end-time dealings with believers *and* unbelievers:

And as it was in the days of Noah, so will it also be in the days of the Son of Man: They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed *them* all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed (Lk. 17:26-30. Also read Genesis 6, 7 and 19).

The following comparison between the Old Testament and end-time situations can be made:

- In the time of Noah and Lot anarchy prevailed as people in these lawless and promiscuous societies did just as they pleased. Force was the most common means to resolve conflicts. So will it be again...
- In the time of Noah and Lot widespread spiritual and moral decline occurred. People became so corrupt that they were "wicked in every intent of their thoughts". So will it be again...
- In the time of Noah and Lot people were excessively materialistic and adopted permissive life-styles that led to all sorts of licentiousness, including sodomy (derived from Sodom). So will it be again...
- In the time of Noah and Lot people scoffed at the men of God and took no heed of the prophetic warnings of forthcoming judgements. They regarded it as far-fetched speculation and continued with their reckless lives. So will it be again...
- In the time of Noah and Lot God gave the degenerate sinners reasonable time to repent from their evil ways. They refused to repent and thereby sealed their own fate. They had only themselves to blame for their downfall and affliction. So will it be again...
- In the time of Noah and Lot God offered a way of escape to the believers at the critical moment before He turned in wrath to the wicked. The order of events was: First the prophetic warnings about the impending judgements, then the safeguarding of the believers who took heed of the appeal to repent, and ultimately the outpouring of wrath over the wicked. So will it be again...
- In the time of Noah and Lot there was no security for nominal believers whose hearts were still devoted to the things of this world. Lot's wife was a type of those believers who only have an outward form of godliness, but are still spiritually dead. This false pretence cost her her life at the last moment. So will it be again...
- In the time of Noah and later in the time of Lot an awful disaster struck this world soon after the evacuation of the believers. Death and destruction occurred as never before in history. So will it be again...
- In the time of Noah and Lot the wicked did not realise how many privileges and blessings they enjoyed because of the presence of a few believers in their midst. God was prepared to pardon a whole city if there were only ten believers. When these people, who shone like lights in a wicked and perverted generation, were taken out of the way, complete spiritual darkness befell the godless and provoked the anger of God. So will it be again...
- In the time of Noah people scoffed at the builders of the ark by describing Noah's efforts as ridiculous: "and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. This is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man" (Mt. 24:39 NIV).

## The first resurrection

A concept which is closely related to the rapture, is that of the first resurrection. At this event, the Lord Jesus will come to raise *only* born-again believers; this is why Paul says that “the dead in Christ shall rise first” (1 Thes. 4:16).

Nothing whatsoever is said here about the resurrection of the unbelieving, *unjust* dead. Since a first resurrection also implies a second, and since we know that the *just* as well as the *unjust* will be raised (Acts 24:15), it follows that the *unjust* dead will be raised at a later resurrection.

Revelation 20 says that at least a thousand years will separate the two resurrections. John refers to the Christian martyrs who will be raised in the first resurrection to reign as kings with Christ during the millennium:

“...and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This *is* the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection” (Rev. 20:4-6 KJV).

Those who share in the first resurrection are declared blessed; therefore, to be declared part of this resurrection signifies a very privileged status.

Various other Scripture references offer irrefutable evidence that the born-again believers will be resurrected first. Paul refers to a strictly chronological order of resurrections:

“But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who slept. For since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at His coming. Then *cometh* the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father” (1 Cor. 15:20-24 KJV).

Between the resurrection of Christ as firstfruits and the resurrection of the born-again *just* at His coming (the first resurrection), the entire dispensation of the church, presently approaching two millennia, will elapse. It is clear from Revelation 20 that the further one thousand years of Christ’s reign will elapse between the resurrection of the *just* and the end of this present earth, when the *unjust* dead will be raised (the second resurrection) to face the final judgement at the great white throne.

The following are expressions which refer to the first resurrection only: The first resurrection (Rev. 20:6), the resurrection of the children of God (Lk. 20:36), the resurrection of those who died in Christ (1 Thes. 4:16), the resurrection of the just, (Lk. 14:13-14), a better resurrection (Heb. 11:35), the resurrection to life (Jn. 5:29), and the resurrection from the dead through Jesus (Acts 4:2).

When the resurrection from the dead of either Christ or of Christians is referred to in Scripture, the Greek expression *ek nekroon* is used. It means from among the dead and is only used when other dead are not raised at the same time, but are left behind in their graves. This expression, which is used 49 times in the New Testament – 34 of which refer to the resurrection of Christ Himself – is not used even once when the second resurrection is referred to. Instead, when the latter resurrection is referred to the expression *toon nekroon*, meaning of the dead, is used.

At the rapture, the *just* will be raised from among the *unjust* dead and, together with the living *just*, who will be instantly changed, both will rise in glorified bodies to meet Christ in the air. The *unjust* (unsaved) dead will remain in their graves, since they did not “die in the Lord” (Rev. 14:13).

## Deception

Immediately after the first resurrection and the rapture have taken place, panic-stricken people will desperately attempt to explain the mystery of the sudden disappearance of millions of people from planet earth. The enigma will be even more confusing when it becomes evident that large numbers of nominal (so-called) Christians, including eminent pastors and theologians, are among those left behind.

The intensity and persuasive power of the spiritual deception that will be unleashed during this troubled time, will be unequalled in the entire history of mankind. A false prince of peace with world-reforming abilities will appear on the scene. He will capture the imagination of the distressed masses and gain their full support.

## The heavenly vision

John was instantly in heaven, in the Spirit, the moment he heard the voice like a trumpet:

“Immediately I was in the Spirit: and behold, a throne set in heaven, and *One* sat on the throne. And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and *there was* a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald. Around the throne *were* twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads” (Rev. 4:2-4).

The glory that John beheld was unspeakable. The closest he could get to a description of the Lord's excellence and brightness was to liken it to the most effulgent precious stones. His appearance was like a jasper and a sardius stone. The description of jasper in Revelation 21:11 as a crystal clear stone, agrees more with that of a diamond. The spotless sanctity of God is expressed in this way. Sardius has a deep red shade and symbolises the precious blood of the Lamb. The green rainbow around the throne indicates the promise of eternal life that we have in the Lord Jesus. The never-ending circle points to eternity, while green is the colour of life.

The 24 elders with crowns on their heads, represent the glorified church of Christ. They identify themselves beyond any doubt when they fall down before the Lamb in worship: "You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9). They are the blood-bought Christians from all the nations, and will receive glorified bodies through the resurrection of the righteous. All the members of the body of Christ will gather around the throne to participate in the Lord's judgement over the world during the tribulation period (1 Cor. 6:2).

The symbol employed here to portray the true church of Christ, is perfectly clear. *Elder* is a New Testament office and indicates a person who has been saved by Jesus Christ *and* who has committed himself to serve the Lord. The number 24 has special significance. In 1 Chronicles 24, king David appointed 24 families to the priestly ministry in the temple. Every group would serve in the sanctuary for two weeks each year according to a fixed schedule. In 1 Peter 2:9 every believer in the New Testament is called to a "royal priesthood.... that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light." To be an elder implies obedience to the Lord's call to discipleship.

## The year of release

After having saved the true church from the hour of tribulation, the Lord will pour out His divine wrath on a wicked world to punish those who rejected Him and to ultimately liberate the world from domination by the Antichrist and his evil forces of darkness. Revelation 5:1-5 is a prelude to a dramatic process of redemption that will occur during the seven years of the coming tribulation. It is discussed in terms of Israel's traditional law of redemption, of which an example is recorded in the book of Ruth. A comparison between the circumstances in

which Ruth found herself, and those prevailing in the end-time, will throw a great deal of light on the scene in Revelation 5:

Naomi, her husband and their two sons moved away from Bethlehem during a great drought and famine, to stay in Moab as strangers. In a similar manner, humanity as a whole found itself in a spiritual drought after the Fall, by which the rights to any earthly property were forfeited. Even to this day we are still strangers and sojourners in an evil world in which we have to wrestle against the powers and rulers of the darkness of this age (Eph. 6: 10-13).

During their exile, three of Naomi's family members died and another one decided to remain behind. Eventually, only two of them found grace in the eyes of God and were restored to their property. By way of comparison we can say that most people die in their wanderings as sinners, but that those who put their trust in the Lord to be saved, are spiritually revived and restored.

Back in Bethlehem, Naomi and her daughter-in-law faced an enormous problem. During the years they were away the accumulated burden of debt incurred on the family property was more than they could afford to pay. They had to find a rich relative who could, in his capacity as kinsman, redeem the land and restore it to its destitute owners. This kinsman would also have to take Ruth as his wife to perpetuate the family. Such a redeemer was found in the person of Boaz. He exercised the law of redemption and paid all the debt. He took Ruth, the Moabitess, as his wife since she had elected to accompany her mother-in-law to the land where the God of Israel ruled. Ruth and Naomi were overjoyed and greatly thankful for what Boaz had done. If he had not come to their rescue, their property would have fallen into the hands of strangers and the name of the family would have been wiped out.

Jesus Christ is the One who stepped in and redeemed us. He took the burden of our debt of sin upon Himself and paid the full price for it. Because of this act of love, we have become co-heirs with Him and will reign with Him over our restored inheritance. In addition He took us who, like Ruth, were born into a heathen world, as His bride because we have taken refuge with Him for shelter. What tremendous joy for us to have found a kinsman who took pity on us, paid our debt and made us sons and daughters of the heavenly Father to enjoy everlasting life in His presence.

The joy of the elders knew no bounds when they realised that their Saviour, Jesus Christ, their Kinsman and Redeemer, had not only paid the price for their sins, but would free the entire world from the power of the Evil One. In this way they will soon, on the strength of Genesis 1:28, repossess their heritage on this earth and rule with Jesus as kings over it. Then the situation caused by the Fall, as the result of which "the whole world lies *under the sway of the wicked one*" (1 Jn. 5:19), will no longer exist.

It was the custom in Israel to record inheritance, or bonds on a property, on a scroll. On each occasion when certain entries were made, that part of the scroll was sealed. The will of our right of inheritance and ownership of the whole earth has been sealed with seven seals. Only Christ is worthy to break the seals and open the book. Not only is He the legal owner of the world, but He also paid all the accumulated debt that was incurred due to Satan's deception of humanity and their failure to fulfil the divinely appointed role for which they were created (Rev. 4:11).

When the seals are opened one after the other, the most violent judgements of all times will be poured out upon the earth. The evil works of man will be destroyed and the power of Satan's kingdom will systematically be disintegrated until all its strongholds have fallen. When the Lion of the tribe of Judah appears victoriously on the battle-field at the end of the great tribulation, the Antichrist and the false prophet will be captured and cast

alive into the lake of fire. At the same time, Satan, the devil, will be bound in the bottomless pit for a thousand years.

The first appointment for the church after the rapture is their appearance before the judgement seat of Christ, "for the time has come for judgement to begin at the house of God" (1 Pet. 4:17).

## 5. The Judgement Seat of Christ

*(Revelation 4 and 5)*

The 24 elders of Revelation 4 and 5 are the glorified church. They all have crowns on their heads, which is an indication that they received rewards from the Lord:

“Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads” (Rev. 4:4).

In their *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 943, Profs. Walvoord and Zuck say the following about these crowns: “The crowns were similar to those given victors in Greek games (*stephanos*), in contrast with the crown of a sovereign ruler (*diadema*, ‘diadem’). The crowns seem to indicate that the elders had been judged and rewarded.”

Peter says that “the time has come for judgement to begin at the house of God” (1 Pet. 4:17). That refers to the judging of the believers’ works. Jesus said: “Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his works” (Rev. 22:12). When the Lord comes, He will reward His servants and judge the wicked:

“Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth” (Rev. 11:18).

The golden crowns that will be awarded to the glorified church are earned through grace by virtue of what the Lamb has enabled people to do; that is why they are laid down before His throne:

“The twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power” (Rev. 4:10-11).

Only He is worthy to receive the glory for what has been achieved by His faithful witnesses on earth. It is through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit that they could work for the Lord and be found faithful in what

He had commissioned them to do. Even so, it still calls for commitment, self-discipline, obedience, and perseverance from their side. But the means of grace to do this work, all come from the Lord.

Although the judgement seat of Christ is not explicitly discussed in Revelation, the evaluation and rewarding of works is accepted as a given. It is also very obvious that this judgement will occur just after the rapture. To the martyrs in the church of Smyrna Jesus says: “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10). There is clearly a specific crown that will be given to them. To His faithful witnesses in apostate Thyatira, He says: “Hold fast what you have till I come. And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations” (Rev. 2:25-26). At His Second Coming He will reward them. To the faithful ones in the dead Sardis church He promises: “He who overcomes shall be clothed with white garments” (Rev. 3:5). To His beloved servants in Philadelphia who kept on serving Him despite their great poverty, He says: “Behold, I come quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown” (Rev. 3:11). They must remain worthy right to the end if they wished to be rewarded.

Regarding this spirit of perseverance to the end, John wrote to the congregations even before he was exiled to Patmos: “And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming” (1 Jn. 2:28). By then, it was already obvious that serious problems and spiritual backsliding had occurred in many of the Christian congregations. The second generation Christians were, in most cases, not up to standard. Even some of the older ones also faltered. Not all were overcomers.

### **The appointment**

All Christians have a definite appointment to appear before the judgement seat of Christ – whether they were good servants or not. Some of them will receive rewards, while others will stand empty-handed. The fact is that the servants of the Lord will have to give account of themselves. Paul said to the church in Corinth:

“For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10).

The word *bad* can also be rendered *worthless*. Many of the works of Christians will, on that day, prove to be worthless as they have no eternal value. The Lord Jesus says to every congregation: “I know your works...” He will reward everyone according to their works, whether they be good or worthless.

Paul gives the same message to the Christians in Rome:

“...we shall all stand before the judgement seat of Christ... So then each of us shall give account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:10, 12).

To the Corinthians, Paul explains in much more detail how God will test the works of believers by the fire of His judgement. From the context it is clear that the works of faith that were done after repentance are to be tested, but that the works of some believers will nevertheless be found to be carnal and therefore rejected. Paul also clearly indicates that as co-workers of God we have a definite task to perform in the kingdom of God. But we must beware how we do it – not in the wisdom of the flesh but in the power of the Holy Spirit:

“...each one will receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become manifest; for the Day will declare it, because it will be

revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Cor. 3:8-16).

A few important points are quite evident from this passage:

- The foundation of repentance, which is the beginning of the new life in Christ, must first be laid in our lives before we can work for the Lord.
- After repentance we are commanded to work for the Lord by being His witnesses and thereby make our lights shine in the world. We must be fellow workers with Him in the extension of His kingdom.
- We cannot assume that all we do for the Lord is done under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and therefore acceptable to Him, since we may also do worthless works that emanate from the carnal human nature (1 Cor. 3:1-3). These works are the wood, hay and straw that have no value for eternity and will be burned up.
- To those who do unacceptable works in the power of the flesh, the question is asked: "Do you not know that... the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16). They should dedicate their lives to the control of the Holy Spirit and start serving the Lord in His power. That is the normal Christian life.

In a parable in Luke 19:11-27, the Lord Jesus also referred to the day when His servants will have to give account of their lives. He says that to each of them money was given, which refers to a God-given gift to work in His kingdom, i.e. the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. The command to the servants: "Do business till I come" (Lk. 19:13) means: "Manage the affairs of My kingdom till I come." When He returns as King He will first summon His servants to see what they have earned through labour. To the one who made ten-fold profit He will say: "Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities" (Lk. 19:17). Another one gets authority over five cities, while the one who buried the money given to him will appear before the Lord empty-handed and be strongly reprimanded because of his uncommitted life.

### **The basis of judgement**

The Lord has an appointment at His judgement seat with all those who belong to Him. It is obvious that they will not be judged on the basis of the presence or absence of faith in their lives. They are all saved through grace by faith, and that is a gift of God. Because they are all believers the basis of judgement is something else, and that is the *works of faith*. These are the works that *must* emanate from a living faith. James says:

"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (Jas. 2:26).

Paul states very clearly in Ephesians 2:8-9 that we are saved by faith, *without* works. No one can earn his salvation by working for it. Salvation is a gracious gift of God. But when a person has been saved and become a believer, it is expected of him to lead a life of devotion and good works. In the text following the one on salvation through faith without works, Paul says: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). We are clearly called to a life of good works.

We must bear fruit that befits repentance. If no fruit is forthcoming in our lives, it is a clear indication that we do not have genuine faith. Every branch that bears fruit is pruned, that it may bear more fruit. Our lives must be purified and sanctified that we may bear more fruit. Every branch that does not bear fruit is taken away and

burnt. Such a person had a false repentance like the seeds that fell on the rocks or between the thorns (Mt. 13:3-23). Such a person must make a new start with his spiritual life.

From this background knowledge it should be evident that the Lord will not reward us for what we are doing *for* Him but only for what He is doing *through* us. We should be used by Him. What we do, must be in the power of the Holy Spirit. We must not rely on our own ideas but acknowledge and consult God in all our ways. When we want to talk to other people we must first study our Bible and get a word from God, to be able to say: "Thus says the Lord."

We must also live holy lives, otherwise the Lord won't use us. He does not use carnal and worldly-minded fellow-workers. If they do not return to their first love He removes their lampstand from them, as He even does from an entire congregation that deviates from truly loving and serving Him. He will then find someone else to serve Him.

### **Crowns**

The Lord knows the works of His children and He will reward them for these works when He comes again. Shortly after we receive our resurrection bodies during the first resurrection and the rapture, we will be awarded crowns for faithful service at the judgement seat of Christ. We should, therefore, endeavour to do works that are pleasing and acceptable to the Lord, for which alone He will give rewards. The earthly lives of people who did these works will prove not to have been in vain as they produced works with eternal value under the power of the Holy Spirit. The Lord will say to them: "Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord" (Mt. 25:21).

The following crowns are promised to the overcomers:

#### ***(1) The imperishable crown for a holy life***

Holiness basically concerns two matters – sanctification and separation for service. When a Christian dedicates himself in a full surrender to the control of the Holy Spirit, he can expect the following two reactions: Firstly, he will be convicted of sin and carnality in his life, which must be confessed and forsaken. The Spirit of God is the Spirit of holiness and He will not take full control of an impure and unclean temple. Paul says: "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1).

Secondly, he must make himself available to the service of the Lord. Paul witnessed the strenuous training programmes of the athletes in Greece, as well as the fact that they abstained from harmful habits. He remarked: "And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown" (1 Cor. 9:25). Do you exert yourself to obtain the imperishable crown for a holy and dedicated life? Paul certainly did. He said: "I discipline my body and bring it into subjection" (1 Cor. 9:27).

However, to many people the ideal of a holy and dedicated life remains an elusive ideal. They should keep in mind that there is a distinct difference between justification and sanctification. In justification, one is saved by grace through faith, without any works of self-justification. In sanctification, the saved person becomes a fellow-worker of God (1 Cor. 3:9). A life and works of holiness are realised by combining the power and guidance of God's Holy Spirit with the efforts of the believer.

First, the Lord should touch your life, cleanse it with the blood of the Lamb and fill it with His Holy Spirit. That is imputed holiness, something which God alone can do for you. But you must be willing to humble and deny



yourself, take up your cross and surrender your whole life and all your possessions to Christ (Ps. 139:23-24; Lk. 9:23). God will then sanctify you completely, which is a second work of grace after salvation (1 Thes. 5:23).

After this experience, you should act in the power of the Holy Spirit, according to your new convictions of God's will, and abandon everything that is wrong and carnal, while disciplining your body and making it serviceable to the Lord (2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Cor. 9:27). Holiness and dedicated service can not be achieved in an armchair. After surrendering your whole life to Christ and trusting Him to fill you with His Spirit, you must rise and do what your hand finds to do. Then, you will never stand before Him empty-handed when you are summoned to appear before His judgement seat.

### ***(2) The crown for soul-winners***

The great commission that Christ gave to His disciples is that of world evangelism. When He appeared to His disciples in the upper-room after His resurrection, He said: "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (Jn. 20:21). Later, He repeated this commission to them: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk. 16:15). It was not to be an easy assignment to proclaim the message of the saving grace of the Lord Jesus in a hostile world, and this is why the power of the Holy Spirit was promised to them: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

For those who lead other people to Christ, the crown of rejoicing is promised. In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul says: "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?" (1 Thes. 2:19). Likewise, all other people who also lead lost souls to Christ, will receive the crown of rejoicing.

### ***(3) The crown of glory for faithful pastors***

The spiritual care and building-up of the congregation is a very important aspect of Christian service that was commanded by Christ Himself. In Revelation, He refers to the seven churches and their pastors in a very extraordinary way:

"The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches" (Rev. 1:20).

A preacher must be like a brightly shining star in the Lord's right hand. A star (meaning a planet) has no light in itself, but it reflects the sunlight onto the earth at night. Likewise, a preacher must be a reflection of the light of the Sun of Righteousness in a dark world. He is not the light, but he testifies about the Light. Furthermore, the preacher is likened to an angel. "And of the angels He says: Who makes His angels [serving] spirits and His ministers a flame of fire" (Heb. 1:7). The preacher is a messenger who is sent to the congregation with a message from God. He must serve the congregation with the Word of God which is the bread of life, and also with the various gifts of grace with which the congregation is to be built up spiritually.

Peter says that the preacher is a pastor who should lead the flock. He should not do it with murmuring, or as being compelled to do it, or with a view to self-enrichment. He must not be a hard master, but one who sets a good example and who guards the interests of the congregation. If he discharges all these duties in an honest, dedicated and exemplary way, he will receive the crown of glory from the Chief Shepherd:

“Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away” (1 Pet. 5:2-4).

It is obvious why a preacher will receive a heavier judgement than other people if he does not do his work as the Lord expects of His servants. The Lord will also claim the blood of lost sheep at his hands. On the other hand, he will be richly rewarded if he is a faithful pastor.

One of the reasons for the great falling-away of the last days is that faithful and able pastors who rightly divide the word of truth, are very scarce. The majority will, for the sake of popularity and also under the influence of colleagues who are false prophets, follow the way of compromise by proclaiming an easy but false gospel message. They will perpetuate the myth of declaring people saved who are not born-again. Long ago, Paul warned against them:

“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

Make sure that you are fed with the pure milk of the Word of God in your congregation, and that you and your pastor have confidence to appear before the judgement seat of Christ.

#### ***(4) The crown of life for Christian martyrs***

To everyone who lays down his life for the sake of his faith, the crown of life is promised. The Lord Jesus said to the martyrs: “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10). Through the ages there were always faithful servants of the Lord who were prepared, at the cost of their own safety, their work, their families and even their own lives, to hold the flame of faith aloft in a hostile world. They realised the full implications of the words of Christ when He said: “Behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves” (Lk. 10:3). He also said: “In the world you will have tribulation” (Jn. 16:33). During the past almost 2000 years, Christians were indeed, in many countries, persecuted, driven away, scoffed at, intimidated, incarcerated in convict settlements and torture camps, while millions were killed for their faith. The Lord will reward them with the crown of life for the price they paid to be His witnesses among cruel and revengeful people.

To a smaller or greater degree, Christians were persecuted throughout the past twenty centuries. It started in Jerusalem shortly after the establishing of the early church, it was perpetuated by the Roman Empire until the beginning the fourth century, practised by the Roman Catholic Church and the governments under its influence for more than a millennium, viciously pursued by communist regimes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and presently also practised in various Islamic countries.

Included in the category of martyrs are those who suffered trials, testing, afflictions and temptation other than being persecuted by fellow men:

“Blessed in the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him” (Jas. 1:12 NIV).

Trials of this nature are varied and may be related to poverty and bereavement, physical disabilities, the caring for disabled, sick or poor ones, etc. Such people will be rewarded by the Lord with the crown of life if they remain faithful.

***(5) The crown of righteousness for those who love His appearing***

To love the coming of the Lord, calls for the pursuing of things with eternal value. You must lay up treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. If you say that you love the appearing of the Lord Jesus, you clearly imply that He is your King, that you are involved with the establishing and extension of His kingdom on earth, and that you are looking forward to the day when He will be revealed as King. In the meantime you are a stranger on earth, as your eternal home is not here. Paul fought the good fight of faith in proclaiming God's kingdom in a heathen world. Shortly before he was executed for his faith, he again expressed his strong expectation of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ:

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

When the wonderful day of His soon expected appearing dawns all believers will receive glorified bodies, and, as citizens of a heavenly kingdom, we will reign with Christ:

“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may conform to His glorious body” (Phil. 3:20-21).

When the children of God have received their glorified bodies and crowns, they will be seated around the throne of the Lamb to judge the world in righteousness with Him. Then the seven seals of the scroll with God's judgements will be broken in heaven and the Antichrist will suddenly appear as a false prince of peace on earth. With all these awesome future events in mind, the elders in heaven wait in suspense for the first seal to be opened by the Lamb...

## **6. The Seven Seals**

***(Revelation 6)***

The events described in Revelation 6 to 19 all occur within a period of only seven years. From the viewpoint of Israel, this period is referred to as the *seventieth year-week*, as described in Daniel 9:24-27. A year-week is a period of seven years (Lev. 25:3-4). In the New Testament the coming year-week in which the Antichrist will reign, is called the *tribulation* and the *great tribulation* (Mt. 24:21, 29; Rev. 7:14). This seven year period is clearly divided into two periods of 3½ years each. To avoid the possibility of spiritualising this, the two halves of the week of years are in Revelation 11 to 13 described literally as 3½ years, 42 months, and 1260 days each. These are different expressions of the same period.

The first half of the tribulation will be characterised by a false peace, as well as by political, social, economic, and religious initiatives to unite humanity under the leadership of the Antichrist. When his peace and unification efforts fail, he will resort to an unprecedented reign of terror during the last 3½ years and introduce the bloodiest dictatorship the world has ever seen. The hundreds of millions of victims that this reign of terror will claim, will render it the biggest human tragedy of all time. The two halves of the tribulation period should be distinguished from each other by referring to the first half as the time of *false peace* and to the second half as the *great tribulation*. The whole seven years should just be called the *tribulation period* as only the last part of the tribulation is called *the great tribulation*. In the first 3½ years the people on earth will be morally, spiritually

and politically enslaved and brainwashed, but in the last 3½ years they will be physically tortured and oppressed.

People often ask why there has to be a great tribulation. The Bible gives five reasons for it:

- The Lord will remove the withholder against unbridled sin – that is His church, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, which is the light and salt of the world (2 Thess. 2:6-7). After this, total spiritual darkness will prevail on earth. Fallen mankind will then have the opportunity, without any restraint, to fill up the cup of their wickedness and to destroy themselves in the process.
- The Lord will judge sinners who refuse to repent. Isaiah 13:9-11 says that the Lord will lay the world desolate and destroy its sinners from it because of all their evils.
- The kingdoms of the world will be destroyed, together with all the evil systems on which they are founded, so that Christ can reign in their place (Dan. 2:44; Rev. 11:15).
- The people of Israel will be tested in the crucible of tribulation in order to purify and save a remnant of them (Ezek. 22:18-22; Zech. 13:8-9).
- From the spiritually hardened nations there will, according to Revelation 6:9-11 and 7:9-17, be gathered a big harvest of souls during the tribulation period. Most of them will continue to harden themselves in the midst of all the plagues (Rev. 9:20-21), but others will repent and be saved.

During the first half of the tribulation period, sin and immorality will proliferate under the leadership of the man of sin and be regarded as human liberties. Sinful conduct in terms of biblical standards will not be regarded as shameful as no Christian norms of decency will then be observed.

### **The four horsemen**

According to Revelation 6:1-8, the Antichrist will be revealed in a highly deceptive way as an *angel of light* in an effort to first mislead people, and later to extend his merciless dictatorship over them. In the first stage of his reign, he will appear to the world as a global peacemaker who brings hope to a conflict-ridden and poverty-stricken world (*the white horse*). In a show of clever diplomacy he will deceive the people into accepting a world government, as well as a universal religion, in order to accomplish international unity.

When his peace initiatives and reform policy collapse after 3½ years, the Antichrist will turn to violence in order to maintain his power. He will then become a military dictator (*the red horse*). The next logical action will be stringent economic control and the rationing of food during the severe wars and famine in the world (*the black horse*). After these calamities, the only activity left to the Antichrist is his ride as the *angel of death* to reap as many souls as possible to join him in perdition (*the pale horse*).

In His prophetic discourse, Jesus Christ described a similar sequence of events that will occur during the coming tribulation period (Mt. 24:4-9):

- "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many" (*the white horse*);
- "And you will hear of wars and rumours of wars:.... For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (*the red horse*);

- "And there will be famines (and) pestilences" (*the black horse*);
- "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you" (*the pale horse*).

When the apocalyptic horses of Revelation 6 are unleashed, cataclysmic events will follow in their wake. They will usher in the final revelation of the mystery of iniquity. Let us consider these horses and their riders in more detail:

### ***The white horse***

“Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals... And I looked, and behold, a white horse. And he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering, and to conquer” (Rev. 6:1-2).

At the very beginning of the tribulation period, the Lord Jesus opens the first seal in heaven and a prince of peace on a white horse suddenly appears on earth. He only has a bow in his hand, and purposely hides the arrows since his march is under the banner of peace and reconciliation. He was not able to make his entry sooner, as the presence of the true church of Christ resisted his appearance and his planned usurpation of power. Now that the Lord has taken them away, the hour of darkness has struck, inaugurating the brief period of Antichrist's reign, before the appearance of the Lord as King of kings and Lord of lords to condemn him to the lake of fire (Rev. 19:16-20).

The identity of the rider on the white horse has for many years remained a controversial subject. However, from the context it is evident that he can be no one else than the Antichrist. It is wrong to assert that the rider of the white horse in Revelation 6 is Christ, merely because He is represented as a rider on a white horse in Revelation 19. There simply is no proof for this assertion. Symbols often do not have fixed applications, and must therefore be interpreted in the context in which they are used. So it is that a lion in one instance symbolises Christ as the Lion from the tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:5), while in another instance the devil is said to be a roaring lion seeking whom he can destroy (1 Pet. 5:8). The white horse of the Antichrist symbolises a false peace. It should also be borne in mind that the Antichrist imitates the true Christ who comes on a white horse in Revelation 19. The Antichrist aims at being accepted and worshipped in His place.

In the vision of Revelation 6, Jesus is seated upon the throne and He opens the book that has been sealed with seven seals. In it the judgements of God upon a sinful world are described. Its purpose is to expose the sinister works of Satan, after which he and his henchmen will be judged and their influence over the earth and its inhabitants will be broken. When the first four seals are opened, four horses follow one another as they are commissioned to mislead and kill people. How intensely terrible and utterly destructive their actions will be, is clearly shown in Revelation 6:

“And power was given to them [that includes all four horsemen] over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth” (Rev. 6:8).

However, the entry of the Antichrist upon the world scene as the rider of the white horse will be in terms of an ideology of reconciliation, unity and global brotherhood. He will be the final unifying factor in a major multi-religious ecumenical organisation. The false religions have already been deceived into thinking that we all worship the same God under different names, but something more tangible is needed to finally bind them together. This *missing link* is the *universal Messiah* who is also called the *cosmic Christ*. When he comes he will be the *Christ* for the deceived nominal Christians and the *Messiah* for the unconverted Jews, the *Imam Mahdi* for the Muslims, the *Maitreya Buddha* for the Buddhists, *Krishna* for the Hindus, and the great *magician* for the shamans and the African religions. All the deceived people on earth will be “brothers and sisters” who

merge into a mystical brotherhood. Religious boundaries will become very vague and completely vanish after 3½ years.

The Antichrist will also obliterate social and political boundaries. He will establish a neo-Babylonian society of planetary citizens under the control of a United Nations based world government. For these major breakthroughs he will be internationally honoured and followed. All people will think that the long-awaited Utopia has dawned, and the New Age Movement's promised dispensation of Aquarius – the time of true unity and brotherly love among all men – has finally become a reality. A threatening third world war will seemingly be averted by the intervention of the new world leader, and cosmic peace will prevail everywhere!

This false peace will be maintained with difficulty for 3½ years. Disloyalty and rebellion against the world empire of the Antichrist will start festering after a time, and bring a sudden end to the peace pretensions of this arch deceiver.

### ***The red horse***

“And another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that *people* should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword” (Rev. 6:4).

Leaders who become unstable and no longer enjoy popular support, often turn to autocratic rule and military force to secure their positions. The Antichrist will be no exception. When, in the middle of the seven year tribulation period, he will discard his mask of pretended peace-maker, gird on his sword and make his appearance as the rider on the red war-horse. With an iron fist, he will rule the world as the most cruel and violent dictator of all times.

The Antichrist will make a drastic about turn from his initial rule in co-operation with other leaders, to autocratic rule. His government of international unity will suddenly be transformed into a one-man dictatorship. In the religious sphere, the alliance of world religions will be abrogated (Rev. 17: 16), and the Antichrist will promote himself from the status of being world Messiah to that of being God. In the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, he will actually declare himself to be God! The Holy of holies will be desecrated by the placing there of an image of the Antichrist by the false prophet (Rev. 13:14; Dan. 11:31; Mt. 24:15). Paul says this rebel will “exalt himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (2 Thes. 2:4). He will grossly blaspheme the true God of heaven. Any refusal to worship the beast as God will, according to Revelation 13:15, be punishable by death – just as was the case under the Roman Caesars and Babylonian kings who demanded to be worshipped as God.

When he claims to be God the Jews will openly reject the Antichrist as Messiah. He will be so furious that he will use his power to commit genocide against the Jews by obliterating them from the face of the earth. This future action was foreshadowed by the holocaust perpetrated by the cruel anti-Christian tyrant, Hitler.

As a military leader the Antichrist will achieve phenomenal success, and his supporters will, in admiration, acclaim him, declaring: "Who *is* like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" (Rev. 13:4). Daniel 11:44 says, “he shall go out with great fury to destroy and annihilate many.” The apostle John says: “And it was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue and nation” (Rev. 13:7). This verse alone is proof that the church dispensation will then be past because the Lord gave the assurance that the gates of Hades will not prevail against His church (Mt. 16:18).

During his reign, the Antichrist will have all Christians killed, as well as those Jews who did not escape to a place of refuge in the wilderness. He will gain victories on all continents until his rule extends over every tribe, tongue and nation. His military campaigns, as well as the famines and pestilences emanating from it, will claim

a death toll of a quarter of the world's population. In terms of a world population of 6 billion, that amounts to 1,5 billion people – a truly appalling prospect.

### ***The black horse***

“And I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand” (Rev. 6:5).

The inevitable result of wars and the mobilisation of economically active manpower is the rapid depletion of a country's finances, the destruction of infrastructure, serious losses in production, especially of food, and hence famine. In an effort to counteract these problems, the Antichrist will institute stringent economic measures. By means of internationally linked computer networks he will exercise control over the world economy. Individual freedom on how to manage financial resources will be completely eliminated and replaced by a global system of electronic funds transfer and financial control. Within the future cashless economy no person will be able to buy or sell without the consent of the Antichrist and his world government.

Because of food scarcity caused by wars, pollution, natural disasters and the over-exploitation of resources, strict rationing and control will in any event be unavoidable. The Antichrist will take advantage of this situation to further enforce his authority. Only those who acknowledge his political and religious leadership by accepting his mark and the number of his name, i.e. 666, will be granted certain privileges. These will include the right to buy and sell, as well as eligibility for employment (Rev. 13:16-18).

### ***The pale horse***

“And I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him” (Rev. 6:8).

Since the Antichrist comes from the devil he will, like his father, be a murderer. He will delight himself in the death of millions of people and continue to wreak havoc in God's creation. About the Antichrist, Daniel says: “And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate” (Dan. 9:27). That literally means: “Under the banner of pernicious idolatry there will be one who ruins.” That is exactly what this cruel dictator will do. Through his continued wars he will destroy human lives and gradually reduce the earth to an uninhabitable, desolate ruin.

Over this grisly scene of desolation, the ominous profile of the death angel on the pale horse will linger. It is frightening that he and his wicked armies assembled from many nations, will be responsible for the death of a quarter of the world's population. In terms of the present (2002) world population it means that this tyrant's victims will be almost 30 times as many as the death toll of 52 million in World War II.

### **The fifth seal: Christian martyrs**

True Christians (those who are converted during the tribulation period) will from the outset know that the Antichrist is a false leader. They will reject him, as well as the false alliance of religions. For them there will be, in the relatively brief kingdom of the beast, only one consequence and that is persecution, martyrdom and death. Although they will lose the physical struggle against the Antichrist (according to Revelation 13:7 he will wage war against the saints and overcome them), they will nevertheless win the spiritual battle against him by not bowing the knee before him to worship him or his image:

“And they overcame him by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death” (Rev. 12:11).

They will die as overcomers! The faithful witnesses of Jesus will not accept the number of the Antichrist for their temporary needs such as their employment or the right to buy and sell. They will realise that to do so would lead to sure defeat and condemnation in hell. When they arrive in heaven after being martyred, they will ask the Lord to avenge their death on the Antichrist and his barbaric powers:

“When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying: How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth? Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed” (Rev. 6:9-11).

It is here stated as a fact that the surviving fellow brothers of the martyrs on earth will during the course of the tribulation period all be killed. Only then will their number in heaven be complete.

### **The sixth seal: natural disasters**

The great disasters and plagues that will come over the world during the tribulation will be clearly recognised as judgements of God. The situation on earth will become so desperate that the wicked will be overcome by a great fear. Panic-stricken, they will flee to the mountains as they will realise that the wrath of God is poured out over the earth and its inhabitants:

“I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks: Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?” (Rev. 6:12-17).

Apart from earthquakes, there will also be cosmic signs and disasters that will strike the world from outer space. Among these will be meteor showers and asteroids that will cause devastation on earth. Serious air pollution will also widely occur. People will not be able to survive in the big cities, where high buildings will collapse. They will flee to the mountains and realise that the awesome day of the Lord has come. Despite this appalling situation most of them – as in the days of the ten plagues in Egypt – will not repent but will harden their hearts.

### **The seventh seal: announcement of the seven trumpets**

In Revelation 8:1-2, the seventh seal is broken. It will lead to further judgements that will be announced by the seven angels with the trumpets. That will constitute a second wave of judgements that will flood the world. Still later, a third and more devastating wave will be unleashed by way of the bowl judgements. It is a fearful thing to fall in the hands of the living God!

Do you have an ear to hear what the Spirit wants to say to the churches and to you personally? The Holy Spirit not only convicts us of sin and righteousness, but also of the impending judgements of the wicked. If we repent and turn to God through the Lord Jesus Christ we will not come into judgement but pass from death into life” (Jn. 5:24), "for God did not appoint us to wrath" (1 Thess 5:9).



## 7. Salvation in the Hour of Darkness

*(Revelation 7)*

Many people make the mistake of failing to identify Israel in the apocalyptic events of Revelation. Because of this ignorance, much of the biblical perspective on the great tribulation is lost, as well as one of the most important prophetic signs of the end of the church's dispensation, namely the restoration of the people of Israel and their capital city, Jerusalem.

In connection with the return of Christ, Revelation 1:7 states that "every eye shall see Him, even they who pierced Him". This verse has the express implication that Israel will be back in their land so that they can make a decision in respect of the crucified Messiah who was rejected by their forebears during His first coming.

The status of Jerusalem is the most important single sign that the Lord Jesus gave us regarding the end of the present dispensation and the start of the tribulation period. After He had outlined the physical destruction of the city of Jerusalem in Luke 19:41-44 and 21:5-6, He mentioned the world-wide dispersion of the Jews as well as the fact that Jerusalem would, during that time, be trodden down by the non-Jewish nations:

“For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Lk. 21:23-24).

The word *until* in Luke 21:24 does not only point to the time when Jerusalem will no longer be trampled, but also to the end of the dispensation of the church when the times of the nations will be fulfilled. It is expedient for us to take note of developments in and around Jerusalem in order that we may correctly interpret the signs of the times. About the ability to discern these signs, the Lord Jesus said:

“When you see a cloud rising out of the west, immediately you say, A shower is coming; and so it is. And when you see the south wind blow, you say, There will be hot weather; and there is. Hypocrites! You can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it you do not discern this time?” (Lk. 12:54-56).

The people were able weather-prophets, and when the clouds from the Mediterranean Sea rolled inland, they could tell that the rain was imminent. When the hot winds from the desert swept over the countryside, they could predict dry and warm conditions. Why then did they lack the ability to observe the signs of the times? These signs are just as obvious as those of nature, if one would just care to read the Bible and use the prophetic word as a frame of reference to interpret and anticipate world events. However, criticism can also be levelled against our generation on similar grounds. The glaring, end-time sign of Israel and the status of their capital city, Jerusalem, are grossly ignored by most Christians. What is the significance of the Jewish sign?

Israel's independence in 1948 was granted with only the new part of Jerusalem under Jewish control. This was an important indication that the prophesied time of the end was imminent. A very significant situation developed in June 1967 when the part of Jerusalem known as the Old City (Zion and the Temple Mount, i.e. the biblical Jerusalem) as well as East Jerusalem, was captured from Jordan in the Six-day War. By then, the physical restoration of Jerusalem was complete and would be followed by its political restoration as capital city. Keep in mind that the last time Jerusalem was an independent Jewish capital, was before the Babylonian captivity in the sixth century BC, that is almost 2600 years ago! During the time of Christ the flag of the Roman Empire was flown in the city.

In August 1980, the Israeli Prime Minister, Menachem Begin, declared Jerusalem to be the eternal and indivisible capital of Israel, and moved his office from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem. During the two years that followed, his entire cabinet was relocated to Jerusalem as office space became available. The political restoration of the city was then complete.

The spiritual restoration of Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple must yet come about. Religiously speaking, the city is still being trampled by the Gentiles as is evidenced by the two Muslim Mosques on the Temple Mount. At present, a third one is under construction. Israel's national spiritual restoration will only occur after the church dispensation in the tribulation period, and be consummated on the last day of the tribulation when Jesus will appear on the Mount of Olives. Then He will save the entire remnant of Israel.

### **The great deceiver strikes**

As the time for Israel's spiritual recovery draws near, the devil will seize the opportunity to offer a false messiah to them. He knows that faced by a massive military attack Israel can be plunged into great anxiety, at which time they will more eagerly look out for the promised Messiah to come and save them from their enemies. A situation of this nature will arise when an allied Russo-Arab attack will suddenly encircle them on every side, descending upon them like a dark cloud (Ezek. 38 and 39). In a most dramatic and unexpected way, God will intervene and save Israel supernaturally by destroying their enemies (Ezek. 39:1-6).

At the same time a dynamic, miracle-working man of Jewish descent will suddenly appear on the scene and claim the credit for the victory. With satanic powers he will cause fire to come down from heaven and make Israel believe that he was sent by God to rescue them. His great ally, the false prophet, will assist him in his deception and perform the miracle on his behalf. Of the false prophet, John says:

“Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth... And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast... He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men” (Rev. 13:11-13).

The Antichrist will pose as Israel's great Saviour, and also claim that he averted a threatening third world war. He will take this opportunity to present himself as Israel's redeemer and promised Messiah. After brief consultations, the Jewish national leaders will accept him as such. The Lord Jesus referred to this tragic mistake that the Jewish leaders will make, when He said:

“I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive Me; If another comes in his own name, him you will receive” (Jn. 5:43).

Jesus explicitly warned the people against this deceiver who will come in His Name when He said: “Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying: I am the Christ, and will deceive many” (Mt. 24:4-5). The false messiah is the rider on the white horse who goes out in Revelation 6 conquering and to conquer. He will waste no time in consolidating his position, and will muster great public support in Israel by allowing the nation to rebuild the temple. Part of his deceptive strategy will be to encourage Israel's long-standing antagonism against the New Testament and Jesus Christ. His followers will therefore take no notice of the New Testament warnings of Jesus about the appearing of a false messiah, and consequently will be ignorant about the spiritual dangers and deception of that time:

“Then if anyone says to you: Look, here is the Messiah! Or: There! Do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand [PJM1] . Therefore if they say to you: Look, He is in the desert! Do not go out; or: Look, He

is in the inner rooms! (*on TV?*) do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of man be” (Mt. 24:23-27).

The false messiah will exploit Israel’s spiritual ignorance by inducing them to enter into a covenant with himself. He will claim to have rescued the nation from the Russo-Arab siege and will allow them to rebuild their temple, thereby reviving the sacrificial service in the temple.

### **The sealed 144 000**

A very important event at the commencement of the tribulation period, just after the revelation of the Antichrist, is the conversion of 144 000 Jews and their dedication to the service of the Lord. The 144 000 is the first group which forms part of the *spiritual restoration* of Israel:

“And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred *and* forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel *were* sealed” (Rev. 7:4).

There is nothing vague about this statement and it is completely unjustifiable to identify the 144 000 Jewish evangelists as the church, or as any other group of people outside Israel. In this chapter, no use is made of symbolic language. The twelve tribes of Israel constitute a well-known historical nation; consequently, the term *Israel* is not a symbol or allegorical description of the church or any non-Jewish group. Likewise, the number 144 000 is not symbolic but literal. Its components are not 3 X 4 X 12 X 1000 as is sometimes alleged (3 referring to the Triune God, 4 referring to the four corners of the earth, 12 referring to the 12 apostles, and 1000 referring symbolically to any large group of people), but its components are 12 000 X 12: it is 12 000 people from each of the 12 tribes of the children of Israel. According to Ezekiel 48, the Promised Land – which is much bigger than the present Israel – will be subdivided and allocated to the twelve tribes during the millennial reign of the Messiah.

From a dispensational point of view it is quite obvious why the 144 000 Jews will be saved and dedicated to the service of the Lord. After the Lord Jesus removed His church, which He commissioned to be the light of the world during the present dispensation, He will then utilise the spiritual potential of Israel to make His light shine in the dark night of the tribulation period. When Elijah was caught up to heaven, his mantle and prophetic ministry fell on Elisha. Likewise, after the rapture of the church, the Lord will find a substitute in Messianic Jews to be witnesses for Him during the reign of the Antichrist.

Revelation 7 ties up with an extensive series of prophecies in the Bible in which the guarantee is given that the Lord will not only restore Israel physically to their land, but that they will in the latter days also experience a spiritual revival:

“Therefore say to the house of Israel... I will take you from among the nations... Then will I sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean.... I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgements, and do *them*. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God” (Ezek. 36:22-28).

The prophet Jeremiah says:

“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah... I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Jer. 31:31-33).

Today there are many thousands of Jews who have been exposed to the New Testament facts about the Messiahship of Jesus, but most of them are deferring a final decision because of uncertainty, or because of the threat of persecution. A decision will only be taken after the rapture has occurred and all the Messianic Jews (those who have previously accepted Jesus as their Messiah) have been taken away at the rapture as part of the church of Christ. A thorough re-evaluation of the facts relating to the Messiah will then have to be made by those left behind. According to Zechariah 12:10, the Holy Spirit will powerfully work among them and many will accept Yeshua Ha Mashiach (Jesus the Messiah).

From this revival the Lord will have 144 000 of his servants sealed early in the tribulation and appoint them to a special evangelistic ministry (Mt. 24:14). As happened with Daniel's three friends, they will be kept safely in the fire of tribulation so that they can continue to fulfil their ministry in a particularly trying time.

The salvation of the 144 000 occurs after the church dispensation, as their religious position is clearly related to their national identity – also with regard to the tribe to which they belong. That is distinctly different to the situation that prevailed during their dispersion among the nations in the church age when national identity was not relevant to the salvation of people. Galatians 3:28 says that in Christ Jesus no distinction is made between Jew and Greek. However, after the church age, God will also deal with Israel as a nation that was called by Him. The physically and constitutionally restored Israel must also be spiritually restored.

The 12 tribes of Israel mentioned in Revelation 7 have a special composition and are also listed in an uncommon order. They are Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin. Of the two sons of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, who were according to Genesis 48:5 adopted by Jacob as his own, only Manasseh is mentioned. Joseph is mentioned in the place of Ephraim. Usually, Joseph does not feature among the 12 tribes when both his sons are mentioned, e.g. in Ezekiel 48. Levi is also not usually mentioned as the Levites do not inherit tribal land like the other tribes. As priests, God is their inheritance and they must settle on the Holy Land. However, in Revelation Levi is taken up in the list in the place of the tribe of Dan.

Why has Dan been omitted from the list in Revelation, compared to the one in Ezekiel 48? The reason is that Dan is probably the tribe from which the Antichrist will emerge. In Genesis 49:17, Jacob said about this tribe: “Dan shall be a serpent by the way, a viper by the path, that bites the horse’s heels so that its rider shall fall backward.” For the rebellion that is associated with Dan there is no place in the restored Israel.

The tribal names in Revelation, as well as the order in which they appear, have a special significance. All the names have meanings and when the meanings are put together in the order the tribes are listed in Revelation 7 a significant statement is apparent. The introductory words are in Revelation 7:4: “144 000 of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed.” In conjunction with the subsequent tribal names and their meanings, the sentence could read as follows: “144 000 sealed Israelites who **praise and honour God** (*Judah*); because they **see the Son** (*Reuben*) **they overcame** (*Gad*) and are **happy** (*Asher*); their **struggle** (*Naphtali*) He made them **to forget** (*Manasseh*) by **hearing** them (*Simeon*); to **him who adheres to God** (*Levi*) **there is reward** (*Issachar*) and **residence** (*Zebulun*); **may the Lord add** to them (*Joseph*) through **the Son of His right hand** (*Benjamin*).

### **The persecution of saved Jews**

For obvious reasons, there will be tremendous polarisation and conflict between the followers of the true Messiah and those of the false messiah. The supporters of the false messiah will be the vast majority and stand firmly with their long-expected messiah. Even when he reaches out to other nations and religions to offer himself also to them as messiah, thereby drawing Israel into an alliance of world religions, his followers will remain blind to his deception. The Antichrist will oppose the true Messianic revival with all his might, as they will brand him as a false messiah and warn their fellow

Jews, as well as other people, against him. They will be regarded as a great threat to his position in Israel and also to his world empire, which he will consolidate with great success.

A most violent persecution of Messianic Jews will be instituted. Like Nebuchadnezzar of old, the Antichrist will announce extreme punishments for those who refuse to join his state religion by honouring and worshipping him as Messiah. Like the three friends of Daniel, the 144 000 will resist all pressure which is applied against them, by absolutely refusing to bow the knee to the Antichrist. Daniel's friends reacted as follows to the orders of the mighty king of their time:

“Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king: O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up” (Dan. 3:16-18).

The Lord will strengthen and save his faithful witnesses in the hour of great peril, as He did with Daniel's friends and also with Daniel himself in the lions' den after he continued to worship the true God of heaven three times a day despite royal decrees to the contrary. The persecution will nevertheless continue and its level of violence will increase.

In Revelation 14:1-5 the 144 000 are seen surrounding the Lamb on Mount Zion. After their earthly ministry they will be united with Him and occupy a special place in His kingdom. It is said of them that they never defiled themselves with women as they walked pure before the Lamb from the beginning. What does that mean? In 2 Corinthians 11:2 the church of Christ is depicted as a chaste virgin. In Revelation 17:4-5 the false, unfaithful world church is referred to as “Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots...” The apostate church will amalgamate with many false religions who are therefore portrayed as ‘harlots’ and the false church as the mother of them all.

The 144 000 are a group that never had anything to do with these religious harlots, these unclean women. They were not defiled by the false religions, neither do they originate from the degenerate and false Christian church of the end-time. Consequently, they do not entertain any distorted theological views. They are therefore a new undefiled ‘virgin’ group that is redeemed from Israel by the Lord Jesus. They will faithfully follow Him and refuse any association with the false world religions. As a result of their uncompromising attitude they will also be discredited and persecuted by the alliance of world religions that gave its full support to the Antichrist. John said of this treacherous and defiled bride of the Antichrist: "And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" (Rev. 17:6).

### **Christian martyrs**

In the midst of the most terrible judgements that will be poured out over this world, grace will still be available to sinners. During the hour of darkness people *can* still be saved. Despite the wrath of God that will be visited upon the wicked, He will continue to have compassion upon those who realise their serious spiritual predicament and call on His Name for salvation.

Partly as a result of the preaching of the 144 000 Jewish evangelists, but also independent of it, a great multitude from all nations will repent during the tribulation period. By doing so, they will bring upon themselves the hatred and wrath of the Antichrist, the false prophet and the alliance of world religions. But they will be determined to follow the difficult course of rejection, persecution and martyrdom. They will, despite the consequences, resist and unconditionally reject the godless structures, ideologies and religions of their time. The persecution against them will begin immediately, but most of them will die as martyrs in the second half of the week, known as the great tribulation. About the aftermath of their martyrdom John said:

“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb! ... Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from? And I said to him, Sir, you know. So he said to me, These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Rev. 7:9-17).

A great harvest will be gathered for the kingdom of God during the reign of the Antichrist – although under most difficult circumstances. Rather seek the Lord *now*, so that He can save your soul and make you worthy to escape the coming horrors of the Antichrist and the great tribulation.

## 8. The Seven Trumpets

*(Revelation 8 to 10)*

The trumpet judgements that will be announced in the tribulation period will in most cases destroy a third of their targets. Both the physical creation and humanity will be affected. The first four trumpets will cause a partial ecological collapse on earth. Many people and animals will die as a result of it:

“The first angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown on the earth; and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up. Then the second angel sounded: And *something* like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood; and a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. Then the third angel sounded: And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood; and many men died from the water, because it was made bitter. Then the fourth angel sounded: And a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened; and a third of the day did not shine, and likewise the night” (Rev. 8:7-12).

From this Scripture it is obvious that large parts of the ocean as well as fresh water resources, trees, grass, and living creatures will be stricken with disastrous results. The light of the sun, moon and stars will be partially obliterated. The great hail and fire, as well as the object like a burning mountain that falls into the sea, may be flaming meteors, meteorites or asteroids that partially burn out in the earth’s atmosphere. Some of these disasters may also be man-made, e.g. nuclear missiles launched in war that go out of control and fall into the sea or on land where they will cause great catastrophes. Apart from the high intensity shock waves that will level buildings within a radius of several kilometres, big fires will also be ignited. Explosions in the sea will cause enormous tidal waves that will flood islands and low-lying coastal areas. Thousands of ships will sink and many marine animals die.

Apart from the judgements of God that will be poured out over the earth, mankind is also contributing towards a global ecological collapse. There are various indications that major natural disasters are looming. According to scientists there is a steady rise in temperature that will significantly change the climate of the earth. This can be attributed to the immense quantity of carbon dioxide gas and other pollutants released randomly into the atmosphere. Irreparable damage has already been caused to the ozone layer around the earth, and large holes have appeared in it. This protective layer is intended to be a shield against ultra-violet rays. The damage caused to it by dangerous gases constitutes a tremendous threat to all living creatures on earth. The risk of skin cancer is greatly increased.

The increase in pollution continues unabatedly. Many emissions from factories produce acid rain, and the result has been the destruction of plantations and natural forests in many parts of the world. In addition mankind has for years been destroying vast areas of rain forest, which seriously damages the ecology of the planet. Add to this grim picture the depletion of natural resources and the serious pollution caused to rivers, lakes and the oceans by waste from factories, the spilling of crude oil, and the uncontrolled dumping of poisonous and radioactive waste.

Climatic changes also lead to a noticeable polarisation in weather conditions, as is evident from the increasing droughts, floods, violent hurricanes and unusually high and low temperatures. On the one hand, millions of people are threatened by steadily expanding deserts, while on the other, parts of the world are subject to an extraordinarily high rainfall, floods and typhoons. These extreme conditions have an adverse effect upon crops and can totally destroy them. To the rapidly increasing world population, large-scale famine and starvation are looming.

This planet will become a less and less habitable place because of the devastation caused to the earth and its natural resources by reckless and irresponsible people, big business, governments, etc., as well as by the destruction that will follow when the powers of heaven are shaken in consequence of the unleashing of God's judgements upon the wicked. God had instructed mankind to subdue the world and have dominion over it. (Gen. 1:28) That places a big responsibility on mankind since they must control the powers and conserve the processes of nature and protect it against over-exploitation and annihilation. However, because of mankind's wickedness, greed and folly which is destroying their own environment, God is allowing them to increasingly endanger their chances of physical survival.

### **A great affliction and slaughtering of men**

The judgements of the great tribulation will not only affect the physical creation, and thereby indirectly also human beings. Many of them will be directly aimed at the people dwelling on the earth as they are, through their sinfulness and rebellion against God, responsible for these calamities. In the wars and other disasters that strike the wicked, demons always play a significant part. They go out from the devil, the Antichrist and the false prophet, and will provoke people to violence.

The fifth and sixth trumpets announce tremendous disasters coming upon humanity – the one, painful torture from poisonous stings and the other one, widespread deaths caused by a big military invasion from the East. In Revelation 9:1-11 mysterious insects are described that resemble hairy grasshoppers with tails like scorpions, faces like humans, long hair like women, teeth like lion's teeth and something like crowns on their heads. They will ascend from the bottomless pit, from which smoke like that of a great furnace will arise and darken the sun and the air. These insects will torment people for five months by stinging them with their tails. The pain will be so severe that people will seek death but not find it. There are those who think that these strange animals are demons that will afflict people. Their origin from the bottomless pit clearly suggests such a possibility.

Revelation 9:13-19 and 16:12 give a description of how the kings of the East – that is China and its allies – will mobilise their forces for the wars of the great tribulation. An army of 200 million Asians will cross the Euphrates River into the Middle East and the Western world, and become responsible for a great slaughter. They will kill one third of the world's population, i.e. those who survived the previous calamities and judgements:

“Then the sixth angel sounded: And I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet: Release the four angels who are bound at the great River Euphrates. So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind. Now the number of the army of the horsemen was two hundred million, and I heard the number of them. And thus I saw the horses in the vision: those who sat on them had breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulphur yellow; and the heads of the horses were like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone. By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed – by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths” (Rev. 9:13-18).

The Euphrates River is the divide between East and West. One of the great end-time enemies of Israel *and* the Free World comes from beyond the Euphrates and will be joined by other eastern countries. Four angels are bound here until the year, the month, and the day when they will be released to kill a third of mankind by making use of this vicious enemy with their enormous army from the East. These four angels are demons because good angels are never bound. They will have 200 million soldiers at their disposal.

The strange description of cavalry horses with fire and smoke emanating from their mouths is not intentional symbolic language, but due to the fact that John, with his vocabulary of the first century, did not have the terminology to describe modern armament and warfare. Possibly he saw modern tanks, and this was the only way in which he could describe them. There are various indications in Revelation that nuclear weapons will be used in the wars of the great tribulation.

Scientists have calculated that if a world war should break out in which nuclear weapons are used, it could result in the immediate death of about one billion people. Another billion will be doomed to a slow death. Heat waves will spread over the earth and set flammable material alight. The ignition of stored poisonous gases will fill the atmosphere with deadly carbon monoxide and cyanide gas.

The aftermath of a nuclear war would be equally ghastly. After the initial heat waves, the surface of the earth would cool down dramatically. Temperatures would fall by as much as 55 degrees, and cover the earth under a blanket of ice and snow. This is described as a nuclear winter. It would destroy all vegetation, while water reservoirs would be frozen and polluted with radioactive dust. The Northern Hemisphere would be covered with smoke, as most of the explosions would occur there. The sun would be darkened for about a month. Dense clouds would drift to the Southern Hemisphere, causing the whole earth to experience twilight for about a year. During this time the sun would become black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon like blood (Rev. 6:12).

### **Diseases**

It is obvious that the pollution caused by nuclear warfare and the firing of chemical and biological warheads will cause unheard of diseases, poisoning and radiation injuries. In the case of a nuclear war, people who have been exposed to an intensive pulse of neutron rays will die immediately. As the energy of the rays diminish, they can still remain a source of serious consequences for millions of people. The extent of the damage will depend upon the intensity of the radiation and the population density of the area. These rays can change a person's cell structure and cause various kinds of cancer. It may vary from skin cancer to malicious tumours in the intestines. If the neutron radiation contains a high energy potential, it can cause disruptions deep into the



body tissue. It can also damage the female reproductive system leading to genetic abnormalities, the malformation of children born, stillbirths and sterility.

The effect on the ecosystem would be disastrous as natural resources such as water, air, soil and plants would be radioactive after nuclear explosions. Plants that grow in radioactive soil absorb this contamination, and animals, including farm animals that feed on it become irradiated. Consequently, their milk, eggs and meat are not fit for human consumption. Even rainwater from clouds that are exposed to radiation becomes radioactive. Besides this, there are various other after-effects of such explosions. Atomic clouds will be driven by the winds and cause radioactive dust to settle over large areas outside the war zone where sickness, misery and death will result among man and beast.

The animal kingdom is just as vulnerable to this invisible, insidious damage as humans. Maritime animals will also suffer because of the shock waves and irradiation. Should there be nuclear explosions in the sea, as implied by Revelation 8:8, it will prove destructive for marine life, while huge tidal waves and storms will cause many ships to sink. Revelation 16:3-4 refers to a situation where marine life will become extinct and all fresh water sources will be polluted and rendered unfit for consumption. The effect of this disaster on human life and health is inestimable.

Mankind has acquired the technology to cause a multitude of illnesses and plagues. Various Arab nations are in the process of supplementing their chemical weaponry with bacteriological weapons. They have the means of spreading bacteria over the armies and cities of their enemies, and to cause dysentery (inflammation of the intestines), diarrhoea, anthrax (splenic fever) and abdominal typhus (enteric fever). A biological installation is more compact and less sophisticated than one required for the manufacture of chemical weapons. Several Third World countries are showing an interest in germ warfare.

An end-time disease that is threatening people in virtually all the countries of the world is AIDS (Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome). It is mainly contracted through sexual contact, although drug users often infect themselves by using contaminated needles. Many children inherit this disease from infected parents. This virus destroys the body's immunity to diseases. Death results mostly from secondary causes such as TB, pneumonia, skin cancer, diarrhoea or any other disease. A person can carry this virus for several years and be HIV-positive before it starts to get active and develop into full-blown Aids. During this period, however, the individual distributes the virus through body fluids (mainly during sexual intercourse) without showing any of the symptoms related to it.

Statistics on the extent of this disease are very incomplete and unreliable. The number of Aids cases may be determined to a certain degree, but not the number of HIV positive cases. Contamination is spreading rapidly in sexually permissive and drug addicted communities who also have much contact with foreigners. This disease has already taken on disaster proportions in some parts of the world, particularly in Africa, and threatens to do so shortly in many other parts also. The immorality of the end-time is an ideal breeding-ground for Aids.

The Lord warns against adultery, prostitution and homosexuality. This may be the reason why no remedy has as yet been found for Aids, despite intensive research by the best medical scientists in the world. Medicines that suppress these viruses, as well as the accompanying treatment, are far too expensive for most of the victims. The Word of God directs the following warning to those who persist in these and other sins:

“Don't fool yourselves. Those who live immoral lives, who are idol-worshippers, adulterers or homosexuals – will have no share in His Kingdom. Neither will thieves or greedy people, drunkards, slanderers or robbers” (1 Cor. 6:9-10 LB).

Adultery, sexual immorality and homosexuality all feature in this list. Remember the fate of Sodom, from which the word sodomy is derived, where homosexuality was the order of the day. The Bible condemns these sinful practices and also mentions the retribution that the transgressors will suffer *in their bodies*:

“For this reason God gave them over *and* abandoned them to vile affections *and* degrading passions. For their woman exchanged their natural function for an unnatural *and* abnormal one. And the men also turned from natural relations with women and were set ablaze with lust for one another, men committing shameful acts with men and suffering in their own bodies *and* personalities the inevitable consequences *and* penalty of their wrong doing *and* going astray, which was (their) fitting retribution” (Rom. 1:26-27 AB).

During the end-time there will again, as in the days of Noah and Lot, be a perverse and immoral generation of people who will abandon their bodies to vile lusts and unnatural practices, be numbered by the Antichrist and even sell their souls to the devil for financial gain. Despite this depraved state into which they have degenerated, and the perils and sufferings of the judgements falling upon them, they will remain impenitent. The wicked in the great tribulation will harden themselves time and again, and refuse to repent in spite of the plagues sent by God. The hideous sores that will appear on their bodies, the excruciating heat, the famine and all the natural disasters, will cause them to blaspheme even more. They "...blasphemed the name of God, which had power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory" (Rev. 16:9 KJV).

In Revelation 9, a grim account is given of a situation in which the survivors of the terrible disasters, surrounded by starving people and decaying corpses, continue with their Satanism, immorality and other evils, with no intention of changing their ways:

“The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood... and they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts” (Rev. 9:20-21).

The four big sins of the tribulation period are:

- 1. Violent crimes:** revolution, terrorism, armed robbery, hostage taking, assault, rape, murder, torture, intimidation and cruelty to people and animals.
- 2. Occultism:** magic, witchcraft, Eastern mysticism, transcendental meditation, yoga, spiritualism, idolatry, and Satanism.
- 3. Sexual licentiousness:** sexual harassment, unmarried co-habitation, extra-marital relations, uncontrolled lust, prostitution, adultery, pornography, homosexualism, lesbianism and the sexual abuse of children.
- 4. Economic misdeeds:** covetousness, gambling, theft, corruption, excessive profiteering, bribery, extortion, fraud and misappropriation.

A person who has publicly made his choice for Satan and his works, is so blinded and perverted that his senses will only respond to lies. He will perpetually reject the truth, while being unaware of the mad race he is pursuing on the road to perdition.

### **The seventh trumpet**

Between the sixth and seventh trumpets there is a short pause. Revelation 10 refers to the seven thunders that uttered their voices, but John was not allowed to write down their message. After this, an angel stood on the sea

and on the land and swore that there would be delay no longer. He had a little book open in his hand and John was commanded to eat the book and to prophesy about many peoples, nations, tongues and kings. In his mouth the little book was sweet as honey but it caused bitterness in his stomach.

This is often the experience of the prophets of God. His message is sweet in their mouths as they proclaim it, but it has bitter consequences as people reject the message and persecute or even kill the prophets. But that should not deter a prophet from loudly and clearly proclaiming the judgements of God upon a sinful generation. To Ezekiel, the Lord said:

“Like adamant stone, harder than flint, I have made your forehead: do not be afraid of them, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they are a rebellious house... Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me: When I say to the wicked: You shall surely die, and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand” (Ezek. 3:9, 17-18).

When the seventh trumpet sounds, the most awesome judgements upon the earth of all time will be announced. Under demonic deception and enticement the kings of the earth will march with their armies to Armageddon where they will be destroyed by the Lord in the valley of decision. As never before, the powers of heaven will be shaken, then the Son of Man will come in a cloud with great power and glory (Mt. 24:30). He will judge His enemies, crush the kingdom of the Antichrist, rescue His nation Israel and take the kingdom of the world on His shoulders as King of kings:

“Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying: The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever! And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshipped God, saying: We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was and who is to come, because You have taken Your great power and reigned” (Rev. 11:15-17).

The judgements that will be poured out hereafter will devastate the world and its natural resources, rendering it virtually uninhabitable. Humanity will be on the brink of extinction, and perhaps only then realise the truth of what Jesus almost 2000 years ago foretold about this time:

“For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved” (Mt. 24:21-22).

## **9. The Temple and Two Witnesses**

*(Revelation 11)*

In Revelation 11, explicit reference is made to the temple service as well as the desecration of the temple in the middle of the tribulation period. Which temple is this? In the history and prophecies about Israel reference is made to the following four temples:

1. The temple of Solomon. This temple was destroyed just before the Babylonian captivity, but after the return of Israel it was rebuilt again. It is commonly referred to as the first temple.
2. The temple of Herod. This temple was built for the Jews by Herod in the last century before Christ. It is known as the second temple.
3. The temple of the tribulation period will be rebuilt in Jerusalem during the coming tribulation period after a covenant with the Antichrist. It is referred to as the third temple.
4. The millennial temple will be built in Jerusalem after the coming of the true Messiah (Ezek. 40-44). It is described as the fourth temple.

The measuring of the temple, as well as its desecration, is described as follows by John:

“Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying: Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city under foot for forty-two months” (Rev. 11:1-2).

This prophecy was written 25 years after the temple of Herod (the second temple) was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD, and can therefore only refer to a third, future rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. The third temple, which will be completed and put into service during the first half of the tribulation period, will be desecrated by the Antichrist. Apart from the prophecy in Revelation 11, there are various other references to the third temple in the Bible. Daniel says:

“Then he [*referring to the Antichrist*] shall confirm a covenant with many for one week [*that is a year-week of seven years*] but in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering” (Dan. 9:27).

The termination of the sacrifices in the middle of the tribulation period will coincide with the time when the Antichrist will assume his role as military dictator, declare himself to be God, and have an image of himself placed in the temple. In the Holy of holies, where only the High Priest may enter once a year to bring a sacrifice for the nation on the ark of the covenant of the true God, the Antichrist will order his image to be placed and demand to be worshipped in the place of God. About this rebellious act, Daniel says:

“And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the abomination of desolation... [This] king shall do according to his own will: he shall exalt and magnify himself above every god, shall speak blasphemies against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the wrath has been accomplished” (Dan. 11:31, 36).

The Lord Jesus also referred to the abominable image of the Antichrist that will be erected in the temple at the beginning of the second half of the seven year tribulation period, described as the great tribulation:

“Therefore, when you see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place... then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains... For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Mt. 24:15-21).

Paul also mentions the Antichrist’s desecration of the temple in the middle of the tribulation, when he describes him as the “man of sin... the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God (2 Thes. 2:3-4).

In Revelation 13 the full implications are spelt out of the placing of the image of the beast in the temple and of the forced worship of the Antichrist as the self-declared god of this world:

“He [*that is the false prophet*] was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed” (Rev. 13:15).

In the middle of the tribulation the Antichrist will declare himself to be God. He will not only stop the Jewish religious sacrifices, but will abrogate all the other religions, as he will exalt himself above every god that is worshipped. That will amount to the obliteration of all religions, aimed at substituting them with the universal worship of the Antichrist by people of all faiths.

We know that the Antichrist will, as an end-time ruler, be a living person on earth during the Second Coming of Jesus (Rev. 19:19; 2 Thes. 2:8), and, as has already been shown, there will definitely be a temple in Jerusalem during his reign.

### **The age-old conflict**

The great animosity of Satan against the temple is, however, not confined to the end-time. Through the ages the Temple Mount has been and still is one of his prime targets – the reason being that God chose to establish His Name on this holy site in Jerusalem and to make important revelations from it (Ps. 48; 132:13-15). It is also the place to which Jesus will return after His feet touch down on the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4) and He has destroyed His enemies. He will then go down into the Kidron Valley, cross the Brook Kidron, ascend Mount Moriah and enter the temple site through the East Gate (also known as the Golden Gate) to proclaim His position as Messiah-King and to restore the throne of David for His millennial reign.

The East (or Golden) Gate is to this day completely sealed up with large stone blocks built into it by the Arabs when they became aware of the biblical prophecy that this special gate was to be kept shut “because the Lord God of Israel has entered by it” (Ezek. 44:2). The Lord Jesus has entered the East Gate during His triumphal entry and knowing the prophecies of His Second Coming, the Arabs wanted to be sure He would not be able to enter the rebuilt East Gate – as if that would be able to prevent Him!

For many centuries the temple also demonstrated God’s plan of salvation, i.e. the atoning death of Jesus for sinners. Every sacrificial animal that was brought through the Sheep Gate to the temple to be sacrificed pointed to the Lamb of God who would be slain, just outside Jerusalem, for the sins of humanity.

Do you understand why Satan and his hordes so fiercely hate this place? His intention has been and is to transform the Temple Mount into a place where a god other than the God of the Bible is worshipped, in preparation for the universal worshipping of the Antichrist here during his evil reign on earth. Since the seventh century – in 638 AD, which was six years after the death of Mohammed – the Temple Mount has been in Arab hands. It is as if Satan challenges God through the temples of a foreign god on this site, which is intensely sacred to Jews and Christians. The Al Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock stand here.

The Dome of the Rock straddles the rock where God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac, who was a type of the Messiah. On the dome of this mosque the following words are inscribed: “God does not have a son!” Muslims regard it as blasphemous if anyone says that God has a Son, and spit on the ground in contempt. The Allah of the Koran is, therefore, not the Triune God of the Bible! Further, the Muslims claim it was Ishmael, not Isaac, who was to be sacrificed on Mount Moriah. Clearly, ‘Ishmael’ is still mocking ‘Isaac’ (Gen. 21:9).

## Rebuilding of the temple

Intensive preparations have been in progress for many years aimed at rebuilding the temple on its original site on the Temple Mount. Many Israelis cherish it as their ultimate dream to see the temple being rebuilt. Now that they have returned to their land, this ideal is much closer to realisation. One of the major obstacles to this is the high profile of Islam on the Temple Mount with its two mosques. The Muslims, the Temple Mount is the third holiest place on earth after Mecca and Medina. The fact that the Dome of the Rock was restored at a very high cost, including new golden plates on its dome, is an indication that Islam has no intention of leaving the Temple Mount.

For many years it was thought that the Dome of the Rock stands on the spot where the temple should be rebuilt, but archaeological excavations disproved this idea. The Jewish temple can be built directly north of the Dome of the Rock, with about 3½ metres between the two buildings. If it is kept in mind that the Antichrist will offer himself as the common messiah of all faiths, it can be expected that these two shrines will indeed stand alongside each other. Islam and Judaism will then co-exist as sister religions with all the other amalgamated world religions for 3½ years. Thereafter the crisis of Daniel 9:27 will arise when the Antichrist will declare himself as God in the temple. The Jews will then reject him and break their covenant with him.

For many years there have been Israeli pressure groups who campaigned and planned for the rebuilding of the temple. The most well-known group is the *Temple Mount Faithful* which was established by Gehrson Solomon shortly after the Six Day War in 1967. Their objective is to free the Temple Mount from what they call its “illegal Arab occupation.” After the capture of the Old City of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount during the Six Day War the former minister of defence, Moshe Dayan, transferred the civil administration of the 35 acres of the Temple Mount to a Muslim council, the *Waqf*. Solomon’s group describes this decision as a great set-back for the temple project.

During the past more than 30 years Solomon’s group has made various attempts to gain control over the Temple Mount. Although it is still a Muslim stronghold, he believes that the Jewish temple will be built here in the near future. In 1990, his group attracted the attention of the international media when they asked permission to lay a cornerstone of 4½ tons on the temple site. Although permission was denied to them, riots nevertheless broke out, leading to the death of 17 Arabs.

Subsequently Solomon’s group again attempted to lay the corner-stone, but without success. These orthodox activists are convinced that they will ultimately achieve their purpose. Solomon says that God commanded him to introduce a new period in Israel’s history in which the restored temple service will play a vital role.

Not all the religious leaders in Israel are prepared to provoke violence in their efforts to secure Jewish rights on the Temple Mount. Rabbi Jehuda Getz, chief rabbi of the Western Wall, says that it is not for man to decide how the Jews will gain control over the Temple Mount. That is a matter for God. Getz expressed the opinion that the time is not yet ripe for the temple to be rebuilt. He says that a prophet must first come and indicate the exact spot where the altar should be. In the meantime, no one can start construction work on the temple until this prophet has come.

In spite of these stumbling-blocks to the rebuilding of the temple, the Temple Institute in Jerusalem is busy preparing for this event. They oversee the manufacturing of golden and silver artefacts, as well as ceremonial pitchers and vessels that must be used in the restored temple. The Institute also exhibits various items such as the linen robe that the priests must wear, the cap of the high priest, as well as harps, trumpets, fire-pans, etc.

The Institute's director of public affairs, Chaim Richman, says that his organisation do their work in obedience to the Lord. The Institute does not see itself as a political organisation and consequently does not negotiate with the Muslims or try to drive them from the Temple Mount. Their objective is purely religious, within the framework of the Jewish religious laws, to try to expedite the building of the temple by peaceful means.

Furthermore, there is a school for the training of Levitical priests in Jerusalem. Should the temple be built at short notice, well-trained priests must be available to conduct the temple services. It is accepted, and DNA tests have tended to confirm, that Jews with the surname of Cohen and Kaplan, among others, are descended from the tribe of Levi and are therefore eligible to be trained as priests. To be an expert in Jewish law demands knowledge of the 625 laws that are prescribed by the Torah, as well as rabbinical rules in the Talmud. According to orthodox Jews these laws and traditions must all be revived and honoured in the Messianic era when the temple will be rebuilt.

Dramatic events are expected in the near future in Jerusalem, and those who have a prophetic expectation know that the time for it is near.

### **The two witnesses**

Because the world will be in spiritual darkness after the rapture, the Lord will raise up special witnesses to gather a harvest for the kingdom of God among Israel and the nations during that time. In Chapter 7, mention was made of the 144 000 Jewish evangelists who will be assigned to the evangelistic ministry. In Revelation 11, mention is made of two outstanding witnesses who will be mightily used of God to proclaim the truth and strongly rebuke His enemies:

“And I will give power to My two witnesses, and they will prophesy 1260 days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth. And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner. These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire.

“Now when they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. Then those from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three and a half days and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves. And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.

“Now after the three and a half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them: Come up here. And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them. In the same hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. In the earthquake seven thousand people were killed, and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven” (Rev. 11:3-13).

Various commentators are of the opinion that the two witnesses will be Elijah and Moses in mortal, physical bodies, who will return to the land and people of Israel. However, it is not a foregone conclusion that Elijah and Moses will *personally* be sent back to earth to be slain by the Antichrist and his evil forces, which would involve Moses dying for a second time. It is more likely that two outstandingly gifted and godly Messianic Jews, perhaps even drawn from the ranks of the 144 000 evangelists converted to faith in Yeshua Ha Mashiach, will be raised up 'in the spirit and power of Elijah' and Moses. It may, therefore, be instructive to review aspects

of the role, exploits and ministry of these two great prophets of Israel – who were singled out for the great honour of appearing on the Mount of Transfiguration with the Redeemer-Messiah Himself – as the parallels with the witnesses are quite striking. Regarding Elijah, it is recorded in the last two verses of the Old Testament that the Lord of Hosts declared:

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse” (Mal. 4:5-6).

This prophecy was partly fulfilled at Christ's first coming. When the disciples mentioned that "the scribes say that Elijah must come first," Jesus replied: "Elijah has come already." Then they understood He referred to John the Baptist (Mt. 17:10-13), of whom the angel Gabriel prophesied that he would "turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God" and "go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Lk. 1:13-17; cf. Mal. 4:5-6).

The prophecy of Malachi 4:5-6 will be completely fulfilled before Christ's Second Coming in that just as John the Baptist acted 'in the spirit and power of Elijah' at Christ's first coming, so will the two witnesses act in the same spirit and power before His Second Coming. They will prepare His way by turning 'many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God' and 'the hearts of the fathers to the children... to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.'

For 3½ years, that is during the first half of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week, and before the dark days of the great tribulation during the second half of the week, these two witnesses will minister so powerfully to the people of Israel that a remnant of the nation will return to the God of their fathers. In defiance of the Antichrist's ideology of abolishing national identity to achieve world unity, the two witnesses will succeed in restoring this remnant's national identity and calling as a people uniquely chosen of God. There will be a serious generation gap due, probably, to the younger generation preferring to abandon their distinctive national identity in favour of the Antichrist's globalism and the worshipping of the cosmic Messiah of all faiths, while the older generation will cling to orthodox traditions and a lifeless form of godliness due to the continued rejection of the true Messiah. The inspired ministry of the two witnesses will succeed in bridging this gap and unifying the generations in a new-found faith in the coming Yeshua Ha Mashiach.

Elijah is known as the prophet who was mightily used of God to perform great miracles in Israel. When he ascended to heaven in a whirlwind, Elisha, his successor, said of him: "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen!" (2 Kings 2:12). To Israel, he was worth more than its defence force and chariots because the power of the Lord worked so strongly through him. The two witnesses will come in that same power, and the fear of the Lord will come upon many people. Elijah raised the widow's child from the dead and confronted the prophets of the false religion of Baal, successfully calling down fire from heaven to defeat them. He also "prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months" (Jas. 5:17). In a similar way, the two witnesses will, 'in the spirit and power of Elijah', miraculously use fire to defeat the false prophets of the Antichrist's world religion and to shut up heaven 'so that no rain falls during the days of their prophecy,' i.e. 3½ years.

The two witnesses will also come in the spirit and power of Moses. Moses was, of course, the great leader whom God raised up to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt, through the wilderness and to the borders of the Promised Land. He also had the role of mediator through whom God gave His Law to Israel (and through them to the world) and who interceded with God on their behalf. Like Elijah, Moses was mightily used of God to perform signs, wonders and miraculous acts of power:



“Since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, in all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, before Pharaoh, before all his servants, and in all his land, and by all that mighty power and all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel” (Deut. 34:10-12).

Moses directly confronted the wicked Pharaoh because of his oppression of the children of Israel and announced severe plagues upon the land and people of Egypt. Likewise, the two witnesses will withstand the Antichrist and his wicked global empire that will oppress the people of Israel, and strike the earth with awesome plagues. They will use their miraculous power to kill any enemies who seek to harm them.

Moses was an outstanding type of Christ whom he foreshadowed and clearly prophesied of:

“The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear” (Deut. 18:15).

By this prophecy Moses was clearly preparing Israel for both the first and Second Coming of their Messiah. Tragically, as a nation, they rejected Him at His first coming. In the spirit and power of both Moses and Elijah, the two witnesses will urgently and powerfully prepare the remnant of Israel for the imminent Second Coming of their true Messiah and strongly urge them to abrogate and renounce their covenant with the false messiah. The witnesses will admonish and teach the remnant of Israel that they, as well as the witnesses themselves, will have to suffer reproach and persecution for their loyalty to the true Messiah, Jesus, and His coming Kingdom in which Israel will have a key role to play. Both Elijah and Moses faced great opposition and suffered affliction because of their faithful witness and dedication to God and His people. Of Moses it is said:

“By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasure of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ [*the Messiah*] greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible” (Heb. 11:24-27).

By taking a firm stand against the kingdom of darkness, ruled by the Satanic triumvirate, the witnesses and the remnant of Israel will pay a heavy price in tribulation for resisting the false messiah. But they will be richly rewarded for suffering affliction for the sake of the true Messiah.

The powerful witness and exploits of the two witnesses will have a world-wide impact during the first half of the tribulation period. It is no wonder that the Antichrist and his followers will be furious because of their activities. When the Antichrist usurps all power and authority in the middle of the tribulation period, he will turn his venom upon the two witnesses and fight against them and kill them. But the Lord will raise them from the dead after three and a half literal days and invite them into heaven, to where they will ascend in full view of their enemies, their mission successfully accomplished.

Subsequently, the dark and stormy night of the Antichrist's reign of terror will engulf the entire world and all its inhabitants for 42 months of the most appalling and gruesome tribulation in the history of mankind. Not many will survive the wars, pestilences, disasters and judgements that will befall the wicked during the awful Day of the Lord.

## 10. The Escape of Israel

*(Revelation 12)*

It is of great importance to correctly understand the message and symbolism of Revelation 12. Many different interpretations are offered for this chapter, and in most cases end up with the wrong conclusion that it is the church that is symbolised and not Israel. As a result, future expectations become confused. The first six verses of Revelation 12 read as follows:

“Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labour and in pain to give birth. And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and to His throne. Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there 1260 days”

In the first instance, the identity of the woman must be clearly established because that is precisely where most of the incorrect views about Revelation 12 originate. She is a married woman, who is on the point of giving birth to a very important Child, because He is destined to rule all nations with a rod of iron. The prophets have already announced the birth of this very special Child. Micah said that He would be born in Bethlehem and that He would be a Ruler in Israel (Mic. 5:2). Isaiah said:

“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over his kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgement and justice from that time forward, even forever (Is. 9:6-7).

To Mary, the angel said: “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David” (Lk. 1:31-32). When Joseph intended to divorce Mary because she was pregnant, the angel appeared to him and said: “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 1:20).

Mary is the personification of the people of Israel, from whom the Messiah and Saviour of the world was born. In the Old Testament, Israel is often described as a woman who belongs to God. In Jeremiah 31:3-4 the Lord says about her: “Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you. Again I will build you, and you shall be rebuilt, O virgin of Israel!” In Isaiah 54:5 God attaches Himself to Israel when He says: “For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is His name.”

Can you see the absurdity of calling this woman the church? Jesus was not born from the church but the church from Him! Furthermore, in 2 Corinthians 11:2, the church is described as a betrothed virgin and not a married woman. The church belongs to the heavenly Bridegroom, Jesus, and will be united with Him at His coming. He was born of the people of Israel, from the house of David and the tribe of Judah.

From another point of view the woman in Revelation 12 is also identified as Israel. She has a garland with twelve stars on her head, which depict the twelve tribes of Israel. She was clothed with the sun and the moon, referring to Jacob and Rachel as the progenitors of Israel. This symbolism is clear from a dream that Joseph had:

“Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me. So he told it to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him: What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?” (Gen. 37:9-10).

Satan knows all these things, which is why he vehemently attacks Israel and tries to destroy her. Since he does not succeed in destroying her he tries to seduce her to become unfaithful to God. But his biggest campaign is against the Son of God who was born from Israel, because this Son will crush the power of Satan and be the sole ruler of the universe. That is why the dragon stood before the woman who was about to deliver a male Child, so that he could devour the Child.

The pregnancy of the woman suggests the period of Christ's birth. The dragon that draws a third of the angels with him from heaven and stands ready to destroy the child, is none other than the devil himself. On this occasion his accomplice was Herod who commanded that all male infants under two should be killed in an effort to take the life of Jesus. But the Lord Jesus came, fulfilled His task and was caught up to heaven. The period when He will rule the nations with a rod of iron will commence after His Second Coming.

### **Hatred of the Jews**

Revelation 12 reveals a further unfolding of the age-old struggle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. For this reason the events are placed in a broad framework. It is not an isolated event confined to the middle of the tribulation period, but part of a struggle that had its origin with the rebellion of Lucifer and a third of the angels in heaven. After the Fall in Paradise a further dimension of this struggle developed when God declared enmity between the woman and the serpent, and between her seed (Christ) and the seed of the serpent (Antichrist). The first five verses of Revelation 12, in broad terms, sketch the background of this spiritual war, which is further extended and broadened later in the chapter.

Against this background it is obvious why Satan has, for thousands of years, been waging a malicious campaign of hatred against the Jews. He is now intensifying his efforts to involve all the other nations in this odious vendetta in order to harass, discredit, falsely accuse, despise and persecute Israel. However, the nations who are deceived into pursuing anti-Israel policies are not only siding with Satan, but are inviting the anger of God against themselves.

Those who support Israel will share in the blessings of the Lord. God said to Abraham: “I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). Two thousand years later Jesus was born from the descendants of Abraham, of the tribe of Judah, “that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:14). It is, therefore, dangerous folly for Christians to participate in slandering and persecuting the Jews and opposing Israel. In doing so they not only reveal their ignorance and ingratitude but, more seriously still, also draw down upon themselves the curse of God against the enemies of Israel.

There are some things about the Jews and Israel that one must never lose sight of:

- They are a people chosen by God to reveal His plan of salvation to the world. Romans 9:5 says that Christ in the flesh comes from Israel. Romans 3:2 says that the words of God were committed to them, and Romans 11 adds that, despite their rebelliousness, ‘God has not cast away His people’ but has reserved a remnant for Himself worthy to inherit His promises to Israel (Zech. 13:8-9).
- In John 4:22 Jesus says that salvation is of the Jews.

- Zechariah 2:8 says that Israel is the apple of God's eye.
- At the Second Coming the whole remnant of Israel will, according to Zechariah 12:10 and 13:9, accept Jesus as Messiah.
- Romans 11 says that "all Israel will be saved" (v. 26) and that their acceptance by God will mean "life from the dead" (v. 15).
- The Antichrist will also be a Jew from the Syrian/Babylonian region, but he will side with the deceived ones in Israel.

With whom are you taking a stand? With the Jew-haters and Israel-opposers who bring a curse upon themselves, or with those who pray for the peace of Jerusalem according Psalm 122:6, and who exert themselves for the spiritual awakening of this nation, thereby bringing the blessings of the Lord also over themselves? The enemies of the cross will perpetuate their campaign of hatred against Israel to the end, and that will also be one of the main factors precipitating the battle of Armageddon. They will try to obliterate Israel and also make the mistake of their lives by trying to confront her true Messiah – Jesus, the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

### **War in heaven**

In the middle of the tribulation period Satan will make another effort to wipe Israel from the face of the earth. He wants to prevent the survival of a remnant of the nation who can meet the Messiah on the Mount of Olives to be spiritually restored and established in the millennial kingdom as the head of the nations. Satan knows very well if that happens it will be at the cost of his own world empire under the leadership of the Antichrist.

An important reason for the intensified struggle between the kingdoms of God and Satan which is described in Revelation 12, will be the outcome of a war in heaven:

"And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

"Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven: Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down... Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time" (Rev. 12:7-12).

Before his expulsion, Satan's attention had been divided: first, he was accusing Israel as well as Christians at the throne of God, day and night, and claimed control over their lives because they sinned and rebelled against God. Secondly, he was engaged in deceiving the nations and damaging the creation of God. In the middle of the tribulation he and his fallen angels will be cast down from heavenly places and barred from any further access to the throne of God. After this further humiliation they will confine all their attention to events on earth. Satan will be utterly vengeful and from that moment do everything within his power to destroy God's people and His creation by attempting to make the world uninhabitable, committing genocide against the Jews, and instigating the summary execution of all who confess allegiance to the Lord.

That will also be the time when the Antichrist will declare himself as God in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, demand the forced worship of his image, rule by way of military decrees, and will not hesitate to use maximum power to subdue and eliminate his adversaries.

### **The flight to the wilderness**

During this time a very evil plot will be devised by Satan to kill all the Jews who refuse to worship the Antichrist as God, and who have withdrawn from his satanic world order:

“Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child. But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time [3½ years], from the presence of the serpent. So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth” (Rev. 12:13-16).

This flight of Israel to a place in the wilderness, possibly Petra in Jordan in the Negev desert, south of the Dead Sea, will take place very hurriedly. It will occur shortly after the Antichrist declared himself to be God in the temple, resulting in his rejection by many in Israel. They will then withdraw from his satanic new world order with which they were involved for the first 3½ years. When his image is placed in the temple and all people everywhere are forced to worship it, the Israeli people who reject this demand will have to flee in great haste, as the Antichrist will try to catch up with them and kill them. Jesus said:

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

This is very clearly a prophecy that applies to Israel as it is aimed at protecting a remnant of this nation from annihilation by Satan and the Antichrist during the dark days of the great tribulation – that is the last 3½ years of the tribulation period. The Sabbath laws are anyway only enforced in Israel, when only a short journey of less than two kilometres may be undertaken. So, if their flight had to be on a Sabbath, the forces of the Antichrist would catch up with and kill them along the way. The Jews should pray that their journey will not be retarded by winter cold, expectant mothers or those with small babies since they would also not get away quickly enough.

The breach between the Antichrist and Israel will occur so suddenly, and his measures to stop them from getting away (much like those of Pharaoh before the Exodus) will be so rapidly instituted that there will not even be time for them to pack their clothes or to prepare provisions for the journey. They will just have to get away quickly. Up to that moment, according to John 5:43, they will have accepted the Antichrist as Messiah, but when he declares himself as God they will immediately realise that he is a false messiah. They will then have to stay out of his way, as Israel’s reaction will pose a real threat to his new world order.

By divine intervention Israel will be protected from being overtaken and annihilated by the Antichrist and his satanic forces. An earthquake may occur in which a large crevasse is formed which will swallow or stop the

pursuing ground forces of the Antichrist, which could be another parallel with the destruction of Pharaoh's forces. Another possibility is that revolts against the world government of the Antichrist will erupt in other places, thus forcing him to turn around and react to those threats. Daniel says:

"But news from the east and the north shall trouble him; therefore he shall go out with great fury to destroy and annihilate many" (Dan. 11:44).

Another part of Satan's war is also described in Revelation 12:

"And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 12:17).

The Antichrist will act equally fanatical against Christians as they will also reject him and only love and worship Israel's true Messiah, Jesus Christ. In this sense Christians are also offspring of the woman, Israel. In Romans 11:15-20 Paul says that Christians from the Gentile nations have by faith been grafted into the Olive tree (Israel) and are nourished from the same root (v. 17) and therefore intimately associated with Israel. This is the source of our love for Israel and the desire and prayer of our hearts that they will, by accepting Jesus as Messiah, also enter into the new covenant (Heb. 8:8-13).

The desecration of the temple in the middle of the tribulation period is a sign which the Lord gave to the inhabitants of Judea to hastily flee for survival to the mountains. The temple that they will build in the first half of the week, and the reintroduction of animal sacrifices (which again constitutes their rejection of the unique, once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God, for their and our sins), will shortly afterwards be the cause of great disillusionment and tragedy to them. A time of great deception and falling away lies ahead for the people of Israel before, according to Daniel 9:24, their sins are brought to an end and they are brought to 'everlasting righteousness'. They will go through a time of severe trial and testing.

Jeremiah says:

"Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it" (Jer. 30:7).

This time of great anxiety will be used by the Lord to bring Israel back to Himself. The Bible clearly teaches that the unbelieving Jewish nation who were restored to their land in unbelief, will only be saved after being subjected to severe afflictions and great anxiety:

"Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have all become dross, therefore behold, I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. As men gather silver, bronze, iron, lead, and tin into the midst of a furnace, to blow fire on it, to melt it; so will I gather you in My anger and in My fury, and will leave you there and melt you... then you shall know that I, the LORD, have poured out My fury on you" (Ezek. 22:19-22).

Since Israel's restoration to their land in 1948, the animosity of the unbelieving majority towards Jesus and the Messianic Jews who worship Him, has been intensified. As a result, the nation will face "the time of Jacob's trouble." In a Messianic prophecy, the Messiah says the following about Israel's future suffering:

"For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, and like a young lion to the house of Judah... I will tear them and go away... [the ascension of Jesus after He announced the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews]... I will return again to my place [heaven] till they acknowledge their offence. Then they [the people of Israel] will seek My face; in their

affliction [in the great tribulation] they will diligently seek Me. Come, and let us return to the LORD; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days [of a thousand years each] He will revive us; on the third day [in the third millennium after His first coming] He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight” (Hos. 5:14–6:2).

It is obvious from these verses that Israel will only seek the Lord "in their affliction."

This process of suffering and testing was long ago foreseen by Moses, who prepared Israel for a time of great distress in the last days:

“When you are in distress, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, when you turn to the LORD your God and obey His voice (for the LORD your God is a merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them” (Deut. 4:30-31).

### **Countdown to the coming of the Messiah**

The remnant of Israel will know that from the time that the abominable idol image of the beast is brought into the temple, 3½ years will elapse before the Messiah will come – that is 1260 days. Their flight into the wilderness will, therefore, be a countdown to their eventual salvation and reconciliation with the true Messiah. About this time, the prophet Daniel says:

“And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be 1290 days” (Dan. 12:11).

That is 30 days longer than 3½ years, and makes provision for the 30 days of national mourning that Israel will need when they realise that Jesus is the suffering Messiah of Isaiah 53 who, though innocent, their fathers betrayed and delivered to the Roman authorities to be crucified. According to Deuteronomy 34:8 the nation also mourned for 30 days after the death of Moses.

About the end-time mourning of Israel, Zechariah says:

“And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they have pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem... And the land shall mourn, every family by itself” (Zech. 12:10-12).

When Israel’s 42 months of hiding nears its end they will, just prior to the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), move towards the Mount of Olives where the Messiah will, according to Zechariah 14:4-5, make His sudden appearance. When He saves them from the advancing forces of the Antichrist, they will recognise Him, accept Him as their true Messiah and mourn with deep repentance and sorrow for 30 days.

After this, another 45 days will elapse while the Messiah judges the nations, introduces His bride at the marriage feast of the Lamb, restores the throne of David, and establishes His millennial kingdom. By then, 1335 days will have elapsed since the dark day when the false messiah declared himself to be God and sole ruler of the world, until the dramatic victory of the true Messiah over Satan, the beast and his kingdom, and the establishment of His government of righteousness. About this extended period, Daniel says: “Blessed is he who waits, and comes to 1335 days (Dan. 12:12).

Jews who survive this terrible time, will live to see the true Messiah and to be reconciled with Him. They will also inherit the Messianic kingdom. To them the challenge is to persevere to the end under very difficult circumstances, in order to be saved. Daniel says:

“...and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book” (Dan. 12:1).

The Lord Jesus says that “he who endures to the end will be saved” (Mt. 10:22).

Israel’s refuge to a place of safety in the wilderness has been ordained by God to protect and preserve a remnant of the nation during the darkest hour of human history. They will be reconciled to Him to be a blessing to the whole world during the millennial reign of Christ. “He who scattered Israel will gather him and keep him as a shepherd does his flock” (Jer. 31:10).

## 11. The Antichrist’s Reign of Terror

### *(Revelation 13)*

In Revelation 13 the Antichrist is described as a beast with seven heads and ten horns. The apostle John says:

“Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name. Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority” (Rev. 13:1-2).

The vision in Revelation 17 helps us to understand this symbolism. In that vision the great harlot, representing the end-time revival of the false Babylonian world religion, sits on the beast with the seven heads. These heads are explained as follows:

“Here is the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. [They] are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time. And the beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition” (Rev. 17:9-11).

It is clear from this that the first beast of Revelation 13 is one and the same as the beast of Revelation 17 on which the woman sits. The literal translation of the angel’s explanation in Revelation 17:9-10 is: “The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sits, and are seven kings: five have fallen, one is, and the other one has not yet come...” Thus, the mountains and heads are the same thing and represent kings, or kingdoms.

Further, the kingdoms succeed one another, five being already past when Revelation was written in AD 95, one being in existence and the last one being still future. From this we can conclude, firstly, that the seven mountains do not refer to the seven hills on which Rome is built, as sometimes supposed, and secondly, as five pre-Revelation kingdoms are referred to, the woman cannot represent the Roman Catholic Church, as is also supposed – though the latter may have some part in what the woman represents. The Lord here gives us a broad perspective on seven world empires that were (and will be) all strongholds of heathen religions that are in open rebellion against God. In Genesis, Isaiah and Daniel mention is made of these kingdoms and to the important



role that idolatry played in them in opposing the true God and His worshippers. They are the following world empires, of which only the seventh one is still future:

1. The ancient Babylonian Empire established by Nimrod.
2. The Assyrian Empire.
3. The neo-Babylonian Empire of Nebuchadnezzar.
4. The Medo-Persian Empire.
5. The Greek Empire.
6. The Roman Empire.
7. The end-time empire of the Antichrist.

In the year 95 AD, when the book of Revelation was written, five of the empires were past – that is from the ancient Babylonian to the Greek Empire. The Roman Empire ruled at the time, while the end-time empire of the Antichrist was still future. This last empire is symbolised by the head with the ten horns.

It is important to see the corporate character and coherence of these seven empires: it is one beast with seven heads. A common characteristic of the first six empires is that all of them were hostile towards the kingdom of God on earth. Their occult practices, pantheism, immorality, the deification of their leaders, humanism, and rebellion against God, will culminate in the seventh empire of the Antichrist and descend to even greater depths of spiritual darkness and deception. The coherence between them has its roots in mystery Babylon, the immoral mother of all the false religions. She exerted a tremendous influence upon the previous godless world empires, and was responsible for their wicked character. "The woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth" (Rev. 17:18). The same evil alliance between a world government and a false world religion will be characteristic of the empire of the Antichrist.

The Antichrist will be head of the seventh *and* eighth empires. During the first 3½ years of his reign he will be the head of a government of international unity, in which other kings or rulers will rule with him. The angel said to John: "And the ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast" (Rev. 17:12). During the second half of the tribulation, the Antichrist will declare a military dictatorship under his personal leadership. The false prophet will be his co-ruler and Satan his spiritual head – a triumvirate of evil. That will be the eighth and last empire before Christ comes.

The Antichrist is so closely identified with the previous world empires that he is depicted with the body of a leopard, the paws of a bear, the mouth of a lion and ten horns on his head (Rev. 13:2). These symbols agree with those in Daniel 7 where the Babylonian empire is represented as a lion, the Medo-Persian empire as a bear, the Greek empire as a leopard and the Roman empire as a ferocious beast with ten horns on its head. This means that characteristics of all these empires will be revived in the end-time empire of the Antichrist – it will not be only a revived Roman empire. The correlation between the Antichrist and the other world empires is as follows:

□ The Antichrist will follow the tradition of the Babylonians who deified their kings. He will declare himself above all that is called god and even challenge the authority of the God of heaven. He will cause an image of himself to be erected in the temple at Jerusalem and force all the citizens of his global empire to worship the

image. Those who refuse to do so will be cast into the fiery oven of persecution. He will make relentless attacks on the Jewish state and try to annihilate all its citizens.

□ As in the Medo-Persian Empire, he will trample upon all the nations, make an end to their independence and incorporate them into his own empire. He will establish a merciless dictatorship and rule over his global kingdom with the irrevocable and unchangeable laws of the Medes and the Persians. He will also order the eradication of the Jewish nation.

□ The Greek Empire was depicted by Daniel as a leopard with four wings. It operated highly mobile armies characterised by skilful military manoeuvres that enabled them to carry out their attacks with speed and efficiency. The Antichrist will revive these tactics in his well-disciplined armies. He will be able to deploy airborne striking forces practically overnight in any part of the world. An anti-Jewish policy also reigned supreme in the Syrian province of this empire. The Greek dictator, Antiochus Epiphanes, was a fanatical hater of the Jews and as such also a type of the Antichrist.

□ The fourth beast with its ten horns and teeth of iron had a terrible appearance. This is symbolic of the brutal, ruthless and intransigent attitudes by which the Roman Empire made its authority and sovereignty felt. During the invasion of Palestine and the siege of Jerusalem, hundreds of thousands of Jews were gruesomely murdered, crucified upon trees and sold as slaves, while many of the survivors were taken as captives of war to other parts of the empire. An even more devastating war of annihilation will be waged against Israel by the Antichrist during the great tribulation.

It is obvious, then, that the world empire of the Antichrist will constitute a revival of all the preceding, godless world empires. It will have particularly strong Babylonian characteristics, with its major strongholds in the Middle East. For this reason it is a mistake to only look at the European Union as the revived Roman Empire and to allege that the Antichrist will come from Rome. He will originate from a country or region that formed part of all four of the empires mentioned. Daniel describes him as *the king of the North* (Dan. 11:36-45). This region is north-northeast of Israel and was in different times in history known as Babylonia, Assyria, and Syria. Presently, this region is known as Syria and Iraq, but its heartland is in Iraq. That is also where the city of Babylon, which is now being rebuilt, is situated.

The book Daniel is of great help in determining the country of origin of the Antichrist:

□ In the broadest sense he is identified as one out of ten (Dan. 7:7-8), being one of the ten provinces of the Roman Empire. The Syrian province, which includes the present Iraq, was part of this empire.

□ Thereafter he is depicted as one out of four, referring to the four provinces of the divided Greek Empire (Dan. 8:8-9) after Alexander the Great. Syria, which includes the present Iraq, was one of these four provinces.

□ In a more explicit way he is identified as one out of two, referring to the provinces of the *king of the North* and the *king of the South* in the divided Greek Empire, as viewed from Israel (Dan. 11). The northern province was Syria and the southern one Egypt. The historical conflict between these two provinces is described in Daniel 11:2-35, while the end-time *king of the North* (the Antichrist) is described in Daniel 11:36-45. He will therefore emerge from Syria or Iraq.

### **Power bases of the Antichrist**

During the first 3½ years of the tribulation period the Antichrist will reign as prince of peace and pursue world unity. Then he will make his big move to gain absolute power. The Antichrist's change of image and strategy in

the middle of the tribulation will be so dramatic and terrifying that he will endeavour to force all people into Satanism. After he has received a deadly wound (possibly by an assassin) and come to life again, the devil will no longer use him to masquerade as a prince of peace and an angel of light.

He will now reveal his true nature as a power-hungry dictator who will give full expression to his inherent disposition for blasphemy, sadism and brutal murder. He will establish a dictatorship that will be power-based on politics, religion and the control of economic resources. Upon each of these spheres, totalitarian control will be exercised, with the main objective of reducing all people to absolute slavery. They will not be granted political rights, religious liberties or economic freedom outside the unitary structures of the new world order. The three power bases are:

### ***Political power***

The devil has never relinquished his plans for an alternative global order of political domination of all nations. Various world empires were established through the ages. They all oppressed and exploited the conquered nations, imposed a heathen religion on them, and also undermined other cultures by enforcing cultural and linguistic conformity to their own institutions. Whenever Satan makes an attempt to achieve such an objective he prepares a suitable strongman who rises to a position of political leadership, to the extent that he becomes a military dictator who conquers and subjects other nations. Through the expansion of his empire he then becomes a world leader who rules his subjects with an iron fist.

According to the Bible, Satan will, before the Second Coming, use all possible means to once more overthrow God's order of independent nations by incorporating them into a new world order of international political, religious, economic, social, and linguistic unity – which, of course, was the intention of those who built the tower of Babel. The man that he has chosen to head the end-time new world order is called the *Antichrist*, *the beast*, and *the man of sin* in the Bible. The world empire which he will establish will in many respects be a repetition of the Babylonian empire of Nimrod – the first of the seven empires. For this reason, the end-time world empire is aptly called *Babylon* in Revelation 17 and 18.

Diplomatic negotiations for the establishment of a new world order have already been conducted under the auspices of the USA, the United Nations, the World Bank, the IMF and other world bodies. When the Antichrist is revealed, he will pursue these negotiations to their final conclusion. Daniel says: “Then he shall confirm a covenant with many [nations] for one week” (Dan. 9:27).

At present, the nations are deceived into sacrificing their sovereignty on the altar of regional and global unity. The effort to achieve European unity is a good example of this dangerous trend. The process of political unification will end up with a new world order and global governance. By that time Satan's strongman, the Antichrist, will offer his services to the deceived masses. Revelation 13 says: “And the world marvelled and followed the beast” (Rev. 13:3).

When the Antichrist is accepted as world leader, it will be at the cost of the deceived nations with whom he has confirmed a covenant. He will not act in their best interests, but in the interests of Satan who prepared and empowered him for his position. John says: “And the dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority” (Rev. 13:2).

In the political sphere he will be the sole ruler of the world during the last 3½ years, and base his power on military strength. No alliance will be able to match him because “authority was given him over every tribe, tongue and nation.” (Rev. 13:7) There will not be even one independent nation with a sovereign government, as all of them will be subjected to the decrees of the Antichrist's military regime. Political disloyalty will not be

tolerated and rulers who fail to subject themselves to his absolute authority will be pulled down from their thrones (Is. 10:13).

### *Religious power*

After the 3½ year period of false peace has expired and has given place to the 3½ years of the great tribulation it will also be, spiritually, the darkest time in world history. The satanic triumvirate of the dragon (Satan), the beast (Antichrist), and the false prophet will then assume dictatorial powers on earth. They will make concerted efforts to crush the power of the Triune God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, by destroying all people who worship the God of heaven. The Antichrist will claim the position of God for himself:

“...the falling away [will] come first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (2 Thes. 2:3-4).

The Antichrist will arrogate to himself the position and authority of God. Revelation 13 clearly confirms the rise of the Antichrist to supreme religious power, and that all the deceived people of the world will worship him:

“And all the world marvelled and followed the beast. So they worshipped the dragon (Satan) who gave authority to the beast, and they worshipped the beast, saying: “Who is like the beast?... And all who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb” (Rev. 13:3-4, 8).

Through the mediation of the false prophet, who will do great signs and wonders to deceive the masses, an image of the beast will be erected in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, and it will be compulsory to worship that image:

“And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed” (Rev. 13:14-15).

Such an absolute form of religious slavery will necessitate the disbanding and destruction of the alliance of false religions (i.e. the mother of harlots according to Revelation 17:5) that will be formed during the first part of the tribulation period under the auspices of the Antichrist as universal messiah. According to Revelation 17:16 that is exactly what will happen. Only then will it be possible to force all people to worship the beast as God.

During the last 3½ years the worship of Satan and the Antichrist will be the only officially recognised religion on earth. All those who refuse to submit themselves to it will be killed, many of them by decapitation according to Revelation 20:4. The present dramatic increase in Satanism, witchcraft, magic, and various other forms of the occult is a build-up to the worship of the Antichrist – first as universal messiah and then as the god of this world who will profess to have all divine power in the universe.

### *Economic power*

Besides political and religious power, financial power will also be used by the Antichrist to control and enslave people. A cashless world economy under the control of the Antichrist will be instituted. With the use of PIN numbers and codes in a computerised system of funds transfer, all financial transactions will be controlled:

“And he causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark in their right hand or in their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666 (Rev. 13:16-18; the KJV's more correct rendering of numbers ‘in’ the hand or forehead has been used).

From this Scripture it is obvious that PIN numbers and codes will be allocated to people, without which no one will be able to buy or sell. Cash will be withdrawn from circulation. The system of electronic funds transfer will only be accessible to people who have “the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.” The condition for obtaining this number or code will be that an oath of allegiance will have to be made to the universal messiah and his world government. Only then will a personal identity number (PIN) be issued. However, a transaction of this nature will involve the selling of one’s soul to Satan for temporary economic gain. By everyone taking an oath of allegiance to the Antichrist, he will be recognised as the sole political, religious and economic head of the new world order.

Electronic technology has been developed to the level where a micro processor on a silicon chip in a tiny glass capsule can be implanted under a person’s skin by injecting it with a needle. It can store information on one’s ID number, address, medical record, passport, finances and other data, which can, at any time, be read with a scanner. It can also be processed, with the result that your bank balance can continuously be updated. In this way all buying and selling transactions will be registered on a central computer network, from where it can be controlled. A person’s movements will also be monitored in this way.

Micro processors of this nature have been manufactured for several years for use in the so-called *smartcard*. This card is a plastic holder on which the chip is mounted. It affords its user the facility of cashless transactions thereby considerably reducing the possibility of the robbing and theft of money. However, the card can still be lost, stolen or tampered with, while electronic fraud is also possible, so it is still not 100% secure. The final solution to these problems will be the phasing out of the smartcard, credit cards, cheques and cash and the implanting of a micro chip under a person’s skin. What the Bible prophesied 1900 years ago about the end-time is in the process of being fulfilled in our time: People will buy and sell by making use of a number!

Many theologians allege that these prophecies are to be interpreted symbolically, and that there will never be any spiritual dangers attached to a cashless monetary system and the acceptance of the number 666. In this way they are assisting Satan’s propaganda campaign in which people will be deceived and brainwashed into accepting the coming antichristian new world order. An economic system for the control of buying and selling is not merely a symbolic statement about an abstract matter but a literal statement about an everyday human activity.

If you are worthy to escape the tribulation period, the number of the Antichrist can never be imposed on you. If you are among those who are left behind after the rapture you will have to repent and surrender your life to the Lord at that time. Your allegiance to the true Messiah will imply that you must utterly reject the false messiah, his world government, his alliance of false religions, his demand for personal worship, and his number for electronic funds transfer, irrespective of the severe consequences that you will have to face.

Those who declare their allegiance to the Antichrist by accepting his number, will be engulfed by the darkness of eternal condemnation:

“If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive *his* mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of

their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name” (Rev. 14:9-11 KJV).

Those who will gain the victory over the satanic conspiracy by not bowing the knee to Baal, will eventually be in the presence of God in heaven and praising Him:

“And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image, and over his mark, *and* over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass having harps of God” (Rev. 15:2).

The political internationalising of humanity within the framework of the new world order, the universal ecumenical movement which gradually unites all religions, and the establishment of a cashless monetary system for the world which can be centrally controlled, create the global platforms for the world dominion of the Antichrist. He can then make his appearance at any time and will quickly gain control over these structures. The political contemporaries of the Antichrist will, according to Revelation 17:12-13, willingly and united transfer their power and authority to the new world leader. The Antichrist’s initial usurpation of power will, therefore, be brought about, not by coercion, but through negotiation and the concluding of treaties. Large-scale coercion and military force will follow 3½ years later!

## 12. Characteristics of the Antichrist

### *(Revelation 13)*

There are various opposites or contrasting statements in the book of Revelation, emerging from the great conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. These opposites explain the high degree of tension and polarisation between the two kingdoms. The antithesis between God and Satan is the reason for the evil struggle of Satan to become the ruler of the universe in the place of God. He is also intent on influencing and controlling, and even destroying, the human race which is part of the creation of God. The antithesis between Christ and the Antichrist is a further reason for the great spiritual battle experienced during the church dispensation. In the coming tribulation period, this struggle will also become manifest physically through the revelation of the Antichrist as a person who will be head of the antichristian new world order.

Since the kingdoms of Christ and the Antichrist are utterly opposed and polarised, no synthesis or reconciliation between them is possible – they are locked in a battle for supremacy that will be settled during a final confrontation. In this struggle, Jesus Christ has already proved Himself as the Conqueror having declared Himself to be “the First and the Last... who lives, and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore... And have the keys of Hades and of Death”. During His Second Coming He will destroy the Antichrist and his evil world government that will be based on the power of Satan. In its place, Christ will then physically establish, on this present earth, a world government as part of the kingdom of God.

As it will be one of the strategies of the Antichrist to be accepted and worshipped as Messiah in the place of Christ, he will reveal himself in a highly deceptive way as a Prince of Peace. In that way he will pretend to be the promised Messiah for whom the world has waited. He will apply the messianic titles of all religions to himself to create the impression that he is the universal Messiah of mankind. In the light of this strategy of his it is imperative that we should be able at all times to clearly distinguish between Christ and the Antichrist. People who are not able to make this distinction beyond any doubt, are vulnerable to the deception of the Antichrist and may naively accept and worship the false messiah in the place of the true Messiah. The following is a list of

contrasts between Christ and the Antichrist, which should help people to clearly distinguish between the true Messiah and false messiahs:

<b>Christ</b>	<b>The Antichrist</b>
<b>Christ came down from heaven.</b> He said: “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (Jn. 6:38). He is the Word who was with God from the beginning, and became flesh (Jn. 1:1, 14). He is the Day-spring from on high who has visited us (Lk. 1:78). The house of His Father is in heaven (Jn. 14:2).	<b>The Antichrist will ascend out of the bottomless pit.</b> As a human being he will emerge from the sea of nations (Rev. 13:1), but he will be possessed of a satanic spirit which comes up from the pit – the place from where the demons also come (Rev. 11:7 and 17:8). His power and authority come from Satan who will give his throne to the Antichrist (Rev. 13:2).
<b>Christ is the Son of God.</b> “And Simon Peter answered and said: You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mt. 16:16).	<b>The Antichrist is the son of perdition.</b> Paul said: “[He is] the man of sin... the son of perdition, who opposes ...God” (2 Thes. 2:3-4).
<b>Christ is sinless.</b> “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15). He is the spotless Lamb of God (1 Pet. 1:19).	<b>The Antichrist is the man of sin.</b> “...the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition” (2 Thes. 2:3). He will establish a culture of sin and rebellion on earth.
<b>Christ came in the Name of His Father.</b> He said to the people of Israel who rejected Him as Messiah: “I have come in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me” (Jn. 5:43).	<b>The Antichrist will come in His own name.</b> The consequence of rejecting Jesus is severe: “...you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive” (Jn. 5:43).
<b>Christ came to glorify the Father.</b> In His High Priestly prayer He said to the Father: “I have glorified You on earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do” (Jn. 17:4).	<b>The Antichrist will glorify himself and blaspheme God.</b> He will “exalt himself...” and also “open his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His Name” (2 Thes. 2:4; Rev. 13:6).
<b>Christ is one with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and came to reveal the Father to us.</b> “For there are three who bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one” (1 Jn. 5:7). Jesus said: “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (Jn. 14:9).	<b>The Antichrist will associate himself with the dragon and the false prophet in a triumvirate and personalise Satan.</b> “And the dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority...” and “another beast” [the false prophet] “caused people to worship the first beast” [Antichrist] (Rev. 13:2, 11-12).
<b>Christ is the Saviour of the world who came to break our bonds and set us free.</b> John says: “And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Saviour of the world” (1 Jn. 4:14). He can break the bonds of Satan. “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (Jn. 8:36).	<b>The Antichrist will bind people and make them political, religious, and economic slaves of the kingdom of darkness.</b> “And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue and nation. And all... will worship him... no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark of... the beast” (Rev. 13:7-8, 17).
<b>Christ came as a lowly servant to the world.</b> “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk. 10:45).	<b>The Antichrist will be high and exalted in his own eyes.</b> This “king shall do according to his own will: he shall exalt and magnify himself above every god” (Dan. 11:36).
<b>Christ came to save repentant sinners and give</b>	<b>The Antichrist will come to scatter and kill</b>

<p><b>them eternal life.</b> “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Lk. 19:10). Anyone who believes in Him “has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgement, but has passed from death to life” (Jn. 5:24).</p>	<p><b>many people.</b> His father, Satan, is a murderer of people from the beginning (Jn. 8:44), that is why the Antichrist himself, during the great tribulation, will “go out with great fury to destroy and annihilate many with his armies” (Dan. 11:44).</p>
<p><b>Christ came to reveal and establish God’s righteousness on earth.</b> Paul said: “I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith” (Phil. 3:8-9).</p>	<p><b>The Antichrist will promote sin and unrighteousness on earth.</b> “Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition” (2 Thes. 2:3). He is “the lawless one” whose coming will be “with all unrighteous deception among those who perish” (2 Thes. 2:9-10).</p>
<p><b>Christ came to fulfil the law.</b> He said: “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil” (Mt. 5:17).</p>	<p><b>The Antichrist will change times and the law.</b> “He shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law” (Dan. 7:25).</p>
<p><b>Christ brings peace into people’s hearts, but His peace brings conflict with the unsaved world.</b> “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you” (Jn. 14:27). In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (Jn. 16:33).</p>	<p><b>The Antichrist will establish a false peace and global unity that will suddenly collapse and give rise to the great tribulation.</b> “For when they say: Peace and safety! Then sudden destruction comes upon them... and they shall not escape” (1 Thes. 5:3).</p>
<p><b>Christ came to expose Satan and to destroy his evil works.</b> “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil” (1 Jn. 3:8). He “disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it” (Col. 2:15).</p>	<p><b>The Antichrist will honour the god of fortresses (Satan) with everything that he has.</b> “He shall honour a god of fortresses [the one who wages wars]; and a god which his fathers did not know he shall honour with gold and silver, with precious stones and pleasant things” (Dan. 11:38).</p>
<p><b>Christ takes a strong stand against greed and earthly wealth.</b> “And He said to them: Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (Lk. 12:15). Treasures must instead be gathered in heaven by doing things that have value for eternity.</p>	<p><b>The Antichrist will accumulate great wealth, give gifts to his accomplices and also bribe people.</b> He shall cause his special friends “to rule over many, and divide the land for gain... He shall have power over the treasures of gold and silver, and over all the precious things.” (Dan. 11:39, 43).</p>
<p><b>Christ proclaimed the truth about God, Satan, sin, salvation, heaven and hell to people, as well as the rewards of eternal life.</b> Jesus said: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (Jn. 14:6). The Apostle John declares: “We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding that we may know Him who is true” (1 Jn. 5:20).</p>	<p><b>The Antichrist will come to spiritually deceive humanity by making them believe lies that will lead to their eternal doom.</b> His coming will be “according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth that they might be saved” (2 Thes. 2:9-10).</p>
<p><b>Christ only associates Himself spiritually with the true church that confesses His Name.</b> “Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men,</p>	<p><b>The Antichrist associates himself with all the false religions.</b> John refers to the false religions as an immoral woman: “And I saw a woman sitting</p>



<p>him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God” (Lk. 12:8). “I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own” (Jn. 10:14). Paul says to the Corinthian church: “I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Cor. 11:2).</p>	<p>on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy... And on her forehead a name was written: Mystery, Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth” (Rev. 17:3-5). She deceived the nations to bow down to idols instead of worshipping the true God.</p>
<p><b>Christ and His bridal congregation will be together forever.</b> With the first resurrection, the true Christians will be caught up to meet Christ in the air, “and thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thes. 4:17). “Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him” (Rev. 20:6).</p>	<p><b>The Antichrist will reject and destroy his bride, the false world religions, after 3½ years.</b> The political allies and the majority of the deceived followers of the beast will worship him as God after the false world church has been destroyed: “And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire” (Rev. 17:16).</p>
<p><b>Christ convicts people through the Holy Spirit.</b> John 16:8 says that the Holy Spirit convicts people of sin, of righteousness, and of the coming judgement. Jesus also said: “The Spirit of truth... will guide you into all truth... and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you” (Jn. 16:13-14).</p>	<p><b>The Antichrist convicts people through a satanic spirit of deception.</b> “Every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming... He who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error” (1 Jn. 4:3, 6).</p>
<p><b>Christ’s kingdom will endure forever in the new heaven and on the new earth.</b> “Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying: The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever” (Rev. 11:15).</p>	<p><b>The Antichrist’s kingdom on earth will be of short duration.</b> The angel said to John that when the beast (the Antichrist) comes, “he must continue a short time... And the ten horns which you saw are ten kings who... receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast” (Rev. 17:10, 12).</p>
<p><b>Christ is the conqueror who will triumph over the Antichrist and his powers.</b> “And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet... These two were cast alive into the lake of fire... And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse” (Rev. 19:19-21).</p>	<p><b>The Antichrist will be eternally condemned when Jesus comes.</b> Paul refers to the disastrous end of the Antichrist not long after his revelation. He says that first the one who withholds will be taken out of the way, “and then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming” (2 Thes. 2:8). Daniel says that “he shall come to his end, and no one will help him” (Dan. 11:45).</p>
<p><b>Christ’s followers will inherit an eternal and unshakeable kingdom.</b> “The God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed” (Dan. 2:44). “For so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:11).</p>	<p><b>All the Antichrist’s followers will share his fearsome, eternal doom with him in hell.</b> “And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name” (Rev. 14:11).</p>

## Character of the Antichrist

In Revelation there are several references to the evil and blasphemous character of the Antichrist. To get the full picture of the major aspects of his character the information in Revelation must be considered in conjunction with statements in other books of the Bible. Paul mentions a number of key aspects of the Antichrist's corrupt and immoral character:

“Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and **the man of sin** is revealed, **the son of perdition**, who **opposes and exalts** himself above all that is called God... For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. And then **the lawless one** will be revealed... [whose] coming is according to **the working of Satan**, with all **power, signs and lying wonders**, and with all **unrighteous deception** among those who perish” (2 Thes. 2:3-4, 7-10; emphasis added).

From this and other sections of the Bible the following character profile of the Antichrist can be constructed:

- He will be the **Lawless One**. After what is restraining the appearance of the Antichrist has been taken out of the way, complete spiritual darkness will set in and the **Lawless One** shall be revealed. **Lawless** means a **morally bad person who rejects the righteousness of God's laws**.
- He will be **without integrity**. Through political fraud he will gain a position of leadership, and by the use of clever diplomacy (political lies) he will soon become world leader (Dan. 9:27).
- He will be the **big briber**. Double standards, bribery and corruption will be the order of the day in his wicked regime. Special favours will be granted to his accomplices: “...he shall cause them to rule over many, and divide the land for gain” (Dan. 11:39).
- He will be a **satanic reformer**. “He shall... intend to change times and law” (Dan. 7:25). He will suspend various traditions and laws based on Judeo-Christian morality. He will possibly abrogate the institution of marriage or, at least, encourage same-sex marriage and co-habitation and also change the days of the week. In the political sphere he will remove the boundaries among the nations and institute an integrated Babylonian world order of planetary citizens (Is. 10:13; Rev. 13:3).
- He will be **the man of sin**. Disobedience, immorality, rebellion, violence and utter selfishness are manifestations of the spirit of sin, and will pave the way for the revelation of *the man of sin*. There will be no limits to the conceit and evil intentions of this dictator's perverted character. He is called **the son of death and destruction** or **the son of perdition** (2 Thes. 2:3). His close companion, the false prophet, will be one of his foremost butchers and use occult powers to achieve his evil purpose.
- He will be the self-declared **God of this world**. After he has been honoured as world messiah for 3½ years he will proceed to the most extreme form of rebellion against God by declaring himself to be God and by demanding the worship of all people. (Rev. 13:8, 12).
- **Pride** and **self-exaltation** will motivate him to deify himself (Is. 10:12, 14).
- He will be a **blasphemer** of the true God and of the saints (Rev. 13:5-6; Dan. 7:25).

- He will be the greatest **hater of Jews** of all times. Although he will be accepted as Messiah by the Jews during the first 3½ years, he will order the killing of all Jews after they have suspended their covenant with him in the middle of the tribulation (Mt. 24:15-22).
- He will be a notorious **occult practitioner** who will make use of the great powers given to him by Satan (Rev. 13:2). His coming will be “after the working of Satan with all power, signs and lying wonders” (2 Thes. 2:9).
- He will be the **great deceiver** of mankind. His coming will be “with all unrighteous deception among those who perish” (2 Thes. 2:10). “Those who do wickedly against the covenant he shall corrupt with flattery” (Dan. 11:32).
- He will be a **man of violence** and a **murderer**. “But news from the east and the north shall trouble him; therefore he shall go out with great fury to destroy and annihilate many” (Dan. 11:44).
- He will be a **psychopath** with a schizoid personality: a man with many facets of personality as he is also seen as a beast with many heads. At times he will seem exceedingly friendly and charming when he deceives people – to the extent that no one will believe that there is anything evil in him. But there will also be the times when the dark side of his character gets the upper hand and leads him to commit the most unimaginable cruelties. During the first half of the tribulation period the innocent, **angel of light** aspect of his personality will be dominant. In the second 3½ years the dark and vicious aspect of his character will be openly manifested. Because of his lack of moral principles he will be completely unpredictable.

Emanating from the example of the Antichrist as a violent person and a man of sin, a culture of violence and sin will be established world-wide. It will form the basis of an international, devil-inspired rebellion against God, His kingdom, His Son (the true Messiah), His Spirit who convicts the world of its sin, and also against His Word which proclaims all His attributes, moral and spiritual laws as well as His judgements upon the wicked, and furthermore patently reveals the evil kingdom of darkness under the leadership of Satan, the Antichrist, the false prophet and their hordes of deceiving spirits. The truth is only to be found in the Bible, which also reveals the major manifestations and plans of the Antichrist and his coming reign of terror on earth.

## 13. The False Prophet

### *(Revelation 13)*

The false prophet will play a big part in the government of the Antichrist. It will seemingly be a two-man government in which the Antichrist will act and rule in close association with the false prophet. In actual fact, it will be a three-man government since the devil – as the unseen spiritual power behind it – will have absolute control over this government. It will thus be a satanic triumvirate, which will be an imitation of the Triune God. In this conspiracy against God's kingdom the dragon (i.e. the devil) is the anti-type of God, the beast (i.e. the Antichrist) the anti-type of Christ, and the false prophet is the anti-type of the Holy Spirit. The Bible says the following about the revelation of the false prophet:

“Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the

first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men” (Rev. 13:11-13).

The false prophet will be *another beast* in the same kingdom from which the *first beast* comes. He will just be another one of the same type as the first one. He will look like a lamb but speak like a dragon. He will have an innocent appearance like a religious leader who has only one objective and that is to unite the world and lead humanity into an era of peace and harmony. But when he speaks it will be evident that he is, to an extreme degree, possessed with the supernatural power and spirit of deception that comes from the dragon, the devil.

The false prophet will be totally intolerant of the kingdom of God and of true Christians and speak blasphemous things against them. He will glorify the Antichrist at the expense of Christ and astonish the world with his signs and wonders. Through his cunning he will cause deceit to prosper. The minds of people will be blinded by the god of this world (Satan); consequently they will be unable to discern between good and evil but will believe a lie (2 Cor. 4:4; 2 Thes. 2:9-12). The false prophet will take full advantage of this climate of deception to induce people to worship the beast.

### **Supporting role of the false prophet**

According to Revelation 13, the false prophet will be the right-hand man of the Antichrist. Satan knows that two are better than one. The false prophet will praise and magnify the beast, causing multitudes of people to accept, follow and worship him.

The mass media, such as radio, television, the press, and Internet, will be utilised to their full potential by the false prophet, who will be the chief propagandist and public relations mastermind for the Antichrist. He will spare no effort to influence and deceive people. All human brainpower and knowledge, including the educational systems and the entertainment world, will be mobilised in the service of the Antichrist. False religions, including compromising, ecumenical Christianity, will be used as an important weapon in his hand. The false prophet will definitely not forbid religion, but instead use it as a powerful tool to deceive the masses. The only message that will be forbidden to proclaim is that of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Religions that do not lead people to a life-changing encounter with the Lord Jesus, but instead proclaim false messiahs and idols, or who preach politics and human rights, as well as those who place a heavy emphasis on signs and wonders, will suit the false prophet perfectly. Signs that are performed by false prophets will greatly increase and be used as a tool for mass deception.

We must remember that Satan has tremendous supernatural powers, which he has always used to oppose God. The miracles that Moses performed in Egypt were in many cases repeated by the Egyptian magicians. The devil often uses false prophets with occult powers to deceive naive people. In Deuteronomy 13:1-3 we read the following warning in this regard:

“If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying: Let us go after other gods – which you have not known – and let us serve them, you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

Take care that signs and wonders don't replace the Word of God! Also beware of the so-called signs and wonders conferences and spectaculars.

Satan is increasingly going to concentrate on signs and wonders and will use every available demon in his kingdom to this end. Because the Antichrist will get the credit for the greatest signs, wonders and manifestations of power, the whole world will marvel and follow him, saying: “Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?” (Rev. 13:4).

### **Imitator and adversary of the Holy Spirit**

The evil spirit of Satan will possess both the Antichrist and the false prophet. The false prophet will imitate and oppose the work of the Holy Spirit in the following ten ways:

- As the Holy Spirit introduces us to Jesus and teaches us to worship Him, the false prophet will introduce the Antichrist to humanity and teach them to worship him.
- The Holy Spirit calls and purifies a bride for Christ, which is the only true church. Through deception and apostasy the false prophet calls together a spiritually unchaste bride (the Mother of Harlots) for the Antichrist, which will include all the false religions.
- The Spirit of God is the Spirit of holiness who convicts us of sin. The false prophet has a wicked spirit through which people are seduced to commit sin.
- The Holy Spirit proclaims the pure words of God to us so that we may be drawn to Him with cords of love. From the mouth of the false prophet an unclean spirit will come, speaking unclean words that will seduce the nations to enter into a covenant with Satan.
- The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth who guides us into all truth. The false prophet will lie to the people of the world and trick them in order to make them captives of the spirit of error.
- The Holy Spirit gives us faith in God and His Son. The false prophet will mislead people to believe in Lucifer (Satan) and in the Antichrist.
- The Holy Spirit comforts us, and also encourages and empowers Christians to act righteously. The false prophet will frighten and oppress people, and also incite and empower them to act unrighteously.
- The Holy Spirit gives divine gifts to people to enable them to better serve the Lord. The false prophet will give demonic gifts to people to enable them to perform signs and wonders to deceive others.
- The Holy Spirit teaches us to worship God and to become partakers of His eternal life. The false prophet will force people to worship the image of the beast, thereby condemning themselves to eternal death.
- The Holy Spirit seals everyone who belongs to Christ as a child of God. The false prophet will induce people to be sealed with the mark of the Antichrist, thereby selling their souls to the devil.

### **Ideological brainwashing by the false prophet**

The false prophet will undertake the ideological and religious brainwashing of humanity on behalf of the Antichrist. He will either emerge from the global alliance of false religions, or come from outside and gain full control over them within a short space of time. The religions of the world will then be exploited to make their followers subservient to the Antichrist and also to worship him. Revelation 13:14-18 clearly states that the false prophet will deceive the world into worshipping the beast and receiving his mark and number on their right

hands and foreheads. This means that the world will be united in the political, religious *and* economic spheres under the leadership of the Antichrist.

The way of thinking that will be fundamental to the world empire of the Antichrist is *monism*, which means *everything is one*. This unitary ideal has two perspectives, i.e. the horizontal, human dimension and the vertical, cosmic dimension:

#### *A united world*

In the horizontal perspective of monism, unity must first be established in the world by building bridges and eradicating boundaries in all spheres of life. Social unity must be realised with a view to establishing an integrated society of planetary citizens who are non-sexist, non-racial, multi-religious, and multi-cultural. A process of internationalisation must also occur politically and economically which will lead to the founding of a world government and a global monetary system. The ecumenical movement must promote religious unity in the world. These building-blocks of the new world order are regarded as critically important for the achieving of harmony and peace, and consequently also for the emergence of the long-expected Utopia on earth.

The Antichrist needs a unitary ideology and reforms of this nature if he is to appear on the scene as a political world leader, a universal religious messiah, and head of a world economy. The more nationalistic and religious divisions there are, the less his chances are of establishing a united, international order under his control. However, the New Age Movement, the new world order, the ecumenical movement, and the globalisation of industry, business and finance, are working hard to promote a spirit of globalism and mutual acceptance for him. They will pursue these aims with much greater dedication after the false prophet has appeared.

#### *Cosmic unity*

The second perspective of monism is that of cosmic unity. For the further development of man to higher levels of divinity, contact must be made with spiritual entities and forces in the cosmos. People must be taught how to contact spirit-guides and masters of wisdom in cosmic spheres. The objective is that all people should be assisted by higher beings to realise their full potential, and to make progress on the evolutionary ladder from the level of *homo sapiens* to that of *homo universalis* (the universal man), also referred to as *homo novus* (the new man). The entire human family must also be collectively assisted to make the transition to the age of Aquarius. Apart from spiritism and other techniques, transcendental meditation (TM) is regarded as one of the most effective methods of achieving an alternative state of consciousness and of becoming one with the cosmic world.

The false prophet will be highly exalted in the hierarchy of cosmic masters of wisdom. He will occupy the second place after the Antichrist, and be able to perform amazing signs and wonders. He will even make fire come down from heaven and, according to Revelation 13:14, this sign will deceive the nations into worshipping the Antichrist.

The false prophet will apply the ideology of "everything is one" to its fullest extent. This means that there is no counter-reality of a devil and a hell, that all religions are one, and that there is only one universal messiah – the Antichrist. Lucifer (Satan) will, therefore, be worshipped as an *angel of light* in the place of God. The only negative element in this ideology of unity will be those people who refuse to unconditionally accept and implement this ideology. They will mainly be the evangelical Christians.

It is obvious that a Christian world-view is diametrically opposed to the monistic philosophy of the Antichrist. The Bible does not teach us *monism* – *everything is one*, but *dualism* – *everything is two*. There are two major

and irreconcilable realities that confront a person, i.e. the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. They are totally polarised and implacably opposed:

<b>The kingdom of God</b>	<b>The kingdom of Satan</b>
God	Satan
Christ	Antichrist
Holy Spirit	False prophet
True religion	False religions
Narrow way	Broad way
Light	Darkness
Heaven	Hell
Truth	Lie
Salvation	Damnation

The way of thinking, or spiritual and ideological orientation, of these two kingdoms is contrasted in the list below. It helps us to identify and resist the clever brainwashing which is employed by the enemy of our souls to condition us to think and argue in terms of the principles of his kingdom.

<b>CHRISTIAN WORLD-VIEW</b>	<b>ANTICHRISTIAN WORLD-VIEW</b>
An antithetic way of analytical thinking in which discernment is needed to be able to categorise things and to think in opposites.	A synthetic way of thinking which ignores differences and integrates all things into a larger whole. This philosophy is called holism or monism.
Continued divergence to a point of eternal separation between light and darkness. Reconciliation and unity between these two opposites will never be possible.	Sustained convergence until all things in the cosmos become integrated and unified. Differences and conflicting interests among various groups of people are ascribed to ignorance.
The cosmic domain of spirits and demons is prohibited. No experimentation with occult powers and extrasensory perception is allowed as these evil powers always blind a person to the truth.	The development of a cosmic consciousness by way of transcending the boundary with the supernatural, mystical world is recommended as it shapes your mind to ignore conflict and think in unitary terms.
Monotheism. The Triune God is a transcendent God. He must be perceived and worshipped independent from His creation. God works within human beings through His Holy Spirit, but remains a distinct Being who should be reverently approached in prayer and worship.	Pantheism. God is mystical and impersonal. There is an element of divinity in the entire creation, which means that everything is god – also plants and animals. Since all people are inherently divine, they must deepen the level of their consciousness and discover the god within themselves.
Man is a unique creation of God. He is distinct from, though physically part of, the natural world and was commanded by God to subdue it and rule over all living creatures. He is responsible to improve and protect his	Man is part of the natural creation. It is claimed that he emerged from a unilinear line of biological evolution and thus descended from more primitive primates. He must be at one with nature, not unduly disturb it and maintain a mystical bond

environment by skilfully managing all natural resources.	with it. It is a religious mission to conserve nature.
Every person has only one earthly life cycle in a physical body. It is appointed for him to die once, after which the judgement follows and eternity dawns in a glorified, immortal body.	Every person (and even animals) have various life cycles in which they evolve to higher forms of life. By way of reincarnation they often return to a new life cycle on earth to evolve to higher forms of life.
Humanity must realise that it is divided into two groups, i.e. the saved ones who are destined for heaven and the unsaved ones who are destined for hell. Those who are in spiritual darkness are invited to come over to the kingdom of God by being spiritually born again.	The unity of the human family must also be reflected in the religious sphere. All faiths must accept the fact that they worship the same God. One religion must therefore not be regarded as better than any of the other. Structures must be created to promote this religious unity.
Because there are, religiously speaking, two opposing kingdoms, each of them promising a messiah to redeem the world – the true Christ and the Antichrist. a Clear choice must be made between the two of them.	Because the different religions emerged from the same source of cosmic wisdom, they all wait for the same cosmic Christ who will finally unite them. In anticipation of this great event they must all join hands now and demonstrate their inherent unity.
Humanity is morally corrupt and spiritually dead because of the Fall. All people are born in sin and therefore have a natural propensity to sin. If they are not born again and spiritually renewed, they will end up in the lake of fire.	Humans are inherently good and only act badly as a result of adverse external influences. There is no devil or hell in the universe; consequently, nobody needs to be regarded as a lost sinner with distorted values and a bad character.
Through repentance and prayer the remission of your sins can be obtained from Jesus Christ, and the love and peace of God will flow into your heart by the work of the Holy Spirit. There is no substitute for prayer and it never becomes a mystical experience with cosmic powers.	Through a process of quiet, mystical meditation and the opening of the receptive faculties of your right-brain you can develop a deeper state of consciousness. You will then become one with the Christ within you and experience a mystical peace and tranquillity which emanates from the deeper self.
When Christians join together in corporate prayer, the Holy Spirit works in a powerful way to convict people of sin and to save their souls. They entreat God in prayer to work in other people's lives by saving them and fulfilling their needs.	When large numbers of people meditate at the same time, cosmic energy will be released to promote peace and unity in communities by saving mankind from all its divisions, hatred and prejudices. In this way, humanity becomes its own saviour.
Reconciliation between man and God occurs at the Cross and is based upon the atoning death of Jesus. Reconciliation between people is based upon the honouring of other's rights, negotiated settlements and the respecting of boundaries.	Reconciliation between people, ideologies and faiths is effected by compromise, unity and the eradication of boundaries. Groups must relinquish their exclusivity and become open and accommodating in order to promote convergence towards cosmic unity.

**The end of the road**

After the false prophet has induced millions of people, through spiritual deception, to become followers of the Antichrist, those who stubbornly refuse to bend the knee to the Antichrist will be summarily executed. Biblical



Christianity is absolutely exclusive and cannot associate or merge with any other religion. That is the main reason why the false religions are, and always have been, resentful and vindictive towards Christianity. In the tribulation period, under the guidance of the false prophet, they will get the right *and* the power to give full expression to their age-old campaign of hatred against evangelical Christianity.

In collaboration with the false prophet, the Antichrist will eradicate all spiritual opposition. Revelation 13:7 says: "It was granted him to make war with the saints and to overcome them." After this, unclean spirits that do signs and wonders will proceed from the dragon (Satan), the Antichrist and the false prophet to deceive the kings of the earth into mobilising their armies for a great war against Israel (Rev. 16:13-14). Although they will also be intent on destroying the remnant of Israel, their main target will be the coming Messiah – the Holy One of Israel. This futile exercise will be aimed at dethroning Jesus Christ and destroying the remnants of Christianity and Israel.

When Jesus comes from heaven, descending to place His feet on the Mount of Olives, there will not be an extended battle or any conversation with the rulers of Satan. They will immediately be captured alive and cast into the lake of fire:

"Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone" (Rev. 19:20).

A thousand years later, the devil will join the Antichrist and the false prophet in the lake of fire, "and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (Rev. 20:10).

Religious deception is wilful rebellion against the God of heaven, who is the absolute and timeless Truth. All false prophets and their deceived victims are heading for eternal damnation in the lake of fire. Many of these false prophets are performing antichristian signs and wonders within Christian churches under the influence of deceiving spirits. Being not firmly anchored in the truth, they have "departed from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1). Before the great white throne, they will in vain glory in their false ministries which were operated in the Name of Jesus, but not in Spirit and in truth. On the final day the Lord Jesus will declare to them: "I never knew you; depart from Me..." (Mt. 7:23).

The culmination of religious lies and deception will be allegiance to the false prophet and the Antichrist. When will the false prophets realise that they have been in error? It will be too late to repent when they appear before the great white throne on judgement day.

## **14. The Seven Bowl Judgements**

*(Revelation 14 to 16)*

Revelation 14 is a prelude to the seven last plagues, or bowl judgements, that will culminate in the great battle of Armageddon. From this chapter it is evident that the Second Coming is at hand, and that Jesus is ready to enter into judgement against the nations of the world. He will tread the winepress of the anger and wrath of God alone, and kill the wicked with the sword that proceeds from His mouth. John describes this action as follows:

“Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud: Thrust in your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe. So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped.

“Then another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying: Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe. So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great wine-press of the wrath of God. And the wine-press was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the wine-press, up to the horses’ bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs” (Rev. 14:14-20).

The nations are here described as grapes that are ripe. They will be trampled in the wine-press of God’s fury until their blood flows as a thick stream in the valley of decision outside Jerusalem. The stream of the blood of God’s enemies will also flow in the plain of Megiddo and in Bozrah. Isaiah referred as follows to the Messiah’s day of reckoning:

“Who is this who comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, this One who is glorious in His apparel, travelling in the greatness of His strength? – I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Why is Your apparel red, and Your garments like one who treads in the wine-press? I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the people no one was with Me. For I have trodden them in My anger, and trampled them in My fury; their blood is sprinkled upon My garments, and I have stained all My robes. For the day of vengeance is in My heart, and the year of My redeemed has come... I have trodden down the peoples in My anger, made them drunk in My fury, and brought down their strength to the earth” (Is. 63:1-6).

Edom and Bozrah are part of the present Jordan. In 1922, Sir Winston Churchill united the territories of Edom, Bozrah, and Ammon, and called them Jordan. Just south of Bozrah is Petra, which means *Rock*. It is the city carved out of solid rock, currently uninhabited and a famous tourist attraction. People from Israel will take refuge here during the great tribulation. This area will remain free from the direct domination of the Antichrist. Daniel says:

“He [*the Antichrist*] shall also enter the Glorious Land [*Israel*], and many countries shall be overthrown; but these shall escape from his hand: Edom, Moab, and the prominent people of Ammon” (Dan. 11:41).

During the great battle of Armageddon the remnant of Israel who took refuge in Petra will move towards the Mount of Olives in anticipation of the Messiah’s coming. When they are surrounded and cut off in Bozrah (in southern Jordan) by the forces of the Antichrist, Jesus will come and deliver them from their enemies whom He will destroy in Bozrah.

In Revelation 16, a very dark picture is painted of God’s judgements during the Second Coming of Jesus. In the events just prior to and during the battle of Armageddon the followers of the Antichrist will be afflicted with obnoxious sores while the natural resources of the earth will be destroyed. In an ecological disaster of unprecedented proportions all marine life will die and fresh water sources will be totally polluted and undrinkable. People, animals, and plants will first be scorched with a great heat, after which the light of heavenly bodies will be extinguished.

In the darkness of God’s judgements devastating earthquakes will occur while massive hailstones will ravage the world and its inhabitants. In the awesome earthquakes, large buildings will collapse. Mountain ranges will

be flattened and islands vanish under the surface of the sea. In the midst of these apocalyptic disasters the armies of the nations will be deployed in the Middle East under demonic provocation. They will be intent on destroying the remnant of Israel and achieving 'the final solution' against this troublesome nation which has been a thorn in the side of the world for so long. They will also be foolish enough to prepare for war against the coming Messiah of Israel.

John describes the seven bowls as follows:

“Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels: Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth. So the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image. Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood as of a dead man; and every living creature in the sea died. Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters saying: You are righteous, O Lord, the One who is and who was and who is to be, because You have judged these things. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. For it is their just due...

“Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory. Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain. And they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds.

“Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty... And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.

“Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying: It is done! And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And great hail from heaven fell upon men, every hailstone about the weight of a talent (50 kg.). And men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great” (Rev. 16:1-21).

The **first bowl** is a judgement which is aimed at people, and it strikes the followers of the Antichrist. Obnoxious sores appear on those who received the mark of the beast and worship his image. That includes all the deceived people who, for the sake of economic survival, concluded a covenant with Satan’s representative on earth, the Antichrist, to receive his number in exchange for their souls. They worship the beast, and before the Second Coming they will already have received the penalty of their wickedness in their bodies which were marked by Satan.

The **second bowl** strikes all the oceans of the world – not only a third of them as in the case of the trumpet judgements. Its water becomes like blood and all animals and other living organisms in it die. A disaster of this magnitude will deprive mankind of an important food source, promote famine, cause pestilence because of the decomposing marine animals, force people to move away from the contaminated coastlines, and render shipping virtually impossible.

The **third bowl** is poured out on the rivers and springs and their water becomes blood. Through this plague the survival chances on land are also drastically reduced and millions of people and animals are faced with certain death.

The **fourth bowl** is poured out on the sun and causes unprecedented heat-waves on earth. Big explosions will occur on the surface of the sun, and by that time the ozone layer will be destroyed. Apart from the tremendous heat, it will cause skin cancer in people who are directly exposed to the harmful ultra-violet rays of the sun.

The **fifth bowl** is poured out upon the world empire of the beast, and engulfs it in total darkness. People will be terrified as they grope in darkness while God's judgements are poured out upon them. Because they have already sold their souls to Satan by accepting the number of the Antichrist, their hearts will be totally hardened and they will blaspheme God because of the plagues. They will be past the point where they can be convicted of their sins as they will already have fallen under the power of delusion to believe the lies of Satan through the false prophet.

The **sixth bowl** is poured out over the Euphrates River to dry up its water so that the kings and their armies from the East can cross through it dry-shod on their way to Armageddon. They will be among the many enemies for the battle of that great day of God Almighty. Under demonic instigation a mighty army of 200 million men will march as sheep to the slaughter to be destroyed by the judgements of God. During their march they will annihilate a third of mankind, as described in Revelation 9:14-19. Consider the fact that there were barely 200 million people on earth when John received this vision; yet, today, China alone can mobilise more than 200 million men for war!

The **seventh bowl** causes the greatest earthquakes of all time. The cities of the nations will collapse and in various parts of the world – including Israel – the landscape will be drastically changed by the earthquakes. Jerusalem will be divided into three parts and Babylon, now being restored, will be totally destroyed. The rumbling quakes will coincide with hailstones of 50 kilograms. For such big hailstones to form unusually high temperatures must prevail causing hot, moist air to rise to great heights. The prevalence of such heat waves is confirmed in Revelation 16:8-9. Isaiah says about this time:

“The light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the LORD binds up the bruise of His people and heals the stroke of their wound” (Is. 30:26).

The day when the Lord comes to save the remnant of His people and to judge the nations, will be a day of terror when the powers of heaven will be shaken. Many Old Testament prophecies describe *the Day of the Lord*. People will be afflicted by great heat and droughts, by ominous darkness and the rumbling of devastating earthquakes. The wicked who hardened their hearts will be given over to ruin, together with all their possessions. This present world, which they wrongly regarded as a safe haven, will be severely devastated:

“Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine. I will punish the world for *its* evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. I will make a mortal more rare than fine gold, a man more than the golden wedge of Ophir. Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will move out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts and in the day of His fierce anger” (Is. 13:9-13).

Other similar warnings about the judgements of the Lord on that day have been recorded so that people should not lightly brush them aside and disregard them. The global extent of the destruction and the reason for these

judgements, namely, an excessively wicked generation of people like that in the days of Noah and Lot, is time and again emphasised:

“Behold, the LORD makes the earth empty and makes it waste, distorts its surface and scatters abroad its inhabitants.... The land shall be entirely emptied and utterly plundered, for the LORD has spoken this word.... The earth is also defiled under its inhabitants, because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore the curse has devoured the earth, and those who dwell in it are desolate. Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men *are* left” (Is. 24:1-6).

“Thus says the LORD of hosts: Behold, disaster shall go forth from nation to nation, and a great whirlwind shall be raised up from the farthest parts of the earth. And at that day the slain of the LORD shall be from one end of the earth even to the other end of the earth. They shall not be lamented, or gathered, or buried; they shall become refuse on the ground” (Jer. 25:32-33).

“For this is the day of the LORD GOD of hosts, a day of vengeance, that He may avenge Himself on His adversaries. The sword shall devour; it shall be satiated and made drunk with their blood; for the LORD GOD of hosts has a sacrifice in the north country by the River Euphrates” (Jer. 46:10).

Joel says the following about the great battle of Armageddon, which will clearly be God’s judgement against the wicked and unruly nations:

“The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD... For behold, in those days and at that time, when I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will enter into judgement with them there on account of My people, My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; they have also divided up My land... Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will diminish their brightness” (Joel 2:31; 3:1-2, 14-15).

The Valley of Jehoshaphat refers to the Kidron Valley in Jerusalem. Many of the armies of the Antichrist will be deployed there in anticipation of the coming of Jesus at the end of the seven year reign of the beast. Other armies will be deployed in North and Central Israel, while there will be a large concentration at the River Euphrates. When the darkness of God’s judgements engulfs them, many of these soldiers will according to Zechariah 14:13, kill one another.

In His prophetic discourse, the Lord Jesus referred to this terrible time before His Second Coming:

“And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (Lk. 21:25-27).

The Lord will reveal Himself in glory to the remnant of Israel but avenge Himself greatly upon His enemies. He will bring down and crush the wicked kingdoms of the world and reign in their place during the millennium.

In the two chapters after Revelation 16 the destruction of the false, Babylonian religion, as well as of the restored city of Babylon, the capital of the Antichrist’s future kingdom, are discussed in more detail. The reasons for God’s judgement upon Babylon and its evil system are given in these chapters and fully explain the

destruction of Babylon as briefly described in Revelation 16:19. The climax of God's judgements on the day of Jesus' return is the subject of Revelation 19.

### **Preparations for His coming**

All who profess to be Christians should heed the Bible's solemn warnings of impending disaster for the world when God's judgements come upon it for its increasing wickedness. They should seriously ask themselves whether they are indeed born again, have truly repented of sin before God and placed their faith in Jesus Christ and His one perfect sacrifice for sins at Calvary. This is the *only* way of escape from God's coming judgements against all unbelievers. Tragically, the faith of many people is only a nominal one, trusting in their own righteousness and works to please God and escape judgement. Because of their unregenerate hearts, they will be left behind when Jesus comes for His bride.

Truly born again Christians should all follow Noah's example in earnestly and repeatedly warning our contemporaries of the coming judgements even if they ignore or mock us, as Noah's did, otherwise their blood will be on our hands. Noah's contemporaries perished in the judgement (the Flood), as ours will unless they repent and believe.

Lot also had to be spiritually worthy to escape the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. According to God's will, which was clearly revealed to Lot, he and his family had to take drastic measures to hastily flee from the doomed city. If he had not really believed that these judgements would be executed, and had not been in his heart fully prepared to part from his possessions, he would have been destroyed with them and with his wicked contemporaries in the flames that engulfed them.

We are not the subjects of God's wrath, but then we have to be spiritually worthy to be caught away to His wonderful presence shortly before the dark days of judgement:

“But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Lk. 21:34-36).

“Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God?” (2 Pet. 3:11-12).

We must "abide in Him, that when he appears we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming" (1 Jn. 2:28).

In Revelation 16, where the great judgements of the Day of God are announced, the Lord Jesus reminds us to be vigilant and live holy lives with a view to His sudden coming before this Day of terror that will engulf the entire world:

“Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame” (Rev.16:15).

After the heavenly Bridegroom has come like a thief in the night to take away His bride to heavenly places, the spiritual nakedness and bankruptcy of those who are not truly born again will be evident to all. Among those who remain behind there will be many nominal Christians who were not ready because they only had a form of godliness, but not the real thing.

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1).

Have you made the necessary preparations to escape the coming judgements, like Noah and Lot did, and like Israel also had to do in their exodus from Egypt, when they had to take shelter under the blood of the lamb? Double-minded people who think they can serve the Lord *and* the passing pleasures of sin with the world will, like the wife of Lot, not qualify to escape judgements. The tragedy is that she only paid lip service to the kingdom of God and wrongly assumed that she was safe. It is not without reason that we are reminded of Lot’s wife! (Lk. 17:28-32).

## 15. Religious Babylon

*(Revelation 17)*

In Revelation 17 and 18 respectively, John mentions two Babylons that will rise to prominence shortly before the advent of Christ. The one is mystical Babylon, referring to an evil ideology, or false system of religious worship, and the other one a commercial city with all kinds of worldly pleasure and immoral practices in it. Both these chapters in Revelation are based upon the supposition that there will be a reconstructed Babylon as an end-time manifestation of the ancient Babylonian empire, and also as a fitting centre of operations for the Babylonian world religion.

The one Babylon is called: "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH" (Rev. 17:5) and the other one: “Babylon, that mighty city! (Rev. 18:10). Because the city of Babylon is the place of origin of the pagan religions, the apostate end-time world religion with its unbiblical unification of all religions, is aptly described as *mystery Babylon*. It is opposed to biblical Christianity and is already in the process of establishing an ecumenical body, or parent organisation, called *the mother of harlots* in Revelation 17:5. This woman rides on the back of the beast, and will be recognised, supported and used by him. The angel said the following to John about this spiritually defiled woman:

“Come, I will show you the judgement of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication. So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus...

“The seven heads [of the beast] are seven mountains on which the woman sits. [They are] also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time... And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire... And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth” (Rev. 17:1-6, 16, 18).

The identity of the beast with the seven heads and the ten horns has already been discussed in the messages on Revelation 13. It is the Antichrist who will be the ruler of the seventh, apostate world empire. Of these empires, five had fallen before the time of John, i.e. the Babylonian Empire of Nimrod, the Assyrian Empire, the restored

Babylonian Empire of Nebuchadnezzar, the Medo-Persian Empire, and the Greek Empire. The sixth one, the Roman Empire, was then in power while the seventh and last one, that of the Antichrist, was still future.

The woman sits on all seven of these empires and has spiritual dominion over them. The seven mountains on which she sits must not be applied to Rome nor the woman narrowly identified as the church of Rome. She symbolises all the false religions of all times. She cannot be related only to Rome as there were more than seven apostate caesars who persecuted the Christians. From Nero to Diocletian alone there were ten. The woman reigns over the kings of the earth, deceiving them and their followers against worshipping the true God. She represents the spiritual power of deception that Satan has on earth. It is in this sense that the whole world, with the exception of a small minority of true Christians, according to 1 John 5:19 lies in the sway of the Wicked One.

It is helpful to keep in mind the significance of the word 'harlot'. It indicates an immoral woman who does not keep herself pure for marriage to one man, but commits loveless fornication or adultery with many men. Or she could be a married woman who is unfaithful to her husband and commits adultery with many men. True religion is to be faithful to the one true God. To set up religions which worship gods other than the true God is spiritual adultery and such false religions are therefore harlots spiritually. The worst kind of spiritual harlotry is to profess Christianity which should worship the true God and Him alone, while forming alliances with heretical 'Christian' churches *and* with false religions who do not worship the true God nor accept Christ as the one mediator between God and mankind. An alliance of adulterated Christian and false religions therefore merits the title THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS.

### **Revival of the ancient Babylonian religion**

The origin of the false world religion of the end-time can, according to Revelation 17, be traced back to Babylon. The ancient Babylonian Empire which was founded by Nimrod, functioned in close association with the pagan religion of that time. The marriage between politics and religion was so intimate that this empire was controlled by a priest-king. He made use of occult powers and astrology to reign. The king was also the personification of the sun-god who was regarded as the giver of light and life. From this superstition the cult of the sun-pillars arose, from which the later obelisks and peace-poles of modern times developed. In Revelation 17 and 18, a description is given of a neo-Babylonian government, religion and economy that will be established before the Second Coming of Christ. That is the ultimate goal of the New Age Movement, of which the roots go back to the ancient Babylonian Empire of Nimrod. It is nothing new.

The end-time emergence of the New Age Movement is linked to the Russian-born Madame Helena Blavatsky who founded the Theosophical Society in New York in 1875. She received her revelations and commands directly from a spiritual master with whom she had telepathic contact. She offered herself as a medium to higher (demonic) powers that worked through her.

As a result of these revelations, she published the book *Isis Unveiled* in 1877, and the six volume *The Secret Doctrine* in 1888. In these volumes she expounds the secret doctrine that, according to her master, forms the foundation of all religious, philosophical and knowledge systems. In the introduction to Volume 1 of *The Secret Doctrine* she says:

“The teaching in these volumes belong neither to the Hindu, the Zoroastrian, the Chaldean, nor the Egyptian religion, nor to Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, nor Christianity exclusively. *The Secret Doctrine* is the essence of all these. Sprung from it in their origins, the various religious schemes are now made to merge back into their original element, out of which every mystery and dogma has grown, developed, and become materialised.



The New Age objective is, quite clearly, to unite all religions, including an adulterated version of Christianity, in an alliance of world religions. In association with demonic doctrines such as evolution, reincarnation, metaphysics, parapsychology, astrology, pantheism and Marxism, all faiths and philosophies must revert to their common Luciferic origin. In this way, unity can be achieved in the world and all people's lives be ordered according to the same evil principles.

It is of the utmost importance to consider the role of the false religions in the end-time as they will be officially recognised by the Antichrist and be endowed with great power and authority in his empire. They will be associated with one another in an ecumenical alliance and gradually narrow the differences between them until they form a corporate group who will accept the Antichrist as their common messiah. To the deceived Christians he will be *the Christ*, to the Jews the *Messiah*, to the Muslims the *Imam Mahdi*, to the Hindus *Krishna*, and to the Buddhists the *Maitreya Buddha*.

After the revelation of the Antichrist the whole world will be religiously united, with the exception of the 144 000 Jewish evangelists and the true Christians of that time. The united world religions will institute a vicious and bloody persecution of Christians who refuse to join their ranks or to worship the beast. The blood of the martyrs of Jesus will be on the hands of this woman who will be the mother of the harlots. On a much greater scale than previously, she will perpetuate the persecution of God's children on earth with a view to obliterating true Christianity.

### **Religious unification of the world**

There are various ecumenical bodies in the growing interfaith movement. Their objective is to first equalise and merge all factions within every religion, after which religious equality will be promoted in a multireligious dispensation. Once this stage of merging has been reached, the final objective of religious unity will be pursued under the pretext that all religions worship the same God. When this idea has been firmly established it will be opportune for the appearance of the universal messiah of all faiths, and also for the global false prophet.

One of the biggest interfaith bodies is the Parliament for World Religions. In August 1993, 7000 delegates of 250 different faiths met in Chicago for the biggest and most representative interfaith meeting in the history of mankind. At this meeting were not only ecumenical Protestants, Roman Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Zoroastrians, and the followers of more than 200 other religions, but also shamans – i.e. magicians and witches. A declaration of global ethics was approved and published. Various other regional meetings were subsequently held to promote interfaith collaboration. The next general meeting of the Parliament for World Religions was held in Cape Town from 1 to 8 December 1999. In 2000, the United Religions Initiative was launched.

The United Nations, as well as many individual governments, support the initiative for the establishment of an alliance of world religions. They see the promotion of a religious world brotherhood as an important prerequisite for the successful introduction of the new world order. That is the reason why the United Nations in the early 1970's founded the World Conference on Religion and Peace, an ecumenical body intended to promote peace and unity on earth. This is a category 2 non-governmental organisation. In South Africa, it functions under the guidance of two theologians of the University of South Africa to bring the various religions closer to one another for the sake of peace and unity. The traditional African religions also feature strongly in their public lectures.

One of Satan's major tools which he uses to adulterate Christian doctrine, infiltrate and unify Christian churches with a view to associating them with the non-Christian religions, is the World Council of Churches (WCC). This body was formed in 1948 in Amsterdam in the Netherlands, and its credo is *One church for one world*.

Right from the outset it was obvious that the WCC did not only have Christian unity in mind, but rather a world-wide alliance of religions. The following actions and decisions are proof of this statement:

In 1961 the WCC had its third session in New Dehli in India. The theme of the conference was: *Jesus Christ, the light of the world*. This was not a reference to the biblical Christ, but to the cosmic Christ of all faiths. In terms of this perception, Hindus and Buddhists are viewed as *anonymous Christians* on the basis of the general grace. It is argued that God has reconciled *all* men to Himself through Jesus Christ. According to the WCC, some people who do not know that they have been reconciled to God are nevertheless on their way to heaven!

At its 1968 conference in Uppsala, Sweden, the vision of the WCC extended beyond the unification of the church since their ultimate goal was formulated as *a united humanity in a new international order*. People from all religions were to be merged into a new world order. To actively promote this idea the WCC instituted the *Programme of Dialogue with People of other Living Faiths*. Since its institution in 1970 the term 'believer' was a substitute for 'Christian', and the members of the non-Christian religions were henceforth addressed as 'fellow believers', based on the premise that we all worship the same God. In 1973, the Bangkok conference of this WCC body was opened by the president of the World Buddhist Society. In her prayer she called on the gods of all religions to save mankind.

The 1975 Nairobi conference of the WCC expressed itself in favour of the more intimate unification of humanity. One of the closed sessions on spirituality was attended by Protestant, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Pentecostal Christians, as well as Hindus, Buddhists and an atheist. Their agenda was obviously humanistic and multireligious!

At the 1983 conference in Vancouver, Canada, a totem pole was erected in honour of all the tribal spirits of the Red Indians. At the conference it was recommended that the different religions should take hands to promote peace on earth.

The 1991 conference at Canberra in Australia resolved that an active process of reconciliation should thence be set in motion by the Christian religion. Justice and peace should be pursued in all walks of life. It was emphasised that this should be an interfaith action as it is beyond the capacity of a single religion to bring about peace in our troubled world. A Korean theologian stated that all missionary work is redundant and should be discontinued as God is present in all cultures and in all religions. Missionaries do not have to introduce Him where He already is. The WCC maintains that God does not only reveal Himself to the world through the Christian religion, but through all the religions. Equality and unity must be pursued by them. One religion should not elevate itself above the others nor denigrate any of them, as they are all equal.

These ideas are very popular in the new South Africa and are advancing with giant strides in the theological faculties of virtually all universities. Various text books for courses in multireligious education have already been produced – here *and* overseas. In this and other ways, religious Babylon is grooming herself for her exalted position in the coming antichristian new world order.

The Roman Catholic Church is, in its own right, also actively involved with the promotion of interfaith ties. They give strong recognition to Islam as a monotheistic religion, which allegedly worships the same God as Christianity and Judaism. The leaders of a number of world religions have in the past been invited by the Pope to venues in Italy where they prayed for world peace. The reason why the Roman Catholic Church is not an official member of the World Council of Churches is evidently because the Vatican regards itself as the 'mother' and 'home' of all Christian churches and expects all the 'separated brethren', as she calls them, to return to her. Despite this stand, they are collaborating with the WCC on committee level, with the result that

degenerate Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, and the non-Christian religions are almost daily moving closer to the objective of a general alliance of religions.

#### **A master plan for a take-over**

The New Age Movement continues with plans to promote global religious unity. The leaders of certain New Age organisations have worked out a thirteen-point *Plan* to institute the new world order. It constitutes a revival of the old Babylonian religion and world government that interacted very closely. In this list you will clearly recognise the woman on the back of the beast. The New Age Movement is the vanguard of the ecumenical movement, and they openly declare their objective of uniting religion and politics in the new world order. The 13 points in the strategy of the powers of darkness are:

1. The principal aim of the Plan is to establish a one world religion and a one world political and social order. Their key concept is that everything is one (monism). This unity must be established in all spheres of life.
2. The New Age world religion must constitute a revival of the religion of ancient Babylon in which mystery cults, sorcery, occultism and immorality flourished.
3. The Plan will be fully implemented when the New Age Messiah (the Antichrist) with his number 666, reveals himself as head of the world religion and the coming world government of the new world order.
4. Spirit guides (demons) will prepare people for the coming of the cosmic Messiah, by acclaiming him as the world teacher.
5. Peace, love and unity are to be used as buzzwords for the new world order and the new world religion.
6. New Age teachings must attain scientific credibility and be vigorously propagated in every sphere of life, in the public and private sectors, around the globe.
7. Jesus must be portrayed as a prophet and a master of wisdom who is one of the disciples of the cosmic Christ. It must be denied that he is unique and that he should be worshipped as a God who is above humanity.
8. Christianity and all other religions must be integrated into the inclusive world religion of the New Age.
9. Fundamental Christian principles that stand in the way of this reform movement (e.g. the atonement for sins on the cross and that Christ is the only Way, Truth and Life), must be discredited and abandoned.
10. Children must be spiritually influenced and indoctrinated in schools in order to promote the New Age dogma.
11. Flattery will be employed to entice people into believing that man is inherently divine. They should be told that we are all gods.
12. Science and the New Age world religion must become one. The mystic (cosmic) dimension of man and nature must be researched.
13. Christians who resist the Plan must be reoriented or dealt with in other ways. If necessary, they will be exterminated and the world purified of their influence.

From this strategy for a take-over it is evident that the new world religion will not function in isolation, but in close association with the Antichrist's political system and world government. He will be the political *and* religious leader of the world. The great harlot on the back of the beast will have a clear political agenda to induce her followers to accept the world government and the number of the Antichrist. She will also have a religious agenda to deceive her billions of supporters into accepting him as world messiah, and into worshipping him.

### **The end of the Antichrist's marriage with religious Babylon**

The Antichrist's marriage with the false world religion is contracted in imitation of the relationship between Christ and His bride, which is the true and unadulterated Christian church composed of those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. The long influence of the false religions over the reigning political powers from Nimrod's time until the advent of the Antichrist will culminate in an unprecedented 'marriage' of the one-world politico-economic power (the Antichrist) with the one-world religious Babylon (the great harlot) but it will not be a long and happy marriage. Religious Babylon will enjoy great privileges and prestige in the Antichrist's empire but after 3½ years the alliance of politico-economic powers under the Antichrist will turn on the great harlot and destroy her, as she will have out-lived her purpose. John describes her execution as follows:

“And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire” (Rev. 17:16).

In the middle of the tribulation, religious Babylon, the harlot-bride, will be abolished and her places of worship closed, destroyed, or used for other purposes. The same fate awaits the orthodox Jewish faith. Daniel says: “...in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate” (Dan. 9:27). The harlot-bride of the Antichrist will thus only be married to him for 3½ years when his role as world messiah and deceiving *angel of light* will expire. After that, he will be revealed in his true character as a cruel dictator, murderer and self-deified god. His harlot-bride will then be confronted with the frightening choice of either worshipping him as god or be publicly humiliated by being abolished. Most of the deceived and spiritually blinded religious people of that time will accept the Antichrist's ultimatum and bend the knee to the end-time Baal as the god of this world.

The harlot-bride of the Antichrist can, right from the outset, count the days of her brief period of glory – 1260 days from her marriage until the dark day of her public execution or degradation to slavery. What a terrible price she has to pay to find favour in the eyes of the beast! She has to sear her conscience, turn her back upon the living God and His Son, Jesus Christ, be prepared to be terribly abused, and on top of it all conclude a covenant with death – all that for the proverbial bowl of lentil soup! That is the way of death which was also trodden by Esau and Judas Iscariot.

The mother organisation of the apostate religious peoples of the world is rapidly taking shape. From the viewpoint of traditional Christianity, this process passes through the following seven phases:

1. Unity in the whole Christian world, including between Protestants and Catholics.
2. Religious equality among all religions in constitutions, government structures, and educational systems.
3. The forming of interfaith alliances among all religions.
4. Propagation of the idea of the universal God who is worshipped by all faiths.

5. Propaganda for the coming of the universal messiah of all faiths.
6. The appearing of the world messiah and his united worship by people of all religions.
7. The forced worship of the Antichrist as God, 3½ years after his appearing.

When phase 6 has been reached at the beginning of the tribulation period, the harlot-bride will enjoy the peak of her popularity and public support as she rides on the back of the beast. In phase 7, her sudden downfall and destruction will occur when all people in the global empire of the beast will be commanded to worship him as God.

## 16. Economic Babylon

*(Revelation 18)*

A development that is directly related to the tribulation period, is the rebuilding of the once renowned metropolis, Babylon, on the banks of the Euphrates River. As the birthplace of the Ancient World's pagan religion, this city must again emerge as the seat of a false universal religion. Babylon is in Iraqi territory and, since 1978, has been in process of reconstruction. The first phase of the rebuilt city was inaugurated amid great festivity between September 22 and October 22, 1987. This festival has since that time become an annual event, and is reported in the media as an international cultural festival.

Included in the first phase of the reconstruction of the old city, is the southern palace of King Nebuchadnezzar. This palace includes the famous throne-room where the writing appeared on the wall during the last night of King Belshazzar's reign. Among the other reconstructed buildings is the gateway to the temple of Ishtar. Hotels and tourist facilities have also been erected on the outskirts of the city.

To Saddam Hussein, Babylon's historical fame as the capital of a once mighty world empire is a strong motivation for rebuilding the city. His main objective is to try and regain the lost glory of Babylon. Hussein also has great veneration for Nebuchadnezzar and sees himself as the modern successor of this world leader. He strives to become the leader of all the Arab countries, and intends using his military power to conquer Israel and have its leaders chained and dragged across the desert to Babylon.

The symbolic value of Babylon as a world capital is clearly realised in Iraq. During the inauguration feast of the first part of the rebuilt city in 1987 the Iraqi minister of antiquity referred to the fact that Babylon is the place from where the nations of the world dispersed across the globe and eventually became hostile towards one another. Should they wish to become reconciled and to restore their unity within the framework of a new world order they should – according to him – return to the place from where they dispersed: that is Babylon!

### **Rebellion against God**

To correctly comprehend current events in Babylon, the city's origin and the relentless anti-God tradition it has followed in ancient times must be taken into account. According to Genesis 10:8-10, Nimrod established a kingdom for himself in Babylon. Apart from the fact that it was a political kingdom, it also became a powerful pagan religious centre from where idolatry spread across the world.

As protagonist of the self-sufficiency of the human race, Nimrod took a firm stand against God. Not only did he offer himself as a king to the people, but also as a god. As a builder of fortified cities in the land of Shinar (one of the earliest names for Babylonia), he was honoured as the *God of Forces*. He was addressed as the *Liberator* and *Crown Bearer*, and regarded as the personification of the *Sun-god* – the one who gives light and life. After him all Babylonian and Assyrian kings deified themselves. This tradition was imitated by the rulers of other world empires, especially in the Roman Empire. This is a pagan tradition that will be revived during the great tribulation when the Antichrist will declare himself as God and demand the worship of all men.

Since its earliest existence, Babylon was the centre and symbol of an anti-God world power. This tradition is also reflected in the name *Babylon*, which means *Gateway to the gods*. (After God confounded their language, the name *Babylon* was also associated with *confusion* and *disorder*). The gateway to the gods consisted of a temple tower (*ziggurat*) in which the priests ascended to make contact with the gods. The top could be reached by means of a helical stairway that surrounded the tower. Up there the priests meditated in order to become one with the cosmic world. Astronomical observations, used in the compilation of horoscopes, were also made from that vantage-point. The establishing of ancient Babylon is described as follows in Genesis:

“Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there... And they said: Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the whole face of the earth. But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the LORD said: Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech. So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the languages of all the earth” (Gen. 11:1-9).

The form of internationalism that was established in ancient Babylon not only promoted linguistic and social unity, but also economic and political unity. It afforded that first world empire the power base which enabled them to forcibly incorporate other nations into their empire, also to control their economies and to impose a world religion on them. The power base that they were in the process of building was so strong that they would have been able to achieve all their objectives.

This evil programme of internationalisation, or globalisation, was directly in conflict with the God-ordained order of independent, self-ruling nations. That is the reason why He stopped and destroyed their unitary reforms on the communication level, thereby forcing the participant nations to move away and conduct their own affairs without intervention by an emerging world empire. In their new situation they would not only be politically and economically free, but also able to enjoy religious freedom to serve the true God or any other gods of their choice, without coercion from a self-deified universal emperor like Nimrod.

Despite the crumbling of the ancient Babylonian Empire, Satan never relinquished his plans to establish an alternative world order of international unity in association with a false world religion. Often in history, satanically inspired efforts to achieve this were made. The Babylonian Empire was succeeded by the Assyrian Empire, which was later subdued by the restored Babylonian Empire of Nebuchadnezzar. They applied the same principles of power politics, the subjection and incorporation of other nations, forced cultural assimilation, and the imposition of an idolatrous state religion. After these empires, the Medes and Persians, as well as the Greek and Roman empires, followed the same model of world domination. The coming Antichrist will institute this same form of globalisation and the forced worship of images in its most severe form. The spirit and influence of Babylon permeates human history right down to the end-time as Satan persists with his strategy for

the raising up of an apostate world leader who will be followed, honoured and worshipped by the spiritually blinded, morally perverted, socially disoriented, and politically deceived nations.

The God-ordained order for the nations, as reiterated in the New Testament, is the existence of independent nations with clear boundaries separating them:

“And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings” (Acts 17:26).

According to Romans 13:1-4, the authority of governments is derived from God. They must recognise God’s supremacy and accept accountability for their policies and the use of power. As such, the God-ordained order for the nations and the Babylonian order are in direct conflict with one another. In the Babylonian order, man is sovereign and determines his own destiny. That is why influential leaders tend to exalt and even deify themselves.

### **God’s judgements upon this city**

In the light of the continued strategies of the kingdom of darkness, God’s judgements still rest upon Babylon and its evil methods. God’s judgements upon Babylon in the Old Testament were never completely fulfilled; consequently, Babylonian conspiracies to form world governments often recurred in historical times. It is evident that the final judgement upon Babylon and its anti-Christian form of government is still future and will be fulfilled during the coming ‘Day of the Lord’. It is within this framework that the end-time world religion, world government and world economy of the Antichrist are called *Babylon* in Revelation 17 and 18. Its destruction during the coming great tribulation will constitute the final eradication of the age-old Babylonian conspiracy of Satan.

Prophecies that deal with the fall of Babylon are so clearly defined and absolute that no period in the entire history of Babylon and Assyria can be found in which they have been exhaustively fulfilled. Consider the following statements:

“And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans' pride, will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It will never be inhabited, nor will it be settled from generation to generation; nor will the Arabian pitch tents there, nor will the shepherds make their sheepfolds there. But wild beasts of the desert will lie there, and their houses will be full of owls; ostriches will dwell there, and wild goats will caper there” (Is. 13:19-21).

Jeremiah refers to the destruction of Babylon in these words:

“And I will repay Babylon and all the inhabitants of Chaldea for all the evil they have done in Zion in your sight, says the LORD. Behold, I am against you, O destroying mountain, who destroys all the earth, says the LORD. And I will stretch out My hand against you... They shall not take from you a stone for a corner, nor a stone for a foundation, but you shall be desolate forever, says the LORD... My people, go out of the midst of her! And let everyone deliver himself from the fierce anger of the LORD... And Jeremiah said to Seraiah: When you arrive in Babylon and see it, and read all these words, then you shall say: O LORD, You have spoken against this place to cut it off, so that none shall remain in it, neither man nor beast, but it shall be desolate forever. Now it shall be, when you have finished reading this book, that you shall tie a stone to it and throw it out into the Euphrates. Then you shall say: Thus Babylon shall sink and not rise from the catastrophe that I will bring upon her” (Jer. 51:24-26, 45, 61-64).

Dr. J. A. Seiss stated as far back as 1865 in his *Letters on the Apocalypse* that it is obvious that the city of Babylon will be rebuilt, for otherwise the LORD cannot finally destroy it like Sodom and Gomorrah, never to be inhabited again. This is clearly an end-time event that will, according to Isaiah 13:6-9, occur on *the day of the Lord*, probably coinciding with the battle of Armageddon at the end of the great tribulation.

In 1918, Clarence Larkin has indicated in his famous book *Dispensational Truth* that Babylon was never completely destroyed or uninhabited. Jeremiah's prophecy that after the final destruction no stones from the ruins of Babylon will be used, must yet be fulfilled. Various towns and cities have in fact been built with bricks recovered from the ruins of Babylon. Before the present rebuilding of Babylon started in 1978, Iraqis removed thousands of bricks for construction purposes elsewhere. Since the official building programme started, several impressive structures have risen on the foundations of ancient Babylon. These developments underscore the biblical view that the great fall of the city is yet to occur.

### **International centre**

In its capacity as the international economic, political and entertainment centre of the world the rebuilt Babylon will, according to Revelation 18, play an important part in the great tribulation. It can be expected that international organisations will rush to be accommodated in Babylon, and that large building projects will be undertaken and completed in a relatively short time. Very soon the city will assume a cosmopolitan character as the point of convergence for a variety of cultures and civilisations from all over the world. Here the nations were separated when their languages were confused. An attempt will soon be made to reunite them at the same place from whence they dispersed 4 500 years ago.

In the days of ancient Babylon, the first United Nations conference on record was held on the plains of Shinar:

“Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top *is* in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth” (Gen. 11:4).

In modern times, a similar appeal may be issued as follows:

“Let us co-operate and build ourselves a city between the East and the West and the North and the South as a symbol of global unity and internationalism. Let us create a united league of world religions and develop our spiritual potential to ascend to the ultimate zenith of the evolution of humanity to divinity! Let us establish one monetary system, one government and a classless social order for all people. Only then will we be united into a peaceful and harmonious society of planetary citizens that does not become separated into conflicting and self-centred national groups.”

In the USA, the catastrophe that occurred in 2001 during the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington, has given new impetus to their campaign to eradicate terrorism and establish a peaceful global society. The threat emanating from fundamentalist Muslim groups is playing an important role in their efforts to normalise relations with Islam, the biggest single religious group in the world (Roman Catholicism being the second biggest). Much attention is now focused on Iraq as a sponsor for terror groups, with a view to bringing peace to the troubled Middle East region by replacing radical leaders such as Saddam Hussein (and also Yasser Arafat) with moderate, peace-loving leaders. It may just be that an international *prince of peace* will soon rise in Iraq to promote the humanistic peace programme of the deceived nations from there! According to the Bible, he will have the full support of Satan to become a globally acclaimed *angel of light* and champion of a unified new world order.



The ideology of the modern tower of Babel is rapidly gaining ground in the world. Its final implementation will occur very rapidly. At the close of the great tribulation, the evils in the reconstructed city of Babylon will have no limits. Revelation 18:5 tells us that the sins of Babylon, like those of Sodom and Gomorrah, will reach unto heaven.

### **Saddam Hussein and the rebuilding of Babylon**

Although Saddam Hussein played a big part in initiating the rebuilding of Babylon, he is only one of many forerunners of the Antichrist. The following characteristics of the Antichrist are also manifested by him:

- He is mustering tremendous military power, including accurate long-range missiles capable of destroying Israeli towns and cities, and horrifying chemical and bacteriological weapons for use as missile warheads.
- He fosters tremendous hatred against the Jews and Israel as well as the countries supporting them, particularly the USA and Britain.
- He is utterly opposed to all moderate Arabs who do not support his radical policies.
- He is a cruel and ruthless dictator who oppresses his own people *and* other nations.
- He has no regard for human life and will not hesitate to instigate a world war and to cause great disasters.
- He rebuilds Babylon in an effort to revive and focus upon himself the fame of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian Empire.

The dreams of Saddam Hussein will not be realised during his reign. But when the Antichrist comes he will restore the Babylonian Empire in a dramatic way and fulfil these dreams for a short time during the coming day of the Lord.

### **The destruction of Babylon**

The final fall of the rebuilt Babylon will occur suddenly at the end of the great tribulation. John describes it as follows in Revelation 18:

“After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority... And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying: Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling-place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury.

“And I heard another voice from heaven saying: Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities...

“...her plagues will come in one day – death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judges her. And the kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying: Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgement has come! ...And every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning...

“Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying: Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore... for by your sorcery all the nations were deceived. And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth” (Rev. 18:1-5, 8-10, 17-18, 21, 23-24).

From these Scriptures it is evident that there will not be a gradual decay and decline of the city over a long period of time. The destruction of Babylon will occur in *one hour*. As with Sodom and Gomorrah, it will be consumed by fire. At the same time a great earthquake with continuous thunder and lightning will occur, as described in Revelation 16:

“And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth... And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath” (Rev. 16:18-19).

When this earthquake occurs a huge crater will appear, from which flames of burning pitch will emanate. The city will subside into a lake of fire, never to be restored or inhabited again. The smoke of her burning will form dark clouds across the plains of Shinar and be clearly visible from ships in the Persian Gulf. The merchants and the seamen will weep and mourn over the destruction of this city with its riches, pomp and glory.

This is the destiny of a global kingdom and society that revolted against God and scorned His mercy. In world empires of this nature, as well as world religions in which relationships with heathen religions are entered into, the children of God have no common cause. The command to them is clear:

“Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues” (Rev. 18:4).

This command is not only meant for the people of God who may find themselves in the city of Babylon during the great tribulation, but also for all those who are members of Babylonian-type churches, political parties and other movements. Do not be influenced and led astray by those who participate in the building of a modern tower of Babel. Their compromise and spiritual blindness may have a severely detrimental effect on you. Through a subtle process of brainwashing they may succeed in deceiving and misleading you in this critical hour just prior to the coming of Jesus, the Head of the true church and the King of kings.

It is frightening and almost incomprehensible that in spite of the historical facts at their disposal, as well as biblical prophecies, modern world leaders are proceeding with their plans to establish a Babylonian new world order. In the process they are creating structures for the world government, world religion and world economy of the coming Antichrist. The European nations are eagerly participating in this Babylonian Empire by relinquishing a significant degree of their sovereignty and transferring it to the European Parliament. A common European monetary system is part of these internationalising reforms.

Recent world financial turbulence is driving the nations inexorably towards global financial control, which will inevitably involve centralised global political control. The urgent need for global financial control will force all nations into very rapid moves towards international political control under strong central leadership, making way for a strong charismatic personality to take over.

In the coming European/Middle East empire various national leaders will relinquish their powers and transfer them to the Antichrist: “These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast” (Rev. 17:13). Other world leaders will also follow this example, and together they will rebuild Babylon as the capital of the Antichrist. This venture, which will be undertaken under the illusion of promoting international peace,

unity and reconciliation, will form the basis for Satan's great end-time conspiracy to subject the entire world to his direct authority. Against this evil, Babylonian empire God's final judgements will not be long delayed.

### **History comes full circle**

The history of the nations started with a Babylonian conspiracy against the kingdom of God, as described in the first book of the Bible – Genesis. In the last book of the Bible, Revelation, a description is given of how the history of the nations will end in this dispensation – with a repetition of that early Babylonian conspiracy against the kingdom of God. Modern technology and the proliferation of evil will render the present conspiracy exceedingly more fierce and destructive.

This author is confident that the rebuilding of the ancient city of Babylon will play a major role in the culmination of the end-time Babylonian new world order after the coming of the Antichrist. The Bible strongly supports such a notion. But even if that does not happen and some other capital is chosen for the Antichrist's world empire, the fact remains that the globalism, power politics and heathen practices of ancient Babylon have strongly re-emerged in our time. We should at least be mindful of the fact that the Bible does not call the multi-religious ecumenical movement of our time the mother of harlots, or *Mystery Babylon*, without indicating a strong relationship between the end-time interfaith movement and the ancient Babylonian conglomerate of false religions and New Age cosmic powers. We are confronted with the same situation.

Furthermore, economic and political Babylon represent the two other power bases of the ancient empire, thereby indicating that the cement of Nimrod's world empire was centralised political domination in association with economic control and the compulsory veneration of heathen gods. The functioning of these three power bases helps us to understand the make-up and functioning of the present new world order, of which the substructure also consists of a strange synthesis of political, economic and religious globalism.

With every passing day, the world is more and more unified in accordance with the principles of the ancient Babylonian empire. The final and formal institution of this new international order will coincide with the dramatic revelation of the Antichrist, who will be the undisputed leader and god of the emerging new world empire.

The utter rebelliousness and blasphemous actions of this new ruler will be seen in the use of occult powers, self-deification and the rigid enforcement of Satan-worship. As the end-time king of Babylon, he will openly challenge the authority of the most high God and thereby invite His anger upon the empire of the beast as well as its capital city. The destruction of Babylon will, therefore, be much more significant than divine judgement upon a single city or kingdom – it will be part of the outpouring of God's wrath upon an entire generation of apostate planetary citizens who joined the devil in his bid to once again challenge the supremacy of God in the universe.

We are now living in the early stages of the end-time Babylonian world society. The people of God have no common cause whatsoever with Babylon and must not associate with any of its structures and evil practices.

## **17. The Second Coming of Christ**

*(Revelation 19)*

On the last day of the great tribulation, during the battle of Armageddon, Jesus Christ will appear on a white horse, followed by the heavenly armies of angels and all His saints, to engage in a short but decisive battle with His enemies:

“Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the wine-press of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

“Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven: Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great.

“And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh” (Rev. 19:11-21).

The Second Coming of Jesus, which is described in Revelation 19, will be like lightning that will be seen from everywhere. But physically He will return to the city of Jerusalem. Just after His ascension two angels said to the Apostles on the Mount of Olives: “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). Zechariah describes His coming as follows:

“And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move towards the north and half of it towards the south. Then you shall flee through My mountain valley, for the mountain valley shall reach to Azal. Yes, you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Thus the LORD my God will come, and all the saints with You” (Zech. 14:4-5).

The Lord Jesus will come with His saints, who were raptured before the tribulation period to be united with Him forever. They will share in His glorious revelation to the world. Paul said: “When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.” (Col. 3:4) Jude writes: "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgement on all" (Jude v. 14-15).

### **Reconciled to the Messiah**

During this momentous event, when tremendous earthquakes spread over the whole world and the Mount of Olives is split in two, a very dramatic reconciliation will occur between the remnant of Israel and their once-rejected Messiah, Jesus. The Jews who fled to the wilderness in the middle of the tribulation period will return to the Mount of Olives to meet the true Messiah. They will do so despite the great danger posed by the deployment of massive antichristian forces in and around Jerusalem as well as in other places in the Middle East. According to the prophecies in Daniel 12 they will know that 3½ years will elapse from the day on which

the false messiah declares himself to be God in the temple, until the day on which the true Messiah will make His appearance. "And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days" (Dan. 12:11). Just prior to the Day of Atonement which will end this period, the remaining Jews will go to the Mount of Olives unarmed and trusting in God's intervention alone.

Despite their anxiety due to the great war of Armageddon raging they will approach Jerusalem. At a certain stage they will despair, fearing that their hope is gone and that they will all be killed. At that critical moment the Messiah will come, and as His feet touch the Mount of Olives it will split in two and the darkness of God's judgements will engulf the enemy forces. The Jews will take refuge from the pursuing forces of the Antichrist in the east to west valley formed by the splitting in two of the mountain.

On that day the Jews will be most surprised to see that their Messiah has marks in His hands, as described by Zechariah. When they see the marks of the nails in the hands of Jesus, they will ask Him: "What are these wounds in your hands?" Then He will answer: "Those with which I was wounded in the house of My friends" (Zech. 13:6). It will be a heart-stirring moment when Israel shows great remorse because of their sins, and particularly the fact that their fathers rejected Him during His first coming. "They will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn" (Zech. 12:10).

Referring to the reconciliation to the remnant of Israel the Lord says: "I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day" (Zech. 3:9). In Zechariah 13:1 it is described as follows: "In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness."

Jesus will accept and comfort the fugitive, tested and mourning remnant of His people by saying: "This is My people!" They will respond to this by saying: "The LORD is my God!" (Zech. 13:9). "And it will be said in that day: Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation. For on this mountain the hand of the LORD will rest" (Is. 25:9-10). "And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Rom. 11:26).

### **The judgement of the nations**

When the Lord Jesus puts His feet on the Mount of Olives the darkness of God's judgements will descend upon the earth. It will also be a physical darkness as it was during the crucifixion of Jesus when it became dark for three hours in the middle of the day:

"It shall come to pass in that day that there will be no light... But at evening time it shall happen that it will be light" (Zech. 14:6-7).

The Lord will strike His enemies with the sword that proceeds from His mouth. He will need only to speak a word in order to bring about their destruction. In the darkness, the forces of the Antichrist will not be able to continue their pursuit of the people of Israel and will also be unable to launch an attack on Christ and His armies. Instead, they will start killing one another:

"For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem... Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east... And this shall be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the people who fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh shall dissolve while they stand on their feet, their eyes shall dissolve in their sockets, and their tongues shall dissolve in their mouths. It shall come to pass in that day that a great panic from the LORD will be among

them. Everyone will seize the hand of his neighbour, and raise his hand against his neighbour's hand" (Zech. 14:2-4, 12-13).

Considering the current bitter hatred of the Arab nations and the increasing hostility of many other nations against Israel, it is not difficult to understand that they will be mobilised for military action by evil spirits which will incite them in their hard and wicked hearts to surround and attack Israel (just as the Arab nations have done more than once since 1948) and also fight against Jesus and His heavenly army. John says that these unclean spirits "are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty... And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon" (Rev. 16:14, 16).

It will be a dark and tragic day for the apostate nations and their armies since, according to Hebrews 10:31, "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

"Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; and the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine. I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. I will make a mortal more rare than fine gold, a man more than the golden wedge of Ophir" (Is. 13:9-12).

"The day of the LORD is coming, for it is at hand: a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness... For the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; who can endure it?" (Joel 2:1-2, 11).

"For behold, in those day and at that time, when I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will enter into judgement with them there on account of My people, My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; they have also divided up My land" (Joel 3:1-2).

### **Destruction of the Antichrist and the false prophet**

The last great target of the Antichrist will be the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and His heavenly armies on the day of His Second Coming. The Antichrist will realise that the coming of Jesus will bring an end to his kingdom, which is why he will use all means at his disposal to oppose and fight the true Messiah. But that will be a totally futile exercise as Jesus is the King of kings who has all power in heaven and on earth. Through this confrontation the Antichrist will expedite his own downfall as well as that of all his followers. It will not be a long and drawn-out battle but a sudden destruction of the enemy forces. The book of Daniel says that this mighty king who conducted a reign of terror on earth "shall come to his end, and no one will help him" (Dan. 11:45).

In Revelation 19:20 it is clearly stated that the Antichrist and the false prophet will both be captured on the day of the Second Coming of Jesus and cast alive into the lake of fire. The place where this confrontation and judgement will occur is most significant from a biblical perspective. According to Joel 3 it will be in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, which is most likely the Kidron Valley between the Mount of Olives and the Temple Mount. *Jehoshaphat* means *The Lord judges*.

The Brook Kidron was in biblical times the eastern boundary of Jerusalem. Its name means *the black brook* because of the dirty wastewater that flowed in it. It was an unsightly area that was also used as a graveyard for the poor. Idols were often destroyed and burned here. Of the God-fearing king Josiah it is said:

“And he brought out the wooden image from the house of the LORD, to the Brook Kidron outside Jerusalem, burned it at the Brook Kidron and ground it to ashes, and threw its ashes on the graves of the common people... And he defiled Tophet, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter pass through the fire to Molech” (2 Kings 23:6, 10).

The Hinnom Valley is overlooked by Mount Zion on the west side of the Old City. The Kidron Valley joins the Hinnom Valley south of the Old City, from where it is referred to as the Fire Valley. The Valley of Hinnom (*ge Hinnom*) is the Valley of the Son of Hinnom. The Tophet was here, where the apostate Israelites sacrificed their children to the idol Molech. Waste from the city was also dumped here and set on fire. Because of the burning waste, and also because of the piles of wood for the sacrifice of children to Molech, the Valley of Hinnom became a symbol of hell. In the Talmud, a Jewish book of religious traditions, it is said that one of the gates of hell is in the Hinnom Valley at a place where smoke ascended from the ground between two palm trees.

Because of these views the name of this valley was in New Testament times changed from *ge Hinnom* to *gehenna*, which means *hell fire* (Mt. 5: 22). God said that the name of this valley will be changed to the Valley of Slaughter:

“Therefore behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when it will no more be called Tophet, or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter, for they will bury in Tophet until there is no room. The corpses of this people will be food for the birds of heaven and for the beasts of the earth. And no one will frighten them away” (Jer. 7:32-33).

This valley became synonymous with a place of death, perdition, being consumed by worms, and burning; that is why the name for hell (*gehenna*) is derived from it. Isaiah also refers to the awful fate of the people who rebelled against God:

“And they shall go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh” (Is. 66:24).

The valleys of Kidron and Hinnom will, on the day of the Second Coming of Jesus, be filled with enemy forces as this region will be the place of encounter between a heavenly army and the armies of the Antichrist. It is significant that the two great end-time idols, the Antichrist and the false prophet, will also be judged and condemned to the lake of fire here. When they move up to the Mount of Olives in a vain effort to confront the One who has all power in heaven and on earth, they will find themselves in the Valley of Judgement where their final doom will be sealed.

### **The binding of Satan**

After the enemies of God have been defeated and the Antichrist, the false prophet and their followers have been judged, the devil will be imprisoned and kept securely in custody for a thousand years, after which he will instigate his last rebellion:

“And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season” (Rev. 20:1-3 KJV).

The description of the binding of the devil is an extension of the scenario of Revelation 19 and is therefore a direct result of the return of Jesus. It follows immediately after the final judgement of the Antichrist and the

false prophet, and is therefore not an event that can be extracted from this context and applied to the present dispensation of the church.

At the cross, victory was indeed gained over the devil. His doom was sealed there but its execution was deferred. We can accept this fact in faith and lead a life of victory over the enemy. But that does not mean that Satan was removed from the scene after Calvary and imprisoned somewhere. On the contrary! Peter says that the devil still goes around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he can devour (1 Pet. 5:8). This warning is given to Christians so that they may remain sober, watchful and clad in the whole armour of God. We can live in the victory of Calvary if we consistently stay near to our Saviour and resist the Evil One in the power of the Holy Spirit:

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (Jas. 4:7 KJV).

The peace of God that we, as saved ones, experience, does not suggest that we are already in the millennial age (the thousand years of peace when Christ will reign on earth). The present battle with the devil and his evil powers can in no way be reconciled with a situation in which he is *bound, shut up and sealed so that he cannot mislead the nations*, as described in Revelation 20. We do not yet find ourselves in a position where peace reigns. Instead, we are involved in a spiritual battle that extends right through the dispensation of the church and will take on unprecedented proportions in the coming tribulation period (Jn. 16:33). Satan will incite the nations to take military action, attack Israel and even confront the Messiah and His heavenly armies.

It is only on Christ's return that the power of the satanic triumvirate will be destroyed. Two of them, the beast and the false prophet, will be confined to the lake of fire. The dragon (Satan) will be sealed up in a bottomless pit and given over to chains of darkness, where he is to remain for a literal one thousand years.

### **The throne of glory**

The Lord Jesus describes the judgement of the nations when, on His return, He will sit on His throne of glory:

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats” (Mt. 25:31-32).

This judgement of the nations by Christ will be accompanied by an international re-arrangement. The nations will, among others, be given their position or forfeit it on the grounds of their past relationship with Israel. The nations will not, as in the Babylonian world order of the Antichrist, any longer eradicate national boundaries and play down their ethnic identity. When the terror of the Lord comes upon them at Armageddon “every man will turn to his own people, and everyone will flee to his land” (Is. 13:14).

### **The wedding feast of the Lamb**

During His secret coming before the tribulation, Jesus will be united with His bride. She will immediately be caught up to be with the Lord. Now, seven years later, the public revelation of Jesus and His bride will take place. The glorious occasion of the marriage feast of the Lamb will be the venue for many guests. They will include the remnant of Israel who will very recently have accepted Jesus as their Messiah. John heard the heavenly company exclaim:

“Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the



saints. Then he said to me, Write: Blessed *are* those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb! And he said to me: These are the true sayings of God” (Rev. 19:7-9).

The splendour of this occasion is described as followed in the psalms:

“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. A sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Your kingdom... All Your garments are scented with myrrh and aloes and cassia, out of ivory palaces, by which they have made You glad. Kings’ daughters are among Your honourable women; at Your right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir... The royal daughter is all glorious within the palace; her clothing is woven with gold. She shall be brought to the King in robes of many colours... With gladness and rejoicing they shall be brought; they shall enter the King’s palace” (Ps. 45:6-15).

With His Second Coming, the bride will share in the crowning moment of the great triumph of Christ when He returns to the earth as King of kings and Lord of lords to crush the power of all His enemies, and establish a government of righteousness in which His servants will reign with Him.

## 18. Christ’s Reign of Peace

*(Revelation 20)*

In Revelation 20, the millennial reign of Christ is mentioned six times:

“Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.

“And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgement was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

“But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years. Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison” (Rev. 20:1-7).

When the Lord Jesus comes back to earth it will be as King of kings and Lord of lords. He will set up a government for the whole world with Jerusalem as capital:

“Then the seventh angel sounded. And there were loud voices in heaven, saying: The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!” (Rev. 11:15).

In a major end-time prophecy Daniel likened Christ's Second Coming to a great rock which will smite the kingdoms of the world, grind them to powder, then become a great mountain filling the whole earth as He

reigns in their place (Dan. 2:34-35, 44-45). Zechariah says: "And the LORD shall be King over all the earth" (Zech. 14:9). The same promise about His reigning as King on earth was made to Mary before the birth of Jesus:

"And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David" (Lk. 1:31-32).

The throne of David is not in heaven but on earth. Jesus does not now reign in a spiritual sense from the throne of David as this throne has, since the Babylonian captivity, been temporarily in suspension. Christ will restore this throne at His Second Coming and then reign from it:

"After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen down. I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up, so that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the LORD who does all these things" (Acts 15:16-17).

The elders around the throne in heaven (the glorified church) know that they will return with Jesus to the earth and will reign here with Him in His kingdom. They explicitly say:

"You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; **and we shall reign on the earth**" (Rev. 5:9-10 emphasis added; also see 2 Tim. 2:12).

It is therefore clearly evident that the events of Revelation coincide with a strong proclamation of the Kingship of Christ:

"Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren... has been cast down... he knows that he has a short time" (Rev. 12:10, 12).

When Jesus, our High Priest who now intercedes for us at the throne of the Father, returns to earth, the power and influence of Satan here will be broken and the kingdom of Christ established. The Devil will then no longer be the *ruler* and *god* of this present evil world (Jn. 14:30; 2 Cor. 4:4; Gal. 1:4; 1 Jn. 5:19), but Christ as "King will reign in righteousness" as "Ruler in Israel", and "have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth" (Is. 32:1; Mic. 5:2; Ps. 72:8).

A further proof that the millennial reign is not in heaven is that in this future dispensation there will still be inherent carnality and disorderliness among the nations, which will necessitate that they be ruled with a strong hand. Although the devil will be bound and prohibited from deceiving the nations to commit rebellious deeds, they will still have a fallen nature that needs to be disciplined. In Revelation 12:5 and 19:15 it is plainly stated that Christ will rule the nations with a rod of iron. About this kingdom He said to His faithful servants:

"Hold fast what you have till I come. And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations – He shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the potter's vessels shall be broken to pieces – as I also have received from My Father" (Rev. 2: 25-27, quoting Ps. 2:9).

The Lord God (Yahweh) declares in Psalm 2:6: "I have set My King on my holy hill of Zion." During the Messianic reign the throne of the Lord Jesus in Jerusalem will represent heavenly rule and therefore be a centre of divine wisdom, power, authority and righteousness. Isaiah says:

“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD’S house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say: Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (Is. 2:2-4; also see Is. 24:23 and Zech. 8:22).

A situation such as this, in which no wars are waged, no military training is done and no weapons are manufactured, has never ever before prevailed on earth. It can only apply to a future reign of peace. Since the devil will be bound during the thousand year reign of Christ he will be unable to deceive the nations, and there will be neither violence nor warfare. Other forms of sin will also vanish and the whole world will recognise and practise the Christian religion exclusively. Even the animal creation will benefit and predation will cease:

“They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Is. 11:9).

Jerusalem will spontaneously be recognised by all peoples as world capital, and no hostility or political tension will prevail between individual nations:

“At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the LORD, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem; no more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts” (Jer. 3:17).

Laxity will be the only form of misconduct that will occur as some nations will neglect their duties to serve the Lord as they should. It will still be a matter of “the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak” (Mt. 26:41). Their neglect will give rise to rebukes from the King and punitive measures:

“And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, on them there will be no rain” (Zech. 14:16-17).

During this time there will be an unsaved remnant of the nations on earth who will be mortal people of flesh and blood. Due to their sinful nature they will still have to be saved to truly belong to the Lord Jesus. According to Zechariah 14:16-17 they will survive the great tribulation and the battle of Armageddon. Although they did not receive the number of the Antichrist they also do not belong to Christ until they have received Him as their Saviour. To evangelise these nations will be the task of the Jewish evangelists of Israel who will also be mortal but saved people. They will gather a harvest for the kingdom of God among all nations:

“Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit” (Is. 27:6).

The doctrine of the two resurrections is also clearly related to the millennium. Only those who have part in the first resurrection (Lk. 14:14; 1 Thes. 4:16), including those saved during the tribulation period, will rule with Christ. We should exert ourselves to be quite sure we have been saved and truly born-again so as to qualify for the first resurrection:

“Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years” (Rev. 20:6).

The rest of the dead are the unsaved multitude of all centuries, and they will not be resurrected until the thousand years have ended (Rev. 20:5). They will then appear before the great white throne to be judged and condemned to the eternal lake of fire.

### **Characteristics of the millennial reign**

Remembering the words of the prayer the Lord Jesus taught us, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven", the following are the most important characteristics of the future reign of peace on earth:

- God will rule on earth through His King of kings, Jesus Christ. A theocratic world government will, therefore, be established (Lk. 1:31-33; Rev. 19:15; Dan. 7:13-14).
- The throne of Christ will be in Jerusalem and the restored Israel will be the hub of the world (Ps. 2:6-12; Zech. 8:22; Is. 2:2-3; 24:23; 33:17, 20-22; Dan. 7:27). His government will be characterised by righteousness and equity (Is. 1:26-27; 32:1-2, 16-17; Jer. 23:5-6).
- Israel's capital, Jerusalem, "the city of our God", "the city of the great King", will be the centre of worship for the whole world and all nations will converge there to worship God through Christ the King of kings (Ps. 48; Zech. 14:16-20; Is. 66:18-23).
- The saved remnant of Israel will rejoice in the Lord and evangelise the entire world (Is. 12:3-6; 27:6; 40:9; 51:11). They will make the world fruitful (Is. 27:6) and God will be honoured (Is. 28:5; Zech. 8:20-23).
- Satan will be securely bound so that he cannot deceive the nations (Rev. 20:1-4).
- Peace will prevail everywhere upon earth. The nations will no longer engage in war or in military training (Is. 2:4; 9:7; Mic. 5:4-5; Hos. 2:18).
- The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Is. 11:9-10; Hab. 2:14).
- There will be no disease (Mal. 4:2; Is. 33:24).
- People will live healthily and actively to a great age – like the antediluvians. A 100-year-old person will be regarded as a child (Is. 65:20-23).
- Nature will greatly benefit since the curse of Genesis 3:17-19 will be lifted and the whole of creation, which since then has been groaning, will be set free from the bondage of corruption into glorious liberty (Rom. 8:19-22; Is. 55:12-13; Joel 3:18).
- An agricultural or horticultural way of life is indicated and the earth will produce food so prolifically that planting the next crop will take place before the previous one has been fully harvested! (Mic. 4:3-4; Amos 9:13-15; Is. 65:21-23; Ps. 65:9-13).
- Harmony will also prevail in the animal kingdom. The lion will lie down with the lamb and eat straw like an ox because the Lord will make a new covenant with the animals that will change the physiology and aggressive nature of the carnivorous predators into the physiology and gentle nature of the herbivores (Is. 11:6-9; 65:25; Hos. 2:18).

## Israel's position in the Millennium

Israel's position during the coming Messianic era is frequently described in the Old Testament where it is specifically related to *the day of the Lord*. It will be a time of great blessing, abundance, joy in the Lord and peace on earth. Israel will fulfil its original destiny and potential as a people of God and be a nation through whom He will bless the whole earth. Paul says of them:

“Now if their fall *is* riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! ... For if their being cast away *is* the reconciling of the world, what *will* their acceptance *be* but life from the dead?” (Rom. 11:12, 15).

Through Israel's fall, by rejecting and crucifying the Messiah, the gospel of reconciliation with God has been offered not only to Jews but to Gentiles also. What a tremendous blessing that is to the Gentiles! How much more will Israel be a blessing to the world in the Millennium as they proclaim Messiah's praises among all nations! This will be the long-delayed, but grand consummation of this unique nation's destiny and calling as the chosen people of God. The following are examples of promises about Israel's restoration and glory in the coming Messianic era:

“And I will bring again the captivity of My people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit *them*... And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them” (Amos 9:14-15).

“Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city” (Is. 52:1 KJV).

“Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising” (Is. 60:1-3 KJV).

“And they shall rebuild the old ruins, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the ruined cities, the desolations of many generations. Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the foreigner *shall* be your ploughmen and your vine-dressers. But you shall be named the Priests of the LORD, *men* shall call you the Servants of our God. You shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory you shall boast. Instead of your shame *you shall have* double *honour*, and *instead of* confusion they shall rejoice in their portion. Therefore in their land they shall possess double; everlasting joy shall be theirs. “For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery for burnt offering; I will direct their work in truth, and will make with them an everlasting covenant. Their descendants shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people. All who see them shall acknowledge them, that they *are* the posterity *whom* the LORD has blessed” (Is. 61:4-9).

“And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they all shall know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jer. 31:34 KJV).

“And David my servant *shall be* king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in My judgments, and observe My statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob My servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, *even* they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and My servant David *shall be* their prince for ever. Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be My

people. And the [nations] shall know that I the LORD do sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore” (Ezek. 37:24-28 KJV).

“And it shall be in that day, *that* living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be. And the LORD shall be king over all the earth” (Zech. 14:8-9 KJV).

“Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment” (Is. 32:1 KJV).

“I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for Mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon” (Hos. 14:4-6 KJV).

“For there shall be a day, *that* the watchmen upon the mount Ephraim shall cry, Arise ye, and let us go up to Zion unto the LORD our God. For thus saith the LORD; Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations: [proclaim] ye, praise ye, and say, O LORD, save Thy people, the remnant of Israel... Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: ...*this shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days... I will put My law in their [minds], and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Jer. 31:6-7, 31, 33 KJV).

“Behold, I will bring it [the city] health and cure, and I will cure them, and will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth. And I will cause the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel to return, and will build them, as at the first. And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against Me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against Me. And it shall be to Me a name of joy, a praise and an honour before all nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do unto them; and they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it” (Jer. 33:6-9 KJV).

“...ye that make mention of the LORD, keep not silence, and give Him no rest, till He establish, and till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth” (Is. 62:6-7 KJV).

These and many other blessings will be characteristic of the Millennium when the Messiah will reign from the throne of David in Jerusalem. His glorified church will rule with Him and righteousness and equity will prevail on earth (Is. 32:1; Ps. 98: 9; Is. 11:4; Rev. 20:6b). Israel will play a leading part in world affairs and will be God’s special representative nation among all the nations of the world.

### **Three proofs that Millennium is future**

Irrefutable evidence that the millennial dispensation is still future is provided by the following three very distinctive features of the Millennium which still await literal fulfilment:

#### ***Unfulfilled prophecies of Israel’s blessings***

Divine prophecies of Israel being re-gathered to their land, spiritually revived, elevated above all nations and abundantly blessed (Deut. 28:1-14, 30:1-4; Ezek. 36:24-28; Is. 60:1-22; Hos. 14:5-8; Rom. 11:26-27) have *never* been fulfilled. On the contrary, no nation has suffered and survived anything like the prolonged world-wide dispersion, disdain, persecution, hatred and genocide which the people of Israel have during the past two millennia. God’s promises never fail – they will be honoured in the Millennium.

***A literal 1000 years!***

The amillennialist claim that the six-fold mention in Revelation 20 of “a thousand years” represents the Christian era of circa 2000 years is untenable. Without doubt it is still future and will be *literally* fulfilled, just as the prophecy of the Babylonian captivity of 70 years was *literally* fulfilled (Jer. 25: 11-12). A thousand year reign of Christ would have ended circa AD 1033, followed by Judgement day!

***The binding of Satan***

At Christ’s appearance the devil will be bound so “that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled” (Rev. 20:3). We know from Job 2:1-6 that Satan is ultimately limited by the supreme authority of God and can only act within the restrictions imposed on him. According to amillennialists Satan is bound and Messiah has been reigning as Prince of Peace for the past 2000 years! If those years are regarded to have been peaceful we may well ask, what on earth will happen after Satan’s release? If Satan is indeed bound in prison why are we warned against his devices (2 Cor. 2:11), subtle deception (2 Cor. 11: 3), wiles (Eph. 6:11), fiery darts (Eph. 6:16), temptation (1 Cor. 7:5), snares (1 Tim. 3:7), power (Acts 26:18), persecution (Rev. 2:10) and efforts to devour us? (1 Pet. 5:8).

**Kingdom-now theology**

One of the major reasons for the theological confusion and apostasy in the end-time church is its lack of dispensational discernment. Prophecies about a future kingdom on earth are allegorised, or spiritualised and applied to the church. In that way, the Millennium is equated with the church age and Christians feel justified in developing and practising kingdom theology. The door has thereby been opened for the following heresies to be brought into the church:

***Dominion theology***

It is asserted that we should rule as kings, even as little gods, and take control over the world *now*. Because of the authority vested in us we have the power to change things in the material *and* spiritual realms by our words – called *positive confession* or *word of faith*. Christians will soon occupy leadership positions in politics and other areas of public life, thereby obtaining the authority to legislate for society in accordance with Christian principles.

**Comment:** Dominion theology is derived from the promise that we will rule with Christ in the Millennium (Rev. 5:10; 20:1-6). People who wrongly assume that we are in the Millennium *now*, mistakenly try to live up to their claim to be *kings*.

***The pulling down of satanic strongholds***

It is claimed that the authority vested in us in this present *kingdom* era empowers Christians to engage in strategic spiritual warfare against the kingdom of darkness, pulling down evil strongholds, binding Satan and stripping him of his power. Peter Wagner, George Otis, *Marches for Jesus*, etc., promote this practice globally, claiming to liberate cities, regions and even entire countries from demonic bondage.

**Comment:** The devil will only be bound at the Second Coming of Christ when the millennial age begins. It is highly presumptuous to argue that we can bind the devil now and deprive him of his territory in this present evil age of which he is “the god” (2 Cor. 4:4). Demons can only be cast out of *individuals* now, not from geographical areas!

### *Christian reconstruction of the world*

Proponents of kingdom theology have a vision to reconstruct, or transform, the world in accordance with Christian principles. They advocate a process of social, political, moral and religious transformation aimed at creating a peaceful and just Christian world. They argue that when they have achieved this vision by preaching a mixture of the true gospel with politico-social reform, then the kingdom will have come – even before the King comes!

**Comment:** In the Millennium, spiritual deception, war, violence, injustice and immorality will indeed vanish from the scene (Jer. 3:17). However, we are not in the Millennium *now*, but in an evil world which is strongly influenced by Satan (Acts 26:18; Eph. 6:12). Sadly, most people are on the broad way to hell and prefer darkness to light (Jn. 3:19).

### *Prosperity gospel*

Many Christians get carried away by the promises of economic abundance during the Millennium and jump to the unfounded conclusion that these promises are intended for the church age. They proclaim a prosperity gospel of *name it and claim it*, and suggest that all who have a strong faith should be very prosperous and free of any problems or hardships in life. If you are sick, disabled, bed-ridden, poor, unemployed and without a big house and large car of your own, your faith must be very weak!

**Comment:** Economic abundance will indeed characterise the Millennium (Amos 9:13-14). However, in the present age we have to be content with what we have (1 Tim. 6:8), not strive for material riches (Lk. 12:15) but prepared to be poor (2 Cor. 6:10; Jas. 2:5); and to suffer for Christ (Phil. 1:29).

### *Signs and wonders*

The advocates of *kingdom theology* say that we should demonstrate our superior spiritual powers by performing great signs and wonders – including sensational healing miracles. Even the most weird, mystical manifestations such as hysterical laughter, jerking, falling down when “zapped”, making animal noises, and being “drunk in the Spirit”, are irreverently ascribed to the activity of the Holy Spirit.

**Comment:** The signs and wonders of the last days are explicitly associated with false prophets (Mt. 24:11, 24). They are paving the way for the appearance of the Antichrist, whose coming will be “after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders” (2 Thes. 2:9). Biblical truth is not the norm, but new and dramatic experiences.

### *Uniting the world*

*Kingdom theology* is aimed at the ecumenical unification of the world church in preparation for the coming of the King. Theologians and church leaders with this mindset advocate a global new world order of unity and peace. This is a human-centred theology of creating a humanistic kingdom on earth before the coming of Christ. Ecumenicalists are devoted to social, political and economic change in the world, working hand-in-hand with New Age leaders.

**Comment:** The united world church mentioned in the Bible is described as an apostate organisation representing all the false religions. This body is identified as “Mystery, Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth” (Rev. 17:5). The true church of Christ cannot enter into an association with non-Christian religions – nor with “false brethren” within the professing church.



## **The true Millennium**

Let us eagerly expect the true Millennium that will commence *after* the coming of the King, Jesus Christ. Only He can save the remnant of Israel and of the nations (Zech. 12:10; Mt. 24:30-31), bind and incarcerate the devil (Rev. 20:1-3), restore the throne of David (Acts 2:29-30) and change everything on earth for the better. If we are prepared to suffer now and serve the Lord in the face of much opposition (Acts 14:22), we will accompany Him during His triumphant return (Zech. 14:4-5) and reign with Him on earth (2 Tim. 2:12).

The deceivers and false prophets who are striving to establish a humanistic Utopia on earth *before* the coming of the King, are exerting themselves in a futile effort to achieve an unattainable humanist dream. There are conditions on earth that we simply cannot change before Jesus comes again! Instead we have a thrilling expectation for the future at His coming – we will not only escape the great tribulation by the rapture (Rev. 3:10), but return seven years later to rule with Him during His millennial reign! (Rev. 5:9-10).

Above all, the most important thing about the millennial reign is that our Lord Jesus will be completely vindicated and glorified on this very earth upon which He walked so graciously, so humbly and so self-sacrificially *and* where He was so disgracefully humiliated, despised and rejected by men and so cruelly treated as worthless by the fallen creatures whom He, as Creator, had made. God's answer to this is that at the name of Jesus *every* knee shall bow, and *every* tongue confess Him to be Lord (Phil. 2:6-11).

Jesus will also be vindicated in the eyes of that very nation which was so very honoured by His first coming, yet so dismally failed and sinned in that they did not recognise Him as their true Messiah, despite His clear fulfilment of their Scriptures. Pilate's inscription above the cross *will* be vindicated and fulfilled in that Jesus will reign not only as THE KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS universally, but also as KING OF THE JEWS (Mk. 15:26) in Jerusalem!

# **19. The Final Judgement and the New Creation**

*(Revelation 20-22)*

The reason why the devil will not be cast into the lake of fire together with the Antichrist and the false prophet is that he will be used as a catalyst to make manifest the latent evil in unsaved people at the end of the millennium. They will then reveal their true character, which will clearly distinguish them from the saved people.

The shocking fact is that even in the dispensation of the kingdom, when Christ will publicly and visibly rule from the throne of David in a government of righteousness, millions of people will proceed with their lifeless form of godliness without complying with Christ's command to be born again. In the history of mankind those who, spiritually, chose the narrow way were always a minority group, referred to as a remnant. The same phenomenon will repeat itself in the millennium. When the deceiver of the nations is released from his thousand year bondage in the bottomless pit the latent evil in people will immediately be activated into sinful deeds of rebellion against God. The carnal nature of unsaved people will be drawn to the devil like pins to a magnet and sinful deeds will proliferate in a short space of time. Of this time, John writes:

“Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Rev. 20:7-10).

After the millennium, ending with Satan’s final rebellion against God, a great white throne will appear in heaven. The second resurrection will then take place, when all people who lived and died without Christ will be resurrected to stand before God at that awesome throne of final judgement, where they will be condemned to eternal death. The narrow way and the broad way (Mt. 7:13-14) will then each reach its ultimate destination – the one in the new Jerusalem with its pearly gates and golden streets, and the other one in hell:

“And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:15).

Please note that the lake of fire is a literal place of torment and that it will exist forever. The Lord Jesus often referred to the eternal abode of the wicked (See Mt. 10:28; 13:40-42; 25:41, 46).

### **The new heaven and new earth**

The book of Revelation concludes with a description of God’s new creation. During the final judgement the earth will be burned up, the heavens will pass away and the elements melt with fervent heat (2 Pet. 3:19). A new heaven and a new earth will be created. The new Jerusalem, that wonderful city which Jesus prepared for those who love Him, will descend from heaven from God, having the glory of God, and rest upon the new earth.

The city and its streets are built of pure and transparent gold. The foundation stones of the wall are decorated with precious jewels that vary from crystal clear stones to deep red sardius, green chrysolite and sparkling blue sapphire. In the high walls that surround the city are twelve gates made of pearls – each gate is a single pearl. The idea of a tear is conveyed by a pearl, since its formation is associated with pain and suffering. When the oyster is injured, a shiny pearl is formed in the wound. When the feet and hands of Jesus Christ were pierced by the rough nails and He gave His life on the cross, the gates of paradise were again opened to fallen humanity. On the merit of His tears and suffering He became a precious pearl to us, which in itself is a gateway to the new Jerusalem. Through Him we can enter into the kingdom of heaven and delight ourselves in the glory of the Lord.

### **Preparation**

After the reader has been given a glimpse of the new heaven and the new earth in Revelation 22, his attention is drawn back to the present. Equipped with new insight into the glorious destination of all Christians, as well as the terrible eternal abode of the wicked, the reader is challenged with the need for a genuine commitment of faith in Jesus on his part. It is also expected of us to be blameless in holiness at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thes. 3:13). We are clearly called to a life of dedication, godliness and separation from the present evil world:

“And he said to me: Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand. He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still. And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward *is* with Me to give to every one according to his work” (Rev. 22:10-12).

The Lord again reminds us that we are not to follow the pattern of Babylonian thinking of unity at all costs. This ideology teaches people to go along with anything that comes their way, and to accommodate all religions and their non-Christian traditions. In our dispensation, which is characterised by the presence of two opposing spiritual forces, the ideal of global unity is not feasible. We should rather, because of our faith in the Lord Jesus, be prepared for greater polarisation against an evil world. Such an attitude calls for spiritual as well as moral non-conformity to the mainstream of the permissive and corrupt life-styles that are the order of the day.

You cannot compromise and revert to the sinful practises and ideologies of this world that is in the power of the Evil One. Follow the straight and narrow road all the way. Do not deviate from God's principles and do not become overwhelmed when the world, as well as the compromising, worldly churches, turn their backs on you. Jesus warned His disciples against persecution and rejection by the world (Jn. 15:18-19; 16:33).

Nominal Christians who compromise with the world, will obviously not be reproached and persecuted. But in the end they will pay dearly for this temporary advantage when the Lord will refuse to accept their self-styled form of Christianity (Mt. 7:21-23). Friendship with the world is emphatically branded as enmity against God (Jas. 4:4; 1 Jn. 2:15-17). Therefore, no bridges should be built between the two ideologies and life-styles.

You are invited at this very moment, even should the tribulation already have begun, to turn from the pathway of darkness and iniquity to the Saviour, Jesus Christ. To everyone who truly wants to be saved, the Lord says:

“And let him who thirsts come. And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17).

Do not delay your decision, but go down on your knees and confess your sins to Jesus Christ. He promises that those who come to Him, He will in no way cast out (Jn. 6:37). He waits for you now:

“Come now, and let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Is. 1:18).

The Lord pardons abundantly. (Is. 55:7) Even if you have backslidden time and again, you can still have the confidence to return to the Lord. Do not allow the devil to prevent your salvation or spiritual restoration with the idea that your sins are too many, too awful or even be unpardonable. These are some of his many lies! Confess everything to the Lord and accept 1 John 1:9 as the promise of complete forgiveness and salvation: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:9).

Testify to others about your faith and take a public stand for Christ (Rom. 10:9-10), even though it may bring persecution. Do not be ashamed to acknowledge your Redeemer, and do not keep quiet about the great things He has done for you. Read the first epistle of Peter, and rejoice even in the suffering you have to undergo because of your faith. The hardships in this hostile world do not weigh up against the eternal glory that is shortly to be revealed to us (2 Cor. 4:16 – 5:1). Time is so short that not a moment should be wasted if you are to get into a right relationship with the Lord. What you do *now*, or neglect to do, will be decisive for your eternal destiny.

At the conclusion of Revelation the assurance is given that, if we have been reconciled with God through the blood of the Lamb, the Holy Spirit will bring a deep longing for the return of Jesus in our hearts. The Spirit and the bride call on the heavenly Bridegroom: *Come, Lord Jesus!* His response to this is: *Surely I come quickly!* (Rev. 22:17, 20). Are you prepared for His coming?

## The Bright Morning Star

In Revelation 22:16 the Lord says: “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star.”

Jesus is the Root and Offspring of David. As the Root of David His Deity is asserted – He is David's Lord! As the Offspring of David His Manhood is involved (Lk. 20:41-44). He is the promised Messiah who was born from the house of David in the tribe of Judah – the seed of Abraham through whom all the nations would be blessed.

In Deuteronomy 18:15 Moses also referred to this great Prophet who would be raised up in Israel. Through the centuries Satan hated and persecuted Israel because of the promises made to them about the coming Messiah. Religious leaders with insight understood the true reasons for the spiritual and physical attacks against Israel and committed themselves to the struggle against the forces of darkness. They realised the worthiness of bearing the reproach of Messiah and of suffering for a cause which has long-term spiritual benefits for humanity. For unselfish service of this nature God will reward them in eternity. Moses chose “rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ [the Messiah] greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he looked to the reward” (Heb. 11:25-26).

As the Bright Morning Star Jesus Himself is the promise of a new day that will dawn over this troubled world. The morning star is visible only during the latter part of the night – just before and heralding the dawn. The darkest hour is often just before dawn. It is still night now and the world is sinking ever deeper into moral and spiritual darkness. The true believers will meet Jesus as the Morning Star during the rapture in the fourth night watch of this dark dispensation. The darkest part of the night will then ensue on earth under the evil reign of the Antichrist. With His Second Coming Jesus will, as prophesied, “arise” as “The Sun of Righteousness... with healing in His wings” (Mal. 4:2), dispelling all darkness and usher in His millennial reign as Prince of Peace, King of kings and Lord of lords!

## 20. A Strategy for Survival

It is necessary to offer a Biblical strategy for spiritual survival in the tribulation period to those who will not be ready to meet the heavenly Bridegroom, and will consequently be left behind. In the light of what has already been said in these messages, only concise statements will be made and advice given on the proper actions to be taken. The main purpose with the strategy is to indicate to people how they can *spiritually* survive and ensure that they get to heaven despite the most gruesome tribulation and deception that they will have to face during the Antichrist's reign of terror.

The question is: What will happen after the rapture and what can the unfortunate ones who remained behind do to spiritually survive the world-wide dictatorship of the Antichrist? The Bible has clear answers to these and other questions. It will guide those who have been left behind to work out a proper plan of action. If biblical instructions are carefully followed, people *can* still be saved during the tribulation period and ensure that they inherit the kingdom of heaven.

However, it will not be easy to find the way to eternal life through the narrow gate during this time. Apart from the basic requirement of repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus as Saviour (Acts 20:21), a very high

price, involving self-denial, economic impoverishment and public scorn and rejection, will have to be paid. Counting the cost of becoming a Christian will also include the willingness to die as a martyr for your faith.

Although many people will accept this challenge in order to obtain eternal life, the majority will, to their everlasting ruin, choose the easier way out of the dilemma. The spiritual deception of the Antichrist's alliance of world religions will be so strong that millions of people will be swept into it.

The tribulation period will comprise two periods of 3½ years, which can be distinguished from one another as follows:

FALSE PEACE (3½ years)	GREAT TRIBULATION (3½ years)
<b>The Antichrist is revealed as prince of peace. He bases his global leadership position on political, religious and economic structures.</b>	The Antichrist desecrates the temple, abolishes the sacrificial service and declares himself as God. Israel abrogate their covenant with him.
<b>The New World Order with its universal government and world Peace Force is instituted, and greatly strengthens the alliance of world religions.</b>	The alliance of world religions (the false world church) is destroyed and replaced by the compulsory worship of the Antichrist as God.
<b>The Antichrist concludes a covenant with Israel as their Messiah. All other religions accept and worship him in this capacity.</b>	Severe persecution is instigated against Jews and Christians who refuse to worship the Antichrist as God. They are convicted and executed.
<b>The third temple is erected in Jerusalem next to the Islamic mosque. The lie is proclaimed that all religions worship the same God.</b>	The Antichrist becomes sole ruler and military dictator. He controls a cashless world economy by means of computerised 666 related numbers.
<b>Babylon is rebuilt in Iraq as the New Age capital and symbol of world unity. A temporary economic recovery and a false peace prevails on earth.</b>	An unprecedented death-toll is caused by wars, pestilences and natural disasters. Military mobilisation for the battle of Armageddon occurs.

### **A marriage between religion and politics**

One of the most conspicuous aspects of the Antichrist's reign will be the close association between religion and politics. He will right from the outset combine these two offices and concurrently be the head of a world government and universal messiah. His co-ruler will be the false prophet who will be heading the alliance of world religions. He will seduce the members of all religions to honour the beast and worship him as their messiah (Rev. 13:12). The religious cloak of the Antichrist will render him a deceiver of the masses such as this world has never known before. He will present himself as an angel of light – a messenger of God who has come to bring real peace, unity and reconciliation to mankind. Jesus strongly warned against this kind of deception that will be perpetrated in His name: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many" (Mt. 24:4-5; see also verse 11).

### **Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb**

Much more than resistance to the Antichrist and his ideologies will be needed to survive spiritually during the time of the tribulation. The blood of the Lamb of God that was shed to atone for the sins of a lost world will still be the only basis for salvation (Eph. 1:7; 1 Jn. 1:7-2:2; 1 Pet. 1:18-19). You will have to confess your sins to the

Lord and also forsake them (Prov. 28:13). Accept His forgiveness in faith, become spiritually renewed (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 5:17) and experience deliverance from the power of sin (Jn. 8:36). Witness to other people about your salvation (Rom. 10:9-10) and your unconditional commitment to the Lord Jesus. Have fellowship with other Christians and encourage one another to persevere despite the daunting prospects and dangers.

### **144 000 saved Jews**

A great outpouring of the Holy Spirit will occur among Jews: "And I will pour on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced" (Zech. 12:10).

Right at the beginning of the tribulation a group of 144 000 Jews will be saved (Rev. 7:1-8). Endued with the power of the Holy Spirit, they will boldly proclaim that Jesus Christ (Yeshua Ha Mashiach) is the only true Messiah of Israel *and* the whole world. Their testimony will immediately bring them into direct conflict with the followers of the false messiah, whose deceit will be exposed by the Messianic Jews. Persecution of the followers of the true Messiah will commence with great fury, but the Lord will protect and keep them (Mt. 24:15-22; Rev. 12:14).

Christians who are newly saved, must associate with the Messianic Jews and support them despite the risk of persecution. Regard it as the very last chance to do something for the extension of the Lord's kingdom on earth. Do not be drawn into the structures of the false church of that time (i.e. the alliance of world religions) and in that way give credibility to the false messiah who was sent by the 'angel of light' (2 Cor. 11:13-15).

### **Persecution of Christians**

The nature of the persecution of Christians will take different forms in the two halves of the tribulation period. The first 3½ years will be characterised by a *false peace and unity*, while the last 3½ years are aptly described as a *great tribulation*. During the first half the Antichrist will rule in association with other leaders, and also handle religious affairs in consultation with the leaders of the alliance of world religions. Force will be used, but not excessively so, and only with the consent of his co-rulers. Milder methods of intimidation, bribery, deception and brainwashing will be employed to gain wider support. When the use of force is necessitated, an international Peace Force will be commissioned to discipline the opponents of the New World Order. They will be branded as rebels whose actions and beliefs constitute a major threat to world peace and unity.

An extensive propaganda campaign and psychological war will be waged against the fundamental Christians who only worship the true Messiah, Jesus Christ, and explicitly dissociate themselves from the alliance of world religions. They will be hated and condemned by all nations and also by the powerful united religions organisation of the false messiah.

The following scenario of the persecution of Christians will progressively manifest during the tribulation period. Initially, the fundamental Christians will experience hatred, rejection and intimidation. With the passing of time, pressure against them will mount and culminate in a campaign of extermination:

"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another... But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Mt. 24:9-14). "...yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me" (Jn. 16:2-3).

The Christians of the tribulation must refrain from compromising in any way whatsoever. Be among those who refute the kingdom of the beast, and instead proclaim the gospel of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Be prepared to die as a martyr for your faith and never shrink from the implications of your decision: "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Mt. 10:28).

### **Guidelines for a strategy**

In order to achieve the maximum advantage for the kingdom of God, it is important to follow the right approach from the very beginning of the tribulation. Guard against the tendency to live a life of self-interest in which you only pursue the economic survival of your family and yourself. Not one Christian will physically survive the tribulation, and should never regard the challenge of economic and physical survival, including going into hiding, as major objectives. The following are guidelines for a sensible strategy:

- You are commissioned to resist the Antichrist and, like Daniel's three friends, not to bow the knee before the modern king of Babylon. Warn as many people as possible against the deception and spiritual dangers of recognising the false messiah. Collaborate with other true Christians to organise an awareness campaign against the dangers of deception and compromise.
- Do not make futile attempts to dethrone the Antichrist or to promote your endangered national interests. The tribulation is the hour of darkness, and to its leader will be given authority over every tribe, tongue and nation" (Rev. 13:7). Warn people against being loyal to or of compromising with this deceiver and dictator, and encourage them to be prepared to pay the highest price for their faith in the true Messiah.
- Do not take foolish risks, which may, at an early stage, lead to your arrest, imprisonment or execution. Try to stay out of reach of the Antichrist and his forces for as long as possible. Guard against their treacherous methods to get information about the movements and whereabouts of Christians. They will most definitely also plant informants among the true believers to spy on them. Daniel says that "many shall join with them by intrigue" (Dan. 11:34). Make very sure about a person's testimony of salvation and do not reveal unnecessary information to newcomers.
- As in the time of the early church, Christians should assist one another to survive economically. Sell your fixed property, unless it can be used as a basis for survival or as some kind of Christian centre. Remember that you will not be able to sell any property during the second half of the tribulation when a cashless monetary system based on the number of the Antichrist will be in operation. Also sell other assets that you do not really need in the short term. Spend the money on evangelism and the provision of places of refuge for Christians. Food, cooking facilities, clothes, blankets and medical supplies should also be bought and stored in a safe place. Do not resign your work and abandon your source of income during the first 3½ years unless unacceptable pressure is exerted upon you.
- During the first 3½ years, centres for evangelism should be established in various places where Bibles and Christian literature can be stored and even printed. (Like the clandestine printing of Bibles and Christian books on home-made printing-presses in Communist countries during the Cold War). Only use the King James Version of the Bible as a reliable account of the Word of God. Store some of the Bibles and literature in secret places where it cannot be easily traced and confiscated by the antichristian authorities. Remember that the Word of God will become unobtainable: "They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, but shall not find it (Amos 8:12).

## **Economic dictator**

In order to gain absolute control over all people the Antichrist will institute a centrally controlled, cashless economic system for the world. 666 related personal identity numbers will be issued to all economically active people, without which it will be impossible to gain access to the cashless monetary system. The 666 qualifies this number explicitly as the number of the beast; consequently it associates the bearer with the satanic rulers of the New World Order.

An oath of allegiance will have to be made to the Antichrist and his world government before a number will be issued. The oath will also imply allegiance to the beast as the god of this world, and for that reason the taking of the oath will be a covenant with death (Rev. 14:9-11). This absolute form of control will extend much further than buying and selling, as people will subject themselves body, soul and spirit to the control of this evil dictator. Do not follow the example of Esau by selling your soul to the devil for financial gain (Heb. 12:16-17).

The refusal of the Antichrist's number will have such severe implications that only strongly committed Christians will be able to face it. Among these are the following:

- Persons who refuse it will forfeit their identity number as well as their right to citizenship of their own country and the world state. That will be a punishable act.
- It will be regarded as the rejection of the New World Order and its leader, whose mark will be part of the new ID numbers. Those without the number will be charged with high treason and summarily executed in public.
- It will also be regarded as a rejection of the compulsory religion of the New World Order, i.e. to worship the beast as God. The death penalty will equally apply to this offence.
- Without the number no access will be gained to the international system of electronic funds transfer (EFT). Such a person will not be able to buy, sell or settle his accounts. It will be impossible to licence his car and buy fuel. Bills for services and taxes will remain unpaid, as well as instalments on property, motor cars and other commodities. In default of payment, property will be confiscated, seized or reclaimed. The message is clear: no one without the number will be able to remain economically active within this cashless system.
- People will lose their jobs and they will not be re-employed without an ID number, as these will at the same time serve as pay and bank numbers.
- After the introduction of the cashless economy, all the money that a person has will be converted to credit that can only be transferred to other accounts or utilised for payment by making use of the new personal identity number.

It is evident that economic control will be a mighty weapon in the hands of the Antichrist to force people to accept his New World Order, and to worship him as their god. In this way he will enslave the entire world population by depriving them of all the political, economic and religious liberties they previously had.

Those who refuse the number will become unemployed, robbed and impoverished fugitives. Because of high treason against the Antichrist and his governance structures they will face a certain death penalty when they are arrested. Special task forces will hunt them down and drag them to the guillotines. Some will be shot while fleeing, and many others will die of starvation, polluted water, diseases and exposure to harsh climatic conditions.



## **Victory in the struggle**

Although the Antichrist will muster awesome political, military, economic and religious power during his reign on earth, he will never be able to force true Christians into subservience to him. He will succeed in killing the saints, but, as with the myriad of Christian martyrs from Stephen to the present day, he will not succeed in gaining their worship if they prefer to remain true to Jesus. During this dark hour the Lord will empower His witnesses to resist the Antichrist and remain faithful until death: "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death." (Rev. 12:11) In the quoted verse, three powerful weapons are mentioned that are to be used by Christians in the struggle:

- The first one is the blood of the Lamb. It forms the basis of salvation when a person confesses his sins to the Lord (1 Pet. 1:18-19; 1 Jn. 1:7-9). The blood of Christ also protects you against the attacks of the enemy. Trust the Lord Jesus to protect you with His blood when you are in spiritual danger.
- The second weapon is the word of testimony. Witnessing to the saving grace and redemptive power of your Redeemer renders the enemy of your soul incapable of influencing you. A testimony of this nature will give unbelievers the courage to stand up and commit their lives to the conqueror, Jesus Christ. Never stop witnessing!
- The third weapon is to remain fearless despite intimidation and death threats. To be without fear of death, even in the face of a martyr's death to which the Antichrist will subject Christians, is a mighty spiritual weapon. It will give undisputed credibility to your witness if you are prepared to die for it. If you are afraid of death, and, perhaps, may even be prepared to deny Jesus for the sake of escaping it, your Christian witness will be powerless and unconvincing. (Read about the uncompromising heroes of faith in Hebrews 11).

## **Destiny of the Antichrist**

The Antichrist and his followers are heading for everlasting punishment and banishment from the presence of God and His glory, in the lake of fire: "Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone" (Rev. 19:20-21; see also Rev. 14:9-11).

## **Destiny of the Christians**

Despite the fact that Christians will stand to lose all the material possessions, rights and privileges they have during the great tribulation, their final destiny will be glorious (see Rev. 7:9-17 and 21:4-5). Will you be among the multitude of redeemed ones from all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues? There is also room for you! (Lk. 14:21-23).

In the light of these wonderful promises of ultimate victory, the martyrs can summon up the courage to persevere on their arduous course of loyalty to the true Messiah. If they remain faithful until death, they will inherit the kingdom of God and soon rule with Jesus Christ on earth:

"And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgement was committed to them. And *I saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received *his* mark *in* their foreheads or *in* their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years" (Rev. 20:4).

Christ Returneth

It may be at morn, when the day is awaking,  
When sunlight thro' darkness and shadow is breaking,  
That Jesus will come in the fullness of glory,  
To receive from the world His own.

It may be at mid-day, it may be at twilight,  
It may be, perchance, that the blackest of midnight  
Will burst into light in the blaze of His glory,  
When Jesus receives His own.

Oh, joy! Oh, delight! Should we go without dying, –  
No sickness, no sadness, no dread, and no crying –  
Caught up thro' the clouds with our Lord into glory,  
When Jesus receives His own.

– H.L. Turner