

9-27-1992

Vision of Victory: The Book of Revelation

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Harding University's 69th Annual
Bible Lectureship

Vision of Victory

THE BOOK OF
REVELATION

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Harding University's 69th Annual
Bible Lectureship

Vision of Victory

**THE BOOK OF
REVELATION**

HARDING UNIVERSITY
Director of Church Relations
Box 750, 900 E. Center
Searcy, Arkansas 72149

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HARDING UNIVERSITY
SEARCY, ARKANSAS 72149

TYPESETTING AND COMPOSITION BY
RESOURCE PUBLICATIONS, SEARCY, ARKANSAS

PRINTING AND BINDING BY
GOSPEL LIGHT PUBLISHING COMPANY, DELIGHT, ARKANSAS

FOREWORD

It was a time of great distress and persecution for the church of the Lord. Thousands of Christians had been martyred because of their allegiance to King Jesus. Many were enticed to accept false doctrines. A climate of despondency and defeat pervaded the church. It was in that environment that John the apostle, himself an exile on a lonely, wind-swept island off the coast of Asia Minor, worshiped on the Lord's Day. It was then that the Lord gave to John a final *Vision of Victory: the Book of Revelation*.

The lectureship committee chose the study of Revelation for the 69th Annual Lectureship because of its importance to the church today. As the church is assailed by secularism and conflict today, it is important for Christians to realize that we also have a secure victory in Jesus. We are assured of a blessing by reading, hearing, and keeping the words of this prophecy (Rev. 1:3; 22:7). Over thirty speakers have been chosen to present lectures on the Book of Revelation. Their greatest compensation will be your attendance in their classes and your careful reading of this book.

I express my gratitude to my secretaries Cindy Drumheller and Marilyn Dowdy for their efficient work in pulling together the myriad of details necessary for the success of this program. David Crouch and his staff in the Public Relations Office have done their usual excellent job in preparing the brochures and advertising the program. I thank them for it.

It is my prayer that this lectureship will be a blessing to those who attend and to you who read this book. I pray that we may gain the victory in Jesus.

Don Shackelford
Lectureship Director

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THEME LECTURES

GOD ON HIS THRONE

John D. Gipson

Centuries ago the Queen of Sheba came to visit Solomon. His wealth was so great, his wisdom so vast, his power so mighty, that she just had to see it with her own eyes. She inspected everything and missed nothing. You can see the awe in her eyes as she approaches Solomon's throne. There had never been one like it in any kingdom. It was a throne of ivory, overlaid with the finest gold. We are told that it had six steps, and at the back of the throne was a calf's head. On each side of the seat were arm rests and two lions standing before the arm rests, while twelve lions stood there; one on each end of a step on the six steps (1 Kings 10:18-20). And on that throne sat Solomon! Wise man; architect; builder; horticulturist; composer; merchant; botanist; zoologist; politician; and king.

When the Queen of Sheba saw that everything exceeded what she had been told, "there was no more spirit in her" (1 Kings 10:5).

There are some things which overwhelm us and take our breath away. A glimpse of heaven with God on his throne is just such a sight. Beautiful beyond description, awesome in power and glory, fearful in judgment, is the throne of the Lord God the Almighty! He alone is holy. Therefore, all nations shall come and worship.

The importance of God on his throne is made clear in the Book of Revelation. The apostle John, on the isle of Patmos, saw in heaven an open door. "At once I was in the Spirit, and lo, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne" (Rev. 4:2). There is a throne in heaven! It is mentioned seventeen times in chapters 4 and 5. And that throne is not vacant! One is

sitting on it—one who rules—the Lord God the Almighty.

As we talk about God on his throne, let me remind you that the language in Revelation is highly symbolic. If we try to see with the eyes of a literalist, we will miss the beauty of the book. If we look with a speculative eye, we will find ourselves adrift in a murky sea of confusion, and crash on the reefs of chaos built upon false conjectures. We should view Revelation as a great drama taking place before our very eyes. There is imagery and symbolism; but if we focus on every detail, we are likely to miss the truth. We will not be able to see the forest for the trees.

We need to sit back in imagination until we can both see and feel. Let the book become an experience, and it will be meaningful. Revelation makes us see: "Then I turned to see the voice" (Rev. 1:12). Get ready for sights and sounds, for thunder and lightning, for songs and silence, for living creatures and bottomless pits, for precious gems and scrolls with seals. It is all there if we can see it.

A THRONE OF BEAUTY

God's throne is a throne of beauty. The rainbow encircling it looks like an emerald. From the throne are flashes of lightning and voices and peals of thunder. Before the throne are seven torches of fire—the seven spirits of God. Circling the throne are twenty-four thrones where twenty-four elders sit, clad in white garments, and wearing crowns of gold. Four living creatures, representing all aspects of created life, are there. Each has six wings, and they never cease to sing, "Holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come."

In the midst of the throne a Lamb is standing, "as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth." The four living creatures, and the twenty-four elders, fall down before the Lamb. Each is holding a harp, and with golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints, they begin to sing.

We hear the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, praising the Lamb.

And before the throne there is, as it were, a sea of glass, like

crystal. Everywhere we look there is splendor and glory and beauty (Rev. 4—5).

A THRONE OF POWER

God is sitting on the throne. He is ruling in his universe. And however fearful and evil the forces on earth may seem to be, they cannot prevail. This world has not been left on its own. It is not ruled by blind fate. Someone is in charge and it is not Caesar or any other earthly ruler. Domitian may insist on being called "Lord and God," but the title belongs to another. Kings of the earth may bring their diadems before the image of Nero, but it is a pale picture of the golden crowns cast before the God Almighty. God is in control. All earthly claims of sovereignty are meaningless before the One who sits upon the throne of heaven. He alone reigns in sublime majesty. He speaks and nations are built up. He speaks and nations are thrown down. They are all like clay in the hands of a potter (Jer. 18:1-10). God has power to defeat the kings of Canaan, the might of Babylon, or the emperor of Rome. "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all" (1 Chron. 29:11).

God has supreme power. With him all things are possible. He is the Creator of all other power. The forces of nature, principalities and powers, visible and invisible, hang on his sovereign will.

Christians in the midst of persecution can take courage with God on his throne. The Roman legions might storm over the earth with their heavy-handed persecution. But as invincible as they appear, Christians can turn to God and say, "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen" (Mt. 6:13).

A THRONE OF JUSTICE AND JUDGMENT

God's rule involves justice and judgment. "Shall not the

judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25). That question, asked by Abraham as he pled for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, finds its answer in the Book of Revelation.

Wickedness must be punished.

In God's hand is a scroll. When the Lamb opens the seals of that scroll, the four horsemen must ride. We will watch in wonder as we see conquest, famine, and death appear before our eyes.

Seven trumpets blow, and there is hail and fire and blood. Even the sun, moon, and stars will be affected.

Evil is exposed as there is war in heaven, and the great dragon is thrown down.

The beast will arise from the sea to meet its certain end.

Seven angels, with seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, will pour their plagues upon the earth.

The harlot on the scarlet beast will go into perdition.

Babylon will fall!

The beast and the false prophet will be thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with brimstone.

Satan is bound and thrown into the pit.

There is the defeat of Gog and Magog.

Judgment comes to all as they stand before the great white throne and the books are opened. "And all were judged by what they had done" (Rev. 20:13).

"The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice; . . . righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne" (Ps. 97:1, 2). The wicked will be punished and the righteous rewarded. What a joyous note this is for the thoughtful and reflective person. Everywhere about us we see disorder, wrong, and misery in this world. It often seems that the wicked prosper while the righteous are made to suffer. The cry goes up, "How long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?" (Rev. 6:10). But it will not always be so. God is on his throne.

A THRONE OF GRACE

God's throne is a throne of grace. Look at all of the redeemed,

robed in white, and you will see evidence of God's grace.

By grace he provides a new heaven and earth. "Behold I make all things new." Aren't you happy that it is new? Aren't you glad that there is a place where sin is not welcome? Where the cruelties of men are silenced, and only goodness can be found?

What perfect fellowship there will be. I have had a foretaste of the fellowship of kindred spirits in my twenty-three years at the Sixth and Izard church. That church has truly become family for me. I miss the saints there when I am away from home. I long for their presence. We have laughed together, cried together, struggled together, and worshiped together. Their fellowship is something I crave. But to think of the fellowship of heaven and dwelling with God is more than I can imagine.

By God's grace there will be security, for the city is surrounded by a wall. It has no darkness, no night, for "God is its light."

Heaven lies foursquare, symbolizing its perfection. It is a city of beauty and splendor. Language is pressed to its limit to describe the scene. Think of a street of gold, of gates of pearl, and of stones of infinite beauty. What grace!

There is provision for every need. The river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flows from the throne of God. The tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit is there. And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations (Rev. 22:1, 2). There will be no more hunger or thirst. And "God will wipe every tear from their eyes" (Rev. 7:17).

This grace of God is something to sing about!

O Thou Fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace;
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
Call for songs of loudest praise.

—Robert Robinson

A THRONE OF WORSHIP

"And his servants shall worship him" (Rev. 22:3). I have

been in worship services where my heart soared. I have been lifted up by the songs and moved by the prayers. I have listened, enthralled to the beauty of the gospel, and in humble reverence partaken of the communion. I have been transfixed as Andy Ritchie led songs of worship and praise. I have almost forgotten to breathe as V. P. Black described the death of Christ. I have come from such experiences with my heart soaring and my hunger satisfied.

The worship of heaven is *reverential*.

And all the angels stood round the throne and round the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen" (Rev. 7:11, 12).

The worship of heaven is *full of praise*.

And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and wonderful are thy deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are thy ways, O King of the ages!" (Rev. 15:3).

The worship of heaven is *wholehearted*. Enthusiasm runs high in the assembled throng. You hear the mighty voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God" (Rev. 19:1).

The worship of heaven is *continuous*. "Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night within his temple" (Rev. 7:15). Their worship is not confined to stated seasons, but is an attitude of heart which is continuous.

Let no man discount worship. As successful men return unsatisfied to the town of their boyhood, yearning for an unspoiled heart, so men return to the purity of God. We *must* return to God or court inward death. People do not live without worship. They die! They sink below themselves when they cease to worship One above themselves.

CONCLUSION

What a throne is the throne of God! It is a throne of beauty and power. It is a throne of justice and judgment. It is a throne of grace and worship. It is the throne of God! And if we can see him there, we have a vision of victory.

One of these days we shall see the King in his beauty. One of these days we will worship round the throne. One of these days we "shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 22:5). O blessed day!

But until then God is no less upon his throne, and our submission and worship should not be delayed.

O that with yonder sacred throng
We at His feet may fall!
We'll join the everlasting song,
And crown Him Lord of all.

—Edward Perronet

JOHN D. GIPSON serves as an elder and pulpit minister for the Sixth and Izard church of Christ in Little Rock, Arkansas. He is a graduate of Abilene Christian University. He has lectured at the ten Christian universities and colleges and is a co-author with Joe R. Barnett on three books: *Happiness . . . Day and Night*, *Paths to Peace*, and *Some Quiet Place*. He is a staff writer for several papers in the brotherhood, and serves on the editorial board of *20th Century Christian*, and the Board of Trustees of International Bible College. He and his wife, Beth, have one son and two daughters.

CHRIST AMONG THE CHURCHES

Richard Rogers

In Revelation 1 we see Jesus walking in the midst of the churches, examining, judging, and rewarding. Many things are to be learned about our Lord in this great chapter.

AN EXALTED POSITION

He stands "among the lampstands" (Rev. 1:12). This speaks volumes! He does not stand "over the lampstands." He is, of course, exalted to be over all the universe, including these seven churches. But, his favorite position has always been among (cf. Lk. 22:24-27). He is our friend, companion, brother, and servant. But, notice . . .

He "walks among the lampstands" (Rev. 2:1). This is to stress his central place of authority and to acknowledge his sovereign presence as the one who will both serve and judge (cf. Jn. 12:48-50). One of the greatest needs in the church today is to see Jesus Christ in all his glory and to submit to his presence and authority. He, not any man or group of men, is "the Head of the Church." He will reward and punish.

UNIQUELY MAN

He became man for us—"like a son of man" (Rev. 1:13a)—that he might know human life by personal experience. He knows what we are like and has been touched with the feeling of our weaknesses and needs (cf. Heb. 2:10-18; 4:14-16). He did all of this for us! He intercedes, enters in to plead, for us!

"Son of Man" was the favorite title Jesus used of himself (found over eighty times in the Gospels). It was an Old Testament phrase for the coming King (cf. Dan. 7:13). God became man! That is the heart of the gospel. Read and compare John 1:1, 2, 14; Philippians 2:1-10; 3:20, 21; 1 Timothy 2:1-5; 1 John 3:1-3. I believe we need a fresh study of the humanity of Christ in the church today.

If Jesus is not God, then he can do nothing to save us from our sins. If he is not man, then there was no genuine death to substitute for us and pay for our sins. But, we have no problem in either of these areas—He is both God and man. The fact that he retains his humanity following his resurrection is both a guarantee to all believers of our future bodily resurrection as well as a blessing that we will have an everlasting revelation of God in bodily form. What an aid to our understanding and need.

UNIQUE APPEARANCE

He has a unique appearance (Rev. 1:13b-16). This is no ordinary man we are seeing. To say that his appearance is unique is a tremendous understatement: It is supernatural, a glorious description that could only be used of God alone.

Notice his majesty—"dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest." This is not the clothes of an ordinary or average poor person or peasant in the ancient Middle East. This is the garment of one of wealth, high position, or royalty. It was worn by the high priest when he officiated in the temple (Ex. 39). Remember, Jesus is our High Priest (Heb. 3:1). The "golden sash around his chest" reminds us immediately of Isaiah's vision of God in chapter 6. (See particularly verse 1.) John sees then a picture of Jesus in the majesty and authority of the Lord in Isaiah.

Stand in awe of his purity—"His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow." Notice Isaiah 1:18: "'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 as crimson, they shall be as wool.'"

The promise of our sins being cleansed is pictured in this

passage, and this urges us to reflect on the total purity of the Son of God, who had no sin to be cleansed.

Submit to his authority—"His eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword" (Rev. 1:14-16). His entire frame is made to speak of his total authority—eyes, feet, voice, hand, and mouth. In the Gospels, Jesus is normally pictured as the sympathetic Savior, the humble servant of God and man: healing, loving, forgiving, etc. His judgment had been hinted at, of course. But now it is different; he is in charge. We are looking at the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

"Eyes" represent knowledge. He has all knowledge. His eyes are like "fire," representing judgment. "Feet" represent the severity of the judgment. He will tread the wicked in the winepress of God until their blood flowing from the winepress forms a lake of blood two hundred miles across, four to five feet deep (Rev. 14:20). His "hand" represents his control of all creation. Notice in his hand are seven stars, but also notice that same hand comforting fearful John (Rev. 1:17). The sword of God's penal justice for the wicked comes out of his "mouth" (cf. Rev. 19:15). What a picture of Jesus! His words bring nations and kingdoms to an end. We surely had better listen when he speaks!

THE FOCAL POINT

He is the focal point of the universe—"His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance" (Rev. 1:16). This surely represents the place Jesus should have in all our hearts! Of course, this reminds us of the mount where Jesus was transfigured before the amazed eyes of his inner circle of disciples. (Read Mt. 17.) We also remember Paul's experience on the Damascus road when he saw "a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions" (Acts 26:13).

THE COMFORTER OF THE FEARFUL

Notice the impact on the apostle (Rev. 1:17a). John could have only one response to seeing the glorified Christ—"I fell at his feet as one dead." How significant for all of us! What is our response when confronted with the real Jesus instead of the "flannelgraph" Christ we often visualize? He is not here prostrate to worship. Notice Jesus' words to him (Rev. 1:17b, 18).

John received immediate encouragement and comfort from the awesome One he had just seen in vision—"Do not be afraid." Then he is given reasons for future fearlessness.

1. The eternity of Christ—"I am the First and the Last."
2. The continuance of Christ—"I am . . . the Living One."
3. The resurrection of Christ—"I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever."
4. The victory of Christ—"I hold the keys of death and Hades."

Hear the commission he received (Rev. 1:19, 20). He is told to write what he has and will see and hear. John has seen a great vision of a great Creator, King, Judge, and Savior. But there are many more things he must see: the condition and destiny of the churches of Christ, the power and destruction of the Roman enemy, the binding, loosing, and final end of Satan, and many more.

AMONG THE LAMPSTANDS

What about these lampstands? (Rev. 2—3). Jesus is described as the Lord of the churches. The church, composed of all believers in the world, is described as the body of Jesus Christ of which he is the *head*. (Read Eph. 1:22, 23; 4:15, 16; 5:23; Col. 1:18, 24; 2:9, 10.) As the living head of his living body, he alone has the right to inspect and, if necessary, judge the body. He has the right to tell us what is wrong with us and what we ought, even must, do about it. As we carefully examine these churches, we will see things that can trouble us as well as help us.

EPHESUS—NEGLECTED PRIORITIES

Notice the description of Jesus Christ (Rev. 2:1). He “holds the seven stars.” The word for “holds,” used with the accusative as it is here, indicates to hold the whole of something. The idea, then, is very significant: Jesus holds the whole of the church at Ephesus in his hand, but more than that, he holds the whole of all the churches (seven stars) in one hand. “He walks among the lampstands.” He does so to inspect, to look upon in order to judge and reward. The only way to real unity congregationally and brotherhood wide is to look upon Jesus as the one who holds *all* the churches in His hand and who is in the midst of *all* of them.

1. It was an active church—“I know your *deeds*.”
2. It was a toiling church—“I know . . . your *hard work*.”
3. It was a persistent church—“I know . . . your *perseverance*.”
4. It was an intolerant church—“You cannot *tolerate* wicked men, . . . *tested* those who claim to be apostles and are not, . . . *hate* the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”
5. It was a consistent church—“You have *persevered* and have *endured* hardships for my name, and have *not grown weary*.” (Emphasis mine.) Note: The Ephesian church was doctrinally strong and service-oriented. Their efforts remain as an example to all believers. We commend them as does their Lord. But, there is a problem.

The Lord’s inspection reveals a problem (Rev. 2:4). The word “yet” presents a great contrast. Do not think for a moment that this is a small defect in their character. It threatens their very existence.

What is “first love”? Is it love for the lost? Is it love for the Word? Is it love for the Lord? Or is it simply “the love you had at the first”? I am inclined to believe that it is the last.

Of course, all love should spring from the love we have for the Lord. The honeymoon should never be over. The most serious and often most neglected priority of the church is a sincere and intense love for the Lord. All else is secondary.

A point worth remembering is that we can hate what the Lord

hates and not necessarily love what he loves. As Vance Havner put it, we can be “straight as a gun barrel doctrinally and just as empty spiritually.”

The Lord’s exhortation reveals how important it is to love deeply (Rev. 2:5). We are admonished to *remember* the days when Christ’s love flowed deeply in our veins. We must *repent*, think differently, and *repeat* those works that “first love” caused. Otherwise, the Lord will *remove* us from the world.

The Lord promises all those who overcome by making the responses just mentioned eternal food in an heavenly paradise.

SMYRNA—SATANIC OPPOSITION

What does Jesus *know* about this church (Rev. 2:8, 9)? He knows their *afflictions*. The word “afflictions” describes pressure brought to bear in a way that leads to perfection. (Cf. grapes in a winepress.) He knows their *poverty*. The word “poverty” indicates destitution, not just need. (Notice the Lord’s estimate: “Yet you are rich!”) He knows their *persecution*. They are being blasphemed by the Jewish community (cf. 1 Pet. 2:19-23). Remember, God is in ultimate control. He allows this not to defeat us but to make us stronger than ever.

What does Jesus *command* this church (Rev. 2:10)? Simply put: *Be fearless and faithful*. Consider the following about Rev. 2:10:

1. Jesus predicts suffering (cf. 2 Tim. 3:12).
2. Satan is behind this coming persecution (cf. Rev. 12:10).
3. The purpose of persecution is to test us (cf. Job 23:10; 1 Pet. 1:6, 7).
4. The tribulation will not last long (for “ten days,” cf. Gen. 24:55; Dan. 1:12).
5. Their faithfulness should be “to the point of death.” Notice that Revelation 6:9 mentions the “souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained.”

What does Jesus *promise* this church (Rev. 2:10, 11)? First,

he offers a crown of life, the victory crown of eternal life. Second, he promises complete freedom from the second death. He predicts two great blessings: eternal life and escape from eternal punishment.

PERGAMOS—RELIGIOUS COMPROMISE

These brethren lived in a *dangerous environment*—"where Satan has his throne." They lived in a "hell on earth." And what was their testimony in Hell's Headquarters? It was twofold: "You remain true to my name," and "You did not renounce your faith in me." And they did this in the midst, and in spite of the martyrdom of Antipas, Christ's faithful witness.

These brethren had a *serious problem*—"Nevertheless, I have a few things against you." Please notice that he said "a few things." A study of Balaam in Numbers 22—25 will indicate that their problem was one of tolerating those who were teaching tolerance and association with the evil people and practices of their city.

These brethren received a *strong exhortation*—"Repent therefore!" This exhortation is based on two things: Jesus' warning of his quick coming and the judgment he will render when he comes. When we tolerate pagan views, when we adopt the lifestyle of the world around us, when we engage in immorality and idolatry, we are manifesting unbelief, no matter what we profess (cf. Mt. 7:21-23).

These brethren are given a *wonderful encouragement*—"To him who overcomes, . . ." Two things are promised: hidden manna to eat and a white stone to carry. Simply put, the Lord promises to give them all they need and to justify them from all accusation.

THYATIRA—IMMORAL PRACTICES

First, notice the evidence of spiritual life. Is it possible to have a growing and maturing church and yet be compromising with sin? Yes, this letter declares. Our Lord's examination of this church reveals four basic things worthy of commenda-

tion—love, service, faith, and patience.

1. They had a proper motivation—love.
2. They demonstrated an effective ministry—service.
3. They were committed to a right message—faith.
4. They endured with a tough mentality—patience.

And, notice that they were growing in all things—"You are doing more now than you did at the first." We cannot help but be impressed by this church in the smallest of all the seven cities. But . . .

In spite of the good things Jesus had to say, he was forced to add, "Nevertheless, I have this against you: . . ." They were tolerating the teaching that immorality was acceptable as a part of the Christian lifestyle. It was so bad that Jezebel, the most wicked woman of all history, was used to describe it. The church was not immoral, but they were tolerating this wickedness in their midst.

Jesus uses very graphic pictures to discuss his judgment on this immoral woman and her followers.

1. Fatal disease for the immoral woman.
2. Great distress for her followers.
3. Coming death for all her children.

This judgment will affect the attitudes of all the churches—"Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds" (cf. Heb. 4:13).

This judgment will come upon everyone—"I will repay each of you according to your deeds" (cf. Rom. 14:10, 12; 2 Cor. 5:10). There is no escape.

Encouragement is given to the overcomer, the true believer. Two things are promised: power over the nations and the morning star (Jesus himself, Rev. 22:16), or simply put: victory over all our enemies and over death itself.

SARDIS—SPIRITUAL APATHY

The church had a good reputation ("of being alive"). But

Jesus sees the real situation—"but you are dead." It is rather startling to learn that there is often a real contrast between what people say and what the real truth is. Do not be quick to judge by outward appearances! Read and reflect on John 7:24.

The appeal that Jesus makes to this church is based on their true condition as well as what they must commit to be and do if things are to change.

Notice, first, their real condition in the eyes of the Lord.

1. They were unconcerned about their spiritual condition. This is seen in his admonition—"Wake up!"
2. They were unaware of how serious their condition was. Christ says, "Strengthen what remains." Even more seriously, he warns, "... and is about to die."
3. They were unresponsive to what the Lord wanted. "I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God." To correct this they must *remember, obey, and repent*.

Then, consider the action Jesus threatens to take. His patience will soon end for Sardis, and he will come as a thief in the night and render an effective judgment upon them as a church.

He gives assurance to the righteous remnant at Sardis. He gives hope because of their moral purity—"have not soiled their clothes." He comforts them because of their personal practices—"For they are worthy." The word "worthy" is used of just balances in the marketplace.

Finally, the Lord gives encouragement to the remnant with three great promises.

1. Perfection—"They will walk with me, dressed in white."
2. Security—"I will never blot out his name from the book of life."
3. Acceptance—"I will ... acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels."

PHILADELPHIA—ETERNAL SECURITY

The city this church served had a reputation of poverty and

complete dependence upon governmental aid to survive. The church in that city was threatened from within and without. They needed to know that the Lord would protect them, even when nothing and nobody else could.

This protection by Christ deals with two great issues: the hostility of unbelievers and a great hour of trial about to come upon the whole earth. Two great promises are made to this struggling church.

1. Christ will honor them in the eyes of unbelievers who have been hostile to them.
2. Christ will keep them from the hour of world trial. (This is at least partially accomplished by their isolated and hated position in the Roman world.)

Christ's promises to this hated church are full of comfort and assurance. He promises two things: They will be a pillar in God's temple (a promise of a permanent place), and he will write upon them wonderful names (a promise of identity with nobility).

LAODICEA—MATERIAL PROSPERITY

The condition of this church made the Lord sick. Even the words, "I know your deeds," are not complimentary as they have been before. The Lord can find nothing good about this congregation. Two things specifically characterized this church.

1. They were indifferent to the work of the Lord. This is seen in the word "lukewarm." Remember the Lord's desire is "hot or cold," not "lukewarm."
2. They were insensitive to their spiritual need. This is seen in their boast, "I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing."

Jesus, the Lord among the lampstands, urges the members of Laodicea to do three things to restore "heat" to their lives.

1. They must *recognize* their spiritual need. He offers to sell

them "gold refined in the fire" to relieve their poverty; "white clothes" that their spiritual nakedness might be covered; eye "salve" to heal their eyes of blindness and short-sightedness.

2. They must *realize* why he rebukes and chastens them: "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline." Tough love is the only kind of love that can do what God desires done.
3. They must *repent*. It is not ignorance that keeps them from repentance but a lack of heart—"Be earnest [i.e., zealous], and repent."

If they will only repent, they will hear the knocking, pleading Lord of the lampstands, begging to have fellowship with him. He is willing to start out as their guest, but he always ends up the host (Rev. 3:19).

Jesus promises that all earnest, zealous disciples shall rule and reign with him. This will be featured again and again in this great book. We reign with him on his throne: he in heaven and we on earth. We do rule the world.

CONCLUSION

We must realize that, in spite of all the problems and shortcomings of humanity, the church is still the body of Christ. We are born of the Spirit. We are children of the Father. We are served by all the angels. We are more than conquerors. The Son of Man still is in the midst of and walks among the lampstands.

RICHARD ROGERS has been a teacher at the Sunset School of Preaching in Lubbock, Texas, for twenty-one years. He is presently working on his master's degree. He has preached in over forty states and thirty countries, and produced over two hundred thirty-minute TV tapes on Bible books. He has authored over twenty books and teaching workbooks, and holds seminars on many subjects, especially church growth and leadership. He and his wife, Barbara Jane, have four children.

WORTHY IS THE LAMB

Wendell Winkler

INTRODUCTION

The theme and purpose of Revelation. With the church of our blessed Lord facing an uncertain future with unquestioned trials, tribulations, and persecution being on the horizon, Revelation was written to give assurance of ultimate victory with its accompanying strength of hope. Hence immediately following the letters to the seven churches of Asia, John invites us into the very throne room of God (Rev. 4—5) where such assurance is given in the form of two doxologies.

The doxology of creation is found in Revelation 4. When this text is analyzed, the following three points appear: first, he who sat upon the throne, vv. 1-3; second, the inhabitants of the throne room, vv. 4-7; and third, the doxology, vv. 8-11.

The doxology of re-creation is found in Revelation 5. Concerning this let us observe three things: First, there is the setting or background to the doxology, vv. 1-7. B. W. Johnson wrote,

The exiled apostle is filled with anxiety to penetrate the secrets of futurity, and to know the fortunes of that Church which he loved better than he loved his own life. He was then a prisoner on a rocky isle of the sea. It was a time of persecution. He was separated from the saints who dwelt upon the shores, and among the mountains that he could dimly observe as he gazed to the east; and when he looks upon the sealed book his burdened spirit implores, with flowing tears, that the seals may be broken, and that he may behold the results, in the future, of all the struggles, sufferings and blood of persecuted people . . . His anxious heart is cheered by the assurance that the book

will be opened and that the Lion of the tribe of Judah, his own dear Saviour, will break the seals and reveal to him the wonderful history. . . . When John looked to behold the Lion of Judah, the root of David, who should open the book, he beheld the only being in the universe who could take it from the hand of God. . . . John looked to see this mighty one who was deemed worthy to exercise the prerogative of God. When his eyes rested upon him, he saw instead of the majestic symbol of a Lion, a Lamb, a sacrificial Lamb bearing wounds, the marks of having been slain. The Lion had become a Lamb. The Lamb became a Lion, a conqueror, and "prevailed" so as to be able to hold and open the book, or to hold the reins of all power, by submitting unto death. As John beholds the vision he observes seven horns and seven eyes, the symbols of unlimited power and the fullness of the divine spirit. The horn is always an emblem of power, and the number seven, the number of perfection, indicates power that has no limit.¹

Second, there is the one who receives the doxology, and why he is so worthy to receive it, vv. 8-10. Note especially that he was worthy "for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood" (v. 9). Even then they could have sung,

I heard an old, old story,
How a Savior came from glory,
How He gave His life on Calvary
To save a wretch like me;
I heard about His groaning,
Of His precious blood's atoning,
Then I repented of my sins
And won the victory.

O victory in Jesus,
My Savior, forever,
He sought me and bo't me
With His redeeming blood;
He loved me ere I knew Him,
And all my love is due Him,

He plunged me to victory,
Beneath the cleansing flood.

—E. M. Bartlett

Third, the doxology appears, vv. 9-14.

Deductions. The early church, and all subsequent generations of the saved, could face the future with calm hearts and steadfast souls, even being willing to suffer martyrdom if need be for (a) they were the children of the "Lord God Almighty, which was, and is and is to come," yea he who "created all things" for his own pleasure; and, (b) they were the blood-bought of the Lamb; who possesses power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, and blessing. Such being the case, they (the Almighty and the Lamb) whose they were, were in complete control of the future and the final outcome, with consequent victory being inevitably theirs. Indeed, as Revelation 1 gave force to the letters to the seven churches of Asia (Rev. 2—3), so Revelation 4—5 gave assuring emphasis to the unfolding of the future, irrespective of how bleak it may have been (with such future being revealed in Revelation 5ff.).

An additional doxology. In addition to the doxologies of Revelation 4 and 5, we read in Revelation 19:7, "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready." Yes, give "honour" (from *doxa*). Such honor can be given to "the Lord God omnipotent [who] reigneth" (Rev. 19:6), as well as the Lamb who is worthy. (According to Revelation 3:21 they both occupy the throne.) And the remaining part of Revelation 19 tells us why he is so worthy.

HE IS WORTHY BECAUSE HE IS JUST THAT—THE LAMB OF GOD

The affirmation. Revelation 19:7 exhorts, "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready." Also, Revelation 19:9 reads, "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." In fact our Lord is spoken of as

the Lamb some twenty-eight times in Revelation. Such is reminiscent of John the Baptist exclaiming, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29). Again, "And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God" (Jn. 1:36). Peter affirms we are redeemed "with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:18-20). Isaiah prophesied, as the eunuch read and Philip explained, "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth" (Acts 8:32-35; Is. 53:7, 8).

The passover lamb, a type. "For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7). Wherein is the type? In Exodus 12 we have the beautiful details. (1) In the passover, it was a lamb that was slain (Ex. 12:3); and Christ is spoken as the Lamb of God (Rev. 5:12; 19:7, 9; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19; Acts 8:32-35). (2) In the passover, the lamb was without blemish (Ex. 12:12); and Christ had no sin (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:21, 22; Jn. 8:46; Is. 53:9). (3) In the passover, a male lamb was slain (Ex. 12:5); and Christ was a male (Mt. 1:21; Gal. 4:4; Lk. 2:7). (4) In the passover no bone was broken in the lamb (Ex. 12:46); and in the crucifixion, no bone of Christ's was broken (Jn. 19:33-37). (5) In the passover, the lamb was slain (Ex. 12:6); and Christ was slain, not dying of natural causes (Acts 2:23, 36; 4:30). (6) In the passover, the blood of the slain lamb was applied (Ex. 12:7); and the blood of Christ must be applied or contacted, and such is the case when one is baptized (Jn. 19:36; Rom. 6:3).

HE IS WORTHY BECAUSE THE LAMB IS JESUS

The affirmation. Revelation 19:10 reads, "And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." Notice that the name Jesus is applied to the Lamb twice in this one verse. Recall that in the announcement to Joseph of the approaching birth of our Lord that the angel said, "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his

name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Mt. 1:21). The same announcement was made to Mary (Lk. 1:31). Then, we read, "And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called Jesus, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb" (Lk. 2:21). Accordingly, we sing:

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,
Sweetest name I know,
Fills my ev'ry longing,
Keeps me singing as I go.

—L. B. Bridgers

Especially note that the name Jesus connotes salvation. He was to be called Jesus "for he shall save his people from their sin."

The Lamb is our Savior. As Jesus, the Scriptures repetitiously affirm that the Lamb is the Savior of the world.

And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world (1 Jn. 4:14).

And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world (Jn. 4:42).

For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings (Heb. 2:10).

Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him (Heb. 5:8, 9).

Study also Acts 4:30-32; 2 Peter 2:20; 3:18. All such reminds us of the gospel preached by the angel to the shepherds on the Judean hills:

And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men (Lk. 2:10-14).

Uniquely qualified. As Jesus, the Lamb is uniquely qualified to be our Savior. (1) He paid the price for our redemption (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:13,14; Rom. 3:24; Heb. 9:12). "When I was beaten, bruised and scarred, and no one would have me, you bought me," said the elderly former slave as he praised his former owner whose body was lying in state at the plantation mansion. So it was with us (Rom. 5:6, 8; Tit. 3:3-7). (2) He is our only means of access to the Father (Jn. 14:6; 15:5). (3) Corroboratively with the last point, he is the one and only mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5). Qualifying as such, he is no party to the cause of offense between the two estranged (Is. 59:1, 2) parties, the offense being sin (2 Cor. 5:21); he is knowledgeable of the facts involved in the case (Jn. 2:24, 25); and he is equal to both parties involved, by means of the virgin birth, being as human as Mary and as divine as the Father. Mendel's law of genetics states that all that is in the parents is found in the offspring and all that is in the offspring is found in the parents. Such being the case, if our Lord's parents had both been human, he would have been totally human (such is the Jesus of the modernists). If our Lord's parents had both been divine, he would have been wholly divine, with such an one being too far removed from sinful man. However, with our Lord's Father being divine, and his mother being human, he would receive both natures; thus, being the God-man, the true Emanuel, "God [deity] with us [humanity]" (Mt. 1:23). (4) He was sinless, perfect (1 Pet. 2:21-23; 2 Cor. 5:21). If our Lord had sinned, he would have been a sinner, thus needing a savior; and, he who needs a savior, cannot be one. Furthermore, a sinless sacrifice was necessary to appease the justice and satisfy

the holiness of a holy, just, merciful, loving, and truthful God (Rom. 4:23-31).

HE IS WORTHY BECAUSE THE LAMB IS FAITHFUL AND TRUE

The affirmation. In Revelation 19:11 John writes, "And I saw heaven open, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war." See also Hebrews 2:17.

The meaning. What does this mean? (1) He means what he says and says what he means. Uzzah (2 Sam. 6:6-11) and Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1-7) came to understand this in a very realistic way. (2) He will not change (Heb. 13:8; Jas. 1:17; Mal. 3:6; Rev. 1:8, 11, 17). (3) He will fulfill his promises (2 Pet. 3:9). Thus, the promises found in Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Matthew 6:33; Hebrews 13:5, 6; and similar references are vouchsafed. (4) He will carry out his threats. Hence, the threats found in Mark 16:16; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9; and Matthew 13:42, 43 will become realities.

An illustration. In Genesis 15:13-16, God makes a sixfold promise to Abraham, the sixth one being, "But in the fourth generation they [the seed of Abraham, Israel] shall come hither again [leave Egypt, etc]." Then, in Exodus 6:16-20 we read that Levi was generation one, Kohath was generation two, Amram was generation three, and Moses was generation four! And what happened? In the days of Moses, Israel came up out of Egypt. There was not a power in heaven, hell, or earth that could have kept Israel in Egypt beyond the days of Moses! Why? The integrity of God was at stake. Jehovah is "the God of the fourth generation." And just think, he is the God whose we are and whom we serve. Indeed, he is the Faithful and True. How meaningful!

HE IS WORTHY BECAUSE THE LAMB IS THE WORD OF GOD

The affirmation. John penned in Revelation 19:13, "And he

was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God." Such is, again, reminiscent of John's previous writings:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life (1 Jn. 1:1).

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him: and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. . . .

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth (Jn. 1:1-4, 14).

God's Word to the world. As the Word of God, the Lamb of God is the Father's communication to the world.

If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father? (Jn. 14:7-9).

See also John 12:45. Jesus portrayed the love, mercy, compassion, forgiveness, and holiness of his Father. He and his Father were one (Jn. 10:30). He was "the express image of his [Jehovah's] person" (Heb. 1:1-3).

Incarnate Word—written word. We cannot separate the incarnate Word and the written word. Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (Jn. 14:15). Yes, "me" and "my commandments" are inseparably joined. See also John 14:21, 23, 24. Then we read, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have

spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (Jn. 12:48). Again, the "me" and "my words" are inseparable. Thus, the Lord and his legislation, the Savior and his sayings, the priest and his precepts, the lawgiver and his law, and the Christ and his commands cannot be separated. Hence, we cannot feign loyalty to one and show disregard for the other. Understanding the present emphasis, we will no longer hear, "God never asked us to believe the Bible, only the Christ of the Bible"; or "The authority for morals is not the Bible, but the God behind the Bible." Thus, it is never "Jesus, yes," but "His judgments, no." Yet, do we not often pledge allegiance to Christ while showing disregard, if not outright disdain, for his commands? "What shall I do with Jesus?" is concretely answered by ascertaining what we do with his Word!

HE IS WORTHY BECAUSE THE LAMB IS KING OF KINGS

The affirmation. Revelation 19:16 says, "And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King of kings, and Lord of lords."

Consequences if he is not king. Millennialists affirm that Christ is yet to sit on David's throne, God's throne. However, if Christ is not now king, serious deductions result: (1) The apostles were wrong in their teaching, for they affirmed the kingship of Christ (Acts 17:7). (2) Christ is not now priest, since he was to be a priest while a king (Zech. 6:12, 13; Heb. 8:4). (3) Old Testament prophecy would have failed and/or Jeremiah would stand convicted as a false prophet, since he prophesied that no one of Jeconiah's seed—Christ being such, Matthew 1:1, 11, 12—would prosper reigning on David's throne in Judah (Jer. 22:28-30). (4) The kingdom has not been established. If this be the case, the Scriptures are wrong (Heb. 12:28; Col. 1:13, 14; Rev. 1:6). Furthermore, there would be no conversion or new birth process (Mt. 18:3, 4; Jn. 3:3-5). There would be no Lord's Supper (Lk. 22:18). There would have to be the re-establishment of the old Roman Empire as a world kingdom, necessitating the fall of America, for which we should be

praying (Dan. 2:31-44; Mt. 6:10).

HE IS WORTHY BECAUSE THE LAMB IS LORD OF LORDS

The affirmation. Revelation 19:16 affirms, "And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King of kings, and Lord of lords." Peter told the Jews on Pentecost, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). He later wrote, "But sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord: being ready always to give answer to every man that asketh you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15; ASV). Study carefully Philipians 2:5-11!

The meaning. What does this mean? Being Lord, he is to be the supreme ruler of our lives, even, "bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:4, 5). However, many, it seems, want him as Savior of their souls, but not Lord of their lives.

HE IS WORTHY BECAUSE THE LAMB IS GOD

The affirmation. We read, "And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God" (Rev. 19:17). But Revelation 19:9 speaks of "the marriage supper of the Lamb." Thus, the Lamb is God.

An explanation. Acts 17:29 and Colossians 1:9 speak of the Godhead, God family, or Godhood, composed of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Now "God" is the designation of the nature of the Godhead, with the word "God" signifying deity. Thus, the Father is spoken of as God (Eph. 4:6), the Son is spoken of as God (Jn. 1:1-4, 14; 1 Jn. 1:1), and the Holy Spirit is spoken of as God (Acts 5:3, 4). Deuteronomy 6:4 affirms, "The Lord our God is one Lord." There is one God in that there

is only one nature of the Godhead; and that nature is deity. Thus, affirming "the three of the Godhead" no way approximates polytheism, as is sometimes ridiculously affirmed.

An expansion. Since Jesus is God, Isaiah 9:6 speaks of him as "The mighty God." Then Jeremiah 23:6 speaks of "The Lord [Jehovah] our righteousness"; and 1 Corinthians 1:30 reads, "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." Thus, Christ is Jehovah. He is God! He is not God the Father; but nonetheless, God, God the Son. In Zechariah the Lord of hosts speaks of "my fellow" (Zech. 13:7) which was a reference to Jesus (Mt. 26:31).

A deduction. Being God, the Lamb is worthy of our loving devotion or worship and unquestioned obedience. How appropriate to read,

Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.

In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: for by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist: and he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence (Col. 1:13-18).

CONCLUSION

Someone has penned "The Incomparable Christ":

To the artist, the Lord Jesus is the one altogether lovely.
To the architect, he is the chief cornerstone.
To the banker, he is the hidden treasure.
To the baker, he is the living bread.
To the biologist, he is the light.

To the builder, he is the sure foundation.
 To the carpenter, he is the door.
 To the doctor, he is the great physician.
 To the educator, he is the master teacher.
 To the civil engineer, he is the new and living way.
 To the farmer, he is the sower and the Lord of harvest.
 To the florist, he is the rose of sharon and the lily of the valley.
 To the geologist, he is the rock of ages.
 To the horticulturist, he is the true vine.
 To the jeweler, he is the pearl of great price.
 To the newspaperman, he is the good news of great joy.
 To the sinner, he is the lamb of God that taketh away the sins of
 the world.
 Friend, what is he to you?

And, in Revelation 19 he is the (a) Lamb of God, (b) Jesus, (c) The Faithful and True, (d) The Word of God, (e) The King of kings, (f) The Lord of lords, and (g) God.

Indeed, worthy is the Lamb! He is worthy to "receive power, and riches and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing" (Rev. 5:12).

Such being the case, let his church faithfully march from one victory to another, having no paralyzing fear in our hearts, knowing we are his who is going "forth conquering and to conquer" (Rev. 6:2) and that "the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). Or, as expressed in Revelation 17:14, "These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful." Let us herald the doxology on time's side; and one day, join the angelic host, with the saints and sages, patriarchs, and martyrs of generations past, present, and future to sing with voices immortal: "Thou art worthy. . . for thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood . . . and made us unto our God kings and priests (Rev. 5:9).

NOTE

¹B. W. Johnson, *A Vision of the Ages* (Dallas: Eugene Smith, n.d.).

WENDELL WINKLER is the Chairman of the Bible Department at Faulkner University in Montgomery, Alabama. He attended the Montgomery Bible College (now Faulkner University), Lamar College of Technology, Beaumont, Texas, and holds A.A., B.S., M.S., and L.Hd. degrees. He has served as a pulpit minister in congregations in Texas, Alabama, Louisiana, and Missouri. He has contributed many articles to brotherhood publications and authored eleven books and edited five others. He taught at Brown Trail Preacher's School for sixteen years. He has held several city-wide gospel meetings. He and his wife, Betty Sue, have three sons.

"FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH"

Ken R. Durham

I hold in my hand an ancient Roman coin, a bronze sestertius from the late first century. On its face is the proud profile of an emperor, and around the edge are inscribed his name and some of his imperial titles: "Domitian, Supreme Commander, Caesar, Consul, Censor, Father of His Country." But the coin has been defaced. Across the face and neck of Domitian two diagonal slashes have been cut deep into the bronze. They appear to be what archaeologists call "insult marks." Who put them there? An angry taxpayer? A loyalist to a later emperor? A bored child?

There is another possibility. The defacement could be an act of defiance by an early Christian—one who knew that Domitian enjoyed being called "lord" and "god," but who would risk public disapproval, arrest, even death, rather than call anyone "Lord" but Christ, anyone "god" but God.

About the time this sestertius was in circulation, away to the east on a six-by-ten-mile rock called Patmos, an old man in exile had a Lord's Day to remember. It began with a divine voice issuing a resounding command: "Write down what you see!" And when John had completed his task, Scripture had its glorious crescendo, the Book of Revelation.

VISION OF VICTORY

The church at the end of the first century seemed to be in supreme need of an apocalyptic vision of victory. The cross was now a lifetime past; the movement's newness had worn off; the honeymoon period was over. Persecution, once sporadic and

localized under Nero, was now systematic and widespread under Domitian. The congregations in Asia Minor were struggling. The Ephesus church had lost the love that once made her great. Pergamum was doctrinally confused. Thyatira was tolerating moral compromise. The reputation of Sardis as a big church in the brotherhood masked her internal deadness. And Laodicea had become content with a tepid, halfhearted spirituality.

So God drew back the curtain of time and space that the church might glimpse the big picture of history and be awakened to fresh courage and hope. Included in the vast panorama witnessed by John are images that are thrilling and terrifying, holy and blasphemous, inescapable and unfathomable. And every image and chorus builds to one thunderous declaration: Victory! Whatever may come in the next few days, or years, or millennia, the final hour belongs to the servants of the Lamb!

But what about the church today? Are we any less susceptible to cultural pressures and spiritual anemia than our brothers and sisters so long ago? Do we sometimes grow faint of heart and feeble of witness? Do we, too, need an apocalyptic vision of victory to refresh our courage and hope?

As the year 2000 approaches, it will become increasingly important for Christians to study, appreciate, and experience the Book of Revelation. We will have to find our way through a proliferation of speculation from end-time experts, to be sure. But more than that, we will need a vision of victory that will call forth from the church bold witness, courageous ethics, and a vigorous resolve to remain faithful amidst a doggedly secular age. The world of the next millennium will be no place for the cowardly, the confused, or the indifferent.

EVEN TO THE POINT OF DEATH

"Be faithful," the resurrected Christ urges his followers in Smyrna, "even to the point of death." Death? What would put a group who preached love, grace, and peace with God and man, in danger of death?

Perilous Times

Christianity met its earliest opposition from the Jewish authorities, but as it spread it came more and more into conflict with Rome. At first the Christians were regarded as merely a sect of Judaism, one of the *religio licita* permitted to exist within the Empire. But Nero singled out the Christians, blaming them for the great fire of Rome in A.D. 64, and massacring hundreds for what Roman historian Tacitus called their "abominations" (alleged cannibalism and incest).¹

By the end of the reign of Domitian (A.D. 81-96), Christians were at risk throughout the empire. Domitian took his divine titles more seriously than any of his predecessors. Emperor worship was the unifying religious force of the empire, and it was not optional. Failure to burn a pinch of incense to the deity of Caesar, and to recite "Caesar is Lord," was nothing less than a crime against the state. It was during this period that the earliest historical tradition dates the Book of Revelation.²

"Are You a Christian?"

In the letters of Roman governor Pliny to Domitian's successor Trajan around A.D. 112, we get a clear picture of the official state process of adjudicating Christians. Those denounced as believers were asked three times, "Are you a Christian?" and threatened with the death penalty if they did not recant. If they persisted in confessing that they were, they were led out and executed. Those who denied being Christians were asked to invoke the Roman gods, to make a wine and incense offering to the emperor's statue, and, to curse Christ. "It is said," Pliny reported, "that real Christians cannot be forced to do any of these things."³

Eugene Boring lists six options that Christians at the turn of the first century might have considered. They could (1) quit the faith, (2) lie about their loyalty, (3) fight against Rome, (4) work to change the laws against Christianity, (5) adjust their doctrine to accommodate the state and culture, or (6) die.⁴ Some did quit the faith; they chose Rome over Jesus. Many lied, intoning the confession "Caesar is Lord" only as a formality. Resistance was futile (as the Zealots demonstrated); so was

working through the Roman system to change the laws. Others sought to compromise sound doctrine in favor of a more tolerant and syncretistic brand of Christianity.

But for many Christians, the faithful option was to go to their deaths rather than curse Christ. Jesus had commanded them to give Caesar what was Caesar's (Mt. 22:21)—payment of taxes, respect for civil authority. But when Caesar asked for what was rightfully only God's—their ultimate allegiance, their worship, their very hearts—this they could not give, even if it meant their martyrdom.

What Is a Martyr?

To chart the development of the Greek word *martus* from its original meaning to its place in the English language today is to behold a sobering evolution:

- A martyr was originally in popular Greek usage simply a *witness*: one who tells the truth.
- For the earliest disciples, a martyr was a *gospel* witness: one who tells the truth about God and his Son.
- In time, a Christian martyr became a *sacrificial* witness: one who *loses his life* for telling the truth about God and his Son.

In Revelation, *martus* is first applied, in its classic double meaning, to Jesus: "Jesus Christ, who is the faithful *witness*, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth" (Rev. 1:5). Again in Revelation 3:14 he is referred to as "the Amen, the faithful and true *witness*." (Emphasis mine.) Jesus is the martyr *par excellence*. His death was uniquely redemptive—one had to die for all (Rom. 6:10; 2 Cor. 5:14, 15). But our Lord also died because he was a faithful disciple of God because he dared to love people more than religious tradition, kingdom more than culture, God more than his own life.

John's vision abounds with references to those who told the truth about God and his Son, and paid the ultimate price. First there is "Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city [Pergamum]" (Rev. 2:13). Then there are more heroic martyrs: those who had been slain (Rev. 6:9-11); the great multitude of those who came through the great tribulation, their robes made white in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 7:9-17); those

killed by the sword of the beast (Rev. 13:1-10); the rejoicing servants of God whose blood has been avenged (Rev. 19:1-10); those who were beheaded because of Jesus and the Word (Rev. 20:4-6).

These are our stories of heroism and heritage, stories the church must hear today if we are to rise above our personal preoccupations and secular distractions. We must tell our children of the staggering courage of Stephen, Peter, and Paul; and likewise, we all need to know of the many great martyrs of later generations, such as Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr, and Polycarp of Smyrna.

THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY FAITHFUL

Are there martyrs today? In the classic sense, there are indeed. Many noble men and women have during our lifetimes lost their lives serving God in unpopular ways and dangerous places: missionaries, translators, medical personnel, social workers. Our children need to hear their stories as well. But what has the biblical concept of *martus* to do with the rest of us?

Living Martyrs

Dietrich Bonhoeffer escaped Nazi Germany in 1939, but returned to his homeland to resist Hitler's madness. He was eventually captured and just before the war ended, hanged. A few years earlier, Bonhoeffer had written:

The cross means sharing the suffering of Christ to the last and to the fullest. . . . Some God deems worthy of the highest form of suffering, and gives them the grace of martyrdom, while others he does not allow to be tempted above that they are able to bear. But it is the one and the same cross in every case.⁵

Jesus called every follower to take up the same cross, *his* cross. Let us hear again: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For . . . whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it" (Mk. 8:34, 35).

Jesus called every disciple to that broader sense of martyrdom, the martyrdom of the submitted life! He called Peter, Andrew, James, and John to drop their nets and fish for men (Mk. 1:16-20). He called the woman taken in adultery to die to her life of sin (Jn. 8:11). He called the Rich Young Ruler to die to his riches and the hold they had on his life (Mk. 10:21). Some heeded the call and found life as they had never known it. And some walked away sorrowful, for they would not put to death the old way of life.

Ultimately, martyrdom is not about death, but life! From times of persecution come accounts which are sad parodies of martyrdom, of men and women who did not live for Christ but hoped to achieve heaven by being numbered among the martyrs in their deaths. But Paul's concept of the "living sacrifice" (Rom. 12:1) clearly places the emphasis on *living* for God. Not every Christian will be a *martus* who witnesses by dying; but every Christian in every age and culture, free or totalitarian, must be a living *martus* whose life witnesses to the truth.

Faithful

The defining element in the submitted life of the living martyr is *faithfulness*. The authentic disciple will follow Jesus to the end of the way, no matter if that comes by natural causes or by capital punishment. Most of us will not be given what Bonhoeffer called "the grace of martyrdom," but each of us is called to be faithful. "Faithful." What a strong and true word that is descriptive of the very character and heart of God: "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22, 23; RSV).

"Faithful" is Noah building that improbable vessel out in the middle of a field. "Faithful" is Abram pulling up stakes in the security of his hometown and heading out into the "who knows where?" "Faithful" is Moses leading a whiny nation of ex-slaves for forty years to a promised land he will never enter. "Faithful" is Hosea buying back his degraded and unfaithful wife at the local slave auction. "Faithful" is Daniel praying to his God in violation of a trumped-up royal edict. "Faithful" is

Mary getting the dumbfounding news that she will carry the Messiah in her womb, and responding, "I am the Lord's servant." And "faithful" is that glorious Gethsemane decision which meant our redemption: "Not my will, but yours be done."

Predictable People

Faithful Christian people are in the finest sense, predictable people. They have a pronounced cadence to their character. Their friends and customers know their word is their bond. Their colleagues at work know they will get the assigned task done. Their neighbors know they will be leaving for their church meetings at the same times every week. Their kids know they will walk in the door from the garage most workdays around 5:45. Dependable. Tried and true.

There is a downside to being a predictable Christian. You will all too often be under-appreciated and under-validated. Most true heroes are unsung. On that fateful night in 1775, many messengers rode through the Boston streets crying, "The British are coming!"; but we revere only one. Many of the greatest in the kingdom do their work in relative anonymity: the Sunday School teacher who is now nurturing the grandchildren of some of her first students, the brother who has led a prison Bible study every Saturday since the Eisenhower Administration. Faithful witnesses. Living martyrs.

So if you are among the taken-for-granted in your home congregation, congratulations may be in order! It likely means that your service is a constant in your church family, so predictable that others have come to expect it. Such back-handed tribute may not be all that thrilling, though; that is why Scripture calls for daily doses of Christian encouragement (Heb. 3:13).

THE CROWN OF LIFE

Thank God for the Book of Revelation! The Father knew that the church today also needed an apocalyptic vision of victory, to lift our eyes above the mundane, to awaken our courage with remembrances of faithful martyrs, to invigorate our faith and

our imaginations with a vision of ultimate victory.

We American Christians may never see our faithfulness tested by physical persecution. But those secular forces which test the mettle of our faithfulness are no less lethal than the pogroms of Nero and Domitian: soul-emptying materialism, heart-withering individualism, character-numbing relativism. These are the beasts, whores, and plagues of the late twentieth century. Revelation lifts our spirit, yes, but it also poses a profoundly weighty question: Do we have a faith worth dying for? A faith worth giving up all else for? A faith not worth dying for generally turns out to be a faith not worth living.

Paul had a favorite image for the life of a faithful Christian witness: the race. He tells his beloved Ephesian elders that with prison and hardship ahead, he only wishes to "finish the race" and complete the task of witnessing (*diamarturomai*) to the gospel of grace (Acts 20:22-24). Later, in what may have been his final epistle, the battle-scarred apostle looks back on a marathon of faithful service: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day. . . ." (2 Tim. 4:7, 8).

"Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life." Who makes that promise? Who will welcome us with that crown if we are found faithful? He who appears in Revelation 19 in one of the most stunning pictures in all of Scripture: the rider on a white horse, wearing a robe dipped in blood, and leading all the armies of heaven. His name? We know him by many names—Master, Teacher, Savior, Jesus. But in that Day we will call him "Word of God" (v. 13), "King of kings and Lord of lords" (v. 16). We will call him, most appropriately, "Faithful and True" (v. 11).

O may all who come behind us find us faithful;
May the fire of our devotion light their way.
May the footprints that we leave lead them to believe,
And the lives we live inspire them to obey:
O may all who come behind us find us faithful.

—John Mohr

NOTES

¹Tacitus *Annals* 15.44.

²Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 5.30.3.

³Pliny *Letters* 10.46.

⁴M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation* (Louisville, Ky.: John Knox Press, 1989), 21-23.

⁵Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1959), 98-99.

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KEN R. DURHAM became minister of the church of Christ in Falls Church, Virginia, in 1991. Prior to that he served as minister for congregations in Louisiana, Texas, Kentucky, Connecticut, and Missouri. He received his B.A. from David Lipscomb and his M.A. from Louisiana State University. He did graduate work in religious studies from Abilene Christian University and Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary. He received his Ph.D. from Louisiana State University. He has written four books and has published articles in nine brotherhood magazines. He is contributing editor for *Upreach Magazine* and a staff writer for *Image Magazine*. From 1987 to 1990, he served as co-host of the "Herald of Truth." He and his wife, Cathy, have two children.

THE JUDGMENT

(Rev. 20:11-16)

Jimmy Allen

THE CERTAINTY OF JUDGMENT

From reading Revelation 20:11-16, it is clear that judgment is a certainty. Many other passages support this truth. The Savior said, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (Jn. 12:48). In preaching to Felix and Drusilla, Paul reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come" (Acts 24:25). Paul wrote "of the righteous judgment of God" (Rom. 2:5). The writer of Hebrews spoke of those who will experience "judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries" (Heb. 10:27). It is also written that "the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished" (2 Pet. 2:9).

The Judgment is as certain as the resurrection of Christ. Paul, in speaking to the Athenian philosophers on Mars Hill, said, "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent: because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead" (Acts 17:30, 31). Paul inseparably connected the Lord's resurrection to the Judgment. According to his reasoning, we have assurance of the Judgment because God raised Jesus from the dead. This means if you believe in the resurrection of Christ, you must also believe in the coming Judgment. The latter is based upon and founded in the former. One who would accept the resurrection and deny the Judgment

would be terribly inconsistent.

The Judgment is as certain as death. According to Hebrews 9:27, "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." Whether one believes the Bible or not, he must accept the reality of death. Decay and death are written on everything. Hair which was once as black as a raven's wing is now as white as the driven snow. Hands which were once strong and steady are now weak and palsied. Backs which stood ramrod straight are now bowed under the weight of many years. To the elderly people in the audience, I direct this question: Where are the companions of your childhood? "On the eternal camping ground, their silent tents are spread. They bivouac with the dead." "The living know they shall die" (Eccles. 9:5). All are aware of the certainty of death. The judgment of God is as certain as death.

The final judgment is as certain as other events predicted by God which have long since come to pass. Those who have researched the matter say there are 333 Old Testament prophecies which were fulfilled in the life of Christ. According to Isaiah 7:14, he was to be born of a virgin. Matthew 1:22, 23 indicates that he was born to the virgin Mary. Micah 5:2 predicted that he was to be born in Bethlehem. At Matthew 2:5, 6 we learn that he was born in Bethlehem. Psalms 22:16, written a thousand years prior to the Lord's birth, predicted that he was to be pierced in his hands and feet. John 19:23 shows that he was crucified. Psalms 16:8-10 prophesied the resurrection of Jesus. In his great Pentecost sermon, Peter quoted this very passage as proof for the Savior's resurrection (Acts 2:25-32). The predictions cited were all fulfilled. The same Holy Spirit who inspired them has spoken through other men concerning the judgment to come. Just as certainly as those were fulfilled, these which relate to the judgment will be fulfilled.

The concept of judgment is in harmony with the conscience of man. Men everywhere have the feeling that there is something beyond this life. Universally, men believe they must give an account to a higher power. Dread and fear plague us all. Really, this is what guilt is all about. God's judgment is also in harmony with our reason. Please do not misunderstand. I am not

saying that all or any of God's teaching is to be tested in the arena of human reasoning before it can be accepted. After all, from the viewpoint of carnal and unregenerate man, a doctrine of Christ might appear to be unreasonable. We walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). However, with my limited ability and understanding, I can see the reason for judgment. Do you believe in the principle of justice? Do you believe that eventually justice will triumph over injustice? Do you believe the wrongs of life will one day be made right? In too many instances, justice and right are trampled under the feet of injustice and wrong. If you believe that good will be victorious, you must believe in judgment and a life beyond this one.

Nero was a sexual degenerate who actually lived with a man as his wife for a short period of time. When he was twenty-two, he had his own mother killed. Her name was Agrippina. She was a wicked, evil, and designing woman. If any individual ever deserved to be killed, she did. But, can you imagine a son murdering his own mother? Nero tried to poison her and failed. He arranged a shipwreck for her, but she swam away to safety. Finally, he had her killed by the sword. When he looked upon her dead body, he simply said, "I did not know I had so beautiful a mother." Nero was married to a woman named Octavia. He wanted another woman named Poppaea, but he had no real grounds for divorce. Eventually, he did divorce and dismiss Octavia. Twelve days later he married Poppaea. The Romans were not happy with his action, so Nero had one of the men who participated in his mother's murder to testify that he and Octavia had engaged in adultery. A short time later, Octavia was beheaded (at the age of twenty-two). Her head was sent to Nero in Rome. One day, a disgruntled Nero returned home from watching the gladiatorial games. Poppaea said something which further irritated him. He proceeded to kick her in the stomach. She was large with his child. Both she and the baby died.

Apparently, Nero burned Rome. Thousands of buildings were destroyed and many died. The Roman populace was justifiably outraged. They rose up in protest. The smell of blood was in the air. Nero had to find a scapegoat in a hurry. He blamed the Christians for burning Rome. He launched a bloody

persecution against the brethren. Some of the disciples were sewn in animal skins and thrown into the arena. Then, wild dogs which had been starved for days were released in the same arena. They pounced upon the skins, ripped them to shreds, and devoured the people. Many saints were crucified. Others were burned. Nero drove a chariot through his garden at night, and the way was lighted with the bodies of burning Christians. In that persecution, Paul was beheaded. According to tradition, Peter was crucified. Personally, I believe the tradition is correct. Likely, Nero killed two of the greatest men who ever walked the earth.

Finally, Rome had its fill of Nero. It was determined that he was to be assassinated. Nero received word of the plot and planned to beat his killers to the punch. First, he tried to drown himself but could not. Then, he put a knife to his stomach. However, when he felt the sharpness of its blade, he withdrew it. With the help of a servant, he managed to get the blade into his abdomen. From the viewpoint of this life, that was the sum, substance, and total of Nero's punishment. That blood-thirsty monster of vice, corruption, and immorality brought wretchedness and misery into the lives of thousands. He died rather easily. Did death end it all? Is there no more? Solomon wrote: "The wicked shall not go unpunished" (Prov. 11:21). Since Nero was not punished adequately in this life, there must be a judgment for him and his kind to be dealt with justly.

THE JUDGE

John teaches that the world will be judged by God, the Father (Rev. 20:11, 12; also notice the distinction between the Father and the Son in Rev. 4:2, 3; 5:1, 7). Acts 17:31 indicates that God will judge the world in righteousness. Hebrews 12:23 refers "to God the judge of all." A cursory look at these and other passages might lead one to conclude that men will be personally judged by the Father. However, this is not the case. Of course, there is a sense in which he will judge. He will judge the world through his Son. Paul said, "He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given

assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). God will judge through the man whom he has raised from the dead. The man raised from the dead was Jesus. Therefore, God will judge the world through Jesus. Paul wrote: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:10). It is evident that the actual judging will be done in the person of Christ.

Why is Jesus to do the judging? The Lord said, "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: . . . and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man" (Jn. 5:22, 27). Christ will judge because he is the Son of man. Jesus is God. He is also man (1 Tim. 2:5). He can understand the viewpoint of deity. He can also understand the viewpoint of humanity. Incidentally, this explains why Christ is the one mediator between God and men. Jesus has been in the flesh. From firsthand experiences, he knows all about us. He can properly represent us. He can do the same for the Godhead. He will make no mistakes. His judgment will be absolutely and infallibly correct.

It is fearful to think of being judged by Jesus because our excuses will not be accepted. They may have worked for us, but they will not work on him. I can imagine one of us standing before Christ, after having been weighed in the balances and found wanting, and saying, "Lord, I was afraid. I was afraid I couldn't hold out. I was afraid of what others would say about me." Remember that was the excuse of the one talent man (Mt. 25:25). To such, Christ could say, "I, too, was afraid. Surely, from your study of the Bible, you know how I shrank from the sharpness of death in the shadow of the cross. However, I did not allow fear to deter me from my course of duty." Another might say to Jesus, "Master, I was all alone. No one else in my family sought to please you. My friends and relatives did not stand with me in the Christian profession. Being alone, I couldn't stand the pressures and had to give up. Please understand my situation." To that statement, the Lord might reply, "I went to the cross for your transgressions alone. I, by myself, purged your sins. On the cross, I asked, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' Although I was alone, I obeyed the

Father for your sake." Perhaps someone else will say, "Lord, I was tempted. You can't possibly understand the power of temptation. It burned me down. It steamrolled me. I was overwhelmed by it. I simply could not stand before it. Please have mercy upon my weakness." Jesus could say, "Don't you know I was tempted in all points as you were, yet without sin? Satan assaulted me through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life as he did you. However, with the Father's help I overcame." Still another could say, "Dear Savior, I was ridiculed. People made fun of me. They said I was narrow-minded, intolerant, bigoted, straight-laced, and old-fashioned. They said so many hard things about me, I finally quit the church." To such the Master could respond with, "I told you in my word that the disciple is not above his master. They ridiculed me. Some said my miracles were performed by the devil's power. They lampooned me on the cross. In spite of the ridicule, I fulfilled the Father's purpose for me. What did you expect as one of my followers? I never promised a life of luxury and ease, free from persecution and hardship." Any excuse we might offer to Christ in the Judgment will be rejected. Jesus has lived here. He once had a body of flesh. He wore our shoes. He knows what life is all about.

On the other hand, it is wonderful to contemplate being judged by the Savior. He does fully know and understand us. We can be sure of receiving a proper verdict from him. I like to think of the Judgment as a courtroom. Satan is the prosecuting attorney. Concerning each of us, he will say, "Condemn him for he sinned." Our judge and defense attorney are one and the same person, the Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps that sounds like a stacked deck. Well, it is. It is stacked in our favor. In making our defense, the Lord will say, "It is true that this person sinned. He stumbled and fell short. His life was not free of mistakes. However, he surrendered to the will of God. He was born again of the water and Spirit. He lived a life which was basically submissive. He never gave up. He was faithful until death. My blood was shed as an atonement for his sins. In light of the evidence, I ask the court to have mercy upon my client." Then the Lord will leave our side as attorney and step behind the

judge's desk. He will strike the desk with the gavel and say, "Guilty, but justified!" Hallelujah, what a Savior!

THOSE TO BE JUDGED

Who will be judged? Paul wrote: "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom" (2 Tim. 4:1). From this statement we learn that both the "quick" or living and the dead will be judged when Christ comes. Here (Rev. 20:12), John said, "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." The small and great will be judged. It is true that there are small and great people according to God's assessment, however, I doubt that John had such in mind in penning this verse. He was likely referring to the small and great from the human point of view. Who are the great? Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Marcus Aurelius, Napoleon, Hitler, Stalin, Roosevelt, Churchill, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Reagan, and Bush. These people have made a splash in history. They will be present for the judgment. Who are the small? They are plain, common, ordinary people like those of us who are here. We, too, must give an account for the way we have lived. According to Matthew 25, the saved and the unsaved will be judged. The saved will be placed upon the Lord's right hand and the unsaved will be placed upon his left.

The nations of the earth will be judged. In that same chapter of Matthew, we learn that "before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats" (Mt. 25:32). In response to this reading, one might say, "There are 250 million people in the United States. If we are going to be judged as a nation, I'll be able to get lost in the shuffle." This leads me to say that cities will be judged.

Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty

works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou Capernaum, which are exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained unto this day. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee (Mt. 11:20-24).

Christ declared that the ancient cities of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom will be judged. He said the cities of his day, Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, will be judged. If those six cities are to be judged, then we have reason to believe that Tokyo, Peking, Hanoi, Saigon, Moscow, Rome, Paris, London, New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Detroit, St. Louis, Houston, Dallas, and Little Rock will be judged. This very community will also be judged.

"But," one could say, "there are several thousand people living here, and since the city is to be judged, perhaps I can get lost in the shuffle." This leads me to say we are going to be judged as individuals. Solomon wrote: "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth: and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment" (Eccles. 11:9). Solomon was telling the young people to have a good time and enjoy life. However, he was urging them to be careful as to how they lived, since they as individuals must answer to God in the judgment. Many of us might dismiss teen-age sin with "They are just kids." This was hardly the attitude of Solomon. He said they are to be judged. Paul wrote: "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12). Nations will be judged, cities will be judged, but we will answer to God individually. No one will get lost in the shuffle. One day you will stand alone before the all-seeing eyes of Jehovah.

We will not be judged as families. Imagine the following. An unsaved man is standing before Christ and trying to justify himself. Listen to him. "Lord, I had one of the finest Christian fathers in the country. My mother was also a godly person. My two brothers were leaders in one of your churches. My two sisters married Christian men. They and their husbands were loyal to you all of their days. My wife was a lovely Christian woman. To our union three children were born. They, too, served you faithfully." Notice, the man has talked about everyone but himself. Then Christ asks, "What you have said is good, but how about you?" The man drops his head and replies, "Master, I was the only one in the family who never yielded to your will." Too many men are singing, "Take my *wife*, and let her be consecrated, Lord, to Thee." We will not be judged as families but as individuals. It is possible for every other member of your family to go to heaven and for you to go to hell. It is conceivable that all the rest of your family will be eternally lost and you will be eternally saved. The acceptance or rejection of Christ is an individual matter.

We will not be judged as congregations. Listen to a brother talk about the great program of the church where he has membership: "We have 1,500 in Bible study and 2,000 for worship on Sunday morning. There are 1,500 back for the Sunday evening service and a similar number present for Wednesday night prayer meeting. We have a \$30,000 budget which is consistently met. We are supporting ten full-time missionaries on foreign soil and five full-time ministers at home. We have a home for the aged. We also have homes for orphan children and unwed mothers. We have a weekly television and daily radio program. We are strong on evangelism. Last year we baptized 325 people. I am a member of one of the greatest churches in the land." It is wonderful to hear a report like the one just related. I am happy there are such churches. May the time come when we will have many more of them. With all of my heart, I believe in building large churches with energetic evangelistic and benevolent programs. However, the question tonight does not deal with the program of the church but with what you as an individual contribute to that program.

You can have membership in a good church and be lost. Conversely, you can have membership in a bad church and be saved. Jesus made this truth plain in his remarks to the church at Sardis. The church as such was dead, but there were a few there who had not defiled their garments. Christ said they would walk with him in white, for they were worthy (Rev. 3:1-4). Every member of the home church can go to heaven, and you can go to hell. Every member where you worship can go to hell, and you can go to heaven. We will be judged as individuals. Do you attend the services of the church regularly? Do you read the Bible? Do you support the church program liberally? Are you active in soul winning? Are you concerned about helping the poor? Do you pray that the gospel will have free course in the hearts of men throughout the world? Our answers to these questions will determine where we will be in eternity.

Most of us have read the Parable of the Talents recorded in Matthew 25:14-30. I intend to relate it now. Listen carefully, and you will see that I have made some changes in the account. A master called in three of his servants. He gave the first five talents, the second two talents, and the third one talent. Then he went on a journey. Later he returned and had a reckoning with his servants. He called the three before him and said, "Men, I gave you eight talents some time ago. How many do you have now?" One, acting as a spokesman for the group, replied, "Lord, we now have fifteen." The master said, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord." I have redone the parable to make it appear as though we will experience a collective judgment. Of course, this is contrary to the teaching of Jesus. Here is the way Christ actually told the parable. The five talent man gave an account to the master. He had used his talents and had gained five more. This was an increase of 100 per cent. Next, the two talent man faced his lord. He had used his talents and had gained two more. To each of those men, the master said, "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord." Finally, the one talent man stood before his master. He

said, "Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strewed: and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine." His lord then described him as wicked, slothful, and unprofitable. He had him cast into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. This is a picture of individual judgment.

THE BASIS OF JUDGMENT

What will be the basis of our judgment? According to Revelation 20:12, "The dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books." Judgment is based on the things written in the books. "Books" is a plural word. I assume the plural is used because men will be judged by different standards. It seems that men will be judged in the light of whatever divine standard was binding when they lived. It is inconceivable, illogical, and unjust to contend that all men will be judged by the same standard. In Romans 2:12-16, Paul taught that the Gentiles, who did not have the law of Moses, will be judged on the basis of how they by nature kept the great moral precepts of the law. The Jews, who lived during the Mosaic Age, will be judged by the law (Rom. 2:12). Apparently, the patriarchs will be judged by whatever communication God had with them. Those living in the Christian Age will be judged by the gospel. Jesus said, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (Jn. 12:48). We will be judged by the words which Christ spoke personally and which he delivered through his inspired apostles. Abraham will not be condemned for never partaking of the Lord's Supper. Moses will not be lost for a failure to be baptized in the name of Christ for the forgiveness of sins. A faithful Christian will not be disinherited for working eight or ten hours every Sabbath. Men will answer to God according to the standard in force during the time they lived.

Since we are to be judged by the gospel or the New Testament, we should spend some time studying it. A teen-ager is

interested in obtaining his driver's license. He knows he must pass a written examination to get it. He would not think of taking the test without a great deal of study. I teach Bible at Harding University. If I announce a test in one of my classes for the following week, more than 90 per cent of the students will make preparation. It is foolish to go to class for an examination without getting ready. An elderly woman was studying the Bible. Some of her grandchildren asked, "Granny, what are you doing?" She replied, "I'm cramming for the final." If we see the need for study to get a driver's license or to make a passing grade, why can we not see the need for studying the Bible? We will answer to Almighty God on the basis of what is written in this book. Do you ever read it for yourself? I do not intend to go before God ignorant of the Bible's contents. Too much is at stake! I urge you to read, study, and obey the gospel set forth in the New Testament.

Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mk. 16:16). Compare that statement with this: "He that believeth and is not baptized shall be saved." The former was given by the Lord; the latter is given by man. Suppose those two statements were printed on large placards and you were asked to sign the one you think is correct. Where would you affix your signature? I would put my name on the card carrying the Lord's statement. One day we will answer for how we deal with Mark 16:16. If you are never baptized, what will you say to Jesus on the last day? Some might say, "Lord, I had a book which taught that baptism was not essential." Of course, we are not going to be judged by man's book but by the Lord's book. Perhaps another will say, "Jesus, my preacher said baptism was unnecessary." Remember, we will not be judged by man but by Christ in the light of his revealed will. This will plainly declares, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Rather than attempt to reason around it or explain it away, men need to surrender and obey. Mark 16:16 will still be in the Bible on Judgment Day.

Here is another passage to consider. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day

approaching" (Heb. 10:25). This verse shows we are not to forsake the assembly. It does not say it is a sin to miss a church service. You may have to miss because of illness. Several times I have missed in getting from one preaching appointment to another. One forsakes the assembly when he deliberately refuses to go. How many times must one do this before the elders talk with him? We will be judged by the New Testament. Clearly, we are told not to forsake the assembly. In contemplating this command, how does your life measure up? Can you give an account to God on this matter without being embarrassed?

Now look to 1 Corinthians 16:2 where Paul wrote: "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." We are to give liberally for the support of good works. About 25 per cent of the members carry the financial load in the average church. The rest simply go along for the ride. From one end to the other, the Bible teaches that God's people are to be generous. God gave; Christ gave; the Holy Spirit gave. How can a Christian be tightfisted and stingy? Giving is the whole tenor and spirit of the Christian religion. I may lose my soul, but I do not intend to go to hell for stinginess. It is absolutely impossible for a penurious, penny-pinching person to go to heaven. Such an attitude is so unlike God and so contrary to New Testament Christianity. There are too many who have never heard the gospel and too many poor for us to think about hoarding our treasures. Somewhere I have read that one of every eight verses in the New Testament deals with money. The Word of God clearly shows that we are stewards. One day we will give an answer concerning our stewardship.

When I was a boy, I played in the sand. It was fun to put sand on a piece of screen and shake it. Some of the sand sifted through the mesh, but some of the grains were too large to go through. God's commandments are like screens. When you cite, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," some people go through the mesh, but some are screened out. When you read, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together," the shaking and screening starts again. Some people pass

through, but others do not make it. When you say, "Let each one give as he is prospered," some people pass through, but many are screened out. You can consider the commands of God one by one in light of this principle. There is a way to safely pass every screening. Only one trait is needed. We must be honest—honest with God and honest with ourselves. Honest-hearted people are not disposed to rebel against God. What they read from the Bible, they accept. They say, "God being my helper, I will do as he has commanded."

We will also be judged on the basis of our behavior. The thoughts and secrets of our hearts will come under the scrutiny of God's judgment. Paul taught that Christ "will make manifest the counsels of the hearts" (1 Cor. 4:5). Solomon and Paul both stated that our secrets will be considered in the Judgment (Eccles. 12:14; Rom. 2:16). Our words will also be judged by Christ. He said, "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Mt. 12:36, 37). What are "idle words"? To me, they are simply words spoken in idleness. They are words spoken "off the cuff" when we are not trying to impress anyone. I think that was the Lord's way of saying every word we speak will be brought into judgment. Think of having to answer to Christ for cursing. "The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain" (Ex. 20:7). Think of having to give an account for vulgar stories, smutty jokes, suggestive expressions, malicious gossip, and harsh, censorious criticism of others. It would be extremely difficult to justify such before the Lord. I read of a lady who had the reputation for always speaking properly. She was asked, "How is it that you always say the right thing?" She answered, "I have learned to taste my words before I let them out." Surely, it is much better to taste them before we let them out than it is to have to eat them on the way back in. I have had the latter experience a number of times! Since we are to be judged by our words, let us pray with David: "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips" (Ps. 141:3).

We must answer to the Master for our actions. We will be

judged by our works (Rev. 20:12; 2 Cor. 5:10). The Lord "will render to every man according to his deeds" (Rom. 2:6). The young will be judged by how they act while on a date. They will answer for their conduct during an examination. God will be concerned about their attitude toward themselves, their parents, older people, and those in authority. But, of course, the rest of us will give an account too. Here are some questions that will help us to understand the scope of judgment. Have you obeyed your parents? Have you brought up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? Have you sought first God's kingdom and righteousness? Have you given an honest day's work for a day's pay? Are you fair and considerate with your employees? Do you love your wife as Christ loved the church? Are you in submission to your husband as the church is in submission to Christ? Is your teaching in harmony with the gospel of Christ? What is your attitude toward Christ's church, elders, and preachers? Are you the least bit concerned about the lost millions in today's world? Are you interested in helping the needy? What is your attitude toward those of other races? Do you dress modestly? Are you guilty of drug abuse, petting, drinking, gambling, lying, stealing, cheating, or committing adultery? Are you faithful in the church for which Christ died? Have you corrupted the worship of the early church? Do you have Bible authority for what you practice in religion?

HOW SHALL WE ESCAPE?

Hebrews 6:2 mentions "eternal judgment." This does not mean it will take God forever to judge us. It does mean the consequences of judgment will be eternal. Christ said some will go away into everlasting punishment and some into eternal life (Mt. 25:46). Have you tried to determine how long is eternity? Of course, this concept is beyond our comprehension. Eternity is until a thousand years and until a thousand years and until a thousand years. This sounds like a stuck needle on the record player, but it is about the best I can do with it. Eternity is endless. How tragic for anyone to leave the world without hope!

An inspired writer asked, "How shall we escape, if we

neglect so great salvation?" (Heb. 2:3). God the Father cannot answer this question. God the Son cannot answer it. God the Holy Spirit cannot answer it. Satan cannot give an answer. There is not an angel in heaven or a devil in hell who can answer this query. There is not a preacher, elder, deacon, teacher, or church member present who has the answer. There is not an alien sinner here who can answer. How shall we escape, if we neglect? The question simply cannot be answered! None shall escape who neglect the salvation offered by Christ!

Suppose at this very moment a store is being burglarized near here. At least four things could happen. First, the thief could slip away without being detected. Second, he could be detected and get away from the police. Third, he could be detected, captured, and through a perversion of justice, be released by the court. Fourth, he could be detected, caught, convicted by the court, sent to prison, and then escape. Are there any here who think they can follow one of these courses and somehow be eternally saved? Our actions will not go undetected because the Bible says, "Be sure your sin will find you out." Jonah furnishes us with the example which proves that no man can run away from God. No one is smart enough to pervert the principle of justice in the court of Jesus Christ. If we go to hell, we will not break out of that place. Houdini was billed as an escape artist. He escaped from strait jackets, locks and chains, and prison cells. Once he was loaded with locks and chains, placed in a barrel, and shoved through a hole in the ice on the Hudson River. He freed himself from the chains and barrel and swam back through the freezing water to the hole. However, even a Houdini cannot pick the lock on hell's door. There is no appeal to a court higher than the judgment bar of Christ. There will be no escapes from the prison of eternal hell.

Remember, you cannot escape if you neglect this salvation. Are you ready for the Judgment Day? Each one of us must give an account for himself. If you live and die under the grace of God, judgment will not be fearful. Really, it will be a glorious event for the redeemed. God is not willing that any should perish. He wants all to come to repentance. Christ went to the cross for your sins. I urge you to receive him as your Savior by

obeying his commands. If you are an erring disciple, return to Christ by repentance and prayer. If you have never entered the kingdom, come to the Lord by repentance and baptism.

JIMMY ALLEN has been Professor of Bible at Harding University for thirty-three years. He received his B.A. from Harding College in 1952, his M.R.E. from Harding Graduate School of Religion in 1959, and in 1971 was awarded a Hh.D. from Oklahoma Christian College. He was awarded a Distinguished Teacher Award as an outstanding educator in 1969. He has published ten books, his most recent being *Rebaptism?* He has held more than 1,000 gospel meetings with 33,000 responses and 8,000 baptisms recorded. He and his wife, Marilyn, have three children.

WE SHALL OVERCOME

Neale Pryor

The Greek word for the Book of Revelation is the Apocalypse, which means unveiling. The irony is that the Book of Revelation seems to be more difficult to understand than most of the other books and appears to be more of a *veil* than an *unveiling*. There is no end to the explanations that people have given of the meaning of the book or of the significance of the symbols used within it.

I doubt if anyone can explain all of the symbols in the Book of Revelation, or if anyone should. Perhaps some were not intended to have a meaning, but just to create an effect. However, the message comes through loud and clear. The theme of the book is "We shall overcome."

"These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful" (Rev. 17:14).¹

BACKGROUND

The Nature of Apocalyptic Writing

The Book of Revelation is difficult for you and me to understand and appreciate because this style of writing is so strange to those of us in the twentieth century. The early Christians were quite familiar with this type of literature. In the Old Testament, apocalyptic writing is seen in Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah, as well as in a few other books such as Joel and Isaiah. The intertestamental period produced a number of

apocalypses, such as the Book of Enoch, the Apocalypse of Baruch, and IV Esdras.

Several characteristics are common in apocalyptic writing.

1. Written during a critical historical situation. Edward McDowell has called them "tracts for hard times."² Ezra and Daniel were written during the period of the Babylonian oppression, in the sixth century B.C. The books of Enoch, Baruch, and Esdras were written during the Greco-Roman times. Enoch was reflecting the oppression of the Seleucids in the second century B.C. Baruch was reflecting the oppression of the Romans around A.D. 70. The Book of Revelation was also written during a period of intense persecution by the Romans.

2. The use of visions and symbols.

3. The dramatic element. The apocalyptic writings often-times are more like plays or operas, something to be experienced and not just to be read and studied. They are written in such a way as to produce a dramatic impact upon the audience. The visual images are very vivid.

4. The predictive element. Most apocalypses are looking beyond the present critical time to a period when there will be great peace and prosperity for the people of God.

5. A triumphant note. Almost without exception, the apocalypses end on a note of triumph. Good will overcome evil; God's people will be delivered and justice will be done on this earth.³

Typical of this is the vision of Daniel in chapters 2 and 7. In chapter 2 Daniel interprets the dream of Nebuchadnezzar in which the gold, silver, brass, and iron of the image represent four world empires. The image is smitten on the feet and destroyed by the stone that was cut without hands. This stone is the church of the Lord. The stone continued to grow until it filled the entire earth.

The triumph of the church is described in Daniel 2:44: "And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever."

The same message is given under the figure of the beasts in

Daniel 7. The first beast, the lion, represents Babylon, similar to the golden head of the image in chapter 2. The second beast, the bear, represents Persia. The third beast, the leopard, represents Greece. The fourth beast represents Rome. Daniel sees in the days of this fourth empire the kingdom of heaven being set up and the Son of Man coming to the Ancient of Days to receive a kingdom.

"And to Him was given dominion,
 Glory and a kingdom,
 That all of the peoples, nations, and men
 of every language
 Might serve Him.
 His dominion is an everlasting dominion
 Which will not pass away;
 And His kingdom is one
 Which will not be destroyed" (Dan. 7:14).

The Imperial Cult and Revelation

Revelation was written against the background of the imperial cult, the worship of the emperor. Julius Caesar was proclaimed to be a god, but was assassinated shortly thereafter. Augustus Caesar was deified after his death in A.D. 14. It became customary to deify each emperor at his death. This was considered more of a way of honoring the emperor rather than a new religion.

In A.D. 37-41 Caligula ruled the Roman Empire briefly. He demanded that he be worshiped and that his image be set up at the temple in Jerusalem. The officer delayed carrying out this command and was commanded to commit suicide. Before it all came to a head, Caligula died. Some think he was assassinated. Caligula was the first emperor we know of who demanded that he be worshiped.

Domitian (A.D. 81-96) is the first emperor we know of who demanded that he be worshiped and enforced it. This was no problem with most people since they already worshiped so many gods. Emperor worship involved a visit to the emperor's temple, burning incense on the fire, perhaps giving a small

offering, and proclaiming Caesar to be lord and god.

To most people it was no more than saying the Pledge of Allegiance or singing "The Star Spangled Banner" would be to a United States citizen. The Jews were exempt from this rule and thus escaped persecution because they had been recognized by the Roman government as a *religio licita* (a lawful religion).

Since Christians did not have this exemption, they were forced to worship the emperor. Many of them were killed; many were put in prison and their property was confiscated; others were exiled. There is evidence from Revelation 13:16, 17 that economic pressure was brought to bear on those who refused to worship the emperor:

And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand, or on their forehead, and he provides that no one should be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name.

It was during the persecution of Christians under the reign of Domitian that John had his vision on Patmos and wrote to encourage the Christians to remain faithful in the face of death. "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10).

THE THEME IN THE BOOK

The Book of Revelation carries with it the theme of triumph. It could well be summed up in the words "We shall overcome." From the first chapter to the last grand vision in the book, the theme is a note of victory, of optimism and encouragement to those who are enduring hardship for the cause of Christ.

The Vision (I)

When John hears the voice on the Lord's Day and turns to see the one who is speaking to him, he does not see a weak or dead Christ, but the glorified Christ. He describes him in terms reminiscent of Daniel 7.

And His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire; and His feet were like burnished bronze, . . . and His voice was like the sound of many waters. . . . and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength (Rev. 1:14-16).

The glorified Christ has seven stars in his right hand and is walking among the seven candlesticks. The seven stars represent the messengers of the seven churches. They are in the Lord's hand. The seven lampstands represent the seven churches of Asia. His presence among the lampstands indicates that he is with the churches. It must have been an encouragement at this hard time for the brethren to know that the Lord was with them.

The triumphant Christ speaks in verses 17 and 18: "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades." After John recovered from his initial fright and shock, he was anxious to share this message of hope with the brethren.

The Letters (2—3)

All of the letters to the seven churches of Asia follow the same general format. The angel is addressed; the one who is speaking is described. Each time the Lord says to the church, "I know. . . ." he tells each church something about them that indicates he is very intimately acquainted with them. It is an encouragement for them to see that he is very, very much involved in what is going on in their lives. "I know your tribulation and your poverty," he said to the church in Smyrna. "I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; . . ." he said to the church in Pergamum. As far as we know, Pergamum is the first place where a temple for emperor worship had been set up. The Lord is probably referring to the seat of emperor worship as "Satan's throne" at Pergamum.

After giving compliments and concerns to the churches, the Lord, in each of the letters, gives a promise to him that overcomes. Seven times in these two chapters we find the expres-

sion, "To him who overcomes." Each one of these contains a promise of victory. The one that overcomes will eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God. He will not be hurt by the second death. He will be given the hidden manna and a white stone and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but the one who receives it. He will rule with a rod of iron as the Lord has ruled. He will be clothed in white garments, his name will not be erased from the book of life, and the Lord will confess his name before the Father. The one who overcomes will be a pillar in the temple of God and will never go out from it anymore. The one who overcomes will sit down with the Lord on his throne as he overcame and sat down with the Father on his throne. Just as the Lord overcame, his people will overcome. The theme of the letters is, "We shall overcome."

God and the Lamb (4—5)

Chapter 4 pictures God on his throne. This is especially significant in contrast with the emperor upon his throne. God's throne is so much greater than that of any earthly ruler. The description of the throne is intended to create in one a sense of awe. There are the precious stones, the rainbow like an emerald. There are the twenty-four elders sitting on their thrones. There are thunders and lightning and the lamps of fire burning before the throne. Living creatures cry day and night, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come" (Rev. 4:8).

Chapter 5 describes the power of the Lamb. He is described as the Lion from the tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:5). He is the only one who has the power to open the seals. When the Lamb takes the book from the right hand of him who sits on the throne, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fall down in praise to him (Rev. 5:9, 10). Angels around the throne join the song of the elders. Thousands upon thousands begin to sing of his power and riches and wisdom (Rev. 5:11, 12). Finally the whole creation under heaven joins in this mighty chorus and sings, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever" (Rev. 5:13).

The message of these two chapters is: How great is our God! Anyone who has a God such as this on his side is bound to be victorious. Anyone who is under the protection of the Almighty God of the Universe need not fear any ruler, whether he be Caligula, Nero, or Domitian.

The Seals and the Trumpets (6—11)

Chapter 6 begins with the opening of the seven seals. The first four seals bring forth four horses representing in sequence, warfare, bloodshed, famine, and death. These describe the fate of the early Christians. At the opening of the fifth seal, John sees the souls of those who have been slain because of the Word of God. As they behold the carnage on earth, they cry, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (Rev. 6:10). The cry "How long?" must have been on the lips of literally thousands of Christians as they and their brothers and sisters were subjected to the cruel tortures of the Roman emperor.

God's answer comes with the opening of the sixth seal. The kings of the earth and the great men of the earth hide themselves because the wrath of God was spent upon them.

However, before the punishment of the wicked, the righteous have to be spared. Chapter 7 tells of the sealing of the righteous, symbolically represented by the number "144,000" to indicate that they will not suffer from the fate that will come upon the world. They are given the promise of victory.

"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; neither shall the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them to springs of the water of life; and God shall wipe every tear from their eyes" (Rev. 7:16, 17).

Chapters 8 through 11 tell of God's judgment upon the wicked, first under the figure of the seals and then by the sounding of the trumpets. The grand climax comes at the sounding of the seventh trumpet in 11:15. A loud voice in

heaven cried, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever." The triumph of the kingdom of God has been completed. The kingdoms of this world have been judged and destroyed, and the kingdom of God will last forever and ever.

A View Behind the Scene (12)

The great drama played out on the earth really stems from the great drama in the spiritual world, the conflict between good and evil. This is represented by the confrontation of the dragon, who is the devil, with Michael and his angels. The great dragon is thrown down from heaven. His power has been broken. Christians do not have to worry about who is the stronger. There is no doubt that, "greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world" (1 Jn. 4:4).

The loud voice in heaven summed up the message.

"Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them before our God day and night. And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even to death" (Rev. 12:10, 11).

The Judgment of the Beast (13—15)

Two beasts appear in chapter 13. The first obviously represents the Roman emperor and the second the emperor worship. The number that is given to the beast, "666," could well be a code number. Some think it refers to Nero. Others think it refers to ultimate imperfection since "7" is the complete number and "6" is incompleteness. The fact that the beast demands that all worship him (Rev. 13:8) makes it quite evident that this is emperor worship.

The heavenly proclamations in chapters 14 and 15 give encouragement to the Christians. Four times the voice from heaven gives a note of triumph to the children of God. "Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and

sea and the springs of waters" (Rev. 14:7).

A second proclamation follows: "Fallen, fallen is Babylon, the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality" (Rev. 14:8).

Throughout the Book of Revelation, Rome is pictured as Babylon. Babylon was the great oppressor of God's people in the Old Testament and formed a fitting symbol for Rome, the oppressor of God's children in the early Christian age.

A third proclamation appears in verse 9: "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or upon his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, . . ."

The fourth proclamation is in verse 13: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on! 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.'"

Chapter 14 ends with a picture of the angel reaping on the earth the bodies and the souls of the wicked. The winepress ran full with the blood of those who had incurred the wrath of God.

Chapter 15 pictures the redeemed singing the song of victory, the song of Moses and the Lamb. The scene ends with a view of the temple of God in heaven and a vision of the angels clothed in linen clean and bright. The temple was filled with the smoke from the glory of God and from his power.

The Judgment on Babylon (16—18)

The bowls of wrath are poured out upon Babylon (Rome) in chapter 16. The righteous judgment of God has been given to those who dared to trouble his people.

Rome is pictured as a scarlet harlot. She was drunk, not with wine, but with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus (Rev. 17:6). The identification of the harlot as Rome is made more certain with the interpretation that the seven heads on which she sits are seven mountains (Rev. 17:9). Rome is widely known as the city on seven hills. The judgment upon the harlot is described in detail in chapter 18. The encouragement this gave to the early Christians is apparent.

The Victory Celebration (19)

After the judgment upon the harlot, we see the victory celebration. The voice of a great multitude and the sound of many waters and many peals of thunder cries saying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns" (Rev. 19:6). The marriage feast of the Lamb follows, and the righteous join in.

In contrast there is another banquet. The birds of prey feast upon the corpses of the kings and commanders and the mighty men of the earth.

The triumphant Christ is pictured in verse 11 as riding upon a white horse. He is called Faithful and True. His eyes are as a flame of fire. He wears many crowns. His robe is dipped in blood and his name is called the Word of God. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which he smites the nations. "And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, 'King of kings, and Lord of lords'" (Rev. 19:16).

The Judgment on the Devil and All the Wicked (20)

The binding of Satan and his ultimate destruction are described in chapter 20. All of those who have followed him are condemned at the end of the chapter in the great judgment scene. "And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:15).

The New Heavens and the New Earth (21—22)

The final grand scene of the book contains the description of heaven. God dwells among his people. God wipes away every tear from their eyes. "And He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4). Following the description of the marvelous beauty of heaven, the final words of encouragement and invitation are extended to God's people. "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost" (Rev. 22:17).

The book ends with the promise that the Lord will come

again. John's response must have been the cry of every faithful child of God, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

CONCLUSION

From the first verse to the last verse in this book, the theme is apparent—an encouragement not only to the people who suffered in the days of Rome, but to all of God's people, no matter where or when their sufferings may occur. With God on our side, who can be against us? We can face the trials of life and endure whatever may come because we know, *We shall overcome*.

NOTES

¹All quotations are from the NASV unless otherwise indicated.

²Edward A. McDowell, *The Meaning and Message of the Book of Revelation* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1951), 7.

³C. Ray Summers, *Worthy Is the Lamb* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1951), 16-26.

NEALE PRYOR has been the Vice President for Academic Affairs at Harding University since 1983. For two years, 1983-85, he was also the Chairman of the Bible Department. He has been a Professor of Bible at Harding since 1962. He received an honorary Doctor of Laws Degree at Freed-Hardeman College in 1986. He was named Alumnus of the Year from Harding Graduate School in 1982. He received his B.A., M.A., and M.Th., from Harding and his Th.D. from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in 1969. He has written *You Can Trust Your Bible*. He conducts approximately fifteen gospel meetings a year, plus numerous appearances at youth rallies, workshops, and lectureships. He currently serves as an elder of the College church of Christ in Searcy. He and his wife, Treva, have two children.

HEAVEN

A. W. Chism

My subject is "Heaven" as it appears in the Book of Revelation. This beautiful word is found fifty-three times in Revelation alone. The word "heaven" is precious to us because it speaks to the longing of our hearts, and it is the homeland of the soul. It is the abode of the Eternal Father and the everlasting habitation of the redeemed. This is an important subject to all of us because often in the days of youth it seems we have so much time that we can afford to be extravagant with it. When the taste of the noon-wine has left our lips, and the cool of nightfall approaches, we cannot help but wonder what the darkness holds. I can tell you, with divine assurance, we are going to a city whose builder and maker is God.

I begin this lesson in full knowledge that I cannot tell you all you would like to know. The reason is obvious. I do not know as much as I would like to know about heaven and the life after death. Yet, we can be as sure as we are sure the Bible is true. Perhaps more would have been revealed if we were able to comprehend. Try to explain how a robin's egg will soon cease to be as it is and the robin will actually fly away in the warm sunlight. The explanation is impossible. Still the marvelous transition takes place ten thousand times a day.

Thus, we are led to believe by the Living Word and the deepest desire within us "that he [God] is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6). The rewards for a life of obedience begin in the here and now, and the final reward is to abide with him in the pearly white city that John saw coming down.

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them and they shall be his people, and God *himself* shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away (Rev. 21:1-4; emphasis mine).

When we keep our thoughts on heaven and how it will be when all of God's children are gathered home, we can endure and abound in a most difficult and trying situation. We live in a time of lowering moral standards, danger in our streets, confusion in our schools, and even our homes have been tragically affected by a lawless society. We know that something so much better is soon to be given us. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things that God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. 2:9). We cannot even imagine how great it is.

We believe this. In our hearts we are sure about it. A moment ago I said: We know that something much better is in the dawning of a new day. And this is to speak as spoken by the inspired apostle Paul. He did not merely suppose or even calculate the possibilities of a home eternal. He said, "*I know* whom I have believed, . . ." (2 Tim. 1:12). He further declares, "*For we know* that, if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5:1). In this same vein of confidence Paul told the Romans, "*And we know* that all things work together for good to them that love God, . . ." (Rom 8:28; emphasis mine). The knowledge of faith is non-scientific and yet, nonetheless, real. To a large degree it is a blessed assurance, the love and provision of an honorable parent for a child. Our God is able, and he is honorable. He wants us with him in heaven. His great desire is to bless and comfort his children and

reward their obedience to his will. Even the usage of language in Revelation is touching and beautiful: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; . . ." Which of us has never felt the rush of blinding tears from a desperate situation and then the comfort of a gentle hand wiping away the tears and easing the pain and grief. The wife of brother Phillip Holt was talking to her daughter about heaven and how it will be in a place where the streets are paved with gold, jewels, and things of such splendor. Their daughter surprised her in saying she did not really care about streets of gold and walls adorned with precious stones. She did explain, however, that she wanted to go to heaven very much because she would not have to cry any more there. Their outstanding teen-age son, her brother, was killed in an auto accident prior to this time, and it was almost too much for the little sister to endure. Let us try to think how it will be in a life not mingled with sickness and death, unending peace and joy for all who believe and obey. Friends, isn't this an evident desire and expectation within the heart of all humanity? What else could the Norsemen be referring to when they speak of Valhalla, the eternal home of valiant soldiers slain in battle? Even the Hindu strives for Nirvana, a place where nothing is needed or wanted and the soul has no desire for anything. Yes, "He has also set eternity in their heart" (Eccles. 3:11; NASV). Even the poor drunken Edgar Allen Poe, in his unusual conversation with the raven, perched on the palled bust of Paulus just above his door said,

"Tell this soul in sorrow laden, if, within the distant Aidenn,
It shall clasp a sainted maiden, whom the angels name Lenore—
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden, whom the angels name Lenore?
Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore.' "

"Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!" I shrieked
upstarting—

"Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian shore!
Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!
Leave my loneliness unbroken!—quit the bust above my door!"

Even the unbeliever wants to think of heaven as an eternal home when all the storms of life are passed. It is natural for the Christian in a very special sense. We want to be with the Savior and the loved ones we have lost for a while.

JOHN ON PATMOS

When the Lord gave this vision, splendid to John on the isle of Patmos, he was letting him know in a graphic way that this life is not all of our living. John was cut off here from his family and congregation, separated from friends and neighbors, but he had not lost his Lord. Jesus knew where he was, and he understood the problem. He knows where you are, every ache and pain of your heart. The church lost John when he was sentenced to the penal colony on this barren, rock-bound island, but God did not lose him for a minute. Admittedly, this is hard to imagine for all of us. Let me give an example, which is really very simple compared to the knowledge of God. You may already know of a system called global positioning. Many of the large transportation companies have an on-board computer and a small satellite dish. The main purpose is so the home office can know any minute of the day exactly where all of their units are. They can locate within five hundred feet every tractor and trailer.

If frail humanity can be that exact about their equipment and its location, be assured that God knows where you are. "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. . . ." (2 Tim. 2:19).

I read a few minutes ago that John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven. This is highly symbolic language, and it relates to the Jewish ideas of that time period. They believed and taught that the temple and the altar and the city of Jerusalem came down from God. Heaven as seen by John was so completely perfect in every detail that he compares it to a bride adorned for her husband. We think nothing is quite so carefully prepared for another human being as a bride adorned for her husband. Beyond doubt, this is to stir our imagination and create high expectation of a city that needs

neither the light of the sun or the celestial bodies, for "the Lamb is the *light*. . . for there shall be no night there" (Rev. 21:23, 25; emphasis mine).

NO MORE PAIN

We are mindful of pain almost every day that we live. Yes, either ours or someone else's pain. If there is no physical pain to deal with, there is mental anguish and sorrow for the sin and wrongs of Adam's race. We are often comforted in the promise that we have a High Priest in the Lord Jesus who is touched by the feelings of our infirmities. There is suffering all around us, and we know we are not immune to it. Sometimes it is the innocent suffering because of the abandonment of a mother or father. The frustration of "Why?" and the wonder of human endurance is often overwhelming. We are assured in Rev. 21:4 that it is all going to end: "The former things are passed away." I believe the end of all the trials and difficulties are referred to in verse 1: "And there was no more sea." The sea is magnificent to me . . . but it was not to the seer of Patmos. It was his prison keeper. To the Jew in general it was a mystery and a danger. The Jew was no sailor. The ocean to him was always restless and changing. When it was calm they knew it would not be so for very long. Our lives are that way to a large degree. I read of a newspaper man crossing Fundy Bay a few years ago in a rather large ship. A tempest arose there, about halfway across, and the ship was tossed about like a cork in the bathtub. He made his way slowly and carefully to the bridge and asked the captain if they were in great danger. The captain reassured him and told him, "I have spent most of my life on Fundy Bay. This you can depend on: when the sea is wild and restless it will soon be calm, and when it is calm it will soon be rough." Life is that way, but it is going to end. "The former things are passed away."

ALL THINGS NEW

"Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful" (Rev. 21:5). There are

some things we instinctively like about things "new." New clothes and new automobiles are exciting, but a new life in a family is beyond our ability to describe. A little baby is pure and fresh and free from care and worry. It is going to be that way in our new home, heaven. This blessed promise is a vision to the young Christian. It is also an increasing confidence to the maturing servant of the Lord—a soft pillow for the aging pilgrim as he slips away to the great unknown. If you or I were soon to inherit a fine and stately mansion, we would tell everyone we see of how fortunate we had become. It would not distress us very much if we had a little traveling problem or two along the way to our new location. When we consider the wonderful provision that God has made for us in this world, we have a foretaste of how it is going to be in the City of God. It is easy to realize that our Creator took care of our needs before those needs were even known to us. In the hot and sweltering days of summer, he knew how much we would need a drink of cold water, and he provided abundantly. In the cold wind of winter, he knew we would need warmth for our homes and bodies, and he abundantly provided for us.

He tempers the wind when His children are cold.
He lightens the load when His servants grow old.

The same power and vast authority which brought this world into existence in the first place has been employed to prepare a place of eternal joy and bliss.

ALPHA AND OMEGA

When the Lord Jesus calls himself Alpha and Omega, he is using a familiar expression. Since these are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, he is saying, "I am the sum-total of it all." His plan and his purpose are why we are here.

He is saying, "I am where you started, and I am where you will face the final judgment and spend eternity." We are told the same thing in different words in Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his

commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."

Our divine Savior said he was going to "prepare a place for us." In Revelation 21 we have a picture of the place he has prepared. The beauty and glory of the Holy City is much more than we are able to comprehend with human imagination. The streets of gold and the walls adorned with precious stones. The soft-flowing River of Life issuing from the throne of God, and on the banks of the river is the Tree of Life. The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. One word is saved for last, and it must not be overlooked.

THE HOLY CITY

Without holiness there can be no heaven such as we have read of and spoken of here. If it is just a matter of perfect beauty and surpassing grandeur, it might have been Babylon or even Rome. If it were just a matter of God's greatness and power, it could have been demonstrated in other ways.

Holiness is that without which no Heaven could exist.

—John Stoughton

The glittering brightness of the pagan Temple of Diana (one of the seven wonders of the world) was so completely overwhelming, the doorkeepers always said, "Take heed to your eyes. You will see nothing comparable to this in all the world." In the City of God we are told "the righteous shine forth as the sun" (Mt. 13:43). In a world of darkness and fear this is a glorious thought. We are thus motivated with high expectations "to walk in the light as He is in the light and have fellowship one with another . . ." (1 Jn. 1:7).

We must be clothed in the righteousness of Jesus, and this means obedience to the will of God (Mt. 7:21). When his will becomes our way of life, we have the imperishable Word of God that the victory is won. We shall hear him say in the last great day, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom

prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Mt. 25:34).

A. W. CHISM is the pulpit preacher for the Linville Forest church of Christ in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Prior to this, he served two congregations in Arkansas for more than fourteen years (Fayetteville and Fort Smith). He attended David Lipscomb University and Tulane University. He conducts radio programs with the International Gospel Hour. He has appeared on five college lectureship programs and conducts six gospel meetings a year. He is married to the former Floye Gillispie, and they have four children.

VICTORY THROUGH SURRENDER

Jimmy Adcox

It was an uncertain time. Domitian was on the Roman throne demanding the confession "Caesar is Lord." When Christians refused, persecution or death followed. The past had brought times of physical, political, and religious oppression. Even more difficult times were still ahead.

"Where is God?" they must have asked. Sixty years had passed since Jesus had been raised and ascended. "What is God doing? What is his plan? What is going to happen next?" They found it difficult to hold on and be faithful in such stressful and uncertain times.

Into these times came a book written for encouragement. The book is a recorded vision of John from God explaining what would shortly come to pass (Rev. 1:1). It begins with a vision of God and a message of immediate focus directed toward the specific needs of seven churches in Asia Minor (Rev. 1:12—3:22).

After receiving Jesus' letters to these churches, John looked and saw an open door. "Come up here," the voice said, "and I will show you what must take place after this" (Rev. 4:1). Filled with the Spirit, John immediately saw a throne in heaven. The one who sat there did so in dazzling array, encircled by a rainbow and surrounded by twenty-four other thrones occupied by the twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and wore crowns of gold. There were flashes of lightning and loud thunder that came from the throne. In front of the throne were seven lamps blazing with fire, and between John and the throne there was a crystal clear sea, so clear it looked like glass. Four living creatures covered with eyes, each resembling respec-

tively a lion, an ox, a man, and a flying eagle—these were around the throne. When they cried, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come,” the twenty-four elders bowed before the throne and cried, “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being” (Rev. 4:8-11).

As John looked closer, he could see a scroll in the right hand of God. It was filled with information on front and back and was sealed with seven seals. Suddenly a mighty angel asked, “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?” When it became obvious that no one in heaven or earth could open or even look inside the scroll, John wept (Rev. 6:1-4)! He did not cry because he could not satisfy his curiosity about the future. There was much more involved. Opening the seals not only would release information, it would also release the action of God to work his will in the world. Without God’s intervention and saving work, John and the struggling Christian could not hope to survive. How could they go on without the assurance that God’s power and rule would march forward in victory and strength?

As John cried, an elder spoke. “Do not weep!” he said. “See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals” (Rev. 5:5). Hope was not lost. There was someone worthy to break the seals!

“Look, the Lion of the tribe of Judah!” A lion is regal and powerful. The allusion is to God’s promise that “the scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his” (Gen. 49:9, 10).

“Look, the root of David.” God had promised to raise up kingly victory through the seed of David, the ideal king. Of this one it was said, he will “strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked” (Is. 11:4).

Awesome regal power! That is what John was invited to see! But when John turned to look, what he saw was startlingly

different. It was not the powerful appearance of a lion, nor the regal look of a Messiah. It was a lamb, fresh from the place of slaughter, with the gaping wound still open and unhealed. Bearing all the marks of death, it at first appeared bloody, wounded, and lifeless. What he saw brought images of weakness, not power; surrender, not aggression; and defeat, not victory.

“Who is worthy to open the seals? A lamb that is slain? You’ve got to be kidding!” From a worldly point of view what John saw was a disappointment. The need was for power, aggression, and force, not Mary’s little lamb!

But most of us do not really understand power. Contrary to popular opinion, the vision of the lamb was not a vision of weakness. It was a vision of power, but a different kind of power! Jesus took the image of the lamb that was slain and turned it into the vision of the lamb as victorious warrior!

The lamb John saw was not dead. He was alive and standing in the center of the throne! He was strong, fully aware, present, and poised to take the scroll, open the seals, and powerfully set in motion the progressive rule of God (Rev. 5:6, 7).

It was power through weakness! God had made himself vulnerable. He had become flesh and blood, lived among his people, and surrendered himself to die for their sins.

It was victory through defeat! When Jesus went to Calvary, Satan and his demonic forces laughed in hellish glee. It looked as if Satan’s day had come and the forces of evil had triumphed. But in the midst of apparent defeat, the tables were turned. “Having disarmed the powers and authorities, [Jesus] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Col. 2:15).

It was exaltation through humiliation! It is the victory of the pierced hand, not the clinched fist. Jesus emptied himself of the powers and prerogatives of deity, took upon himself the form of a servant, and endured the embarrassment and shame of the cross. For this reason, he is exalted and worthy to receive the confession, “Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:5-11).

Yes, it is a different kind of power! It is a power that brings

victory over sin and death. Victory that ushers in the kingdom of God, where the rule of God changes lives, gives meaning and purpose, and supplies hope and joy. It is a rule that transcends any kind of earthly power. It deals with the central issues of life which no human power can address.

Because he is "the lamb that was slain," he is worthy and able to fulfill the continuing work of God. He has complete power to bring to completion the good work he has begun in his people (Phil. 1:6).

And yet our tendency is to rely on our own strength, effort, ingenuity, plans, methods, and goals. Too often we live with a divine orientation, but with little sense of divine power. We want to live for him, but we forget to live through him. So we have a form of godliness, but deny its power! We forget that in seeking to save life, we lose it. But in losing life for Christ's sake and for the gospel, we find it. Victory truly does come through surrendering ourselves to the power and purpose of God!

The Book of Revelation makes it clear that conflicts will continue between the forces of good and evil until Jesus comes again. But it guarantees that if we keep ourselves in the purpose and power of the Lamb, we will share in his victory. This is nowhere better stated than in Revelation 17:14. Speaking of the forces of evil, John writes: "They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen, and faithful followers."

Once we catch a vision of the Lamb that was slain, we, too, will fall to our knees in praise and adoration. We, too, will join with the four living creatures and twenty-four elders in singing the new song:

You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God and they will reign on the earth (Rev. 5:9, 10).

We will also join the voices of angels numbering ten thousand times ten thousand as we sing, "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise" (Rev. 5:12)!

And we can ultimately join all the creatures in heaven and earth as we sing, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power for ever and ever" (Rev. 5:13).

By surrendering ourselves to the Lamb that was slain, we can share in the victorious rule of God!

JIMMY ADCOX has preached at the Southwest Church of Christ in Jonesboro since 1977. He formerly served as youth and pulpit ministers in several congregations in Tennessee where he began his preaching career at age 14. He attended Freed-Hardeman University and David Lipscomb University and received his M.A.R. and M.Th. degrees from Harding Graduate School of Religion. He is currently a candidate for the D.Min. from Abilene Christian University. He has written for several Christian publications and speaks on programs for "Better Life" TV and radio. He and his wife, Ann, have three children.

THEME CLASSES

THE OLD TESTAMENT IN REVELATION

F. Furman Kearley

INTRODUCTION

I have studied three college courses on Revelation from three different perspectives. Brother R. C. White taught the continuous fulfillment view throughout church history with most of the prophecies and fulfillments having to do with Roman Catholicism. Brother Thompson presented a more universal type interpretation focusing on the constant war between good and evil and the symbols in the book relating to this.

Later I studied under Dr. W. B. West. He stressed that the message was originally and primarily addressed to the seven churches in Asia during the reign of Domitian. He emphasized that the book has application and encouragement to Christians of all ages because in the end God will win over the devil and exalt his kingdom over all the kingdoms of the world.

During that time and since then, I have read many commentaries on Revelation, heard many lectures, and taught the course on Revelation several times, both in colleges and at churches. I have come to believe that Revelation is a vital study and one of the best encouragements for Christians. The sum total answer is, "We win." Christians win.

Everyone needs to know the encouragement of Revelation. God is over the devil and over the devil's servants here upon this earth. Christ is Lord of lords and King of kings (Rev. 19:16). The devil and his henchmen may win some battles temporarily, but God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the saints of the ages will win the war. Righteousness will be exalted. The kingdoms of this earth will become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ (Rev. 11:15).

Since so much work has been done before, I do not claim any originality for this study. I have studied the book and have checked time and again the references to the Old Testament and studied these in their Old Testament context and then in their context in Revelation. However, I have never undertaken an independent work of my own concerning the statistics of the quotations, allusions, and references in Revelation to Old Testament material.

I know that to a careful student who knows both the Old Testament and the New Testament it is evident that Revelation makes generous use of the Old Testament to convey the message of encouragement to the persecuted Christians.

Brother Homer Hailey has observed, "The writer of the Revelation was steeped in the prophetic writings, following the example of one of his predecessors, Ezekiel, having 'eaten up' the books of the Old Testament, thereby saturating his whole spiritual being with their thoughts, feelings and language."¹

Brother Ferrell Jenkins affirms,

It is believed that one of the major reasons why Christians fail to understand the book of Revelation is that they lack an awareness of the use of the Old Testament which permeates the book. Even an awareness of this phenomenon has not always brought an understanding of the Old Testament symbols used. If Christians could only see that John was using language and imagery which was thoroughly familiar to his first readers! But this insight does not come without careful study and comparisons of the Old Testament background parallels.²

For the statistical studies I have relied heavily on the analysis made by brother Jenkins from the spadework done by Brooke Foss Westcott, Fenton John Anthony Hort, R. V. G. Tasker, H. B. Swete, and others.

STATISTICS AND ANALYSIS

Scholars universally recognize the extensive presence of the Old Testament in Revelation. Isbon Beckwith states, "The

author's mind was stored to a marvelous degree with the ideas, the language and the imagery found in the Old Testament and in apocalyptic writings."³

Donald Guthrie concluded that the Old Testament had "so molded the author's thought that he cannot write without reflecting it."⁴

This extensive presence of the Old Testament in Revelation apparently is what gives so many contemporary and Middle Age commentators and students difficulty in understanding Revelation. They are not familiar with the Old Testament and the circumstances from whence these allusions came. Thus, they miss the significance of them and how they would have been understood by a first-century audience.

While we cannot know for certain, it seems strongly evident that John the apostle in writing Revelation chose to use the apocalyptic language of the Old Testament as a code language by which to communicate to the Christians while concealing his message from the Roman authorities. Had the Roman authorities understood that John was encouraging the Christians to resist pagan idolatry, the idolatrous priesthood and the Roman authorities enforcing paganism, they would have used the document of Revelation as evidence to persecute all the more and try to destroy the church.

John, knowing the Christians being largely of a Jewish or proselyte background were familiar with the Old Testament, was able to take its events, symbols, and language and apply them to Rome, the pagan priesthood, the devil, and his forces who were opposing the Christians. However, it is important to note that it is Jesus who is making the revelation of John, and thus, the Lord and the Holy Spirit are revealing these matters to him and guiding him in the use of the Old Testament language to express the key concepts.

Most English versions do not clearly indicate all of the Old Testament quotations or allusions. Jenkins notes, "The recently translated *The Jerusalem Bible* has sought to separate words which are quotations from or close allusions to other books of the Bible by printing them in italic type."⁵

On the other hand, some of the Greek texts attempt to mark

clearly the differences. Tasker states:

A glance at the book in the editions of the Greek Testament of Westcott and Hort or of Nestle, where all Old Testament expressions are printed in special type, reveals the extent of the influence of the Old Testament. While there are no direct quotations, it is clear that the writer is saturated with the language of Scripture, particularly of the Prophets and the Psalms. He is not however just a borrower from these earlier writings. All that he takes over he invests with a thoroughly Christian significance.⁶

Westcott and Hort list over four hundred quotations from the Old Testament in the apocalypse. Swete says that of 404 verses in Revelation, 278 contain references to the Old Testament.⁷

Merrill C. Tenney is one of the few writers who includes a chapter on the Old Testament background of Revelation in his commentary. He gives a more extensive breakdown of the Old Testament usage in Revelation:

It [Revelation] is filled with references to events and characters of the Old Testament, and a great deal of its phraseology is taken directly from the Old Testament books. Oddly enough, there is not one direct citation in Revelation from the Old Testament with a statement that it is quoted from a given passage; but a count of the significant allusions which are traceable both by verbal resemblance and by contextual connection to the Hebrew canon number three hundred and forty-eight. Of these approximately ninety-five are repeated, so that the actual number of different Old Testament passages that are mentioned are nearly two hundred and fifty, or an average of more than ten for each chapter in Revelation.⁸

Jenkins, who wrote his master's thesis at Harding Graduate School of Religion on this topic, bases much of his study on Tenney's list. Figure 1 represents Tenney's study and conclusions concerning the distribution of the Old Testament quotations and allusions in Revelation.⁹

Distribution of Old Testament Quotations and Allusions In Revelation¹⁰

DISTRIBUTION BY SECTIONS

| SECTION | REFERENCE | NUMBER |
|------------|-----------|--------|
| Prologue | 1:1-8 | 11 |
| Vision I | 1:9—3:22 | 38 |
| Vision II | 4:1—16:21 | 164 |
| Vision III | 17:1—21:8 | 95 |
| Vision IV | 21:9—22:5 | 24 |
| Epilogue | 22:6-21 | 16 |
| TOTAL | | 348 |

DISTRIBUTION BY BOOKS OF OLD TESTAMENT

| BOOK | NUMBER | BOOK | NUMBER |
|--------------|--------|----------------|--------|
| Genesis | 13 | Psalms | 43 |
| Exodus | 27 | Proverbs | 2 |
| Leviticus | 4 | POETRY | 45 |
| Numbers | 3 | | |
| Deuteronomy | 10 | Isaiah | 79 |
| PENTATEUCH | 57 | Jeremiah | 22 |
| | | Ezekiel | 43 |
| Joshua | 1 | Daniel | 53 |
| Judges | 1 | MAJOR PROPHETS | 197 |
| 2 Samuel | 1 | | |
| 2 Kings | 6 | Hosea | 2 |
| 1 Chronicles | 1 | Joel | 8 |
| Nehemiah | 1 | Amos | 9 |
| HISTORICAL | 11 | Habakkuk | 1 |
| | | Zephaniah | 2 |
| | | Zechariah | 15 |
| | | Malachi | 1 |
| | | MINOR PROPHETS | 38 |

Figure 1

An analysis of the chart indicates that Tenney believes Revelation contains citations from 24 of the Old Testament books. Tenney's total is 348 citations. One hundred ninety-seven of these are from Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel; 38 from seven of the Minor Prophets; 57 allusions from the

Pentateuch; 45 from Psalms and Proverbs; and only 11 from the historical books.

These various connections between Revelation and the Old Testament range all the way from the use of one key word from a text to reference about a biblical figure to a direct quotation. Revelation never gives a full citation of referring back to the specific Old Testament book.

Jenkins says on this point:

A citation "is a fairly exact reproduction of the words of the original text, accompanied by a statement of the fact that they are being quoted and by an identification of the source." There is no such direct citation in Revelation. A quotation "is a general reproduction of the original text, sufficiently close to give the meaning of its thought and to establish unquestionably the passage from which it is taken." But even quotations, as here defined, are rare in the book. That which closely approaches a direct quotation is found in Rev. 2:26, 27. The "quotation" is a loose one from Psalm 2:8, 9. An allusion "consists of one or more words which by their peculiar character and content are traceable to a known body of text, but which do not constitute a complete reproduction of any part of it."¹¹

This is in keeping with the purpose and manner of the use of the Old Testament. The revealer of Revelation is Jesus, and he is, with the Holy Spirit, the author of all of the Old Testament. The purpose is to use the Old Testament terminology in large as a cryptic or code language. Thus, the intent is to take the phraseology and use in a new context rather than focus on the statement in its original context.

THE TEXT USED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT ALLUSIONS

Since the usage varies all the way from one word to several verses, great difficulty is encountered in identifying the text used by the author of Revelation. One cannot be certain about details. Sometimes it is not possible to be sure whether the word

or phrase comes from one or another book of the Old Testament. Indeed, then it is difficult to always know the precise original Greek translation being used. Sometimes it may be the translation of the author himself guided by the Holy Spirit, of course.

H. B. Swete provides a table of the 278 verses in the Book of Revelation which he believes contains reference to the Jewish Scriptures. Perhaps ninety or more of these are used twice harmonizing Swete's list with the table provided by Tenney. With each of his 278 comparisons, Swete indicates whether he believes the quotation was from the Septuagint (omicron = LXX) or Aquila (alpha = Aquila) or Theodotion (theta = Theodotion) or Symmachus (sigma = Symmachus) or the rest (*hoi* lambda = the rest).¹²

R. H. Charles thought that John translated directly from the Old Testament text and did not quote from any Greek version, but was often influenced by the Septuagint and a later revised Greek version.¹³ For much greater detail of this kind of technical information, study carefully the works cited by H. B. Swete, R. H. Charles, R. V. G. Tasker, and Westcott and Hort. These renowned scholars have provided the basic spade work by their thorough and careful analysis of the text and textual criticism.

WHY USE THE OLD TESTAMENT?

Tenney poses several possible reasons for using the Old Testament text. Jenkins concludes, and so do I, that likely the principle reason is that the Old Testament passages were used because it presents the model of apocalyptic literature and language. This had become common among Christians, probably through apostolic use, as a code for referring to their suffering and persecution, their persecutors, and also for comparing their suffering experiences to the captivity period of Daniel and Ezekiel and to the Maccabean period. The people of these periods also drew heavily from Ezekiel, Daniel, and other Old Testament references for encouragement to persevere.

A part of the use of the Old Testament may be compared to the use of the KJV in the preaching and writing of Bible scholars in the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centu-

ries. They were so steeped in the memorization of the text that it flooded their expression of biblical ideas. This was all the more appropriate for the writer of Revelation as he used the well-known persecutors of the past to symbolize the persecutors of the Christians at the end of the first century.

REVELATION IS APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

One is aided in an understanding of Revelation by having a good understanding of all apocalyptic literature, especially, that from the Old Testament which Revelation has absorbed extensively within it. Revelation is a book with 404 verses and yet contains nearly 400 allusions to the Old Testament.

Apocalyptic literature basically is designed to reveal God's working and overall control of matters. It arises out of societies that are in deep trouble with many problems. Particularly a suffering and persecuted people, who see only more of the same, envision God's intervention on behalf of the poor and oppressed. They see God moving in mysterious ways to overthrow wicked rulers and powerful nations and exalt God's people to deliverance, freedom, and abundant blessings.

The Old Testament apocalyptic literature, including some sections of Isaiah, much of Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah, grew out of the exilic period under the Assyrians and then the Babylonians.

Later apocalyptic literature from the Pseudepigrapha such as the Book of Enoch, the Assumption of Moses, the Apocalypse of Baruch, Fourth Ezra, and others grew out of the persecution by the Antiochian Empire and was reworked under the Roman Empire. The suffering Jews looked for the intervention of God to deliver them.

D. S. Russell, one of the most informed writers concerning apocalyptic literature, describes it in this manner:

It is essentially a literature of the oppressed who saw no hope for the nation simply in terms of politics or on the plane of human history. The battle they were fighting was on a spiritual level; it was to be understood not in terms of politics and economics, but

rather in terms of "spiritual powers in high places." And so they were compelled to look beyond history to the dramatic and miraculous intervention of God who would set to rights the injustices done to his people Israel.¹⁴

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The book of Revelation is inspired apocalyptic literature like Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah. It contains the clear evidences of inspiration as it claims Jesus revealing his will and the things shortly to come to pass to persecuted Christians.

THE FOUR HORSEMEN AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

Revelation 6 begins to describe the opening of the seven seals by the Lamb. John saw four horsemen. Revelation 6:2 says concerning the first, "Behold, a white horse, and he who sat thereon had a bow; and there was given unto him a crown: and he came forth conquering, and to conquer."

Revelation 6:4 describes the second: "Another horse came forth, a red horse: and to him who sat thereon it was given to take peace from the earth, and they should slay one another: and there was given unto him a great sword."

Revelation 6:5, 6 describes the third: "Behold, a black horse; and he who sat thereon had a balance in his hand. And I heard as it were a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, a measure of wheat for a shilling, and three measures of barley for a shilling; and the oil and the wine hurt thou not."

Revelation 6:8 pictures the fourth: "I saw, and behold, a pale horse: and he who sat upon him, his name was Death; and Hades followed with him. And there was given unto them authority over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with the sword, and with famine, and with death and by the wild beasts of the earth."

These four horsemen bring to mind the four chariots of Zechariah. Zechariah 1:7, 8 describes a man riding upon a red horse who stood among the myrtle trees. Behind him were red horses, speckled and white.

The *Melech Ha Dobher Bi* (the angel who spoke with Zechariah) said, "These are they whom the Lord has sent to walk to and fro through the earth" (Zech. 1:10).

In Zechariah 6 he saw four chariots come out from between two mountains of brass. This time in the first chariot were red horses, in the second black horses, in the third white, and in the fourth grizzled and bay horses. (This is the KJV description. Some versions vary.)

Again, the *Melech Ha Dobher Bi* (the messenger) explained that these are four spirits of the heavens. The black horses go forth to the north country, the white after them, the grizzled or dappled go toward the south country. The bay went to walk to and fro through the earth.

Jenkins concludes:

The similarities in these two accounts lead us to the conclusion that the symbol of the horsemen in the book of Revelation is rooted in Zechariah. Both use different colored horses to go forth from God to control the activity on earth and to execute judgment, and the colors are similar.

But the dissimilarities should also be noted. The order of the horses is different. In Revelation it is white, red, black and pale; in Zechariah it is red, black, white, and gray. In Revelation the color of the horse conforms to the character of its rider, but this doesn't seem to be the case in Zechariah. In John's vision the horses bear riders, while in Zechariah's vision they pull chariots. In Revelation there are only four horses, but in Zechariah an unspecified number of horses.¹⁵

Some also see an allusion to the victorious King or Messiah of Psalm 45. Also, there is a possible connection between the allusion to the scarcity of food or great expense for food and Ezekiel's description of breaking the staff of bread in Jerusalem, eating bread by weight and fearfulness and drinking water by measure (Ezek. 4:16; 5:16).

THE SEALING

Revelation 7:1-8 describes the sealing of the servants of God on their foreheads. Ezekiel 9:1-8 describes putting marks on the foreheads of people concerned about the city's abominations to protect them from being slaughtered by those who executed the evil ones.

No doubt there is a relationship, and one is to understand in Revelation that God will protect his righteous in some way, perhaps, both physically and spiritually from persecution.

THE GREAT HARVEST

Revelation 14:14-20 describes the righteous judgment of the wicked. One like a son of man seated on a white cloud came with a sharp sickle in his hand. This reminds one of Matthew 13:41, 42 and also of Joel 3:11-13.

The backgrounds from Joel and from Matthew seem clearly to help show that Revelation 14 is describing a righteous judgment when God will punish the wicked.

THE OVERTHROW OF BABYLON

A major theme in Revelation is the overthrow of Babylon described in chapters 16, 17, 18, and 19. Compare especially Revelation 18:21 with Jeremiah 51:60-64. Both passages compare the downfall of Babylon with the casting of a stone into the sea.

These four comparisons of major themes in Revelation with the Old Testament background illustrate in a broad sense how Revelation adapts and reworks earlier figures to apply them to the Christian situation under Rome.

The horsemen seem to be an indication of God's universal power and control over all the circumstances of life. Because of the sinfulness of man and also because of the repentance of man, God sends forth both blessings and curses and is ever aware of his faithful people to protect them.

He seals his righteous ones against the evil and destructive forces, sometimes physically but always spiritually.

As a reaper harvests his crop, God in the Old Testament and in the Book of Revelation will make his harvest, and he will bring righteous judgments down upon the wicked and punish them for their sins. Babylon's overthrow and destruction surely has become a symbol in the Maccabean age, in the Roman period, to the Christians and for all time that God is over the nations. God is concerned for his people, and God will destroy any Babylon-type power, whether great or small, that attempts to crush God's people.

DANIEL IN REVELATION

Daniel is a short book of twelve chapters, but there seems to be approximately fifty-three allusions to it in Revelation. Daniel, as noted earlier, lived during the period of exile both under Babylon and then under Persia. Daniel relates dramatic accounts of God's intervening to save his servants under persecution. Chapter 1 describes God delivering Daniel and his friends from being forced to eat the king's dainties and faring well on the Jewish diet.

Chapter 2 describes Daniel surpassing all in wisdom and interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's great dream and being exalted and honored.

Chapter 3 relates God acting to save the three Hebrew children from the fiery furnace.

Chapter 4 describes Daniel interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's strange dream, the humiliation of Nebuchadnezzar, and his ultimate praise of Daniel and of the God of heaven.

In chapter 5 Daniel interprets the handwriting on the wall, and his interpretation is confirmed by the invasion and conquest by the Persians.

In chapter 6 the jealous presidents plot and have Daniel cast in the lion's den, but he is delivered from the lions' mouths by the mighty hand of God.

In chapters 7, 8, and 9 Daniel predicts the rising and falling of the major empires, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome, and is very explicit about many of these details. This shows God's power through his servant to know and control even the future.

Chapters 10, 11, and 12 give a detailed account of the conflict between the Ptolemy and the Selucid Empires with the children of Israel caught in the crossfire and specific details fulfilled in the Maccabean period. The book concludes with God's great deliverance of his people.

The Christians in Asia under severe persecution as the Jews under Greek persecution and Babylonian persecution received great encouragement by remembering Daniel, God's faithful servant, and God's intervention on behalf of his people.

Jenkins concludes:

The similarities between Revelation and Daniel are evident:

- a. The authors of both were in exile: John on Patmos and Daniel in Babylon.
- b. The people of God were oppressed by an ungodly force in both cases; the Israelites by Babylon and the Christians by Rome.
- c. Each writer spoke of the overthrow of the evil power and of the continuing rule of God. There is, however, an important difference that should be noted: Israel was in captivity because of apostasy, but the Christians were being persecuted because of their faithfulness.¹⁶

It might also be noted that God's focus during the Babylonian captivity was the deliverance of the righteous remnant. Most of the apostates were destroyed by conquering Babylon. The Christians of Asia could easily be compared to the righteous remnant.

EZEKIEL IN REVELATION

Daniel was taken into Babylonian captivity about 605 B.C. and continued through Babylon and into Persia until about 520 B.C. Ezekiel came on the scene about 593 B.C., some twelve years after Daniel among the captives who had been taken to Mesopotamia by Nebuchadnezzar in the second carrying away about 597 B.C. Ezekiel's entire ministry was apparently among these captives by the River Chebar except for his vision of transport or actual transport to Jerusalem to see the wicked conditions.

Jeremiah was an earlier contemporary beginning his ministry about 627 B.C. and continuing until about 580 B.C. Jeremiah was placed by the Lord to minister in Jerusalem to encourage the faithful, to stand fast in faithfulness, and to rebuke the sin of the wicked and to foretell the doom and destruction of the Babylonian captivity.

Daniel was chosen of God, perhaps, because he was of royal seed, to minister in the palaces of Babylon and Shushan. God used him mightily to encourage his people to faithfulness to God, to pray to Jerusalem, to know God's will, and to hope for return at God's appointed time. He helped to build a spiritual strength that survived captivity.

God chose Ezekiel to live among the common people who were in slave labor to their captors. Ezekiel also continued to teach the people to lead them in reflection upon God's will and work. He is credited by some of Jewish tradition with beginning at least the foundation of the synagogue. The synagogue came to be the chief center of the Jewish community within a pagan community and contributed immensely then and even until now to maintaining the identity of the Jews as a people, their knowledge of God, the Old Testament, and God's mighty workings among the Hebrew people.

About forty-three allusions to Ezekiel are found in Revelation. Similar conditions of persecution and suffering are shared by Ezekiel and his people with John and his people.

Some shared material in Ezekiel and Revelation include (1) the term "son of man," (2) God's judgments against the nations (Ezek. 25—32), and (3) symbolic figures and visions. The description of the Lord and the throne of God in Revelation are similar to the description of the glory of the Lord in Ezekiel 1 (cf. Ezek. 1 and 10 with Rev. 1 and 4). We have already noted the similarity concerning the sealing of God's people (cf. Ezek. 9:1-7 with Rev. 7:1-4). They both mention the measuring of the temple of God (cf. Ezek. 40:1-49 with Rev. 11:1-11).

The description of the fall of Babylon the great in Revelation 16—19 has similarities with Ezekiel's descriptions of God's judgments upon the nations.

JEREMIAH IN REVELATION

Revelation contains about twenty-two references to material from Jeremiah. In relation to the size of the books, this is much less frequent than from Ezekiel and Daniel. However, Jeremiah contains little, if any, that would be classed as apocalyptic literature. Though he was opposed and persecuted, he was not under the domination of foreigners but rather was in conflict with the sinners of his own people. Thus, his situation was different from that of Ezekiel, Daniel, and John, who were being persecuted by pagans.

The description in Jeremiah 50—51 of the fall of Babylon is similar to Isaiah 47, Ezekiel 26—28, and Revelation 16—19. Sometimes this makes it difficult to determine from which prophet John may be borrowing.

Jenkins summarizes the relationship as follows:

Jeremiah spoke of the overthrow of literal Babylon; John used similar terminology to describe the overthrow of mystical Babylon. Jeremiah stayed among his people in their homeland, continuing his work; John was separated from his people during his exile on Patmos. A study of the expressions used by Jeremiah in their historical setting can be helpful in clarifying the meaning of similar expressions in the context of the Apocalypse.¹⁷

OTHER OLD TESTAMENT SOURCES

Revelation seems to contain some allusions from Isaiah, perhaps 79; Zechariah, perhaps 15; Psalms, perhaps 43; Exodus, perhaps 27; and a few from various other books. From these the allusions are not as extensive or clear to see.

The throne scene in Revelation 4—5 seems to draw from Isaiah's call vision in chapter 6. Isaiah describes the fall of Babylon in chapters 13, 14, 21, 47, and 48. His language is frequently similar to that in Revelation 18. John's description of the new heaven and the new earth in Revelation 21—22 compares to Isaiah 65.

Three striking parallels exist. Isaiah saw a vision of the Lord,

and so did John. Isaiah prophesied the fall of literal Babylon, and John prophesied the fall of the figurative Babylon, Rome. Isaiah and John spoke of new heavens and a new earth and a new order of things after the overthrow of the evil, opposing force.

Zechariah prophesied about 520 B.C. His principle work was to encourage those who returned from the captivity to rebuild the temple. He did so with powerful encouraging visions of God's being with the people, bringing them back, and assisting them in this work.

Some figures occurring in Zechariah that are used in Revelation and seem to be related include the lampstands (Rev. 1), the seven eyes of the lamb (Rev. 5), the two witnesses who are the two olive trees (Rev. 11), the horses (Rev. 6), and perhaps others.

Tenney lists forty-three references to the Psalms in Revelation, but close examination shows that most of these contain little more than a word or two that connects with the wording of the Psalms.

Comparisons with Exodus seem natural considering their circumstances. The children of Israel were suffering in Egyptian bondage as the Christians were under Roman persecution. Revelation seems to make about twenty-seven allusions to Exodus.

Themes in Exodus reflected in Revelation seem to be the tabernacle and its furnishing, the lampstand, the trumpets, the plagues upon Egypt, the song of Moses, and Moses seems to be the model for one of the witnesses in Revelation 11.

CONCLUSION

Time does not allow a more thorough exegesis of Revelation and each of the passages alluded to from the Old Testament in its context both in the Old Testament and in Revelation. However, one who will take the time to recognize the Old Testament allusions in Revelation, study carefully their context in the Old Testament, and see the application made to the sufferings of the Christians under the Roman Empire will be greatly aided in a deeper, more complete understanding of Revelation.

The Old Testament prophets gave great hope and encouragement to the Hebrew people to survive and contributed much to the deliverance of a righteous remnant. The writer of Revelation encouraged Christians to faithfulness under most severe periods of suffering and martyrdom. Because of the encouragement provided by Revelation, by the prophets, and the Bible as a whole, Christians remained faithful, the church survived, and the gospel spread throughout all of the world.

Every generation needs the encouragement provided by Revelation. Every individual needs this certainly at times of depression and oppression in the Christian life. Revelation and the Old Testament passages behind it tell us, "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment unto the day of judgment" (2 Pet. 2:9). The message of Revelation and the exilic prophets and Exodus is that God's people win and God's opponents lose.

May our study be extensive and our faith be deep, for faith comes by hearing the Word of the Lord (Rom. 10:17).

NOTES

¹Foreword by Homer Hailey to *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation* by Ferrell Jenkins (Marion, Ind.: Cogdill Foundation Publications, 1972), 10.

²Ferrell Jenkins, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation* (Marion, Ind.: Cogdill Foundation Publications, 1972), 14, 15.

³Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1919; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1967), vii.

⁴Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction: Hebrews to Revelation* (Chicago: InterVarsity Press, 1966), 285.

⁵Jenkins, 22.

⁶R. V. G. Tasker, *The Old Testament in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954), 146.

⁷Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1911), 612-8; Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1906; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954), cxi as cited in Jenkins, 23.

⁸Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957), 101.

⁹*Ibid.*, 104; see also Jenkins, 24.

¹⁰Chart from Tenney, 102.

¹¹Jenkins, 25.

¹²Swete, cxi-clviii.¹³R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of Saint John*. International Critical Commentary, Vol. I (New York: Charles Scribner, 1920), lxviii ff.¹⁴D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), 17, 18.¹⁵Jenkins, 43.¹⁶Ibid., 54.¹⁷Ibid., 61.

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F. FURMAN KEARLEY is the pulpit minister for the church of Christ in Monahans, Texas. He has been the editor of the *Gospel Advocate* since 1985. He formerly served as minister for churches in Montgomery, Alabama; Covington, Kentucky; and Abilene, Texas, and taught at Abilene Christian University for ten years. He and his wife, Helen, have two daughters.

THE FIGURE OF CHRIST IN REVELATION

John Mark Hicks

The dominant descriptive figure of Jesus Christ in Revelation is "the Lamb." This appellation occurs twenty-eight times in contrast with eleven uses of "Christ" and only seven occurrences of "Jesus." The symbolic figure of "lamb" is the motif around which Christ has revealed himself.

The figure is both theologically and structurally significant. The Lamb appears at the center of the drama of the book. At every movement in the drama, the Lamb is leading the forces of God. The victory of God is the victory of the Lamb against his enemies. It is a war between the Lamb of God and the beast of Satan. The Lamb is God's champion, and he wins the battle.

This lesson is arranged around four themes which reveal who the Lamb is as he is pictured in Revelation. The Lamb is (1) worthy, (2) redeemer, (3) warrior, and (4) shepherd. These themes effectively summarize the message of Revelation concerning Jesus Christ. It is his self-revelation of his exalted position which he now enjoys at the right hand of God. The Lamb provides his own self-portrait.

THE WORTHY LAMB

The Lamb is worthy! Through comparing the hymns of Revelation 4 and 5, it is apparent that the Lamb is worthy to receive what the enthroned God is to receive. The Lamb is worshiped and enthroned with God the Father. Revelation 4 is a picture of the enthroned and sovereign God who reigns over the world. He is worthy, as Lord and God, to receive "glory and honor and power" (Rev. 4:11). With these words, the twenty-

four elders "fall down before him" and "worship him" (Rev. 4:10). Revelation 5 is a picture of the divine throne room where the Lamb appears at the right hand of God. He, too, is "worthy" to receive "power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise" (Rev. 5:12). Again, the twenty-four elders "fell down before the Lamb" (Rev. 5:8) and worshiped him. God and the Lamb are then addressed together and to them is offered "praise and honor and glory and power for ever and ever" (Rev. 5:13). The twenty-four elders then "fell down and worshiped" both the enthroned one and his Lamb. The Lamb is worthy alongside of God; they share the praise and glory of the heavenly hosts. They share their adoration and worship.

One of the clear motifs of Revelation is that only God is to be worshiped. Idolatry, the worship of demons and objects of stone, gold, or silver, is condemned (Rev. 9:20). The war pictured in Revelation is a battle between the Lamb and the beast who himself demands that the inhabitants of the earth worship him (Rev. 13:4, 12, 15; 14:9, 11; 16:2). It is a contest over who will be worshiped: God and his Lamb or the Dragon and his beast? The Lamb deserves the worship that is forbidden to the beast and appropriate to God himself. Only divine persons are to receive worship.

This motif is emphasized twice in the book by the clear message that not even angelic messengers, divine appointees, are to be worshiped (Rev. 19:9, 10; 22:8, 9). On two different occasions the prophet John fell down and worshiped one of God's messengers, an angel. On both occasions, the angel protested that he was but another servant of God like John. The command was then given which resonates throughout Revelation: "Worship God!" The implication is clear: Only God is to be worshiped; only divine persons are worthy of worship. The intensity of this theme in Revelation cannot be doubted, and neither can the fundamental point that the Lamb is counted worthy of this worship which belongs only to God. God and the Lamb are worshiped together (Rev. 5:13; 7:10).

The worthiness of the Lamb lies in both his person and work, in who he is and in what he has done. The worthiness of his work is extolled in Revelation 5:9 and is directly related to the

redemptive work of the slain Lamb. His work of redemption renders him worthy of worship. Yet, his work of redemption is intimately tied to who he is since his redemptive work depends upon his person. The Lamb was able to redeem only because of who he was—the divine Son of God who became man. He was able to win the battle only because he was the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 17:14).

The worthiness of the Lamb, then, lies fundamentally in his person. The Lamb is worthy because he is divine. He is God; he is the Son of God (Rev. 2:18). His deity is underscored by the titles he is given in the Revelation. Whether or not it is Jesus who is speaking in Revelation 1:8, the titles "the Alpha and the Omega," "the First and the Last," "the Beginning and the End" are directly ascribed to Jesus in Revelation 22:13 (cf. Rev. 1:17). Jesus is the "Living One" (Rev. 1:18) or the one "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty" (Rev. 1:8). This ascribes to the Lamb the nature of Jehovah (Yahweh) himself: "I am that I am" (Ex. 3:14; cf. Jn. 8:58). The Lamb shares the nature of Yahweh—he is, along with the Father and the Spirit, Yahweh. This is verified by the use of the title "the First and the Last" in the Old Testament. Isaiah 41:4 says, "I, the Lord [Yahweh]—with the first of them and with the last—I am he." Again, Isaiah 44:6 (cf. Is. 48:12) says, "I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God." The Lamb shares in this oneness of the divine nature, and he receives the worship of angels and his followers as one deserving of the worship which belongs only to Yahweh. The Lamb is worthy because he is God.

THE REDEEMING LAMB

The worthiness of the Lamb also lies in his redemptive work. The symbolism of the "lamb" derives in part from the sacrificial background of the Old Testament and Isaiah 53:7. Even though the words for "lamb" are different in the Gospel of John (cf. 1:29) and Revelation, the significance overlaps. The sacrifice of the Lamb is redemptive in purpose. Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. "You are worthy," the

four living creatures and the twenty-four elders sing, "because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9).

The essential kerygma of Revelation is the redeeming blood of the Lamb which the love of God has provided under the sovereignty of his own purposes (cf. Rev. 1:5). The key text of Revelation 5:9, 10 proclaims that the blood of the Lamb purchased a people for God who would be kings and priests in order to serve God. A people has been bought; a kingdom was inaugurated through the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 11:15).

The kerygma envisions a world dominated by evil and plagued by sin. It is a world destined for judgment. Sins are to be punished. The world, with its bloody thirst, must be destroyed (Rev. 11:17, 18). The wrath of God is to be released upon the earth for their sins. The wedding supper of the Lamb in chapter 19 is itself an act of vengeance and wrath on the part of God. God is to be praised (Hallelujah!) because "he has avenged on her the blood of his servants" (Rev. 19:2). Sin must be judged; Babylon must receive "double portion" (Rev. 18:6). Therefore, the call to God's people is eloquently given in Revelation 18:4b, 5:

"Come out of her, my people,
so that you will not share in her sins,
so that you will not receive any of her plagues;
for her sins are piled up to heaven,
and God has remembered her crimes."

Therefore, God is just when he gives to the inhabitants of the earth the wrath they deserve. When the bowls of wrath are released in chapter 16, an angel breaks out in praise. God is the Holy One whose judgments are just. Since the inhabitants of the earth have "shed the blood" of saints and prophets, God has "given them blood to drink as they deserve" (Rev. 16:6).

The kerygma, the good news (Rev. 14:6), however, is that God has acted in Christ to remove our sins. The Lamb who was slain has purchased a people for God. Instead of demanding our

blood as we deserve, God has received the blood of the Lamb in our place. This was accomplished through the sacrificial blood of the Lamb which "freed us from our sins" (Rev. 1:5). Our soiled robes have been made white in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 7:14). As a result, the promise is that the followers of the Lamb will not suffer the plagues due to the inhabitants of the earth. God will not remember the crimes of his people because he has already remembered them in the Lamb who was slain for their sins. They have been "redeemed from the earth" (Rev. 14:3) and are able to sing the new song of redemption. They sing about a new Exodus; they sing the song of Moses and the Lamb (Rev. 15:3). They will not suffer the plagues of the earth nor the destiny of the wicked. On the contrary, they will share eternal life with the enthroned Lamb (Rev. 2:7; 3:5, 21).

The cross is the only act of the earthly Jesus mentioned in Revelation. It is the central focus of the earthly ministry of Jesus as it is seen from the vantage point of the exalted throne room. It is that act which made him worthy to take the book out of the hand of God and settle the destiny of God's people (Rev. 5:6, 7). It is the slain Lamb who is victorious over the enemies of God. It is a victory rooted in the Lamb as a slain Lamb. The cross was a victory, not a defeat. It was a victory because it provided the ground of redemption for the followers of the Lamb. Its redemptive power emboldens saints to look beyond this life, beyond death, and beyond martyrdom. They will pass through the great tribulation and reign with Christ because they have been freed from their sins through the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 1:5; 7:13; 20:4).

THE WARRING LAMB

The Lamb is at the center of the judgment scenes in Revelation. The image of the Lamb is not only drawn from the sacrificial background of the Old Testament, but is also drawn from the powerful images of the militant and powerful lamb of apocalyptic literature. This Lamb is horned—seven horns (Rev. 5:6). Horns are an apocalyptic symbol of power. Seven horns is an apocalyptic symbol for perfect power—omnipotence. The

Lamb is also a Lion (Rev. 5:5), a powerful beast which is able to overpower and destroy its enemy. The horned lamb, therefore, picks up the encouraging message of a mighty Messiah, a powerful King who will rule the nations (cf. Gen. 49:9, 10).

The Lamb, in Revelation, is not a symbol of weakness, but of strength and power. Even the blood of the Lamb is not understood as some sort of victimization of a powerless individual, but the definitive expression of the power of the Almighty God. The cross is the expression of God's love (Rev. 1:5) and power (Rev. 5:6). The Lamb is *Christus Victor* through the cross. He expresses his power, not his weakness, through the shedding of his blood.

This cross was God's victory over Satan. It was the event that threw the accuser out of heaven itself. While Satan stands as the accuser of the people of God by pointing to their soiled garments (Zech. 3:1-10), the work of the Lamb on the cross overcomes him. The voice in heaven proclaimed that "salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ" had come when they overcame Satan "by the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 12:10, 11). The war has been won; it was won at the slaying of the Lamb. It was not weakness; it was victory. It was not victimization; but triumphant redemption!

Those who do not repent of their sin (Rev. 9:20, 21), glorify God (Rev. 16:9), or follow the Lamb (Rev. 14:4) will suffer the wrath of this powerful and triumphant Lamb. It is the "wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. 6:16) that is poured out on the rebellious inhabitants of the earth. The metaphor of a Lamb's wrath immediately strikes the reader as inappropriate. The "lamb" is a gentle figure whose innocence is most apparent; a lamb would not harm a fly. But this Lamb is horned, powerful, and righteous. He is a just judge. His anger will be vented upon those who make war against his people, against those who worship the beast. The wrath of God is the wrath of the Lamb, and "with justice he judges and makes war. . . . He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty" (Rev. 19:11, 15). This wrath is poured out on those who worship the beast when it is the Lamb whom they should worship (Rev. 14:9-11).

The Lamb makes war against the beast who makes war

against his people, his followers. This is clearly pictured in Revelation 17:14. While the kings of the earth gather with the beast to "make war against the Lamb," the Lamb will overcome them "because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen, and faithful followers." The Lamb's victory is certain because he is "Lord of lords and King of kings." This is a divine title which belongs only to God. The Lamb will be victorious because he is the Almighty, and he will win the victory for his people.

The Lamb of God, therefore, is not only a sacrificial victim, but a reigning and victorious King. He rules with a rod of iron to punish the wickedness of the nations and to rescue his people (Rev. 2:26, 27; 19:15). He is the warrior Lamb who leads the heavenly hosts in the battle against evil. His victory is final.

THE SHEPHERDING LAMB

The image of the Lamb as a warrior is evocative, but so is the image of the Lamb as a shepherd who leads his people into rest and peace (cf. 1 Pet. 2:25; Heb. 13:20). This picture of the Lamb is given in chapter 7 where John sees the great multitude that no one can count in the presence of the throne room of God. They are praising God and the Lamb, and wearing robes made white in the blood of the Lamb. One of the twenty-four elders describes the condition of these saints—they are being shepherded by the Lamb (Rev. 7:17). The Lamb is at the center of the throne and he "will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." As a result, they will never hunger or thirst again. Instead, they will serve God day and night in his temple because God has spread his tent over them and dwells with them as with his own people.

The imagery of Revelation 7:17 is drawn from the Twenty-third Psalm and Ezekiel 34:23. The Lamb is one who will lead his people through the wilderness into times of refreshing through living water. Those who are thirsty can answer the invitation of the Lamb who will provide for them living water (Rev. 22:17) which flows from the throne of God and the Lamb

(Rev. 22:1).

The people of God are followers of the Lamb. They follow him in his witness for God, his martyrdom. They follow his patience and his martyrdom. This picture is vividly portrayed in Revelation 14:3-5. The faithful followers of the Lamb are pure, chaste, blameless, and they are "offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb." The saints are called to the same patient endurance that characterized the Lamb himself (Rev. 12:17; 13:10). They are God's chosen and his called (Rev. 17:14). Their names have been written in the book of life since the creation of the cosmos (Rev. 13:8).

Christ is a shepherd to his people. His people are sheep to their shepherd. They follow him; they follow him even to the point of giving the same witness he gave. They follow him to the point of death, to martyrdom (Rev. 2:10; 12:17; 20:4). Yet, his victory is their victory. Just as in death the Lamb was exalted to reign with his Father, so also in the death of the saints they are exalted to reign with the Son on his throne (Rev. 3:21). Their Shepherd leads them to rest and peace (Rev. 14:13).

CONCLUSION

The image of the "lamb" in Revelation is a complicated one. It is drawn from both Old Testament and apocalyptic sources to describe the multi-dimensional character of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the sacrificial Lamb whose death frees the inhabitants of the earth from their sins. Jesus is the victorious Lamb who wages war against the beast and defeats him in the struggle for the destiny of the Lamb's followers. Jesus is the Lamb who shepherds his own people and leads them to victory, peace, and rest. He is a Lamb who is both victim and victor, both sheep and shepherd. He is the redeemer God who both identifies with and rescues his people.

The image of Jesus Christ as the Lamb in Revelation is an apocalyptic and Levitical designation of the enthroned and exalted Jesus who became man and redeemed a people for God from every nation. He is the glorified Christ who is destined to be victorious and leads his people to victory. He is the God who

was slain, the Lamb who waged war, and the Shepherd who watches over his flock. Though he was dead, now he is alive and he holds the keys to death and Hades. He is the Lamb who was slain only to be victoriously enthroned by his Father. He now awaits his followers who will join him in his reign throughout eternity.

JOHN MARK HICKS is Associate Professor of Christian Doctrine at Harding Graduate School. He has previously taught at Magnolia Bible College, Capstone School of Ministry, and Alabama Christian. He earned his B.A. from Freed-Hardeman in 1977, his M.A.R. in 1979 from Westminster Theological Seminary, his M.A. from W. Kentucky University in 1980, and his Ph.D. in 1985 from Westminster. He has been named in Who's Who in American Colleges, 1977; American Education, 1992; Religion, 1992; and International Who's Who for 1992-93. He has published articles in the *Restoration Quarterly*, *Evangelical Journal*, *Gospel Advocate*, and *Image* magazine. He has been a speaker for seminars, gospel meetings, radio and television broadcasts. John and his wife, Barbara, have three children.

THE BEATITUDES OF REVELATION

Patrick H. Casey

Victories in Revelation, in part, can be seen in the beatitudes of the book. The seven beatitudes of Revelation are found in 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7; and 22:14.

Revelation was written to God's people of the first century. It was written to warn, comfort, and encourage a persecuted people. The great servant John assured them that they were, and would continue to be, victorious in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The beatitudes will be studied in the light of the book's historical context. The method of approach in this study will be "through first-century glasses." It is my belief that the first responsibility of a student of Revelation is to learn the meaning of the book to its inspired human author and to its first readers.

In order to better understand Revelation, the nature of the book must be considered. First, the book is an *apocalypse*, which indicates a revealing and uncovering of that which has been hidden. Second, the book is a *prophecy*, which suggests that the message is to its day as well as future days.

The book is a *letter* or an *epistle*. The word "epistle" indicates a writing. This writing was, and is, to the seven churches of Asia (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea).

The date of Revelation has been set during the days of Claudius, Nero, Domitian, and Trajan. It seems that the major evidence indicates a time during Nero or Domitian. I believe that Revelation was written during the time of Domitian, which is about A.D. 95.

I believe that the major purpose of Revelation was to strengthen and encourage suffering Christians who were being

persecuted by the religious and political conditions in the Roman Empire. Christians refused to worship the emperor as "Lord God." Emperor worship was begun in the days of Augustus, but by the time of Nero and Domitian, it was demanded that all people in the Roman Empire must worship the emperor. Christians would not, and could not, worship the emperor; therefore, they were persecuted, tried, and many killed. Revelation was written within this context, and it assured the Christians of genuine victory in, through, and by the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE BEATITUDE OF REVELATION 1:3

The blessedness and happiness of Revelation 1:3 is set forth in the following words: "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand." In order to get a better understanding of this beatitude, an analytical study of this verse will be made.

"Blessed"

Some never think of Revelation as a book of beatitudes. Perhaps, most of us think of the Bible beatitudes as coming from Matthew 5. The English word "blessed" comes from a Greek word *makarios*, which basically means "the blessedness of happiness" that nobody can enjoy except the people of the Lord. In the Hebrew Old Testament, the word *ashere* is translated "blessed." When the Septuagint was made, the word *makarios* was used to translate the Hebrew word *ashere*. In Psalms, the word "blessed" is used a number of times (cf. Ps. 1:1; 2:2; 32:1, 2; 33:12). In the Greek New Testament, a form of the word *makarios* is used some forty times. The majority of uses are found in Matthew, Luke, and Revelation.

"Blessed Is He That Readeth"

The reading of the Scripture is reference to the public reading of the Word. Public reading was a common matter in the Old Testament era (Neh. 8:1-8) and in the early New Testament

period (cf. Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27; 1 Tim. 4:13).

A number of possible reasons can be given for the need of public reading. One, Old Testament people were limited in reading materials. Two, early New Testament people had few copies of the Scriptures. Three, also perhaps in the Old and early New Testaments periods, some people were limited in their reading ability.

In the church history classes at the Harding Graduate School of Religion in Memphis, Tennessee, Dr. Earle West referred to the public reading of the Bible as related to the Restoration Movement. In some cases, public reading of the Bible would last for one week. I well remember as a child hearing the Word read at every Sunday morning service. I want you to get this: According to Revelation 1:3, there is a blessing for a reader of the Word.

"And They That Hear"

There is the blessedness of happiness in the hearing of the Word. The hearing of Revelation 1:3 is the "keep on" type of hearing. In Revelation, hearing is emphasized (cf. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 22:17). There is a blessing in the hearing of the Word in preaching, in teaching, and in the public reading of Scriptures. Paul wrote to the church at Rome and stated, "So then faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

"And Keep Those Things Which Are Written"

The basic idea is to keep on keeping on. The New Testament is filled with words of exhortation for Christians to keep going on and overcome. The people who made up the seven churches of Asia were living in difficult days, and they needed to know that God continually blessed his people.

THE BEATITUDE OF REVELATION 14:13

"Blessed Are the Dead"

This second beatitude is stated by a voice from heaven, which said, "Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord

from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them" (Rev. 14:13).

We need to understand four things about physical death:

1. Physical death is sure (Eccles. 8:8; Heb. 9:27).
2. Death is sometimes sudden (1 Sam. 20:3; Jas. 4:14, 15).
3. Death does not always mean the same thing to all people (Lk. 16:19-31).
4. Death is final. It is final in the sense that we will not return to earth in order to have a second chance to get ready (Job 16:22).

"Which Die in the Lord"

There are two ways to die. One, people can live and die in the Lord (Rev. 14:13). Two, they can live and die out of the Lord (Jn. 8:21, 24).

While a student at Freed-Hardeman College, I had the opportunity of being taught by a good Christian lady by the name of Betty Brumley. On one occasion, and in order to illustrate a point, she told about going with her dad, who was a medical doctor in Rector, Arkansas, to the home of a Christian who was dying. She said, "The good man died in peace and calmness." Then Betty told about a man in the same community who lived in sin. She accompanied her dad on his last visit to the sinner's home. She said, "The unsaved man died in anger." How will you die?

"They May Rest"

One victory that the persecuted people of Revelation 14 could enjoy was that of rest (*anapausis*). According to Luke 16:19-31, there is a contrast between one who experienced rest and one who experienced no rest. In Hebrews 4:9, the Bible teaches, "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God." In every generation, God's people can take comfort in knowing that there is a rest after physical death.

"From Their Labors"

The labor (*kopos*) of Revelation 14:13 is a labor that is

related to trouble, toil, and suffering. A general reading of the entire Book of Revelation can give one an insight to the real trials and troubles of these early disciples. On earth, Jesus never promised an easy life for his people. Paul wrote to Timothy and simply stated, "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. 2:3). Even in view of hard times, God's people are to labor (Mt. 10:28; 1 Cor. 15:58; Gal. 6:9; 2 Tim. 3:12; 4:6-8).

"And Their Works Do Follow Them"

The work (*ergon*) of Revelation 14:13 pictures the persecuted life of people. The works of Christian people are a reflection of the spirit of Christ who lives and dwells in their souls. Listen to me: Your total life's influence and works will not be final until the end of time (Heb. 11:4). Throughout the Bible, works are emphasized (Gen. 2:15; Ex. 20:9; Neh. 4:6; Mt. 20:1-7; Jn. 9:4; 2 Cor. 5:10; Gal. 5:6; 1 Thess. 4:11; 2 Thess. 3:10).

THE BEATITUDE OF REVELATION 16:15

As listed in Revelation, this is the third beatitude, and it comes as an interlude in the midst of earthly calamities, as set forth by the angels and the pouring out of the vials (bowls). The Lord declares that he is coming and there is a blessing to the watchers and keepers.

In order to better understand the impact of the beatitude of Revelation 16:15, I want you to think about the conditions on earth as being very bad and then the victorious Lord Jesus appears to his people and pronounces a blessing. Also, it is good to remember that, in some way, this beatitude pictures a soldier in his alertness and readiness for the battle.

"Behold, I Come as a Thief"

The word "behold" means to listen and pay attention. The expression "I come" can refer to a coming of Christ, and it is a fact that while on earth, Jesus made the promise to return (Jn. 14:1-3). This coming is as a thief and means at an unexpected

time. The coming as a thief is referred to in other Scriptures (cf. Mt. 24:43; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 3:3).

"Blessed Is He That Watcheth"

"Blessed" is the word to remind God's people of the blessedness and happiness that can only be experienced by genuine believers. The pronoun "he" can be a reminder that God never forgets one of his people. Perhaps the "he" in Revelation 16:15 refers to certain ones in the early church but, in some way, all believers can enjoy a "blessed." The word "watcheth" comes from a Greek word *gregoron* which is a present participle and indicates that the watching is to be continuous. Military men know something about being alert and watching. The people of Revelation 16:15 can be described as spiritual soldiers (2 Tim. 2:3), and they were to be continually on the watch. Concerning the matter of guarding and watching, the Bible is not silent (Ezek. 3:17; Mt. 26:41; 1 Cor. 16:13; Eph. 5:14).

"And Keepeth His Garments"

The word "keepeth" (*taron*) in the Greek is a present active participle and means to keep on. A similar use of the word can be seen in 2 Timothy 4:7 and Revelation 3:8. The expression "garments" denotes the idea that a child of God is to keep his garments (clothes) with him and, therefore, he is prepared. Clothes in this context can be a reminder of a soldier who is ready for battle. Also, it can be a reminder of a believer who is saved and secure with the Lord. To the church at Sardis, John wrote, "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy" (Rev. 3:4).

"Lest He Walk Naked, and They See His Shame"

A child of God can fail to properly prepare. Matthew 22:11, 12 tells about one who did not have on a wedding garment, and Matthew 25:1-46, in some manner, is given to a discussion of the lack of adequate preparation. Nakedness indicates a failure to dress in a proper way. The faithful are admonished to be alert and not be taken by surprise, as a soldier, who, when the alarm

is sounded, must flee away naked because he has misplaced or lost his garments and armor.

THE BEATITUDE OF REVELATION 19:9

The nineteenth chapter begins with the praise of heaven over Babylon's (Rome's) fall and anticipates the marriage of Christ and his body, the church. Chapter 19 opens with a great host in heaven singing a hallelujah chorus.

In this group of hymns, the word "hallelujah" occurs four times. This word comes from the Hebrew and means "to praise God." It is found in the New Testament only in this chapter, but occurs quite often in the Psalms, particularly in the group of Psalms known as the "Hallel" or praise psalms (Ps. 113—118).

The final chorus of this great group of hymns looks forward to the marriage supper of the Lamb. As we consider the fourth beatitude, it needs to be remembered that the invited guests are the individuals who collectively make up the bride. There is no contradiction here, since the two are really two ways of looking at the same event. It is in this context that we have the fourth beatitude.

"And He Saith Unto Me"

The speaker ("and he") is probably the interpreting angel of chapter 17 although, as the following verse indicates, John apparently mistakes him for the Lord (elsewhere he never falls before the feet of an angel). It is of interest to note that even at a trying time, angels see and understand. Although on earth angels do not operate in a miraculous way today, yet they still have a function (Mt. 18:10; Heb. 1:14).

It is evident from the teachings of the Word that angels can speak. There is an angelic language (1 Cor. 13:1). The angel of Revelation 19:9 may have been the speaking angel of Revelation 17:1. God's angels know, and they know God's people by name. John and the disciples of Revelation had gone through much, and so the angel came and communicated a blessing.

"Write"

It seems that God looked down from heaven and saw that his people needed instruction and encouragement that could only come by the written Word; therefore, the angel told John to write. The written Word is one way the Lord communicates his will (Ex. 31:18; 32:16; Jn. 8:1-11; Acts 15:20; 1 Cor. 10:11; 14:37; Rev. 1:3). The written Word is a powerful means of communication, inspiration, information, and understanding. The written Word assured victory to the tried people of Revelation.

"Blessed" (Makaratoi)

The English word "beatitude" is derived from the Latin "beatitudo" or "beatus," the root word, which is "beare," meaning "to make happy," or "to bless." This concept of blessedness, inherent in all the beatitudes, is one of the widest terms for describing the attitude of God to men and their proper response to God and denotes a state of true well-being.

According to the New Testament, in addition to the seven in Revelation, beatitudes are found in Matthew 5 and Luke 6. The New Testament beatitudes, although they resemble in form the ones of the Old Testament, differ in their stress upon the joys of the eschatological kingdom of God beyond the visible and tangible blessings of life. The blessing of God is given in history through the person of Christ, and the "blessedness" of Christians is to be "in Christ" even though this may bring persecution and physical death.

The fourth beatitude pronounces a "blessing and victory" upon the persecuted and righteous overcomers who were, and are, in the care of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Blessed Are They Which Are Called"

Again, we need to be reminded that the invited guests, at this point, are the individuals who collectively make up the bride. The "they" of Revelation 19:9 are God's people, who are the sanctified and saved. They are "His church or bride." They are the called and invited ones, who are invited and called of the Lord.

"Unto the Marriage Supper"

This feast or supper is nowhere described; however, the time of blessedness it portrays is presented under different symbolisms in chapters 17 and 18 of Revelation. Marriage suppers are described in Matthew 22:1-14 and 25:1-13. Jesus is described as the bridegroom (Mk. 2:19, 20; Jn. 3:29). Marriage is a symbol that occurs in both the Old and New Testaments to express the relationship of God to his people. In the Old Testament it is God and the people of Israel who are spoken of as being married (Is. 54:5, 6; Jer. 31:32). In the New Testament, it is Christ who claims for himself a people (the church). Sometimes, he is spoken of as the husband and the church as his wife (Eph. 5:22-31).

The church is spoken of as the engaged or betrothed bride of Christ whose coming again will be like the coming of a bridegroom to receive his bride (Mt. 25:1-10; 2 Cor. 11:2). It is in this sense that we understand Revelation 19:9. The bride has made herself ready for the marriage, as any engaged girl would make herself ready for the great day of her wedding. The church, as the espoused one, is described as "arrayed with fine linen" (Rev. 19:7, 8), and this fine linen refers to "the righteous deeds of the saints" (Rev. 19:8).

The clothing that the church wore is the sum of the saintly acts of those who are members of Christ's church. Each guest to the wedding feast must wear a wedding garment (Mt. 22:11); the saints (Christians) are individually clothed in garments that have been washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 7:9, 14; Eph. 5:25, 26). It should be remembered that, in accordance with other scenes referred to in Revelation, there is no description of the actual marriage itself. The marriage supper of Revelation 19:9 denotes joy, celebration, and victory for God's people.

"Of the Lamb"

In the Revelation, Jesus is pictured as a Lion, Judge, Victorious Warrior, and, in this beatitude, as a Lamb. In this book, over twenty times, Jesus is referred to as a Lamb. The word "Lamb" (*arnion*) is used in the writings of John in order to

denote great things about the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lamb of Revelation is Jesus Christ and the bridegroom, as described in the first part of Revelation 19.

"And He Saith Unto Me, These Are the True Sayings of God"

The angel ended the beatitude of Rev. 19:9 by reminding John that these matters are the true word of God. John was moved by the communication of the angel, and it seems that John may have mistaken the speaker (angel) to be the Lord for he fell at his feet to worship. The angel refused to allow John to do such and said, "... I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: ..." (Rev. 19:10).

THE BEATITUDE OF REVELATION 20:6

In order to understand Revelation, it is not necessary to interpret the book in view of one of the major theories concerning a millennium. However, I do believe there is some kind of reign mentioned in Revelation 20, and it will be dealt with as attention is given to the fifth beatitude.

"Blessed and Holy"

The word "blessed" (*makarios*), as in the other six places in Revelation, is describing a state of happiness and/or condition for God's people. Also, the word "blessed" can suggest the active outgoing of the divine good will or grace which results in prosperity and happiness among God's people.

The fifth beatitude is the only one that is joined to the word "holy." This word means "separated and set apart." The idea in the word "holy" is something special. It is a word that is often used in the New Testament of people, places, and things (Mt. 4:5; 25:31; Acts 3:21; 1 Pet. 1:16).

"Is He That Hath Part in the First Resurrection"

There is a blessedness and there is a holiness pronounced upon the ones who have a part in the first resurrection. Some say the first resurrection is the resurrection that one experiences at

baptism (Rom. 6:1-6). Others say the first resurrection is that which happened in connection with the resurrection of Christ (Mt. 27:52, 53). Also, others say the first resurrection is the resurrection of all at the end of time (Jn. 5:28, 29).

What is the first resurrection of Revelation 20:6? I believe it is that which is described in Revelation 20:4, a resurrection of a cause—a spiritual resurrection of the persecuted cause of the martyrs. Revelation 20:5 says, in describing 20:4, that this is the first resurrection.

"On Such the Second Death Hath No Power"

What is the second death? It is a symbolic expression for eternal separation and punishment in the lake of fire. The martyrs, who are pictured in victory, are blessed because they have passed the first death (physical) and the second death (eternal separation from God) has no power over them. Besides, mention of the second death in Revelation 20:6, it is also referred to in Revelation 2:11; 20:14, 15; 21:8.

In summary, it can be concluded that the second death had, and has, no power over the apostles and others who died for the cause of Christ in the first century. Also, it needs to be remembered that the second death has no power over God's faithful people at any place or at any time.

"But They Shall Be Priests of God and of Christ"

The "they" are the martyrs, who are described in Revelation 20:4 and perhaps in Revelation 6:9. The "they" (martyrs) are described as priests. In the Old Testament, priests served in connection with sacred and holy things between God and man. Priests are referred to in the New Testament (1 Pet. 2:5,9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).

"And Shall Reign With Him a Thousand Years"

I understand this to mean that the "they," who are priests, will reign with him (the Lord Jesus). The concept of a reign (*basileuo*) suggests the idea of ruling and serving with some source of authority and power. The martyrs of Revelation 20 were to reign with the One who has all authority and power (Mt. 28:18).

I believe the reign of Jesus began as he returned to heaven and took his place as described in Daniel 7:13, 14 and Acts 1:9-11.

I view the thousand-year reign as a period of time when Christ and the martyrs of Revelation 20 reign. The reign is a reign of victory over the devil and his deceivers. This fifth beatitude reminded the suffering saints on earth that their labors, trials, and troubles were not in vain. There is victory.

THE BEATITUDE OF REVELATION 22:7

The final two chapters of Revelation picture things of beauty and rest, as related to the final blessings and victories of the Lord's redeemed. Of the seven beatitudes in Revelation, the final two are found in the last chapter. The sixth beatitude, as the third beatitude (Rev. 16:15), refers to the coming of the Lord. To the martyrs of Revelation, there was victory in connection with the coming of Christ. The preceding matters are set forth in Revelation 22:7.

"Behold"

"Behold" (*idou*) in the imperative mood is calling attention to what may be seen or heard. "Behold" is to look, see, and listen, or in the language of today, we may say, "Listen to me, or pay attention to." The word "behold" is commonly used in the Scriptures (cf. Jn. 1:29; 1 Jn. 3:1; Rev. 3:20).

"I Come Quickly"

The expression "I come quickly" is a reference to the Lord Jesus. "Come quickly" can be translated "Come suddenly." This coming can refer to a coming of Christ to deliver and bless the persecuted ones (Rev. 6:9-11; 20:1-4), or the coming can be the coming of Christ at the Second Coming (Acts 1:9-11; Heb. 9:28; Rev. 1:7).

At this point, I want to make an observation about the coming of Christ in Revelation 22:7. Things are not always given in a chronological way. The coming of Christ, to bless the martyrs, and the Second Coming (at the end of all earthly things) may be divided by hundreds of years and yet not indicated in a clear

way. It is certain that Revelation 22:7 promises a coming of Christ. The Lord never forgets his people.

"Blessed Is He"

"Blessed" (*makarios*) means "happy" is he. The "he" refers to a child of God. Nobody but the righteous can enjoy this "blessedness." Christians are to be a happy people (Mt. 5:1-12; Rom. 4:8; Jas. 1:12). I ask this simple question: Are you among the "blessed" people of the Lord? The blessed are the saved, the secure, the servants, the sanctified, and the special people of the Lord.

"That Keepeth"

"Keepeth" (*taron*) is a nominative singular masculine, present active participle, and the idea is to keep on keeping on. God's people are to be "keepers" and keep on keeping on (Mt. 19:17; Jn. 8:51; 14:15; 2 Tim. 4:7; Jas. 1:27; Jude 21; Rev. 1:3).

"The Sayings [Words] of the Prophecy of This Book"

The sayings, or words, of the Lord are important (Mt. 24:35; Jn. 12:48). "Prophecy" (*propheteias*) is a message from God that sets forth matters about the present and the future. At this point, let me remind us that Revelation is an *apokalupsis*, a prophecy and a letter. There were certain prophets in the early church (Acts 11:27, 28; 15:32).

In 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 2:20, the prophets are placed along with the apostles. It is my understanding that prophets as well as the apostles have served their earthly function. The expression "of this book" (Rev. 22:7) I understand to refer, in a specific way, to Revelation; therefore, the persecuted people could be assured that they had a message from the Lord, that he had not forgotten them, and victory is sure and certain.

THE BEATITUDE OF REVELATION 22:14

The last beatitude (Rev. 22:14) comes in the closing and final words to the churches (Rev. 22:16). As we come to the last

beatitude, it might be good to remember that Revelation is addressed to the seven churches of Asia (Rev. 1:4), which were all beyond the boundaries of Palestine. There were other churches, in the area of the seven, addressed at the time of the writing. Revelation 1:1 identifies the work as an apocalypse. The apocalyptic literature is characterized by the fact that it is usually written in times of persecution and suffering.

Revelation was written during the time of emperor-worship. The worship of an emperor is the worship of living or dead rulers, as gods, because of their superior achievements or exalted office. The early Christians prayed for the emperor, but they would not pray to him. Refusing to worship the emperor was considered treason and the penalty was death. Some Christians became martyrs at the hands of the Romans (Rev. 1:9; 2:9-13).

This final beatitude (Rev. 22:14) should be viewed from the standpoint of the difficult days the disciples faced and the blessed and final victory for the martyrs, as set forth in the entirety of the book.

"Blessed"

"Blessed" (*makarioi*) is the sure benefit and blessing for God's overcomers. This is the wholesome well-being that only God can give to his people. Also, this is the sure victory over the devil and his forces. If "7" signifies completeness, then the final beatitude is the last of that which is complete.

"Blessed Are They Who Do His Commandments"

English versions indicate a difference in the wording of Revelation 22:14. The reason is based upon the difference in certain ancient Greek manuscripts. Some manuscripts allow the English translation to be "Blessed are they who do his commandments, . . ." and other manuscripts allow the wording to be "Blessed are those who wash their robes, . . ." For the purpose of this study, the two concepts will be woven together because each statement is in harmony with the total teaching of the Word. The "doing of the commandments" and/or the "washing of their robes" indicates the readiness of the people.

"That They May Have Right to the Tree of Life"

The "they" are the doers of the commandments or the ones who have washed their robes. In context, the "they" are the martyrs and mistreated ones who suffered for the cause of Christ (Rev. 1:9). The word "right" comes from the Greek word *exousia* and can mean the authority or right—that is, a right to do something or the privilege to do a thing. The Greek word *exousia* is used in Matthew 28:18, where it is stated that Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth.

The Tree of Life is an interesting expression (Gen. 3:22-24; Rev. 2:7; 22:2). There may be some reference to the Tree of Life in Ezekiel 47:12, where the Bible states, "And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine."

The Tree of Life, which John pictures in the New Jerusalem, has no flaming sword to guard it, but the tree stands accessible to all who enter the city. This can signify the complete restoration of fallen man to God. With this glorious scene, John encourages the first-century Christians to faithfully endure.

One may wonder why the Tree of Life is mentioned before the entrance into the holy city where the tree is located. There seems to be no real problem with this order because the arrangement of matters does not disturb the apocalyptic way of thinking. The point is that the ones who are washed in the blood of the Lamb have access to either the Tree of Life or to the city.

"And May Enter in Through the Gates Into the City"

The ones who may enter are the saved (Jn. 14:1-3; Rev. 14:13). Gates can be opened to let people in and closed to keep certain ones out. The gates of Revelation 22:14 are open gates to allow the redeemed to enter. Gates are an important part of an ancient city. They gave the only means of passing through the wall, and the gates usually closed at night. The gate was the place of public discussion. Much of the legal business of the

city was done there (cf. Ruth 4:11).

It is certain that Revelation pictures gates that are open to the persecuted people. Let me say to every faithful child of God: The gates will be open for you when you get there, and the gates will open to the city (Heb. 11:10, 16; 13:14; Rev. 21:2; 22:19). In some way we may think of this entering into the city as the final victory for God's people.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In summary and conclusion, it is good to be reminded that Revelation was written to discouraged Christians of Asia Minor, at a time when persecution and demands of emperor worship were being enacted upon God's people by the Roman Empire. Through a heavenly vision, inspired by the Holy Spirit, John attempted to convey the total reality of the situation, encouraging the Christians to remain faithful to the end, even to the extent of becoming a martyr for the cause.

The entire book of Revelation is saturated with symbolism in an account of the great conflict between good and evil. The seven beatitudes are given to encourage the churches. It is important to put the book in its proper historical context of the first century, but it is also important to understand that the real meaning of Revelation is no less relevant today than in the time of its writing. Satan's opposition may take various forms, and the conflict is always present. Through Revelation, the Christian finds the assurance of the sovereignty of God that he needs to endure today's struggle. A Christian gains confidence in the knowledge that God is with his people and in a hope that grows from the promise the victory is sure for the faithful people of the Lord.

PATRICK H. CASEY has been the pulpit minister for the Millington (Tenn.) church of Christ for twenty-five years. He attended Freed-Hardeman, Abilene, and Harding University where he graduated with a B.A. He received his M.A. and D.Min. from Harding Graduate School of Religion. He has spoken in major workshops on bus evangelism, church growth, and revival meetings. He began a bus evangelism program in Millington in 1972,

and now they average 325 children each Sunday. He has written a book entitled *Bible School On Wheels* and is the editor of *International Bus Evangelism*. He and his wife, Shirley, have two children.

EXPOSITION OF LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

James W. Thompson

WILL THE CHURCH SURVIVE?

The "crown jewel" of Germany's greatest museum is the Pergamum Altar, which is an extraordinary monument both to the glory of ancient Greece and the plundering done by the nineteenth-century European colonial powers. Indeed the Pergamon Museum in Berlin, which takes its place alongside the Louvre and the British Museum, takes its name from this prized possession. The visitor to the Pergamon Museum walks through time by moving from the monuments of ancient Assyria through Babylon's gate of Ishtar until he reaches the Greek world, with its many artifacts. Then he reaches a giant room reserved for the Pergamum Altar, which archaeologists brought back from Asia Minor in the late nineteenth century.

The Pergamum Altar was erected between 180 and 160 B.C. on the acropolis of ancient Pergamum in gratitude to Athena, patron goddess of the city, for her protection of the city during a time of war. The Pergamum Altar stood below the temple of Athena on a special terrace. According to the Roman writer Lucius Ampelius, in antiquity the altar was considered one of the wonders of the world. "In Pergamum," he writes, "stands a great marble altar forty feet high. Its friezes depict the battle of the titans."¹ The Altar is more than 100 feet wide and 100 feet deep. On all sides of the massive structure are the reliefs with their beautiful sculptures depicting the battle of the titans. These reliefs are more than seven feet high.

If the modern viewer looks upon this extraordinary monument to Athena with awe, one can scarcely imagine the impression that ancient Pergamum would have made in antiquity. The

old city of Pergamum was built on an acropolis that rose one thousand feet above the plain of the river Caicus.² Standing majestically on the acropolis were, in addition to the Temple of Athena, temples erected in honor of Zeus, Asclepius, Hera, Demeter, and Dionysius. After coming under Roman rule in A.D. 133, Pergamum was also the home to the Roman emperor cult,³ as numerous coins depicting its temple suggest.

Pergamum was founded in the fifth century, but it was only in the period after Alexander the Great that it emerged as a major city. Under the Romans, it became the capital of the province of Asia. During this period it became also a center of culture and literature. Its library ranked second only to that of Alexandria.

Pergamum is not known to most of us, however, because of its cultural, religious, and political influence in the Hellenistic Age. Its name has become known to us because of the presence of a small community of Christians who lived a vulnerable existence at the end of the first century A.D. They left no monuments, and no ancient historian mentioned them. Nevertheless, Pergamum is most widely known in the Western world because it is one of the seven churches of Asia mentioned in Revelation. The legacy of the Christian community, which had no imposing buildings of its own, has outweighed the legacy of imperial Rome because that community is one of seven churches to whom the Book of Revelation was first addressed.

The Seven Cities of Asia

Like the letters of Paul, Revelation is actually a letter written to congregations at a specific time in response to important issues of the day. At the opening of the book, John addresses his letter "to the seven churches in Asia." When he hears the voice of God, he is told, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea" (Rev. 1:11). The address to the seven cities is, as Donald Guthrie has written, "a potent reminder that this book must be interpreted in its historical context."⁴ What is said to the seven churches is actually a prelude to the visions which are

given in chapters 4 through 22, which were addressed to the concrete situation of the churches in these seven cities. Their situation is so similar that the same message (chaps. 4—22) can be addressed to all of them. However, each situation is sufficiently unique that John writes to each church.

Why is Revelation addressed to seven churches? Apparently there are two reasons. In the first place, "7" represents the universality of the church: What is said to the seven churches of Asia has a wider significance for the whole church. In the second place, as William Ramsay once pointed out, these seven cities are the centers of communication and political significance in the Roman province of Asia.⁵ They are the natural centers of communication for an itinerant messenger. It has been suggested that a regular itinerary had been perfected since Pauline times and that these cities had acquired a central place as organizational and distributive centers for the church of the area.⁶

The letters to the seven churches reflect the ties of solidarity which connected churches to each other. In receiving a letter that was addressed to both them and the other congregations, each community of Christians would recognize that the message which follows is addressed to their concrete concerns. Yet at the same time they recognize that they are joined by congregations elsewhere in hearing the same message. Congregations do not see themselves as facing their problems in isolation. They recognize that, while they live a vulnerable existence, they are united with the churches in the other cities in hearing the same message.

One finds in the seven churches, as in Paul's missionary travels, that Christianity first entered the major cities. The Ephesian church, which is mentioned first, rivaled Pergamum as the greatest city in the Roman province of Asia. As a seaport it was the gateway to the province. It was on the main road from Syria to Rome. The Roman governors always entered the province by way of Ephesus. Like Pergamum, it was a center of pagan religion. As we know from Acts, it was the home of the cult of Artemis.⁷

Smyrna was also one of the great cities of Asia. It boasted of

being "first of Asia in beauty and size."⁸ Aristides declared that the city is as a statue sitting with her feet on the sea, and her head rising to heaven and crowned with a circlet of beautiful buildings.⁹ The city was known for its famous street of gold which ran from the Temple of Zeus to the Temple of Cybele, the mother goddess and patron of Smyrna.

Thyatira lay on the road between Pergamum and Sardis on the banks of the Lycus River. It was a great commercial trade center. More trade guilds were known here than in any other Asian city.¹⁰

Sardis was one of the wealthy cities in Asia Minor. Its very name stood for power and wealth. Its acropolis commanded the whole region, making it a formidable military force. Its advantageous position on the roads from Smyrna and Pergamum to the interior gave it considerable wealth.¹¹

Philadelphia and Laodicea both had a strategic importance also. They were built on important roads to the interior of Asia Minor, and from them Greek culture penetrated the countryside.

The letters to the seven churches suggest that Christianity began among the urban cities where little house churches stood in sharp contrast to the magnificent shrines of the Greek religions. The new religion that had spread from Palestine seemed insignificant when compared to the ancient religions of Asia Minor and Greece. Here, in the context of the tolerance which Rome extended to the many religions and cultures she conquered, the little congregations attempted to grow.

Churches in Crisis

Although each of the seven churches faced problems of its own, one central question confronted all of them: Would the fledgling churches survive in the presence of the imperial might of the great cities? What resources did they have among these powerful institutions? The question was critical because the seven churches of Asia did not experience this well-known Roman tolerance of other religions. As Revelation opens, John identifies himself as "your brother, who shares with you in Jesus the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endur-

ance" (Rev. 1:9). Both the author and the readers are partners in tribulation. John is in exile "on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus." Although he is separated from the seven communities, they share the same fate. Throughout the letters to the seven churches, there are references to the tribulations (Rev. 2:9), suffering (Rev. 2:10), and patient endurance (Rev. 2:2, 19; 3:10) of these communities which, like John, suffer on account of the gospel of Christ. Each of the communities was left to wonder how long it could survive.

These Christian communities may be among the first to suffer from a systematic persecution of Christians. The persecution under Nero was localized in Rome. Elsewhere the New Testament records sporadic outbreaks of persecution of Christians (cf. Heb. 10:32-34; 12:5-11; 1 Pet. 4:12-19). In Revelation, however, a prisoner writes to Christians who face prison sentences and even death.

Why was Roman tolerance not extended to Christians? The book was apparently written around A.D. 95 under the reign of Domitian, who demanded that his subjects confess, "Caesar is Lord." Some type of tattoo or marking may have been placed on the worshiper's hand to indicate that he had participated in Caesar-worship. Revelation 13 suggests that such a marking allowed the people to buy food in the marketplace.¹² To confess that "Caesar is Lord" was for many a sign of patriotism, one religious allegiance among many. But the Christian claim that "Jesus is Lord" precluded any other religious loyalty. Consequently, Domitian, like several emperors after him, attempted to stamp out Christianity. It was the Christians' confession of absolute loyalty to Jesus Christ and their rejection of all other deities—their "intolerance"—which led Domitian to attempt to destroy them.

A Message for All Time

The power of Revelation has been that its message has spoken not only to the seven churches of Asia, but to churches throughout history who have been persecuted. Wherever Christians face a hostile environment, Revelation's message has been a source of encouragement. As we face an increasingly

secular society, the message of Revelation will speak to us.

Instead of writing one letter to the seven churches, John writes to each of the communities. In each instance he addresses the local situation, most often describing the recent past of the congregation. Then he relates the strengths and weaknesses of the churches. In Smyrna and Philadelphia, however, there are no weak points, and in Laodicea there are no strong points. In each of the seven letters he concludes on a note of hope for the future, indicating that the present moment is not the end of the story.

What does Revelation say to the churches of another day? In the first place, Revelation is a reminder that the Christian faith is serious business. The confession that "Jesus is Lord" alienated not only ancient Roman rulers; it alienated Marxists and National Socialists, and it will alienate modern secularists as well, leaving Christians to pay a price for their commitment. I recently read a young woman's story of her first encounter with the stories of the martyrs. Having grown up in a comfortable church, she said in amazement upon reading the martyr literature, "They took their Christianity seriously." Nothing in her past Christian experience had suggested that Christianity is costly. No one can read the letters to the seven churches and ignore the fact that Christianity is serious business.

These letters have a powerful message to the modern church, in the second place, because of the extraordinary message of hope that is expressed. At the beginning of the story, John is told in the vision, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades." Each of the seven letters ends with a note of hope. John concludes his letter to the Ephesians with the words, "To him who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is the paradise of God" (Rev. 2:6). To the church at Smyrna he wrote, "He who conquers shall not be hurt by the second death" (Rev. 2:11). To the church at Pergamum he wrote, "To him who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone which no one knows except him who receives it" (Rev. 2:17). To the church at Thyatira he wrote, "He

who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, I will give him power over the nations" (Rev. 2:25).

When the bombs were falling in Germany, turning the great cities into a fire and rubble, Helmut Thielicke recalls that Revelation was the New Testament book which addressed him and his people most. The message of Revelation is that God is the Lord of history, and that victory lies beyond the trauma and the duress of the present moment. Churches which expect victory without pain and endurance will do well to read the letters to the seven churches, which serve as reminders that victory is only promised to churches which endure hardship for the cause of Christ.

The letters to the seven churches remind us, in the third place, that the church can hope for tomorrow because it stands before a transcendent God. Before John writes the letters to the seven churches, he recalls the vision amid the seven golden lampstands, where he saw "one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast" (Rev. 1:12). When John saw the vision, he "fell at his feet as though dead" (Rev. 1:17). The hope that is expressed in Revelation is credible because of the transcendent Lord who is the Lord of history. The words to the seven churches are his words. The final, hopeful outcome is not guaranteed by impersonal fate, but by the one who stands above our history.

Although the letters to the seven churches were addressed to real churches at a specific point in time, their message has spoken throughout the ages with a word of hope. Consequently, the remains of the great imperial cities stand in museums as relics of the past, while the seven churches have left a living witness: the voice of hope that tells all of us, "Fear not, I am the first and the last" (Rev. 1:17). The church of the twentieth century, like the ancient churches, wonders about its prospects for the future. Revelation, the final word of the Bible, "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life."

I am frequently told that the key to planting a viable church is to ensure that the proper conditions exist for the success of the church. The proper conditions, humanly speaking, did not exist among the seven churches for survival of the church. But the

church was not stamped out by Domitian because the Lord whom it confessed was the Lord of history. In our times of doubt about the future, Revelation is the reminder that the proper conditions always exist where faithful people confess that "Jesus Christ is Lord."

A REPORT CARD FOR THE CHURCHES

How is the success of the church measured? A common means is to measure the church's success the same way we would measure any organization. The common standards include statistics regarding such things as attendance, membership, budget, staff, facilities, and the influence of the church in the community. These are standards that we readily understand because they are applied in almost every enterprise in which we may be involved.

In the letters to the seven churches, one finds one of the New Testament's few report cards on churches. The letters are words of hope to churches living under the duress of the Domitian persecution. The one feature that is common to all of the letters to the seven churches is the ringing assurance that God is the Lord of history who will prevail and open the "tree of life" for his suffering people. However, this ringing assurance is conditional. The God who will bring his faithful ones to victory warns the churches that he will "remove your lampstand from its place" (Rev. 2:5). He will give to the churches what they deserve (Rev. 2:23). Since only the faithful churches will inherit the crown of life, John issues a report card on the state of the church.

This report card is significant for our own assessments of the success of the church, for here we do not have human assessments of success, but Christ's measurement of the health of the church. John Stott's book *What Christ Thinks of the Church* reminds us that the letters to the seven churches are to be taken with absolute seriousness because it is Christ who measures the church by his own standards. Stott says in the introduction to the book,

What Christ thinks of His church and what He says to His church we shall discover in detail in the next few chapters. He has a right to think and say what He does. In the first place, it is His church (Mt. 16:18). He is its head and the source of its life. In the second place, He knows it intimately. In each of the seven letters He begins, "I know." . . . He is walking among the lampstands, patrolling and supervising His churches. He is the chief pastor, the chief bishop.¹³

Stott observes that, in each of the seven letters which follow, the risen Christ lays emphasis, either in rebuke or commendation, on particular aspects of the ideal church.

Vernard Eller in *Outward Bound* comments that the letters to the seven churches describe, more clearly than any other New Testament writing, the mark of a successful church from the biblical understanding.¹⁴ "Of the seven churches, two receive "A's" (unqualified commendation), two receive "F's" (unqualified condemnation), and the rest are scattered in between." We will do well to look to Revelation to see the divine perspective on success and failure.

Successful Churches

By our standards, the church at Smyrna was anything but a successful church. Indeed, the church might have been declared "terminally ill" by knowledgeable experts in church growth. In the midst of the wealth of the city of Smyrna, the community was known for its poverty, which probably resulted from the economic losses suffered by the church at a time of persecution. John says, "I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan" (Rev. 2:9). Moreover, conditions were likely to become worse in the future, for John says, "Do not fear what you are about to suffer, for the Devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested" (Rev. 2:10). Faced with both the Romans who objected to the Christians' refusal to worship the emperor and the Jewish community, the church at Smyrna faced an uncertain future. These were hardly the conditions for success.

Despite the conditions which faced the church at Smyrna, this congregation was one of two among the seven churches which received unqualified commendation as a "successful" church in the eyes of Christ. John summarizes the Lord's evaluation of this church when he says, "But you are rich." At the end of his message to them he says, "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life." He offers no analysis of their attendance, budget, or facilities. He commends them for one thing only: that they were rich in fidelity.¹⁵ He does not promise that their fidelity will lead to success that is measured in human terms. He promises only that they will be rewarded for their fidelity with a "crown of life."

The church at Philadelphia faced the same conditions as the church at Smyrna (Rev. 3:7-13). They, too, faced both the hostility of pagan society and the local Jewish community. If the church at Smyrna was known for its poverty, the church at Philadelphia was known for the fact that it had "but little power" (Rev. 3:8). And although it lacked the conditions for success, in the eyes of Christ it was one of the "successful" churches, for it, too, received unqualified commendation.

What was the mark of the "success" of the church at Philadelphia? In the first place, the Christians are commended because they have "an open door, which no one is able to shut" (Rev. 3:8). In the preceding verse, Christ is presented as the one who "has the key of David, who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens" (Rev. 3:7). The church at Philadelphia was thus the church of the "open door." The "open door" led to the presentation of the gospel to the people of her city. This congregation was not intimidated by local forces from taking the gospel to the local inhabitants. Just as Philadelphia was the door of Greek culture for the interior of Asia Minor, the church maintained an "open door" for all to hear the gospel.

The church did not know what numerical success would result from her open door, for no promise of success is given. The church maintains the open door because it represents the Christ who says at the end of the letters to the seven churches, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my

voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20). The church at Philadelphia maintained its proclamation under threatening conditions.

The Philadelphians were commended for a second and related reason. John writes, "I know that you have little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name" (Rev. 3:8). The church was apparently small, but its small size did not leave the members in despair. Christ commends them because they held on under the most adverse circumstances.

What are the marks of success from the divine point of view? We have seen that the churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia are commended for their faithfulness to Christ under difficult circumstances. Those who are promised the "crown of life" would not have passed the standards of worldly success, but they are commended from the divine point of view. The commendation of these two churches serves as a welcome reminder that small churches today need not believe that they are failures when they do not measure up to the standards of others. These faithful churches set the standard by which churches should measure themselves.

Unsuccessful Churches

By human standards, the most successful of the seven churches in Revelation was the church at Laodicea. This congregation was the opposite of the church at Smyrna. The church at Smyrna was known for its poverty, but the church at Laodicea said, "I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing" (Rev. 3:17). It lived by its own resources. Nothing is said about this church's conflict with the surrounding world. Its feeling of well-being may reflect its comfortable status within the city. It was a church with considerable "self-esteem." Nevertheless, the church's estimate of itself was the exact opposite of Jesus' estimate of the church.

Why was the church at Laodicea condemned? "I know your works," the risen Lord said through John. "You are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot!" The Greek words are striking. "Cold" means icy cold and "hot" means boiling hot. Jesus Christ wanted a church that would boil or freeze rather

than simmer down into a tasteless tepidity.¹⁶ Other Christians were willing to risk their lives for the faith, but the Laodiceans were halfhearted in their commitment. Their faith undoubtedly became a matter of routine and shallow commitment. Even while the Laodiceans apparently considered themselves a successful community of Christians, they receive unqualified condemnation from the Lord. This church, which seemed successful to human eyes, was in fact a failure.

The church at Sardis (Rev. 3:1-6) was scarcely more successful in the divine perspective than the church at Laodicea. Although a few in this congregation "have not soiled their garments" (Rev. 3:4), the church is unhealthy. Christ says to them, "I know your works; you have the name of being alive, and you are dead" (Rev. 3:1). Perhaps both these Christians and the Laodiceans began their Christian lives with an enthusiasm that gradually faded away. We know nothing of how they compared in numbers and influence with the other churches, for only one thing mattered in Christ's judgment. Despite the signs of strength, they were dead.

John Stott has commented that, of all of the words given in the letters to the seven churches, the verdict on these lukewarm churches may be most appropriate for the modern church.¹⁷ Churches may have the signs of vitality and growth and still not recognize that the Christian faith is a serious matter. Individuals may "shop churches" in search of the one which offers the most benefits, and churches may comply with those desires, giving the church the signs of success. But even these churches may actually be lukewarm and subject to Christ's condemnation.

Between Failure and Success

In John's time, as in our own time, many congregations are neither totally successful nor unsuccessful. In the letters to the churches at Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira, Christ finds both positive and negative features. In his commendation of these congregations, one theme stands out as a positive sign for the church. Each of the churches is known for its patient endurance in difficult times. To the church at Ephesus, Christ

says, "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance" (Rev. 2:2). Then he adds, "I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary" (Rev. 2:3). To the church at Pergamum he writes, "I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; you hold fast my name and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells" (Rev. 2:13). To the church at Thyatira he writes, "I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first" (Rev. 2:19). Although these were not perfect churches, their one distinguishing feature was their "patient endurance," their fidelity under difficult circumstances.

"Patient endurance" may not be highly regarded in the modern world, for we are accustomed to quick solutions. I am told that a characteristic of the postwar generation is its lack of loyalty to institutions. We turn to institutions for the benefits they confer on us. When they produce more problems than benefits, the postwar generation moves on to something else. Even churches which are successful by human standards may appeal to the selfish interests of those who come in search of benefits. From the divine perspective, a successful church is known for its endurance in difficult circumstances. The measure of a successful church today is the quality of patient endurance. The only churches which will survive require loyalty and commitment under adverse circumstances.

"Patient endurance" was not enough, however, to make a successful church. The churches of Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira had problems that had to be confronted. In many instances they had not confronted these problems adequately. The church was not confronted only by persecution; it was confronted by various false teachers as well. False teachers were circulating in the church at Pergamum. John compares them to the figure of Balaam in Numbers (Num. 24:1, 2; 31:16). Before the Israelites crossed over into the promised land, Balaam taught them to commit immorality in the Baal cults and to participate in idol worship. John also points to the presence of the Nicolaitans at both Pergamum and Ephesus (cf. Rev. 2:6,

15). The church at Thyatira tolerated someone who resembled Jezebel in the Old Testament by encouraging the people to practice immorality (Rev. 2:20).¹⁸ We have incomplete information about the precise teaching of the various false teachers. We know only that they were a threat to the church, and that Christ condemns those churches which tolerate them. The church is summoned, therefore, to stand against the dual forces of persecution from without and false teaching from within. To survive and even to grow is not enough; institutions often survive without remaining true to their original purpose. Faithful churches resist both the outward and the inward pressures.

The Church and the Future

The contemporary church will do well to consider what Christ thinks of the church. The letters to the seven churches address us as we, like the ancient churches, consider the future.

We learn, in the first place, that even the most difficult circumstances will be overcome because the future is in God's hands. Each of the letters contains a word of hope for struggling churches.

We learn, in the second place, that God's promises are conditional. Churches are challenged to examine themselves and to repent of their failings in order to inherit eternal life. Even apparently-successful churches must submit themselves to rigorous examination under the rule of Christ. Even they may have their candlestick taken away.

We learn, finally, that even the churches which receive the most vociferous condemnation are not hopeless. The path to repentance is open, and God grants another opportunity for churches to return to their first love.

At the end of the letters to the seven churches, Christ speaks to the ancient churches as he speaks to us. He says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock" (Rev. 3:20). Christ invites the church of all ages to "be faithful unto death" in order to receive the crown of life.

NOTES

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- ⁴Donald Guthrie, *The Relevance of the Apocalypse* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 70.
- ⁵Sir William Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches and Their Place in the Plan of the Apocalypse* (New York: Edward H. Fletcher, 1852), 15.
- ⁶Hemer, 15.
- ⁷Blevins, 13.
- ⁸Ibid., 14.
- ⁹Ibid., 15.
- ¹⁰Ibid., 19.
- ¹¹Hemer, 134.
- ¹²Blevins, 3.
- ¹³John R. W. Stott, *What Christ Thinks of the Church* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1958), 20.
- ¹⁴Vernard Eller, *Outward Bound* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 40.
- ¹⁵Ibid., 40.
- ¹⁶Stott, 116.
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JAMES W. THOMPSON has been the President of the Institute for Christian Studies in Austin, Texas. He has served as a Professor of New Testament and Homiletics at the Institute since 1974. He attended Abilene Christian University where he received his M.A. in 1965. He completed the Ph.D. in 1974 from Vanderbilt University. He was named 1991 Christian Author of the Year at the Pepperdine Lectures by the *21st Century Christian* and *Power for Today* after the publication by ACU Press in 1990 of his study on 1 Peter, *The Church in Exile*. Other books he has authored include: *The Mark of a Christian*, *Our Life Together*, *Strategy for Survival*, and Sweet Commentaries on Hebrews and 2 Corinthians. He and his colleagues have conducted "How to Study the Bible" seminars mostly among Texas churches. He and his wife, Carolyn, have two children.

REVELATION AND CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Ken Neller

What would you do if suddenly you found yourself transported into the very presence of God? None of us expects, obviously, ever to be in the actual presence of God until we see him in Judgment. Nevertheless, we do live our lives before him every day, and we do come into his presence in a very real way when we approach him individually and collectively as a church in worship. How we answer the hypothetical question of "What would you do . . . ?" determines to a great extent the answer to the practical question, "What do you do when you come into the presence of God to worship him?"¹

THE REASONS WE WORSHIP

Before answering the question, "What do we do when we worship?" it would seem appropriate to answer the question, "Why do we worship God?"

First, we worship God because it is our nature to worship something or someone. Every culture throughout human history has had values which they held sacred and pursued causes for which they lived and died (which is the essence of worship). In our sophisticated, rational society this may not seem to be the case, but it is. Instead of worshiping gods or nature, the Western world tends to pursue money, power, pleasure, self, a political ideal, etc. However subtle the "god" might be, it is human nature to worship.

Almost all of human worship has been misdirected, however, because only the eternal, invisible Creator of the universe is worthy of worship. This is Paul's point in Romans 1: The pagan

world was worshiping the creation, not the Creator. Only the Creator is worthy of worship. Hence, the first two of the Ten Commandments emphasize the exclusive object of worship for the children of Israel: God (Ex. 20:2-6). God is the Creator and Sustainer of all that is visible and invisible; he is the only Savior. He is great; we are weak. He is holy; we are sinful. Those who dwell in heaven recognize this; and when Isaiah saw God in all his glory, he recognized it too (Is. 6:1-7). So a second reason we worship God is because only he is worthy of worship (see Mt. 4:10).

Finally, we worship God because he, as Lord of the universe, has commanded us to worship him (Deut. 6:13; Mt. 4:10). God demands obedience, he is worthy of obedience, and through obedience we render worship to him (cf. Deut. 10:12, 13; 1 Sam. 15:22, 23; Hos. 6:6; Amos 5:21-24; Mic. 6:6-8).

VARIOUS ASPECTS OF WORSHIP

There are a variety of ways in which we worship God in addition to our obedience. All of this worshipful activity is directed toward God. For instance, we worship God by giving him honor, glory, and praise for who he is and what he has done (Ps. 9:11; 66:1-20). Of course, the rendering of praise to God is more than a mere aspect of worship. It is a fundamental reason for the existence of God's people. It is what God's people are all about (Jer. 13:11; 1 Pet. 2:9). As A. W. Tozer observes, "God is trying to call us back to that for which He created us, to worship Him and enjoy Him forever!"²

Another aspect of worship is remembrance. By bringing to mind the ways in which God has blessed us and delivered us, we recognize our dependence upon him and recall his faithfulness to us. Accordingly, the Israelites were commanded to observe the Sabbath and in turn remember that God made the earth and rested on the seventh day (Ex. 20:8-11) and that God delivered a nation of slaves from Egypt and made them a great nation (Deut. 5:12-15). The Passover feast also reminded Israel of God's faithfulness and deliverance (Ex. 12:17, 24-27). In a similar way, Christians observe the Lord's Supper and thus

worship God and his Son by remembering our sinfulness and the divine love and grace (Lk. 22:19, 20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26).

With remembering also comes thanksgiving, another essential aspect of worship. When we remember what God has done for us, a worshipful heart gives thanks (Ps. 95:1-7; 100:1-5; Lk. 1:46-55). The failure to remember God's goodness leads to thanklessness, and thanklessness leads one to a neglect of worshipping God (see Deut. 6:10-15; 8:11ff.).

Remembering, thanksgiving, and praise are all intricately bound together and are essential aspects of our worship to God.

WORSHIPFUL ATTITUDES

The attitudes and bearing with which we approach God in worship determine to a large extent whether or not our worship will be acceptable to God. A good way to determine what our attitudes should be is to look closely at the words which the biblical writers use to describe worship.

One of the most frequently used words in the Old Testament for worship is the word *shachah* which means "to bow oneself down," "to worship" (e.g., Ex. 34:8). Kneeling and bowing down with one's face to the ground was a common way of showing reverence and adulation in ancient times. Often it is used in combination with other Hebrew words for "to bow down" in an apparent attempt to emphasize the humility and fervency of the worshiper.³ In the Greek Old Testament (LXX) these words are most often translated by *proskuneo* which means "to bow before," "to prostrate oneself," "to worship." This is the word used most often for "worship" in the New Testament. The physical posture of prostrating oneself indicated, of course, an attitude of reverence and humility. In Matthew, this word describes how people often come to Jesus—the leper (8:2), Jairus (9:18), the companions in the boat (14:33), the Canaanite woman (15:25), and the mother of James and John (20:20) all prostrate themselves before Jesus to demonstrate humility and respect. When such bowing is directed toward a god, it has obvious spiritual implications. In John 4:20-24, when Jesus is describing those who can worship God

acceptably, he uses a form of the word *proskuneo* (literally, "those who bow"). Such obeisance, Jesus said, should be directed toward God alone (Mt. 4:9f.).

Another word group used often in the Bible to describe worship is *yara'* in Hebrew and *phobeomai* or *sebomai* in Greek. For example, *phobeomai* translates *yara'* in Deuteronomy 6:13; Psalms 33:8; and Ecclesiastes 3:14. It is used in the New Testament in Revelation 14:7. *Sebomai* translates *yara'* in Joshua 4:24; 22:25. It is used in the New Testament in the context of worship in Mark 7:7. These words, meaning "to fear," "to revere," "to stand in awe," have an obvious negative connotation, but in a context of worship have the positive meaning of experiencing wonder, showing respect, and rendering worship. In the New Testament we encounter a group of people called "God-fearers" (e.g., Cornelius in Acts 10) who are uncircumcised people who not only respect and revere God, but serve and obey him.

The word for "to serve" (Heb., *'abad*; Gr., *latreuo*) is also used frequently in the Bible as a synonym for "to worship." The word was used in a non-religious context for a person who served another for a reward. Later, it meant "to render services" or "to serve" without the thought or expectation of reward. Most often, when used in a religious context, "to serve" carried the idea of offering sacrifices to a god or the God (e.g., 2 Kings 10:18-23). These sacrifices did not have to be animal sacrifices, however. Deuteronomy 10:12, 13 speaks of serving God "with all your heart and with all your soul" (which would include "formal" worship, but also would include one's daily walk with God). In Luke 2:37, Anna serves (worships) God by fasting and praying. In Romans 12:1, the sacrifice offered to God is one's own life. All of this service/worship is given to God out of a grateful, sacrificial heart: "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship [or "serve"] God acceptably with reverence and awe" (Heb. 12:28).

Reflection upon these words for "worship" clearly demonstrates the attitudes with which God should be approached: with humility, reverence/awe, and sacrificial service. A humble,

contrite approach to God would seem obviously appropriate. God as Creator is vastly superior to any human being. As the holy and righteous Judge, we are at his mercy. As Giver and Sustainer of life, we are totally dependent upon him.

Sacrificial service, too, is clearly deserved by God. In light of who he is and all that he has done for us, certainly he is worthy of praise and thanksgiving (see Rom. 12:1 and Heb. 12:28 again; also Heb. 13:15, 16).

Awe—a healthy respect and reverence for God, a sense of wonder—may be the attitude most lacking in modern worship. As Warren Wiersbe observes,

There is an undue familiarity with God that only proves that the worshiper does not really know God at all. True worship must always involve mystery. There are many things we cannot explain but that we can experience.

Mystery and humility go together, and there can be no real worship without humility. God reveals himself but he rarely explains himself. Christians do not live on explanations; they live on promises, on deepening relationships. . . . God deliberately keeps some things secret so that you and I will stay humble and learn to trust Him even when we do not understand what He is doing.

In our desire to explain everything and avoid whatever we cannot explain, we have almost robbed worship of the dimension of mystery.⁴

To neglect the attitude of wonder, awe, and reverence in worship would be tragic, especially if there is any truth to Thomas Carlyle's statement, "Wonder is the basis of worship."⁵

Approaching God with reverence, wonder, and awe does not mean we cannot and should not celebrate as we worship. On the contrary, celebration is an important aspect of worship. When the Israelites offered and ate their sacrifices in God's presence, they rejoiced (e.g., Deut. 12:5-7, 11, 12, 17, 18). Old Testament worshipers sang, clapped, shouted, played musical instruments, and danced before God (Ps. 95:1; 96:11-13; 97:1; 98:4-9; 150:3-5). New Testament worshipers held a feast as part of their

worship (1 Cor. 11:17ff.; Jude 12; 2 Pet. 2:13; cf. Phil. 4:4). Yet there is a significant difference between celebrating and partying, between joyfulness and frivolity. Worshipers should rejoice in what God has done, while being duly respectful of who he is—a God who transcends human understanding and power.⁶

Nor should God be approached casually or with undue familiarity. God is holy. He is pure, separate, other-worldly. We are sinful creatures. This is not to deny the images in the Gospels where Jesus happily welcomes children (Mt. 19:13-15) and calls his disciples "friends" whom he awaits to receive into his home (Jn. 15:15; 14:1-3). Neither should we overlook the images of the kingdom being like a banquet (Mt. 22:1ff.) or of God being a concerned father who runs to hug and kiss a penitent sinner (Lk. 15:11ff.). But these images are not worship scenes. They are images used to describe, for the most part, the love of the Father and the Son and their approachability. Such compassion and approachability is overdrawn if we envision an image of anyone coming into the presence of God, running and jumping into his lap, throwing one's arms around his neck, and calling him "Daddy!" No such image can be scripturally justified.⁷

The close, familiar relationship with God that a Christian enjoys as a child of the heavenly Father must be held in tension with the fact that God is transcendent and holy and thus worthy of reverence and awe. The writer of Hebrews makes this point well. After emphasizing the high priesthood of Jesus, the superior sacrifice which he offers, and the better covenant which he makes, he concludes that "we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus" (Heb. 10:19). Therefore, he exhorts, "let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith" (Heb. 10:22). This confidence before God, however, should not be confused with casualness, for the same writer later says, "Therefore . . . let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:28, 29).

The awesomeness of God and its effect on people is clearly demonstrated by biblical examples of human encounters with God or his holy messengers. For example, when Moses encoun-

ters God in the burning bush, he hides his face (Ex. 3:6). As a matter of fact, even though no prophet knew God face to face as Moses did (Deut. 34:10), if we read of his life carefully, we will see him on his knees and face before God a number of times! More instances of such obeisance before God include Manoah and his wife (Judg. 13:20), Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:28; 3:23), and Jesus' disciples (Mt. 17:6). Of all the people who should have had a casual relationship with God, or at least with his Son Jesus, it was John, "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Yet when John saw Jesus glorified, his reaction was anything but casual and familiar; he was awestruck. "When I saw him," John says, "I fell at his feet as though dead" (Rev. 1:17).

This brief study should make it clear that while worship is a joyful celebration, this enthusiastic remembrance and thanksgiving should be conducted with the attitudes of humility, sacrificial gift-giving, and reverential awe.

THE NATURE OF WORSHIP

A study of Christian worship would not be complete without recalling one of the most important biblical passages on worship, where Jesus himself reminds us, "True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks" (Jn. 4:23). Christian worship is spiritual worship. God is, of course, a spiritual being and is best approached in a spiritual manner. God has not changed. But the activities through which his people approach him have changed dramatically.

The Israelites under the old covenant approached God in a very tangible, sensory way. They could only offer sacrifices to God in one place—where the tabernacle or temple was located (Deut. 12:5, 6). Only priests could offer incense (Num. 16:40; 2 Chron. 26:16-18).⁸ And worship appealed to the senses of taste, sight, hearing, smell, and touch. The high priest had an elaborate uniform including bells that tinkled whenever he walked. Animals were killed, bled, and burned. Oil and blood were poured. Meat and bread were eaten. Incense was burned in an elaborately constructed and furnished edifice. In such an

atmosphere it was easy to forget that God was a spirit and really desired the spiritual sacrifices of a pure heart and righteous living (cf. Amos 5:21-24; Mic. 6:6-8).

Under the new covenant the approach to God has changed to an almost purely spiritual worship. All Christians are priests who have the ability and authority to offer sacrifices (1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6). God can be worshiped anywhere (Jn. 4:21). Activity in worship is spiritual—singing, praying, giving spiritual sacrifices. Even the only tangible parts of worship—the emblems of the Lord's Supper and the giving of money—are representative of deeper, spiritual offerings.

In our worship today we would do well to remember that God is a spirit. What can we offer a spirit which would please him? Does he have nostrils to smell incense? Does he enjoy animals being burnt to ashes? Is he flattered to have ornate buildings built in his honor out of rocks, wood, and metal (however precious) which he himself has created from nothing? Does he have ears to enjoy melodies which we ourselves enjoy? Does a spirit prefer Bach over Bluegrass? Is he impressed with large amounts of money? God is not flesh as we are, yet we often project what pleases us upon him and create a god who likes what we like.

God is a spirit. What can we offer a spirit which would please him? We can offer the most valuable thing we possess and the only thing which would be of value to him—the precious spirit, created in his image, which he has given to each of us. Christian worship is a communion of spirits—our weak and inferior spirit with the Spirit who created and sustains us. So, we offer our lives as spiritual sacrifices (Rom. 12:1). We offer to God "the fruit of our lips," and we serve (worship) him by sharing with others and doing good, "for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Heb. 13:15, 16).

GOALS OF WORSHIP

It may seem strange to speak of the "goals" of worship; but when we engage in a specific activity for identifiable reasons, can we not analyze whether the reasons for which we worship

have been fulfilled? Hence, we need to consider again the reasons we worship God.

We worship God because God alone is worthy of worship and it is his will that his creation worship him. Worship, first and foremost, is thus directed toward God. Worship is our effort to adore, revere, praise, honor, and thank him.

A second reason we worship has to do with corporate worship. We assemble to worship in order to glorify God as well as to encourage our fellow worshipers (1 Cor. 14:26; Col. 3:16; Heb. 10:24, 25). When others see us offer our sacrifices to God and hear our words of exhortation, they are encouraged and strengthened in their faith.

There are, however, an alarmingly large number of Christians asking the question, "What's in it for me?" Their goals for worship are selfishly pragmatic: "If I don't get something out of worship, I'm not going to do it. It's simply a waste of time." Such an attitude belies a fundamental and tragic misunderstanding of the basis of worship.

Worship is not about receiving; it is about giving. We give our gifts, our sacrifices to God. We give him praise, glory, honor, thanks. We offer him our lives in his service. We give encouragement to our fellow worshipers. We give all this expecting nothing in return except, perhaps, the satisfaction which comes from fulfilling our need to worship. We may hope that we receive encouragement in our Christian walk from others, but that is not guaranteed. We may hope that God will bless us as we worship, but we have to trust him for that. Yet the fundamental "goal" of worship is to give, not to receive. Remember, one of the words for "to worship," *latreuo*, means "to serve" without expectation of pay/reward.

Many people assemble to worship "to get my cup filled." The world shoots their cups full of holes during the week; they feel they have nothing to offer, but are in desperate need of being filled. While one may sympathize with their situation, they need to be warned: Never come before the Lord empty-handed. This axiom is stated a number of times in Scripture (Ex. 23:15; 34:20; Deut. 16:16). The fundamental purpose of worship, as we have seen, is to give, so we should always come before the

Lord with something to offer him. Wiersbe reminds us, "We do not worship God for what we get out of it, but because He is worthy of worship."⁹ Jesus himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). A "give me" attitude is totally inappropriate in worship and is no doubt offensive to God.

Those who feel they have nothing to offer God need to look in their cups again. There may not be much there, but there is something—something for which to be thankful, some praise for God, some devotion, some faithfulness, some promise to keep on trusting even though no end is in sight and no answers seem forthcoming.

Consider two worshipers whom Jesus extolled. The Pharisee who was full of himself, thinking he had much to offer God, was rejected by God, while the tax collector, who offered God nothing but a humble, penitent heart, worshiped God in an acceptable manner (Lk. 18:9-14). When he did, his "goal" (pleasing God and being justified) was met. A widow had almost nothing to offer God—nothing of consequence, an amount of money so small many might be embarrassed to offer it. Yet she gave to God all that she had, and her memory of sacrificial giving and acceptable worship has been preserved through the centuries (Lk. 21:1-4). Why? Because she gave. She worshiped with no thought of herself. Her selfless, self-sacrificial attitude is beautiful.

So we need to look into our cups again. Maybe there are only a few drops left; but if we thankfully, sacrificially pour those few drops out in worship to God, he who is faithful will fill our cups when they are turned right side up again.

We might summarize the "goals" of worship and some of our previous study in the following way. The spiritual worshiper of God wants:

1. To experience God's presence
2. To feel forgiven
3. To give God a gift
4. To promise God something (e.g., continued faithfulness)
5. To be encouraged to keep his/her promises

If the worship of God is approached with the proper attitude and with these expectations, and if the worship leaders will lead with these expectations in mind, then the worship will be pleasing to God and a blessing to the worshiper.

WORSHIP IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

We began our study with the question, "What would you do if suddenly you found yourself transported into the very presence of God?" This is precisely what happened to John when he was "in the Spirit" one Lord's Day. His personal experiences and what he saw as he records them in his letter entitled "Revelation" give us some valuable insights into the worship of God and will confirm and illustrate many of the things we have studied.

Having said this, however, we should also stress that what we see regarding worship in Revelation is not normative. We do not witness a New Testament Christian worship assembly; what we see through John's eyes is not normal human activity. We, through John's testimony, are brought into the very presence of God—something no mortal today has or should ever hope to experience during his earthly existence. Yet the heavenly activity and attitudes we observe in Revelation are helpful reminders of what our earthly activity should be all about.¹⁰

It is significant that those who dwell in the presence of God and his Son consider them worthy of worship (Rev. 4:11; 5:9, 12, 13). As a matter of fact, an angel commands that worship should be directed toward God and God alone (Rev. 19:10; 22:8, 9).

God is described as holy in the well-known triple incantation of the beasts (Rev. 4:8; see also 6:10; 16:5). Other things or beings are called holy (e.g., the holy city in Rev. 11:2; 21:2, 10; 22:19; the holy angels in 14:10; those of the first resurrection in Rev. 20:6), but these are sanctified only by virtue of God's holiness, for God alone is holy (Rev. 15:4).¹¹

God is also described in awesome terms (Rev. 4:2-6), as is his Son (Rev. 1:13-16; 5:6). The awesome appearance of the Son evidently caused John to be deathly afraid (Rev. 1:17a). Such

fear, however, is inappropriate before God and his Son (Rev. 1:17b). Nevertheless, their holiness is certainly worthy of reverence and awe. Accordingly, John uses the word *phobeomai* ("to fear," "to revere," "to stand in awe") to describe the worship of God in Revelation 11:18; 14:7; 15:4; and 19:5.

John's favorite word to describe the worship of God is *proskuneo*. In fact, of the sixty times the word is used in the New Testament, 40 per cent occur in Revelation. Thus, the twenty-four elders, who probably represent the people of God,¹² bow in humility and obeisance before God as they worship him (Rev. 4:10; 5:8, 14; 11:16; 19:4). Not only the elders, but the angels (Rev. 7:11) and four creatures (Rev. 19:4) bow before God. If such august beings as these, who are continually in the presence of the Creator, humble themselves before him, how much more should we!

Finally, we should note that the role of the saints in heaven, both presently and in the future, is that of worship through service (*latreuo*, Rev. 7:15 and 22:3). Worship is clearly demonstrated again to be serving and giving. Not only do the saints give to God their service, but the twenty-four elders cast their (precious) crowns before God and give them to him (Rev. 4:10). The heavenly beings give glory, honor, and thanks to God (Rev. 4:9; 11:17). God is given praise and adoration for who he is (Rev. 4:8; 15:3, 4; 16:5-7) and for what he has done (Rev. 4:11; 15:3, 4; 19:1-3). This remembrance and thankfulness brings forth praise in a spirit of joy (see Rev. 19:7).

It becomes obvious from even a cursory reading of Revelation that the sum of heavenly activity is the worship of God—through humble reverence, the giving of praise, honor, and thanks, and the rendering of service to him. It would seem most appropriate, then, if those on earth who seek to please him would do the same. Small wonder that Robert Webber is moved to say that worship is the primary work of the church today.¹³

NOTES

¹This discussion will primarily focus on the "formal" worship of God—how we approach him in Sunday assemblies or in private, daily "quiet time." Nevertheless, to distinguish clearly between "formal"

worship and the worship we give God through our daily routines of "love and good works" is difficult, and perhaps even artificial. Therefore, much of what we can say about "formal" worship can also be said of our daily walk with God.

²A. W. Tozer, *What Ever Happened to Worship?* (Camp Hill, Penn.: Christian Publications, 1985), 12.

³For instance, in 2 Chronicles 7:3 it is used in conjunction with *kara*, and in Nehemiah 8:6, it is used with *qadad*.

⁴Warren Wiersbe, *Real Worship* (Nashville: Oliver Nelson, 1986), 26.

⁵Quoted by Wiersbe, 43. Wiersbe goes on to explain that "True wonder is not a passing emotion or some kind of shallow excitement. It has depth to it. True wonder reaches right into your heart and mind and shakes you up. It not only has depth, it has value; it enriches your life" (p. 45).

⁶Excellent examples of joy mixed with reverence may be found in Leviticus 9:24 and 2 Chronicles 29:30.

⁷An over-familiarity with God on the part of many Christians can be traced back to a misunderstanding of the word "abba." This designation for God, frequently (perhaps always) used by Jesus, has been said to be equivalent to our modern "Daddy" and is thus indicative of our extremely intimate relationship with God through Christ. This oral tradition regarding "abba," however, overstates the case. "Abba" is the language which a child would use to a father, but it is not the endearing, informal, intimate title which many understand it to be; it was merely the way children addressed their fathers during Jesus' time (which included a great deal of respect, not casual intimacy). The revolutionary aspect of Jesus' usage, appropriated by Christians, was the addressing of God simply as "Father," "My Father," or "Our Father" without any further elaboration in the title of address, such as "Father in heaven," etc. For further discussion, see H. Ringgren, "'ab," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, trans. John Willis (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 1:8-10; G. Kittel, "Abba," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel, trans. and ed. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), 1:5-6; and G. Dalman, *The Words of Jesus*, trans. D. M. Kay (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909), 189-94.

⁸Priests also had the exclusive right to offer sacrifices, with the apparent exception of kings (cf. 1 Sam. 13:8, 9; 2 Kings 16:11-14).

⁹Wiersbe, 22.

¹⁰For our purposes, we will focus our attention primarily on the worship scenes in Revelation 4:8-11; 5:8-14; 7:9-12; 11:15-18; 15:2-4; 16:5-7; and 19:1-8.

¹¹This would, of course, include the Son's holiness as well (see Rev. 3:7).

¹²This is the view preferred by R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark,

1920), 1:128-33. G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1966), 63-64, entertains the view favorably, but R. H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), 135, considers it unlikely.

¹³Robert E. Webber, *Worship Is a Verb* (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1985), 18.

KEN NELLER accepted a position as professor of Bible at Harding University this fall. Prior to this, he was the pulpit minister for Southside church of Christ in Lexington, Kentucky, from 1983 to 1992. For the past three years, he has taken an annual trip to El Centro de Estudios Biblicos in Santiago, Chile. He was also an adjunct professor at Kentucky Christian College from 1991 to 1992. He received his B.A. from Harding University, his M.Th. and his M.A. from Harding Graduate School of Religion. He received his Ph.D. from the University of St. Andrews in Scotland in 1983. He has written several articles for Christian publications. He and his wife, Barbara, have two children.

THE SONGS IN REVELATION

Mark C. Black

Few portions of Scripture have inspired more enduring songs than has the Book of Revelation. Among the better known of these are "Worthy Art Thou," "Holy, Holy, Holy," "On Zion's Glorious Summit," "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name," "Crown Him With Many Crowns," and the "Hallelujah Chorus" from Handel's *Messiah*. The spirit of worship which pervades the Revelation has clearly been the inspiration for some of Christianity's greatest hymnody. Oddly enough, however, there has been little serious study of the songs of Revelation.¹

Although scholars disagree on the precise number of hymns in Revelation, we will assume that the following portions of Revelation include hymns: 1:5f.; 4:9-11; 5:9, 10; 5:11-14; 7:9-12; 11:15-18; 12:10-12; 13:4; 14:1f.; 15:3f.; 16:5-7; 18:20; and 19:1-8. We will look at the hymns as a group, discussing first their background, then their general characteristics, and finally their function in Revelation.

EARLY CHRISTIAN HYMNS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

One of the most interesting discoveries of modern scholarship is that several New Testament texts may actually be early Christian hymns which the authors have incorporated into their writings. For example, most recent interpreters believe that Philippians 2:6-11 is just such a hymn. One can never be certain, of course, but there are several indicators that in his effort to call the church to a humble attitude, Paul has cited an

early song of the church about Jesus' humiliation and subsequent exaltation. In addition to the fact that it begins with a Greek term commonly believed to introduce hymns, this passage has a poetic structure and is easily arranged into verses or stanzas. Furthermore, it is unlike its surrounding context; the language is lofty and exalted, as one would expect of a hymn; and it appears to use words uncharacteristic of Paul. This is, of course, to oversimplify what is a somewhat technical discussion which cannot be entered here. It must suffice to say that there are excellent reasons to believe that New Testament writers occasionally made use of songs regularly sung in the worship gatherings of the early Christians.

If, indeed, the "Philippians hymn" and other passages are early songs of the church, they provide us our clearest glimpse into the content of early Christian worship in song. We know from a number of passages that singing was an important part of the worship of the early Christians (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; 1 Cor. 14:15, 26; Jas. 5:13). What we do not know with clarity is what the early Christians sang. The phrase "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" in Ephesians 5:19 tells us little about the content of the singing envisioned.² Among the most likely hymns in the New Testament are the following: Ephesians 5:14 (notice the introductory "Therefore it says"); Colossians 1:15-20; 1 Timothy 3:16; 6:15, 16; 2 Timothy 2:11-13; and Hebrews 1:3. What is perhaps most interesting about these hymns is that they are thoroughly theological and Christological. That is, in terms of content they are exclusively songs of praise to God and Jesus Christ.

It is interesting to compare with these the hymns in Revelation. On the one hand, there is no doubt regarding the hymnic status of the Revelation songs—they are explicitly identified as songs which are sung by the hosts in heaven. Not surprisingly, they are very much like the hymns discovered elsewhere in the New Testament in that they extol God and Christ. On the other hand, it is far from clear that the songs in Revelation were earlier used in Christian worship. Although many have proposed that John has incorporated hymns that he knew from worship, two characteristics of these texts argue against this

hypothesis. First, they reflect so perfectly their contexts that they must have been composed specifically for the Revelation. Second, their vocabulary and style are the same as that of the rest of the book, suggesting a single author.

There are still good reasons, however, for assuming that these hymns tell us something about early Christian worship. First, there is the simple fact that they are found in this early Christian document. It is only reasonable to expect to find in them characteristics of the forms and styles of worship of the writer's day. Second, as already noticed, they are quite similar in content and form to Jewish and other early Christian hymns. As Ralph Martin writes, "How else could [John] have made his descriptions intelligible to his readers?"³ We may conclude without too much hesitation, therefore, that these hymns are *like* songs being sung in the churches in John's day, even though they were composed for the Revelation and were only later actually used in worship.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SONGS OF REVELATION

We stated above that the hymns in the Apocalypse are fundamentally theological and Christological. The striking fact is that the praise offered to Christ is in the same high and exalted language as that offered to God. Whereas *prayer* in the New Testament seems to be primarily directed toward God the Father, the *songs* seem to be addressed equally to Christ, as is clearly the case in the Revelation hymns. For example, the same sort of language used to describe the One seated on the throne in Revelation 4:11 is used of the Lamb in 5:12:

"Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might
and honor and glory and blessing!"⁴

We may categorize the several elements of the Revelation hymns more specifically as (1) adoration, (2) enumeration of blessings, and (3) expression of future hope, all couched in Old

Testament language. These elements, of course, are precisely what one would expect from a Christ-centered community whose worship grew out of Jewish roots in the temple and synagogue.

The modern reader may also be surprised at the fact that most of these hymns are antiphonal. Throughout the visions, the first part of the songs are sung by one group, after which another group answers, usually in terms reminiscent of the words earlier sung. For example, in Revelation 4:8 the four living creatures around the throne sing,

"Holy, holy, holy,
the Lord God the Almighty,
who was and is and is to come."

Then in verse 11 in response to the song of the creatures, the twenty-four elders sing,

"You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they existed and were created."

Other examples of this antiphonal style are the hymns of Revelation 5:9b f.; 5:12; 7:10b; 7:12; 11:15b; 11:17f.; 16:5b f.; 16:7; and 19:1b-8a.

That antiphonal singing represents a common form in early Christian worship may possibly be suggested in Paul's instructions that his readers "address one another. . . ." (Eph. 5:19) or "teach and admonish one another. . . ." (Col. 3:16) in song.⁵ Of course, it should not surprise us to discover this style. Antiphonal singing had been practiced among the Jews for centuries, as is most clearly seen in Ezra 3:11 and Nehemiah 12:24, 31. The presence of such singing at the very beginning of the second Christian century may be implied in the comments of the non-Christian writer Pliny, governor of Bithynia, in a letter to the Emperor Trajan. The governor, who admittedly knew little about Christians, wrote,

[The Christians] affirmed, however, the whole of their guilt, or their error, was, that they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang *in alternate verses* a hymn to Christ, as to a god. . . . (Emphasis mine.)⁶

THE FUNCTION OF THE HYMNS IN REVELATION

Having looked at the hymns in Revelation in relation to early Christian worship in general, we must now discuss their function in the literary work of which they are a part. Following the previously-mentioned work of Carnegie, we will suggest four ways in which they play a role in the narrative.

First, the hymns seem to have an interpretive and unifying function within the larger visions. Only the hymn in Revelation 1:5f. falls outside the main body of visions in chapters 4 through 19. The remainder of the hymns are placed so that each section of visions has at least one hymn. The hymn then appears to function within the vision to interpret the meaning of the vision. Not only do the hymns tend to be interpretive of the major point of the individual visions, they also seem to link the visions together. For example, the hymn in Revelation 11:15-18 interprets the coming seventh trumpet blast as the final one, at which time God's final wrath is to be revealed. It also is linked verbally to the hymn back in Revelation 4:11 and ahead to the one in Revelation 22:5. The songs, therefore, represent a connecting and interpretive thread that John has woven throughout his work.

A second function of the songs is that they are proleptic (as is the entire work). Not only do they inform and assure the reader of the future glory and triumph of God and his hosts despite what appears to be present defeat, they also call for praise for the fulfillment of events which have yet to take place. God is thanked and glorified for what he is *about* to do. The hymn just referred to, Revelation 11:15, is an excellent example. Despite the horrors just narrated and those yet to be narrated, the worshipers sing,

"The kingdom of the world has
become the kingdom of our Lord
and of his Messiah,
and he will reign forever and ever."

This is typical of the hymns throughout Revelation. It is argued by some that each section of visions ends with a hymn for precisely the reason of anticipating what God has yet to do.

The third function of the hymns is to show an ever-widening circle of praise to God and his Messiah. The first stage (Rev. 4:6-11 and 5:8-12) has the worship being offered by heavenly beings who surround the throne. In stage two, reached by Revelation 11:15, the worship is inclusive of the "great multitude" of the redeemed. The third stage (see Rev. 19:5) seems to add the voices of earthly singers. Finally, by the end of chapter 21 (although there are no worded hymns recorded), all the nations are involved in the honor given to God and the Lamb.

THE HYMNS AND THE IMPERIAL CULT

A fourth function of the hymns relates directly to the historical situation of John and his earliest readers. John wrote the Book of Revelation at a time when the emperor of Rome was being worshiped as a god by the Imperial cult. Chapter 13 depicts the earthly worship of the beast, representing the Roman Empire and especially the emperor. This worship is accomplished through the form of a hymn: "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?" (Rev. 13:4). The reason for this is undoubtedly the fact that the emperor was worshiped with just such hymns (including highly dramatic antiphonal choir singing) as John shows to be properly reserved for God and the Lamb.⁷ Several have noticed the similarity in terminology between the worship of the emperor and the worship of God and the Lamb in the hymns. For example, Revelation 4:11, with its mention of "our Lord and God," may have been written in direct response to the title the emperor Domitian gave himself, *Dominus et Deus noster* ("our lord and god"). Other phrases which were common in the worship of the emperor are found throughout the

hymns, such as "the one who sits on the throne," the one who is "worthy," and various expressions using terms such as "power," "authority," and "salvation." Perhaps one purpose of John then is to depict in the starkest of terms the arrogance of the Imperial cult and the choice that must be made by those who would be faithful to God and his Christ.

CONCLUSION

We conclude that the hymns in Revelation function to interpret and unify the narrative, to call forth present praise for those future events which God is sure to accomplish, and to show the absolute incompatibility between emperor worship and the worship of God and Christ. It is difficult for the modern reader to imagine their importance for John's original audience, a people under severe persecution who needed to be sustained by worship of the God who will fulfill his promises through Christ who has triumphed over all enemies.

There are also perhaps a couple of implications for those of us living two millennia later. First, we may be reminded that there is no single style of singing commanded in Scripture. Perhaps the songs of Revelation are warrant enough for calling for the rediscovery of antiphonal and related styles, in which we quite literally "*address one another* in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, as we sing and make melody *to the Lord* with all our hearts" (Eph. 5:19; emphasis mine).

Finally and most importantly, we are reminded that the heart and soul of our worship, including that expressed in song, is the offering of our highest praise to the God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb who was slaughtered for our salvation and who reigns forever and ever. Our worship ought to be a continual retelling and celebration of God's work in Jesus Christ, who is rightly worshiped as the very image of God.

NOTES

¹I must acknowledge at the outset my indebtedness for much of what follows to the fine article by David R. Carnegie, "Worthy Is the Lamb: The Hymns in Revelation," in *Christ the Lord: Studies in Christology*

Presented to Donald Guthrie, ed. Harold H. Rowdon (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982), 243-56, in which he summarizes the few important studies of these hymns, most of which are in German.

²Scholars are not even sure that the first term in the series, "psalms," refers primarily to the psalms in the Old Testament book of Psalms. While no one doubts that the Psalter was likely used in Christian worship, many believe that the "psalms" of Ephesians 5:19 were "Christian" psalms, composed for Christian worship. See, for example, Ralph Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), 39-52.

³*Ibid.*, 46.

⁴Most of the quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

⁵It is also probable that the early Christians engaged in *responsorial* singing, in which "the main content was sung as a solo by the cantor . . . with the congregation repeating the last words or responding with a refrain or acclamation." The quotation is from Everett Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak: Faith and Life in the First Three Centuries* (Austin, Tex.: Sweet Publishing Co., 1971), 161.

⁶*Ibid.*, 81.

⁷See G. W. Bowersock, "The Imperial Cult: Perceptions and Persistence," in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, vol. 3, ed. B. E. Meyer and E. P. Sanders (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 171-82.

MARK C. BLACK is an assistant Professor at David Lipscomb University. He formerly served as the minister of the Donelson church of Christ in Nashville, Tennessee, from 1986 to 1990. He received his B.A. from Harding University, his M.A. in 1981 from Princeton, and his Ph.D. from Emory in 1990. He and his wife, Margo, have three children.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION AND THE MILLENNIUM

Jack P. Lewis

INTRODUCTION

After the survey of the fortunes of the seven churches of Asia which depicts conditions on earth (Rev. 1—3), the reader of Revelation is given a look into heaven to see what is going on behind the scenes (Rev. 4). This vision leads to an account of the opening of the seven seals by the Lamb. There then follow three other series of seven events, each beginning with the seventh of the preceding one: the sounding of the seven trumpets, the sounding of the seven thunders, and the pouring out of the seven bowls of the wrath of God.

It is a debatable issue in the interpretation of the book whether these events form a linear chronological sequence or are overlapping cycles. Any approach to the interpretation of Revelation 20 is dependent upon the prior approach made to Revelation. If one is convinced that there is a chronological sequence with one episode following another in chronological order in the narration, he will see chapter 20 in an entirely different light from the person who is convinced that the book proceeds in cycles. Those holding one approach will likely never be able to convince those holding the other.

Meanwhile, the reader is given an allegorical presentation of the birth of Jesus and is introduced to the dragon who is identified as the devil and Satan seeking the life of Jesus (Rev. 12). The reader is introduced to the beast out of the sea and then to the second beast who fosters the worship of the first beast (Rev. 13). With the pouring out of the seventh bowl comes the overthrow of Babylon, the great harlot. There is then the invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb, a vision of the

rider on the white horse going forth victoriously, and an account of the scavenger birds feasting on the flesh of the conquered.

As a part of this victory, the beast is captured as also is the false prophet, and the two are thrown into the lake of fire. Those who have supported them are fed to the scavenger birds. Chapter 20 then presents the victory over the devil and Satan in whose service the beast and the false prophet have been. The devil himself is captured and thrown into the bottomless pit. The writer is dealing with the fates of the three great enemies of the Christians: the devil, the beast, and the false prophet.

After having described in the earlier part of the book the suffering brought on by the beast and false prophet stimulated by Satan, the writer describes the victory over the first two of these and their being thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 19:20). The primary theme of Revelation 20:1-10 is not the thousand-year reign of Christ (as it has been made in some systems of eschatology) but is the overthrow of Satan who has been the stimulus of the actions of the beast and the false prophet. It proclaims the ultimate and certain triumph of Christ. It does not say anything specific about how long Christ reigns.

EXEGESIS OF REVELATION 20:1-10

The chapter beginning with "and I saw" (*kai eidon*: cf. Rev. 19:11, 17, 19; 20:4, 11, 12; 21:1) which, unlike "after this I saw" (*meta tauta eidon*: Rev. 18:1; cf. 19:1), does not determine the order of time in which the vision was seen in relation to what goes before it. One should not assume that the events follow immediately the destruction of the beast and false prophet. The phrase "I saw an angel coming down out of heaven" previously occurs at Revelation 10:1; 18:1, and the phrase "coming down from heaven" at Revelation 3:12; 13:13; and 21:2, 10.

It is obvious that Revelation 20:1-10 easily divides into three sections. Verses 1 through 3 deal with the binding of Satan, verses 4 through 6 deal with the reign of the beheaded with Christ, and verses 7 through 10 deal with the end of Satan. These events are followed by verses 11 through 15 that deal with the general resurrection and the final judgment.

The word *angelos* that occurs in about fifty-five passages of the Apocalypse, and frequently in the rest of the New Testament, can be used for either an earthly or heavenly messenger. This angel's descent from heaven (as those in Rev. 10:1 and 18:1) ties him to the second of these categories.

The verb *kratein* ("laid hold of"), also used in Matthew 26:55, means to take into custody. A nameless angel descending from heaven suffices to reduce the devil to impotence. Since only Michael (Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1; Jude 9; Rev. 12:7) and Gabriel (Dan. 8:16; 9:21; Lk. 1:19, 26) are named angels in Scripture, it is not striking that this one is unnamed. The angel has the key to the abyss and has a great chain.

Abyssos is used in the Septuagint about twenty-five times, most often translating *tehom* which is the primeval ocean (Gen. 1:2), but is also the place of the dead (Ps. 71[70]:20; cf. Ps. 106[107]:26). In late Judaism, the abyss came to be used for the prison of fallen spirits (Eth. Enoch 10:4ff., 11ff.; 18:1ff.; Jub. 5:6ff.). The Prayer of Manasseh 3 ascribes to God the attribute: "who closed the abyss and sealed it with your fearful and glorious name." The New Testament has disobedient angels chained in nether gloom (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6).¹

Use of *abyssos* is seen when the demons cast out of the Gerasene man begged Jesus that he not command them to depart into the abyss (Lk. 8:31). They chose rather to enter the pigs. Paul writing the Romans says, "The righteousness based on faith says, Do not say in your heart . . . , 'Who will descend into the abyss' (that is to bring Christ up from the dead)" (Rom. 10:6, 7).

The other seven occurrences of *abyssos* are in the Apocalypse. At the blowing of the fifth trumpet, a star fallen from heaven to earth was seen, and he was given the key of the shaft of the bottomless pit. When it was opened, smoke as of a great furnace ascended on high darkening the sun and the air (Rev. 9:1, 2). The king over the locusts that ascend from the pit is the angel of the pit whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon but in Greek is Apollyon (Rev. 9:11). When the two witnesses have finished their testimony, the beast that ascends from the bottomless pit makes war on them, conquers them, and kills them (Rev. 11:7).

This beast is described as one who was, and is not, and is to ascend from the bottomless pit, and is to go to perdition (Rev. 17:8). Finally, it is into the abyss that bound Satan is cast, and the abyss is shut and sealed over him (Rev. 20:3).² He is cast out of earth as he had been cast out of heaven. This *abyssos* is to be distinguished from the *limne* ("lake") of Revelation 19:20; 20:10.

Throughout Scripture the holder of the key has authority over that which the key opens and shuts (cf. Is. 22:22; Rev. 1:18; 3:7). Here in the Apocalypse the key to the bottomless pit is met previously at Revelation 9:1 where a star fallen from heaven has the key. Only the one who authorized the imprisonment can authorize release from it (cf. Dan. 6:17).³

The binding of a prisoner with a chain is common in the biblical world (Ps. 149:8; Jer. 40:4; Mk. 5:3, 4; Acts 12:7; 28:20; 2 Tim. 1:16). The term *halysis*, as opposed to *pede*, suggests hand fetters. The large chain (*halysis megale*) for binding Satan (a prisoner of extraordinary strength) by logic has to be figurative. It is not conceivable that a literal metallic chain could hold a spiritual being. Some interpreters see the chain as the Word of God. Luther said, "A word shall quickly slay him."

The victim of the binding is introduced by four titles already encountered in Revelation 12:9; 13:2, 4 where he is cast out of heaven and thrown down to earth. He is the dragon, the ancient serpent that is the devil and Satan.⁴ *Drakon* occurs in the New Testament only in Revelation where it occurs twelve times (Rev. 12:3, 4, 7, 9, 13, 16, 17; 13:2, 4, 11; 16:13; 20:2). There are numerous occurrences in the Greek Old Testament translating six different words designating various creatures.

The epithet "serpent" takes the reader back to Genesis 3 and the story of the temptation of Eve. Though not specifically given in Genesis, the identification of the serpent with the devil is older in Judaism than Revelation. The Book of Wisdom says, "through the Devil's envy death entered the world" (Wisd. 2:24). From the war in heaven, the devil and his angels have been thrown down to earth with great wrath (Rev. 12:9, 12).

The confining of Satan to the pit is described in four terms:

"bound," "threw," "shut in," and "sealed over" till the thousand years are ended. *Dein* (Latin: *alligare*) is a common verb for binding a prisoner like the strong man (Mt. 12:29; Mk. 3:27) or the sick woman (Lk. 13:16). The term also is for things bound on earth (Mt. 16:19), the binding of believers in Damascus (Acts 9:2), and for other bindings. It occurs elsewhere in the Apocalypse for the four angels bound at the Euphrates (Rev. 9:14). *Ballein* ("threw") is used in Revelation 2:10; 8:5, 7, 8; 12:9; 19:20; etc. *Kleiein* (Latin: *claudere*) is for closing a door (Mt. 6:6; 25:10; Acts 5:23; 21:30; etc.). In the Apocalypse *kleiein* is for closing the door of opportunity (Rev. 3:7, 8), for closing the heaven from rain (Rev. 11:6), and for the gates of the city not being shut (Rev. 21:25).

Sealing (*sphragizein*) which occurs seven times (Rev. 7:3, 4, 5, 8; 10:4; 20:3; 22:10) was done for authoritative closing (Dan. 6:17; Prayer of Manasseh 3; Mt. 27:66). The seven seals secured the contents of the scroll in Revelation 5:1.

Satan's power had been allowed him (cf. Rev. 13:7). Rather than being for punishment, the purpose of the binding is that Satan should "deceive [cf. Rev. 13:14] the nations [*ta ethne*] no more." In Revelation 12:9, the devil is described as "the deceiver of the whole world [*ho planon ten oikoumenen holen*]." In the Gospel of John, he is the father of lies (Jn. 8:44). Some said that Jesus deceived the people (Jn. 7:12). The phrase *achri telesthe* ("until finished") occurs in Revelation 15:8 and 17:17 for ending of plagues and the fulfilling of God's words.

There are not a great many cases of a thousand years in Scripture. The Psalms say, "A thousand years in thy sight are as but yesterday when it is passed" (Ps. 90:4), and the second epistle of Peter says, "With the Lord, one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Pet. 3:8). However, if all cases of a thousand are included, the number thousand is used both literally and as a description of a large number. Job says, "One could not answer him once in a thousand times" (Job. 9:3). The Psalms speak of the cattle on a thousand hills which are the Lord's (Ps. 50:10) and speak of the word he commanded for a thousand generations (Ps. 105[104]:8).⁵

All expositors recognize that they are perplexed by why the

binding is limited to a thousand years; but they are also perplexed by why Satan must (*dei*) be loosed for a little while (*mikron chronon*). *Dei* ("must"; Mt. 24:6; Mk. 8:31; 13:7; Lk. 24:26, 44) introduces that which is in accordance with God's purposes. It occurs seven times in the Apocalypse (Rev. 1:1; 4:1; 10:11; 11:5; 17:10; 20:3; 22:6). It is futile to speculate on the "why" of the necessity.

Another vision (*kai eidon*) sees thrones and those seated on them to whom judgment is committed. The term "throne" occurs in Revelation forty-seven times, and all but three instances (2:13; 13:2; 10:10) appear to be to thrones in heaven.⁶ The writer here seems to be describing what is seen in heaven.

The throne scene with judgment given (Rev. 20:4) is likely a development of Daniel 7:9ff. where thrones are placed and judgment given to the saints of the Most High. Further influence may come from the Gospels where the disciples are promised thrones (Mt. 19:28; Lk. 22:30) and from Paul's statement about Christians judging angels (1 Cor. 6:3).

Also seen are souls (*psychai*) of those beheaded (*pelekizesthai*) for their testimony to Jesus and for the Word of God. *Psyche*, occurring seven times in the Apocalypse, has divergent uses. It designates marine creatures (Rev. 8:9), human physical life (Rev. 12:11), a person (Rev. 18:13), and the individual surviving death prior to the resurrection (Rev. 6:9).⁷ While the term *psychai* may in some passages (Acts 2:41) designate those living on earth, here it has to designate those who have died. The term *pelekizesthai*, meaning behead with an axe, is a New Testament hapax but occurs in classical writers and Josephus.⁸ It is rendered *decollari* in Latin. The verb may be contrasted with *spazein* ("slain"; Rev. 6:9; 18:24; cf. 5:6; 6:4; 13:3) used for martyrs. These martyrs have earlier been met in Revelation 6:9ff. where safely under the altar they cry for vengeance and are told to be patient. At Revelation 19:2, God avenges the blood of his servants. Here in chapter 20 they are on thrones and have judgment committed to them.

Testimony (*martyria*) to Jesus is the term expressing why John was on the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:2, 9). *Martyria* is a common term in the Apocalypse (Rev. 6:9; 12:11, 17; 19:10).

The beheaded are also described as having suffered for "the word of God" which is also a common concept in the Apocalypse (Rev. 1:2, 9; 3:8; 6:9; 17:17; 19:9; 21:5; 22:6, 7, 9, 10, 19).

The persons are further described as those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands.⁹ These temptations are described in Revelation 14:9-12, and the writer has not been optimistic over their escaping death; in fact, death is promised (Rev. 13:15).

It is likely that John sees only one group.¹⁰ While the Greek text has a series of items connected with the conjunction *kai*, the interpreter has to decide whether the conjunction is coordinate or explanatory. The Greek form would be the same in either case. *Kai* can be explanatory equaling "namely." If *kai*, however, is coordinate, then those seen who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands could be a different group from the beheaded. The ASV with its "and such as" can be so understood. However, one should remember that this is merely a value judgment on the part of the translator or interpreter. It could just as well be the other way as the KJV, NKJV, RSV, NIV, and NRSV have it. Those seen came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. There is no compelling reason to suppose that this thousand years is a different one from that spoken of in verses 1 through 3. "Christ" is in the Apocalypse only at Revelation 11:15; 12:10; 20:4, 6, each a victorious context (cf. Ps. 2:6).

The contrast with the rest (cf. Rev. 2:24; 9:20; 11:13; 12:17; 19:21) of the dead is explicit. The rest of the dead did not live until the thousand years were ended (cf. Rev. 15:8; 17:17; 20:5). They are those not included in the beheaded. This reign with Christ is the first resurrection. A blessing is pronounced over those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them. They are priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years.

They Lived

In verses 4 and 5, the crucial Greek phrases for living are *kai*

ezezan and *ouk ezezan*. The identical verb and verb form occurs in each instance. The verb *zen* occurs in Revelation in eight other passages: 1:18; 2:8; 3:1; 4:9; 7:2; 13:14; 15:7; and 19:20. The first two speak of the results of Christ's resurrection (other New Testament passages also use *ezezan* for a resurrection or the resurrection: Matthew 9:18; Romans 14:9; 2 Corinthians 13:4); the others in Revelation speak merely of living. It would be a hasty generalization to conclude that *zen* always has the meaning of a resurrection.

The verses 4 and 5 passed into Latin with the literal rendering *et vixerunt* and *non vixerunt*. They then came into English with John Wycliffe as "and they lyueden" and "lyueden not."

A very slight modification with great interpretative significance entered English with William Tyndale who had "And they lived" and "lyved not agayne." Tyndale was followed with spelling modification in his rendering "again" by the Great Bible, the Geneva Bible, and the Bishops' Bible. The Rheims, however, did not make this addition but had "lived not" in verse 5. The KJV (as the NKJV) followed the Tyndale tradition with the addition which arises from a textual variant *anezezan* in the *Textus Receptus* not considered of enough weight for listing in the Nestle apparatus or for discussion in the *Textual Commentary*. The *Simple English Bible*TM falls into the same fault with verse 5 reading "came back to life" contrasting with "they lived" of verse 4. Whatever the intention of the translators was, the common reader is invited to understand a life after physical death. The addition can seduce the mind to think in a certain pattern.

The ASV omitted the "again" as have the RSV, TEV, NASV, NIV, NABR, New Jerusalem Bible, and the NRSV, all of which have "came to life" in both verses 4 and 5.

The NEB and REB have "came to life again" in verse 4 but have "come to life" in verse 5, leaving the reader no interpretation possibility other than a post-physical death one. English translations reflect a pattern of thought and in turn influence the pattern of thought of their readers.

The First Resurrection

The beatitude is the fifth in the book (Rev. 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6 [22:7, 14 follow]). This one adds "holy" (*hagios*) not used in others. Having part (*meros*) may be contrasted with Jesus' statement about not having part (Jn. 13:8) and with the other occurrences of *meros* in the Apocalypse (Rev. 21:8; 22:19). The term "first resurrection" (*he anastasis he prote* which occurs twice) is limited to this setting.¹¹ "First" distinguishes it from the great resurrection (Rev. 20:11f.) though that one is never called "second." It is a resurrection of those beheaded and should be contrasted with the general resurrection of all others. Scripture elsewhere teaches a bodily resurrection that involves both believers and unbelievers (Jn. 5:29; Acts 24:15); hence, this passage should not be interpreted in a way to contradict those passages. The statement is not parallel to 1 Thessalonians 4:16 where the contrast is between the dead in Christ and the living in Christ. Neither is it parallel to 1 Corinthians 15:23 where the words are not limited to martyrs.¹²

Nothing is said in this passage about the second advent, about the earth, about Palestine as the center of the reign, or about the Jews. The commonly held millenarian descriptions are not given here. Nothing is said of reigning over people who are living and have not died. It is not legitimate to read "on the earth" between the lines.

The Greek word *achri* ("until") does not imply that the unbelieving will later live and reign. In Revelation 20:3, what happens after *achri* is explained in an explicit statement. The second death (Rev. 20:14) has power over these. Their change is for the worse, not for the better.

The term "second death" occurs here, in Revelation 2:11; 20:14; and in 21:8. It is plainly defined: "Their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death," and "The lake of fire is the second death." While the term "first death" does not occur, logically it has to be physical death which is to be experienced by all people: "It is appointed for man to die once" (Heb. 9:27). The second death, then, is the eternal punishment of the wicked. Here it is declared that this

death will not have power over those (*epi touton . . . ouk eche exousian*) who overcome (cf. Rev. 2:11).

The beheaded ones shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with him a thousand years. Already in the Apocalypse, priests have been mentioned. The addressees of the book are made priests (Rev. 1:6) as also are those described in the worship song (Rev. 5:10). Elsewhere in Scripture, in the Old Testament Israel is a kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:6), and Christians form a royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5, 9). These beheaded ones reign with Christ (*basileusousin met' autou*).

And when the thousand years are finished (*kai hotan telesthe ta chilia*, etc.), the projection of verse 3 is realized. Satan will be loosed out of his prison. The verb *lyein* is a common New Testament verb for freeing, used elsewhere in the Apocalypse for freeing from sin (Rev. 1:5), for opening seals of a book (Rev. 5:2), and for loosing bound angels (Rev. 9:15). The prison is the *abyssos* into which Satan has been cast. *Phylake* (Latin: *carcer*; "prison") is of common occurrence in the New Testament but occurs only three more times in the Apocalypse. The devil is about to cast some in Smyrna into prison (Rev. 2:10), and in two cases the term is rendered *custodia* in Latin and "haunt" for birds in the RSV, NIV, NRSV, and REB (Rev. 18:2).

To deceive the nations (*planan ta ethne*) is to do what Satan was previously bound to prevent (Rev. 20:3). The nations (*ta ethne*) are found in Revelation 12:5; 11:18; 14:8; 15:4; 18:23; 19:15; 20:3, 18; 21:24. Despite Satan's imprisonment, no change in his methods has taken place. *Planan* (Latin: *seducere*) occurs in the New Testament for various sorts of deception (Mt. 24:4; Lk. 21:8), especially religious deception (cf. Jn. 7:12; 2 Tim. 3:13; etc.). Jezebel deceives the Lord's servants (Rev. 2:20); but especially, Satan is the deceiver of the whole world (Rev. 12:9), the second beast (the false prophet) deceives those who live on the earth (Rev. 13:14), and the devil deceives the nations (Rev. 20:3, 8, 10).

The devil's action is to bring nations from the four corners of the earth to battle against the saints. Corners suggest totality. A star rising out of Jacob would smite the corners of Moab (Num. 24:17). The wind struck the four corners of the house of Job's

children (Job 1:19). The Lord promises to gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth (Is. 11:12); there is an end to come to the four corners of the land (Ezek. 7:2); and there are four angels standing at the four corners of the earth (Rev. 7:1).

The expression "gather for battle" occurs in Revelation 16:14. The nations are identified as Gog and Magog (cf. Gen. 10:2) which is an obvious development of Ezekiel 38:2, 9, 15 where Gog is from the land of Magog. Masses of people compared to the sands of the sea are common in the Old Testament. The simile is used to describe Abraham's promised descendants (Gen. 22:17; 32:12; Hos. 1:10; Rom. 9:27; Heb. 11:12). The simile also describes the grain Joseph accumulated in Egypt (Gen. 41:49), the people Joshua faced in the north (Josh. 11:4), the camels of the Midianites faced by Gideon (Judg. 7:12), and other groups (1 Sam. 13:5; 2 Sam. 17:11; 1 Macc. 11:1). The term "broad earth" has parallels (Hab. 1:6; Sir. 1:3). "The beloved city" has its background in "Mt. Zion which he loves" (Ps. 78:68; 86:2).

Fire coming down out of heaven to destroy an army takes one back to the story of Elijah and the captains King Ahaziah sent to take him (2 Kings 1:10-12). But it is likely Ezekiel 38:22 (cf. Ezek. 39:6; Lk. 9:54) which is in view: "I will rain upon him and his hordes and the many people that are with him, torrential rain and hailstones, fire and brimstone."

The section ends with the devil who deceived them¹³ being thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone (cf. Rev. 19:20; 20:14, 15) where his henchmen the beast and false prophet have already been cast. The fire is prepared for the devil and his angels (Mt. 25:41). They are tormented day and night (Rev. 4:8; 7:15; 12:10; 14:11) forever and ever (*eis tous aionas ton aionon*). This term "forever and ever" is a phrase which occurs a dozen times in the Apocalypse beginning with the ascription of glory to God (Rev. 1:6; 5:13; 7:12). It is for the life of the resurrected Christ (Rev. 1:18; 4:9), the existence of God (Rev. 10:6; 15:7), the reign of the Lord and his Christ (Rev. 11:15), and the torment of one who worships the beast, as well as for the torment of the beast, the false prophet, and the devil (Rev.

14:11; 19:3; 20:10). It also describes the reign of the righteous (Rev. 22:5). Those who affirm the final reconciliation of all people, as well as those who champion annihilation of the wicked, have a serious problem with this term.

The Thousand Years

All speculation about the millennium arises out of interpretation of Revelation 20 where those beheaded are said to reign with Christ a thousand years. Nothing is said about any others. The Greek term for thousand is *chilias* and that word gives us "chiliasm" in English for ideas about the thousand years. Jerome's translation into Latin gave *mille*; early English religious thought was heavily influenced by Latin, and that gave us "millennium" for the period and "millenarianism" for systems dealing with it. One should not be confused whether he is hearing "chiliasm" or "millenarianism"; the meaning of the two terms is the same. We are more familiar with the term of Latin derivation than with the Greek one. Neither term occurs in the English Bible.

The thousand years are not mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. Nothing in the preceding chapters of Revelation has prepared the reader for the idea. All is to be found in the first seven verses of Revelation 20 where the term occurs six times. The definite article is used in Greek in four instances (Rev. 20:3, 5, 6, 7) with only the case in verse 6 bracketed in the UBS text. The devil is bound for a thousand years (Rev. 20:2, 3), and the souls who have been beheaded live and reign with Christ a thousand years (Rev. 20:4). The rest of the dead do not live until the thousand years are ended. Those having part in the first resurrection are priests of God and reign with Christ a thousand years. Satan is loosed after the thousand years are ended. All else that is said across the centuries, including all the oratory and description heard on the television and radio and seen in books and papers, is the result of combinations of passages which combinations may or may not be legitimate.

HISTORY OF MILLENARIANISM IN THE CHURCH

The debate over whether the reign of Revelation 20 is to be understood as projecting a literal, future reign on earth or is symbolic has surfaced in almost every century of Christian history, especially in times of persecution or hardship.¹⁴ The allegorist writing the *Epistle of Barnabas* finds a connection between Genesis 1:3—2:3 and 2 Peter 3:8 and concludes there are six thousand years of the world followed by a Sabbath: "This means, when his Son comes he will destroy the time of the wicked one, and will judge the godless, and will change the sun and the moon and the stars, and then he will truly rest on the seventh day."¹⁵

Irenaeus attributes to Papias a description of a golden age of earthly fertility.¹⁶ Eusebius tells of his teaching: "That there will be a certain period of a thousand years after the resurrection of the dead, when the kingdom of Christ will be set up in a material order on earth."¹⁷

Eusebius reports that Cerinthus (ca. A.D. 100) claimed revelations by angels that after the resurrection the kingdom of Christ would be on earth and that humanity living in Jerusalem would again be the slave of lust and pleasure. He claimed that the marriage feast would last a thousand years.¹⁸ Eusebius attributes a description of Cerinthus' teaching to Dionysius of Alexandria.¹⁹ At that period, some in rejecting Cerinthus' claims considered the Apocalypse a forgery of Cerinthus.²⁰

Weightier figures who held to millenarian beliefs include Justin Martyr. To Trypho's inquiry, Justin states that he and others "who are right-minded Christians on all points are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned, and enlarged as the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and others declare."²¹

Irenaeus argues that the promises of the prophets cannot be taken allegorically but must have their fulfillment after the coming of the Antichrist and the resurrection. They are to be in a terrestrial Jerusalem.²² Tertullian states,

But we do confess that a kingdom is promised to us upon the earth, although before heaven, only in another state of existence; inasmuch as it will be after the resurrection for a thousand years in the divinely-built city of Jerusalem. . . . After its thousand years are over, within which period is completed the resurrection of the saints, who rise sooner or later according to their deserts, there will ensue the destruction of the world and the conflagration of all things at the judgment.²³

One would be in error if he supposed the various millenarian views we have surveyed represented all the early church. Justin admitted that there were faithful Christians who differed with him: There are many who belong to the "pure and pious faith and are true Christians who think otherwise."²⁴ Origen spiritualizes the description of Revelation 20.²⁵ Dionysius of Alexandria opposed millenarian views.²⁶ While expressing regard for the learning and character of Nepos, a bishop of Africa, Dionysius, in his no longer extant treatise *On Promises*, took exception to Nepos' claim in *Refutation of the Allegorists* that promised that divine Scriptures should be interpreted after a more Jewish fashion.²⁷ Eusebius recognizes that Papias influenced those who came after him, but he considers that Papias' writings show him to be "a man of very little intelligence."²⁸

It remained for Augustine to make a comprehensive statement against the literal-millenarians whom he found construing the Apocalypse "into ridiculous fancies." He saw the first resurrection to be resurrection of the soul taking place in baptism from being dead in sin; he appealed to John 5:25, 26 as his proof. The second resurrection is of bodies and is to judgment of the righteous and the wicked. Augustine acknowledges that he once held the view of a thousand years spent in a spiritual Sabbath. But he objects to the carnal interpretation held by some which he feels can be held only by the carnal.

Augustine identifies the binding of Satan with the binding of the strong man (Mk. 3:27). Each conversion is a part of the binding as the devil is despoiled of a part of his goods. The thousand years may be either that the event mentioned happens in the sixth thousandth period from creation which Augustine

considered himself living in, with a part spoken of as the whole. Or a second alternative considers "1,000" to be a cube of "10", and, by numerics, in that system stands for "to all generations." It covers from the first coming of Christ to the end of the world. Augustine saw the abyss as the countless multitudes of the wicked. The nations that cannot be seduced are those that belong to Christ. Augustine argues that "until" in connection with the devil's deceiving the nations does not mean that deception will be done afterward, but rather means "no more." Augustine thought of the devil being loosed later for three years and six months, a period in which there would be conversions even in the face of the devil's fury.

Augustine saw the reign of the saints during the thousand years to be in the present kingdom represented in the parable as a situation of wheat and tares. It is a kingdom of least and greatest. The church even now is the kingdom of Christ. He stresses that it is the souls of those beheaded, not their bodies, that are spoken of. He thought the pious dead not separated from the church. Christ is Lord of both the living and the dead (Rom. 14:9). The rest of the dead do not come out of their graves until they are raised for judgment and the second death. In other words, they do not live at all no matter how lustily they lived in the body.²⁹

In the Middle Ages millenarianism was advocated by Joachim of Flora.³⁰ It had a further rebirth during Reformation times among the Anabaptists.³¹

In the twentieth century, premillennial beliefs have spread out of the confines of sects and (with varying details) have gained widespread acceptance in Evangelicism.

ESCHATOLOGICAL SYSTEMS

In the modern world, Revelation 20 is dealt with in four different ways. Each expects the Lord's return in glory (Tit. 2:13; 1 Thess. 4:16). Their differences are over what is to take place before, during, and after that return. The names applied to them are oriented to those expectations. All believe in the resurrection of the dead, the judgment, and the eternal state.

They differ over the time and manner in which the millennium will be set up, but also differ even more over the nature of the kingdom and the manner in which Christ exercises his control. These details do not come from Revelation 20.

Postmillennialist

The millennium expected by the postmillennialist is not essentially different from the age now experienced. He envisions the preaching of the gospel resulting in converting the majority of people. The gospel is to make disciples of all nations (Mt. 28:18-20), not merely to be a "witness" (Mt. 24:14; RSV/NRSV: "testimony") to them as premillennialists and dispensationalists hold. The gospel is powerful for accomplishing its purpose. The crying need is for the preaching of that gospel. Marriage and the home will continue. Sin will be reduced as the population becomes dominantly Christian. The age will close with the coming of the Lord, the resurrection, and the Judgment.

The postmillennialist sees the Lord as a great king over all the earth (Ps. 47:2; 97:5). His kingdom is from sea to sea (Zech. 9:10), including redeemed people from every tribe (Rev. 7:9, 10). However, there will be tares among the wheat until the end; but whether the time is long or short, the gospel cannot be defeated. When other characteristics of the millennium era are realized, the predictions of prosperity will also be realized.

The kingdom is not coming with signs to be observed (Lk. 17:20), but there is the blade, the head, and the full grown grain (Mk. 4:28). One age blends into another like the Middle Ages blended into the modern period.³²

It is said that postmillennial views in the modern world go back to the teaching of Daniel Whitby (d. 1726).³³ Theologians holding this view include Augustine, Brown, Hodge, Dabney, and Warfield. In some circles it has been customary to claim that two world wars killed postmillennialism. However, at the most recent national meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, postmillennialism had its champion on a symposium along with other systems.

Amillennialism

The amillennialist believes that the church age is the millennium. He does not deny the millennium of Revelation 20 as the name of his system might appear to suggest. He believes the millennium as he understands it is now in the process of realization.

The amillennialist contends that Revelation 20 is a communication in figurative language no less true because of the figures. This section of the Apocalypse (the seventh) takes us back to the beginning of the New Testament era. The binding of Satan took place in the coming of Jesus at which time the strong man was bound (Mk. 3:27; Mt. 12:29) with the same verb being used that occurs in Revelation 20. His goods were despoiled. Jesus spoke of Satan's fall as lightning from heaven with the preaching of the gospel (Lk. 10:18). He said, "Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out" (Jn. 12:31). The first epistle of John speaks of Jesus' being manifest to destroy the works of the devil (1 Jn. 3:8).

The number "1,000" is considered by the amillennialist to be a symbolic number of "10" (for completeness) raised to the third power. Though describing the period from Christ's first coming to just before his second coming, it is not a span of time either definite or indefinite. Satan is completely bound; the saints who reign are completely victorious.

Jesus began his reign at his ascension following his resurrection. His followers are transferred into his kingdom (Col. 1:13). They now sit on thrones and now judge. They reign with him (Rom. 5:17; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Tim. 2:11, 12; Rev. 5:10) though they are on earth and he is in heaven, just as Enoch walked with God while God was in heaven, or as Saul of Tarsus persecuted Jesus though Jesus was in heaven. Their judging is in the present, not at the final judgment day at which time Scripture only mentions the King as judge. The amillennialist considers that we are in the last days now (Acts 2:16, 17; 1 Cor. 10:11; 1 Jn. 2:18). The kingdom is present but also future in that it will be yielded to God the Father at the Second Coming (1 Cor. 15:24).

Those beheaded come to life in heaven (2 Cor. 5:8; Phil.

1:23). They overcome (Rev. 3:21) and are reigning in heaven now during the time between their death and Christ's coming. The first resurrection is their transition from physical death to life in heaven with Christ.

The amillennialist would see two groups of people described in Revelation 20:4, and in that way he extends what is said to all faithful Christians. As death was threatened Adam and Eve for disobedience (Gen. 2:17), as the dead are to bury their dead (Mt. 8:22), and as the one who gives herself to pleasure is dead while she lives (1 Tim. 5:6), so people are dead in their trespasses and sins but are quickened in their obedience to the gospel (Eph. 2:5, 6). It is this rising from being spiritually dead that is called the first resurrection. In this case, Revelation 20:4 would be using *ezesan* in two different senses as John 5:24-29 does, once for regeneration—rising from a death in sin to a life in righteousness—and once for bodily resurrection.

The amillennialist argues that there is no clear passage in the New Testament which ascribes a reign to Christ on earth. Neither is there one that sets the center of his kingdom to be in earthly Jerusalem. The final judgment comes after the thousand-year reign as defined above (Rev. 20:11-15) and is elsewhere also associated with the second coming of Christ (Mt. 16:27; 25:31, 32; 2 Thess. 1:7-10; Jude 14, 15; Rev. 22:12).³⁴

Premillennialist

The informed premillennialist like George Ladd recognizes that the New Testament clearly teaches that the kingdom is now in existence and that believers are translated into it (Col. 1:13). One could hardly improve on Ladd's demonstration of Jesus' present exaltation and reign. His refutation of cases built on interpreting Old Testament prophecy is very convincing.³⁵ He recognizes that Christians are now kings and priests. Nevertheless, Ladd insists that there must be a visible manifestation of Christ's reign on earth that is a demonstration of the lordship and sovereignty he already has in his reign that is seen only by the eye of faith before the kingdom is yielded up to God the Father (1 Cor. 15:24). It is in that visible reign that he has interest and into which he fits Revelation 20. He insists that the

chapter fits into a chronological system in which the second coming of Christ is described in chapter 19. He insists that chapter 20 should be treated as literally as possible.

For the premillennialist, the binding of Satan lies yet in the future. He sees in the present evil of the world adequate evidence that Satan is not yet bound in any real sense. Though he grants that "chain" in the chapter is figurative, he insists that a thousand years must be literal time as also is the "little while"; however, this "little while" is left indefinite.

The premillennialist insists that this visible manifestation of the reign of Christ is on a literal throne in Jerusalem despite the fact that no prior biblical passages (Old Testament or New Testament) hint at a limited reign for the Messiah. For a background to his understanding, he appeals to Jewish apocalyptic works which do have such a concept.³⁶ But for the New Testament, his case rests solely on his interpretation of Revelation 20. He recognizes that Revelation has said nothing about a reign over Jews or about the realization of prophetic hopes for the Jews.³⁷

The details of his program do not come from Revelation 20 but are an effort to fit miscellaneous Scriptures into his picture. He expects the visible, personal return of Christ to establish a reign in Jerusalem by his overwhelming power. Ladd insists that the phrase "in this way all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:26) implies that God yet has a future for the Jews. The details he is willing to leave to the Lord. Others are not so willing but insist that Jews will be converted en masse at the sight of Christ, and they become the chief rulers in the new kingdom. Nature becomes abundantly productive. The ferocious nature of wild beasts gives way. Evil is held in check by the rod-of-iron rule of Christ. During this period saints in glorified bodies mingle freely with people still in the flesh.

The premillennialist sees two groups described in Revelation 20:4: those beheaded and those who did not worship the beast. In this way, his program for "saints" can take in all the righteous who are raised at Christ's coming. He insists that the Greek aorist form *ezesan* is ingressive and should be understood as "come to life." He denies that the term is used in two

different senses in this context. Ladd notes that the context in John 5 makes clear that *ezesan* is being used in two senses, but he insists that in Revelation 20:4, 5 there is no such play on words.³⁸

The "rest of the dead" are the wicked who are not raised until the end of the thousand-year period. This contention demands that the premillennialist find other passages that suggest two literal resurrections separated from each other, a task hard to accomplish. Ladd insists that such time may be inserted into 1 Corinthians 15:23, 24 between *epeita* and *eita* which designate a sequence of unidentified time.³⁹ Though Ladd does not admit it, one ten-thousandth of a second could fill the need.⁴⁰ Ladd concludes with insisting that there is progressive revelation, and the revealing of the millennium in Revelation 20 is all that is needed for belief in it. The premillennialist argues that a resurrection of the just and the unjust (Acts 24:15) does not necessarily presuppose that the two are simultaneous.⁴¹

His program then projects that the devil will be loosed, that he will literally gather the nations led by Gog and Magog against Jerusalem. The rebels are destroyed by fire from heaven, and the devil is cast into the lake of fire. Then follows the judgment of the resurrected dead.

Dispensational Premillennialism

The teachings of Dispensationalism, traced back to John Nelson Darby, founder of the Plymouth Brethren (d. 1881), have become one of the most widespread and colorful of premillennial beliefs. Its primary foundations are its insistence (while allowing for figures of speech) that the Bible must be literally interpreted, that it must be read dispensationally with seven dispensations, and that God's plan for the Jews and his plan for the church are completely different for all eternity. The church is in no sense spiritual Israel. The church age was not foreseen in Old Testament prophecy.⁴² Earlier the system was characterized by its insistence that the literal kingdom was offered the Jews and was rejected by them at Jesus' first coming. A recent development known as reformed dispensationalism repudiates this postponement of the kingdom be-

cause it was offered and rejected while holding still the basic system.

According to the Scofield Bible, a distinction is to be made between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God with the thousand years being the duration of the kingdom of heaven in its mediatorial form.⁴³ The first resurrection is the "resurrection of the just" mentioned in Luke 14:13, 14 or the "resurrection unto damnation" (Jn. 5:29). The Scofield comment on Revelation 20:4 is, "We here learn for the first time what interval of time separates these two resurrections."⁴⁴ The dispensationalist projects an elaborate program for the Jews (including rebuilding the temple and resumption of sacrifices) and a program for the church none of the details of which beyond the thousand years are derived from Revelation 20.⁴⁵

MAJOR ISSUES

Four major issues face the exegete of Revelation 20. The first is method of interpretation. The premillennialist and dispensationalist insist that the literal interpretation is to be used where possible. The postmillennialist and the amillennialist insist that the literal is not the nature of the Apocalypse.

However, the statement that "Every prophecy pointing to the first advent of Christ was literally fulfilled to the letter in every detail" of the dispensationalist is not true. The coming of Elijah (Mal. 4:5) was, according to Jesus, fulfilled in the coming of John the Baptist (Mt. 11:14). Isaiah's road building program (Is. 40:3-5) was not literally fulfilled in the ministry of John the Baptist (Mt. 3:3; Lk. 3:3-6). The words of Isaiah about people in darkness (Is. 9:1, 2) were fulfilled in Jesus' ministry (Mt. 4:12-16), but it was spiritual enlightenment, not physical enlightenment.

Other examples of non-literal statements include deliverance from Egypt on eagle's wings (Ex. 19:4) to a land of milk and honey (Ex. 3:8). The passages from Hosea and Jeremiah in Matthew 2 are not literally applied. To recognize that they are figurative is the only way of arriving at their true meaning. Jews

of Jesus' day used literal interpretation and missed the meaning.

Until there is a meeting of minds on how to interpret Scripture, there is no possibility of a meeting of minds on the teaching of Revelation 20 and the thousand years. One disputant will not be able to convince the other.

An issue within the passage is the question of who reigns. Is it merely those who have been beheaded who also have refused to worship the beast and his image, or are two groups mentioned, the second of whom would be those who have not received the mark of the beast? As pointed out earlier, this issue turns on what one does with *kai* in the passage—whether taking it as coordinate or as explanatory. If it is concluded that there is a second group, is it then legitimate to extend this second group to include all faithful Christians? Exegetes easily slip from the actual wording into using "saints" or "martyrs" which do not occur in the passage. Having shifted to "saints" or "martyrs," those who see two groups see no difficulty in extending the reigning to all faithful people.

A third issue is, "What is meant by the thousand years?" Strictly literal interpretation would demand one thousand years, no more and no less. Yet many postmillennialists and some premillennialists would grant that it is not an exact figure, but means a long, indefinite time. Amillennialists find it to be a figurative expression for completeness with no chronological time significance at all. Satan is completely bound, and those beheaded completely reign in a state of complete and glorious victory. Though Satan is deprived of his power over the righteous, he is still the deceiver and ruler of the wicked. The whole Christian age is "the little while."⁴⁶

The fourth crucial issue is, "Where is this reign with Christ to be?" The premillennialist says it is to be on the earth after the second coming of Christ with resurrected saints reigning and ruling with Christ. It is then to be followed by the general resurrection at the end of the thousand years. However, nothing is said in the passage of the place of the reign whether in heaven or on earth.

Opponents of the Premillennial system point out that in the

Gospel of John, believers are raised at the last day (Jn. 6:39, 40, 44), not at a thousand years before the last day which this system requires. The statement of Paul leaves no room for the Lord's coming before he comes in judgment (cf. 1 Cor. 15:23, 24; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17). Jesus, Paul, and John do not speak of two comings of Christ, one before the millennium and one after it.

CONCLUSION

Revelation 20 has produced a never-ending mountain of literature. The diversity within the advocates of the various eschatological systems should caution one from attributing to the specific individual beliefs that he does not hold.

Most of the crucial arguments lie outside of Revelation 20. I believe that prophecy is conditional (Jer. 18:7-11). Jesus stated to Jewish leaders, "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it" (Mt. 21:34).

I know that *houtos* (Rom. 11:26) should not be translated or understood as "after that has happened" (REB). I do not think that "Israel" means every Jewish person. Paul has used "Israel" in the letter to the Romans in a spiritual meaning (Rom. 9:6). I do not see the New Testament teaching two future comings of Christ. I am not willing to crowd a thousand years in between *epeita* and *eita* (1 Cor. 15:23, 24). I look forward to the glorious coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and the eternal kingdom.

At the same time, when rebuked for teaching children the model prayer with its phrase "Thy kingdom come," and when my devotional was rejected by elders because of an allusion to a prayer which had the phrase about the kingdom that it might come speedily in our days, I am left wondering if there is belief in the eternal kingdom. John ended Revelation with "Come, Lord Jesus."

A year ago I attended a gathering of scholars at which the devotional song was "Jesus Shall Reign." Sung unaccompanied by over two hundred evangelical voices, it was very moving. The song is in *Great Songs of the Church*, but in more than sixty

years in the church I had never heard it. I will not try to define what the songwriter may have had in mind by "shall," nor will I delimit what it meant to each singer on that day. The meaning of "shall" in English usage is fluid. I was left wondering, however, if perhaps in getting out of Babylon I might have run past Jerusalem. The one who wrote Revelation 20 also wrote, "The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15).

NOTES

¹J. Jeremias, "Abyssos," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel, trans. and ed. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), 1:9, 10.

²H. Bietenhard, "Abyssos," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1976), 2:205.

³J. Jeremias, "Kleis," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel, trans. and ed. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), 3:744-53.

⁴On the grammatical solicism, see *BDF*, no. 135 (1).

⁵E. Lohse, "Chilias," in *Theological Dictionary to the Old Testament*, ed. G. Friedrich, trans. and ed. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 9:469-71; Colin Brown, "Chilias," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1976), 2:701-2.

⁶Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969), 236.

⁷E. Schweizer, "Psyche," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Friedrich, trans. and ed. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 9:653-4; Colin Brown, "Soul" in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. C. Brown (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1978), 3:686.

⁸Josephus *Antiquities* 20.5.4 (117).

⁹On the use of *oude*, see *BDF*, no. 145 (1).

¹⁰On the basis of *kai hoitines* ("and who"), the contrary opinion is held by Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1911), 262; see also Cyprian, *ad Fortun*, 12.

¹¹*Protos* is here used for *proteros*; see *BDF*, no. 62.

¹²Swete, 263.

¹³The present participle *ho planon* has a frequentive or durative sense; see C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom-Book of New Testament Greek* (Cam-

bridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 206.

¹⁴D. H. Kromminga, *The Millennium in the Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1945), 360 pp.

¹⁵*Epistle of Barnabas*, 15.4.5.

¹⁶*Irenaeus Against Heresies* 5.33.3, 4.

¹⁷*Eusebius The Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.11.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 3.39.12.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 3.28.3, 4.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 7.25.2, 3.

²¹*Justin Dialogue* 80 [ANF 1:239]; 113 [1:255]; 119 [1:259].

²²*Irenaeus* 5.35.1, 2 [ANF 1.565-6].

²³*Tertullian Against Marcion* 3.24 [ANF 3:342-3].

²⁴*Justin* 80 [ANF 1:239].

²⁵*Origen de princ* 2.11.1.

²⁶*Eusebius* 7.24.25.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 7.24.1.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 3.29.13.

²⁹*Augustine City of God* 20.6-9.

³⁰"Joachim of Fiore," in *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingston, 2d ed. (London: Oxford University Press), 374-40.

³¹N. Coh, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (London: Mercury Books, 1961), 481 pp.

³²L. Boettner, *The Millennium* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1957), 380 pp.; "Postmillennialism," in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. R. G. Clouse (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1957), 117-41.

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³⁴A. A. Hoekema, "Amillennialism," in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. R. G. Clouse (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 155-87.

³⁵G. E. Ladd, "Premillennialism," in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. R. G. Clouse (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 17-40.

³⁶G. F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1946), 2:376.

³⁷The concept of an interregnum was rejected by the Catholic Church, April 11, 1941; see R. Schnackenburg, *God's Rule and Kingdom* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), 341.

³⁸Ladd, 36-37.

³⁹The case is expounded by R. D. Culver, "A Neglected Millennial Passage from St. Paul," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 113 (April 1956): 141-52; W. D. Wallis, "The Problem of an Intermediate Kingdom in I Corinthians 15:20-28," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 18 (Fall 1975): 229-42.

⁴⁰See the discussion of Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the*

Corinthians, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 753.

⁴¹M. C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952), 154.

⁴²Expositions of this system are to be found in C. C. Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith* (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Brothers, 1953), 160 pp.; J. D. Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1964), 633 pp.; J. F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Findlay, Ohio: Dunham Publishing Co., 1963), 373 pp.

⁴³J. F. Walvoord, *Thy Kingdom Come* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1955), 30.

⁴⁴C. I. Scofield, ed., *The Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), 1350.

⁴⁵H. A. Hoyt, "Dispensational Premillennialism," in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. R. G. Clouse (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 63-92.

⁴⁶C. H. Roberson, *Studies in the Revelation* (Ft. Worth: Manney Co., 1957), 162.

JACK P. LEWIS is retired as a Professor of Bible at Harding Graduate School of Religion where he taught from 1958 to 1989. He holds two Ph.D.s from Harvard University and Hebrew Union College. He received several fellowships to study in Jerusalem. Lewis is an elder of the White Station congregation in Memphis. He is on the editorial board of *Restoration Quarterly* and *Journal of Hebraic Studies*. He is the author of eight books and the editor of several periodicals. He has made twenty-eight trips to the Holy Land. He is married to the former Annie May Alston.

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST AND PREMILLENNIALISM (1)

DOES THE SECOND COMING TAKE PLACE IN REVELATION 19?

J. D. Bales

Robert B. Boyd, an old friend and schoolmate, argued from Revelation 19 that since the "church is up in heaven with Christ," and the time for the marriage and its celebration has arrived, it follows that Christ had already come for the church (1 Thess. 4:13-18). The Christ and his bride are "officially joined in wedlock" before Revelation 19:11. Verses 11 through 16 tell of Christ's coming to earth. Since the bride shall "ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 5:17), the bride is with him when he comes to war against the beast, the prophet, and the nations.

Furthermore, this point is made clear in Rev. 19:14, which says, "the armies which are in heaven followed him." So we have pictured here the Lord Jesus, with His bride, coming down out of heaven "to smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of God, the Almighty." (vs. 15) All opposition to Him is subsequently and quickly dealt with, and at verses 19-21, we see what happens to the kings of the earth and their armies, and to the beast, and the false prophet.¹

Then Satan is dealt with, and the millennial reign starts. Therefore, Christ's coming is premillennial.

Premillennialists teach that when the Lord comes, the church is caught up (raptured) to be with Christ for seven years during which tribulation takes place on earth. At the end of the tribulation, Christ comes with his bride, the church, to rule for a thousand years. The marriage supper takes place "in connection with the second coming of Christ to establish His millennial kingdom."² The second advent is recorded in Revelation 19. This is followed by the binding of Satan, the millennial reign on

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earth, the little time in which rebellion takes place, and then the resurrection and Judgment.

REVELATION 19 ENDS A CYCLE?

Many, including premillennialists, agree that everything in Revelation does not follow chronologically from the beginning to the end of the book. There is recapitulation and enlargement on certain matters in a series of visions. "Progressive parallelism says that Revelation is divided into seven sections each of which describes the church and the world from the time of Christ until His second coming."³ However, not everyone accepts the same number of cycles.⁴

Some who reject premillennialism believe that Revelation 19 closes one cycle of visions and Revelation 20 through 22 is another cycle which starts with the establishment of the Gospel Age and its consummation in eternity.

This is not the explanation which I accept. Revelation deals with Christ's conquest of his enemies including the beast, the false prophet, Babylon, the devil, and death. Revelation 19 does not deal with the conquest of all of Christ's enemies. Babylon fell, and then the beasts, the false prophet, and their backers were conquered (Rev. 18:2; 19:2, 19-21). There were yet enemies who had not been overthrown. The beast and false prophet were agents of the devil, and they were now in the lake of fire. But the devil who had operated through them was still at large. The devil and his hostility were still present though a final blow had been given to two of his agents. Death also remained to be conquered.

Revelation 20 continues the conflict between Christ and the two main remaining enemies. Satan is bound after the beast and false prophet are cast into the lake of fire. Later he is loosed for a little time and then consigned to the same lake (Rev. 20:10). This leaves the final enemy unconquered. Death is conquered after the Second Coming, the resurrection, and the Judgment. Hades, being the abode of disembodied spirits, was also eliminated when the resurrection took place. Death and Hades were also cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14). The last enemy,

death, having been conquered, the kingdom is delivered to the Father in the eternal state (1 Cor. 15:24-28).

The theme of Revelation 20 is the conquest of the devil and of death.

CHRIST'S BRIDE TAKEN INTO BATTLE?

If the marriage supper took place in Revelation 19, the bride came with Christ to war against the beast, the false prophet, and the nations, for the bride was to "ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 5:17). Glorified saints are in Christ's armies (Rev. 19:14).⁵ They make up the bride who is clothed in linen (Rev. 19:8). The bridegroom returns as field marshal of heaven's armies or, as Hal Lindsey puts it, as the lion.⁶

This is more than a strange development. Paul thought his warfare was over when his life on earth ended (2 Tim. 4:6-8). At death, Christians rest from their labors (Rev. 14:13), and the church receives rest at the second advent (2 Thess. 1:5-8).⁷ Imagine the bride's surprise when she was taken from the marriage supper to carnal conflict with the kingdoms of this world. Her fine linen garments, bright and pure, must have been red with blood as she slaughtered the enemies of Christ. She witnesses the supper where the birds eat the bodies of men and of beasts (Rev. 19:11-21). Surely the premillennialists should shrink from their extreme literalism!

The premillennialists cannot be consistent and claim that the bride of Christ does not engage in literal physical warfare with the beast, the false prophet, and the armies of the earth. In Daniel 2:34-44, the stone (representing the kingdom) itself smites the image and grinds it to powder. Christ did not do it by himself, for the kingdom "brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold" (Dan. 2:44). "... all ungodly kingdoms" are destroyed.⁸ "The battle is a fulfillment of the smiting-stone prophecy of Dan. 2:35."⁹ One of the reasons premillennialists claim the kingdom was not established in the first century is that Rome did not feel even a tremor when Christ was proclaimed as reigning at God's right hand (Acts 2:34, 35).

The beast against whom Christ and his bride warred was the

little horn (Dan. 7:24-26), the desolator (Dan. 9:27), the abomination of desolation (Mt. 24:15), the man of sin (2 Thess. 2:4-8), and "earth's last and most awful tyrant, Satan's cruel instrument of wrath and hatred against God and the Jewish saints."¹⁰ Christ and the bride overcome the enemy of the Jewish saints.

After having conquered these enemies, Christ gives (or had already given) his bride the rod of iron with which to rule the nations in the millennium. She uses it to smite to slivers any rebels. She rules in a land in which there are tears and death, for these are not eliminated until later (Rev. 20:14; 21:4, 5). At the end of the millennium, Christ and the bride are subjected to a worldwide assault and war in which they are almost defeated. Since the church ruled with the rod of iron for a thousand years, this rod must have been taken from her at the end of the millennium, for the church had to be rescued by fire from heaven (Rev. 20:9).

CONTRARY TO THE NATURE OF THE KINGDOM

It is contrary to the nature of the kingdom to maintain that it engages in carnal warfare with the nations of the earth. When Pilate asked Christ if he was King of the Jews, he obviously had in mind an earthly king of a physical nation. Jesus said he was King, but the nature of his kingdom was such that it was not established and upheld by the physical sword:

My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not hence. Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end have I been born, and to this end am I come into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice (Jn. 18:33-37).

Pilate realized Christ's kingdom was not of this world. It did not physically threaten Roman rule. Christ's kingdom is the king-

dom of truth which makes men free (Jn. 8:32). His Word is the seed of the kingdom which brings forth fruit when planted in honest hearts, i.e., those are "of the truth" (Lk. 8:11-15).

A premillennialist rightly said that the origin and source of the kingdom is not of this world. It does not come "through military exploit by his disciples," but as "a gift to him from the Father."¹¹ However, if their interpretation of Revelation 19 and 20 is true, it does come by military force exercised in part by members of the kingdom, and it is maintained by such force. Furthermore, in the world war which follows the millennial reign, this same premillennialist said, "A great host 'as the sand of the sea' will gather from all quarters of the earth to surround Jerusalem, 'the beloved city' and 'the camp (*parembole*, military barracks, headquarters) of the saints,' the capital city of Messiah and his world government."¹² This indicates a kingdom like the world which in this case was losing out in military combat until rescued by fire from heaven (Rev. 20:9).

Scofield said, "Earthly kingdoms are inaugurated, carried on, and brought to an end by human force, but His kingdom would be ushered in and maintained by His personal appearance and omnipotence."¹³ Why, then, was it necessary for the bride of Christ to engage in combat in the establishment of the kingdom and to rule with a rod of iron for a thousand years? Furthermore, since the millennial kingdom lasted only a millennium, what force brought it to an end? How did human forces defeat so thoroughly the church, Israel, and Christ that they were so greatly reduced in number that they were holed up in the city of Jerusalem and the camp? Why was not omnipotent force used to keep the kingdom from total defeat? Why did fire from heaven have to come down to destroy their enemies? Why did not the fire come out of Jerusalem?

CHRIST'S VICTORIES

The New Testament sets forth the victory of Christ which takes place in spite of opposition and seeming defeats. Seemingly he was defeated in the rejection and crucifixion, but his death was the foundation of his kingdom. God enthroned his

Son in spite of their opposition (Ps. 2; Acts 4:25-27; 1 Pet. 1:10-12). In his death, burial, and resurrection to reign at God's right hand (Acts 2:30-36), Christ "despoiled the principalities and the powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Col. 2:15). He reigns at God's right hand "far above all rule, authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come" (Eph. 1:20, 21). It was "when he ascended on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men" (Eph. 4:8). This is a more spectacular victory than the millennial reign pictured by the premillennialists. Through death he brings many sons unto glory (Heb. 2:9, 10). "... that through death he might bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver all them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. 2:14, 15).

Since the kingdom is spread through the seed line, as people are converted through the Word of God (Lk. 8:11-15; Rom. 10:17), its spread is a matter of growth and is tied in with the faithfulness of Christians in sowing the seed of the kingdom and living by the Word of God. We have an important part to play in the victories of Christ achieved through the seed of the kingdom.

The impact of the kingdom on the earth is not all at once in its beginning. It is first the seed, the blade, the ear, and then the full grain in the ear (Mk. 4:28). It works as leaven. Leaven does not always signify evil, for Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is like leaven hidden in meal (Mt. 13:33; Lev. 7:13; 23:17). Because the devil is like a lion (1 Pet. 5:8) does not mean that Christ is not a lion (Rev. 5:5). Leaven does not exercise a sudden, catastrophic blow on the mass which it leavens, and its working is not noisy.

The victories of Christ in the world are won by his Word as it is lived and taught by the disciples of the Lord. Its influence as leaven elevates the moral and spiritual level of multitudes who do not become Christians. Christians fight with the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:11, 12), and their weapons, though not carnal, are mighty "to the casting down of strongholds); casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against

the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:4, 5).

The victory of Christ over the beast and the false prophet were due to the Word of God and not to carnal conflict (Rev. 19:13, 15, 21). The beast and the false prophet were not the devil but were the agents of the devil. Their overthrow did not destroy the devil (Rev. 19:20), but it did mightily curb his influence. The final and decisive victory over the devil takes place after the little season and is wrought by the almighty power of God.

In saying that Christ's victories on this earth before the second advent are wrought by the Word of God, we are not denying the power of the providence of God as he works behind the scenes. However, it is my conviction that God's providence is intertwined with the actions, whether good or evil, of men.

A SECOND HUMILIATION

Christ's first advent had to do with his humiliation. The church on earth suffers humiliation. The Second Coming brings not humiliation but triumph and vindication. When Christ comes for his disciples, he will take them to the place he has prepared for them (Jn. 14:1-3). Why would they leave the prepared place to come to carnal conflict on this earth and to defeat in the little season? Even before the resurrection, we are at home with the Lord (Phil. 1:21-23; 2 Cor. 6:6-8). Why would he bring us back to earth for a temporary visit—temporary in comparison with eternity?

What are some of the elements in the humiliation? (1) Christ died to make Jew and Gentile one, but the distinction between the two will be re-established (Eph. 2:14-16). The majority of Christians are Gentiles not Jews. Since Israel is to reign sovereign over all other nations, and since most of the church cannot be of physical Israel, Israel will reign over most of Christ's bride. Furthermore, all Jewish Christians will have to be of physical Israel. They cannot be of national Israel and of the church also when the distinction between Jew and Gentile is restored. Christ will suffer the humiliation of having national

Israel reign over his bride the church.

(2) As Gentiles, and not as circumcised Jews, the church will not have access to the temple in Jerusalem as does physical Israel. The church is not of the tribe of Levi, and no Christian as a Christian can function as a priest in the temple.

(3) Since Revelation 20:4-6 teaches that it is the martyred who reign, even if some Christians reigned, most of the church will not have thrones. There will be this much division in the church in addition to the division which came when Jewish Christians rejoined national Israel to reign.

(4) Christ and the church suffering humiliation because in spite of their having rods of iron and Christ ruling with omnipotent power, the devil is loosed and the millennial reign ends. Christ did not lift a hand to keep Satan bound. God must have loosed Satan, for Satan did not break the bonds himself.

(5) Even if the church ruled, did it surrender the rods of iron which were used to shatter opposition during the millennium? If Christians still had them, why did they not strike down the attacking nations? Why did not Christ use the omnipotent power by which he reigned to put down the rebellion? Although the armies of men could not lay a hand on Christ and Christians in their resurrected bodies, they could attack and kill those human beings who were converted during the millennium. Why did they not stop the slaughter before it really got started? Why did they suffer such a decimation of their ranks that they would be confined by the invading armies to the small space occupied by the city and the camp? It must have been humiliating for Christ and the church to watch converted human beings undergoing such defeat.

(6) It must also have been humiliating for Christ and the church to be unable to rescue the faithful who had been converted during the millennium and who lived during the little time. If they could have rescued them, surely they would not have had to wait for fire to come down out of heaven to destroy the rebel armies. Or did Christ and the church abandon the faithful on earth and return to heaven (Rev. 20:9)?

The millennial reign began with the execution of all the unsaved. Righteousness covered the earth as the water the sea.

In the latter "stages of the millennium," a "large percentage . . . will really know the Lord."¹⁴ Rebellion was crushed at its first sign by rulers with rods of iron. What a humiliation when the millennium ended and the overwhelming majority of the earth not only deserted Christ but carried on a highly successful war against him and he and others had to be rescued by fire from heaven. Surely this is not the biblical concept of what happens after the second advent.

CHRIST'S LITERAL COMING NOT POSSIBLE IN REVELATION 19

The Second Coming is to be an unexpected event for the world. With them life will be going on as usual. A literalistic interpretation of Revelation 19 is impossible to harmonize with the second advent. The armies of the earth were gathered to fight Christ. "And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered to make war against him that sat upon the horse, and against his army" (Rev. 19:19). How did they learn of his coming so that they had gathered together their armies? Was his coming so slow that when they saw him coming they had time to gather the armies? How did the world learn of the time of his coming when Christ said he did not know?

A physical war does not make scriptural sense. Christ's Word is the sword of the Spirit which overcomes error and which slays spiritual opposition (Eph. 6:17). "For the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the casting down of strongholds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ; and being in readiness to avenge all disobedience, when your obedience shall be made full (2 Cor. 10:4-6).

The sword came forth out of Christ's mouth (Rev. 1:16; 2:12). The conflict in Revelation 19:11-21 was waged by the "sharp sword" which proceedeth "out of his mouth" (Rev. 19:21). It is by the Word of God (taught, lived, and died for) that the Lamb overcomes the beast, the false prophet, their armies, and bound Satan (Rev. 19:20; 20:1-3). Biederwolf said the sword of Revelation 19:15 is the Word of God (Rev. 1:16).¹⁵ Instead of all tribes of the earth mourning (Rev. 1:7), they all fought him (Rev. 19:16). Can you imagine Christ appearing in flames of fire, with angels and immortal saints, while mere human beings hasten to fight against these supernatural beings?

Since the conflict in Revelation 19 was won by means of the Word of God, and not by carnal conflict, the death of the armies was a symbolical death, i.e., the forces of the beast and prophet were overcome by the Word of God (Rev. 19:21).

NOT ENOUGH TOOK PLACE

What happened in Revelation 19 is not what happens at the second advent. (1) Christ's present reign continues until the last enemy is conquered (1 Cor. 15:24-28; Acts 2:34, 35). Death was not conquered until after the little season and the Judgment (Rev. 20:14).

(2) When Christians are raised, they inherit the eternal kingdom, and not a kingdom which lasts but a thousand years (1 Cor. 15:54, 55; 1 Pet. 1:3-5; Rev. 20:4-6).

(3) The righteous and the wicked are raised the same hour (Jn. 5:28, 29) on the last day (Jn. 6:39, 44; 11:24; 12:48) at the last trump (1 Cor. 15:52). Premillennialism has the wicked dead raised at least two hours (periods) later than the hour or time the righteous are raised. The righteous are raised at the first aspect of the Second Coming. Then follows an hour (seven-year period) of tribulation, and then the second aspect of the Second Coming and the hour of the millennium which is followed by the hour of the little time and the hour of the resurrection of the wicked. This adds up to too many hours or periods to be the same hour.

(4) If Christ is on the throne at God's right hand until his

coming, if he is on a different throne (the throne of his glory) when the judgment of Matthew 25:31-46 takes place, if he is on David's throne in the millennium (and they insist he is not now on David's throne), and if his reign on David's throne ends in a thousand years, he must be on another throne at the Judgment in Revelation 20:11. This means that he cannot reign on his present throne until death is conquered (1 Cor. 15:24-28; Rev. 20:14).

(5) The passing away of the heaven and earth, the Judgment, and the coming of the new heaven and earth, all take place in connection with the second advent, and these things occur after the little time (2 Pet. 3:1-14; Rev. 20:11—21:5).

(6) Rest comes to the church and destruction to the sinners at the revelation of Jesus Christ from heaven (2 Thess. 1:5-12), but the saints did not find rest during the little season (Rev. 20:7-9) nor did eternal destruction come to the wicked until the Judgment in Revelation 20:11-15.

(7) The deliverance of the children of God and their bodily resurrection takes place at the same time the deliverance of the creation takes place (Rom. 8:19-23). The deliverance of the earth does not take place until after the millennium, the little time, and the Judgment; and then the new heaven and earth appear (Rev. 20:4—21:1, 5).

MATTHEW 25:31-46

Scofield claimed that the judgment of Matthew 25:31-46 takes place in Revelation 19. It is the judgment of "individual Gentiles according to their treatment of Christ's brethren, the Jewish people."¹⁶ This cannot be the case. (1) The judgment of individuals and nations is set forth in Matthew 25:32, but Revelation 19:11-21 "is the picture, not of a judge sitting on his throne and formulating sentence, but of a fierce warrior who goes forth to execute judgment by treading the enemies of God under his feet."¹⁷ Although the armies are slain in Revelation 19:21, the beast and the false prophet are the only ones who receive their eternal sentence in the lake of fire (Rev. 19:20).

(2) The judgment in Matthew places all the wicked in eternal

punishment, not just the beast and false prophet (Mt. 25:46). The eternal sentence takes place in Revelation 20:11-15.

(3) The majority of Jews who have lived since the first century have not accepted Christ and are not his spiritual brethren. During the Gospel Age the church only constitutes the people of God, the brethren of Christ. Not one word is said in Matthew 25:40-44 of Christ's *Jewish* brethren.

(4) If Matthew 25 is the basis on which Gentiles will be judged, they will be saved on the basis of their good deeds to Jews and not by the blood of Christ through faith. Matthew 25:35-40 is not the total picture of judgment, or one can enter eternal life without faith in the blood of Christ. A Gentile could be saved, if they served Jews, without the blood of Jesus.

(5) If the Gentiles before the throne do not include Christians, non-Christians "inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Mt. 25:34). Surely this is not the kingdom which lasted but a thousand years and then suffered defeat at the devil's hand and had to be rescued by fire from heaven (Rev. 20:4-10).

(6) Since the righteous went into eternal life and the wicked into eternal punishment, and since these two classes composed "all the nations" (Mt. 25:32, 46; emphasis mine), who are the righteous who reign in a temporary and brief millennium and over what nations do they reign? According to premillennialism, the wicked and the righteous do not enter their eternal habitations at the close of Revelation 19. A little time of tribulation for the saints is not eternal life in the inherited kingdom (Rev. 20:7-9).

PERSONAL APPEARANCE NOT NECESSARY

The devil, the angels, and Christ do not need to make a personal appearance in order to do a work on earth or be at war with one another. Christ does not have to be on earth in order to remove candlesticks (Rev. 2:5); to make war against a church with the sword of his mouth (Rev. 2:16); to smite nations with "a sharp sword" which proceedeth out of his mouth (Rev. 19:15); to cast Jezebel into a bed, into great tribulation, and kill

her children (Rev. 2:21, 22); to cast a burden on a church (Rev. 2:24); to come as a thief if they do not watch (Rev. 3:3); to open a door none can shut (Rev. 3:8); to make a synagogue of Satan worship before a church and to know that God loved the church (Rev. 3:9). This could not be in the millennium, for the wicked dead are not raised until after the little season. It has to be in a figurative sense or at the general resurrection (Rev. 20:12-15). Christ can come quickly to keep a church from an hour of trial (Rev. 3:11). Without a personal appearance, he can spew one out of his mouth (Rev. 3:16); counsel (Rev. 3:18); love, reprove, and chasten (Rev. 3:19); stand at the door and knock, come in and sup with one (Rev. 3:20). Did "every created thing which is in the heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and on the seas, and all things that are in them" literally appear before the throne and the Lamb in heaven prior to the opening of the seven seals (Rev. 4:1, 2; 5:1, 13)? Did the white, red, black, and pale horses have to be on earth in order to do their work with reference to earth (Rev. 6:2-7)? Did the trumpet sound of seven angels have to be heard on earth in order for them to do their work (Rev. 8:6—10:4)? Did the angel have to literally stand with one foot on the sea and the other on earth, with a book in his hand (Rev. 10:1, 2)? Did John *in heaven* take the book and prophesy (Rev. 10:8-11)? Where was John when he measured God's temple on earth, when the city was trodden down and the outer court given to Gentiles (Rev. 11:1, 2)? God has no literal, physical temple on earth. Did their enemies see the literal resurrection and ascension of the two witnesses (Rev. 11:11, 12)? Did the earth hear a literal angel preach the gospel to the earth while flying in midheaven (Rev. 14:6, 7)? Did an angel personally put in the sickle on earth, and were any individuals seen trampling the winepress (Rev. 14:19, 20)? It did not take a personal appearance of God for him to put something in the mind of evildoers so they would accomplish some purpose of God (Rev. 17:17). He does not personally intervene to turn one enemy against another (Rev. 17:16). No literal voice told God's people to come out of Babylon (Rev. 18:4, 5). Why does Christ have to put in a personal appearance in order to war against the beast and the false prophet (Rev.

19:11-21)? He made war with the sword of his mouth (Rev. 19:15, 21).

There is no more need for a personal appearance of Christ in Revelation than there is for a personal appearance of the devil on earth for the devil to deceive the nations and "*to gather them together to the war*" (Rev. 20:7, 8; emphasis mine). The devil did not have to be present personally for "Satan's throne" and dwelling place to be in Pergamos (Rev. 2:13). Was he literally reigning on earth from a literal throne in Pergamos? Did he have to make a personal appearance and cast "some of you into prison" where they would have tribulation for ten days (Rev. 2:10)? He did not have to make a personal appearance on earth to do the work mentioned in Revelation 20:7, 8.

God's judgment on Babylon was a coming of Jehovah. "Jehovah of hosts is mustering the host for the battle. They come from a far country, from the uttermost part of heaven, *even Jehovah*, and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole land" (Is. 13:4, 5; emphasis mine). God and Christ came in judgment on Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Christ comes in judgment on Christians. "Remember therefore whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works; or else *I come to thee*, and will move thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent" (Rev. 2:5; emphasis mine). He would not come if they repented. If they did not repent, his coming would not be visible. "Repent therefore; or else *I come* to thee quickly, and *I will make war* against them with the sword of my mouth" (Rev. 2:16; emphasis mine). This was no more a visible coming than his making war against the beast, the false prophets, and the nations with the sword of his mouth (Rev. 19:15, 21). Thyatira was told: "Nevertheless that which ye have, hold fast till I come" (Rev. 2:25). This did not mean he would come visibly to the church there in their lifetime, for he did not. It did not mean they had to hold fast until the Second Coming, for they did not live that long. Sardis was told by Christ: "If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee" (Rev. 3:3); "I come quickly: hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (Rev. 3:11).

In view of all these considerations, why is a personal appearance of Christ required in Revelation 19? Did the beast and the false prophet have to appear in person in order for Christ to war with and overcome them, or are they symbolical descriptions of anti-Christian activity and teaching?

WHY SO LONG?

If Christ's second advent did not take place in Revelation 19, how can one explain the long period of time between people being bidden to the marriage supper, the bride being ready (Rev. 19:7, 9), and the bride joining the bridegroom in Revelation 21?

It is the manner of the writer to throw out hints of the next great scene some time before he begins to enter it; thus "Fallen, fallen is Babylon" is heard in xiv. 8, though the fall itself does not come into sight before cc. xvii.—xviii. Here in like manner the Marriage of the Lamb is announced as imminent . . . though a thousand years are yet to pass before its consummation (xx. 3), and the Bride is not revealed until we reach c. xxi.¹⁸

In fact, it was a thousand years, plus a little time and the Judgment. There were other enemies to be disposed of before the bridegroom could come for his bride.

The doom of the worshipers of the beast was announced in Revelation 14:9-11. The beast was thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 19:20) before the thousand years, the little time, and the Judgment; but his worshipers were not thrown into the lake until after the Judgment (Rev. 20:15).

Why should we be surprised that there is a lapse of time between the bride being made ready (Rev. 19:7) and the appearance of the bride in the new heaven and earth (Rev. 21:2, 9, 10)? The marriage was certain in Revelation 19:7, but it was not consummated until chapter 21.

There is a long period of time between the first invitations being sent and the marriage supper taking place. The first invitations went out in the first century. Jesus was the bride-

groom even in his personal ministry which is at least around two thousand years before the marriage. When asked by John's disciples why Jesus' disciples did not fast, Jesus said: "Can the sons of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the day will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then they will fast" (Mt. 9:15). The sons of the bridechamber "is a late Hebrew idiom for the wedding guests."¹⁹ Alford, a premillennialist, said they were more "than the mere guests at the wedding: they are the bridegroom's friends who go and fetch the bride."²⁰ They were then celebrating, but around two thousand years later they have not brought the bride to the bridegroom. The bridegroom left the sons of the bridechamber almost two thousand years ago, and the length of his absence has not ended yet. It is still the time of "fasting." The virgins have gone forth to meet the bridegroom, but he tarries (Mt. 25:1-5).

In fact, it takes a long time for the bride, the church, to make herself ready to meet the bridegroom.

The making ready has respect to the *worthy reception of the bridegroom*. To make ready for the coming of the bridegroom, is represented in the parable of the ten virgins, as the great object of the church during the whole time that was to elapse between the first and second appearance of the Lord.²¹

The bride making herself ready occupies the entire Gospel Age. During this time Christ prepares a place for his bride. "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself: that where I am, there ye may be also" (Jn. 14:2, 3). The place he is preparing is not this old earth. He did not say, "I came to this earth to prepare a place for you on earth." If earth was the place he was preparing, why leave to go to the Father's house to prepare a place? The place he is preparing is not a place in which the bride was to be for a thousand years and a little season after which the place would flee away and no place be found for it (Rev. 20:11). He is not preparing a temporary place, or in-

heritance, on this perishable earth but an eternal inheritance in the new earth (Rev. 21:7).

Christ died in order to create the church (Eph. 2:13-16). He purchased the church with his own blood (Acts 20:28). Why was the bride purchased before the bride existed? Because he died in order to create the church which is composed of the redeemed. Why is there at least two thousand years between the time he paid the purchase price for the bride and the time when the marriage supper takes place?

Paul said, "I espoused you to one husband, that I might present you as a pure virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2). Why was there such a long time between the betrothal and Paul's presentation of the church to Christ? The church has not yet been presented as a pure virgin to Christ. Christ loved the church when the church was established, but he has not yet presented "to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (Eph. 5:27).

Even if the marriage took place in Revelation 19, it was a very long time from the first century until this time. Therefore, the passage of time has nothing to do with the specific time when the wedding takes place.

Since Christ's present reign continues until the devil and death are conquered, and since these are not conquered until after the millennium, the little seasons, and the Second Coming and Judgment, the marriage could not take place before the advent of the Lord in Revelation 20:11.

Although people "are bidden to the marriage supper" (Rev. 19:9), and "his wife hath made herself ready" (Rev. 19:7), the bride does not appear until after the millennium, the little season, and the Judgment. "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2). The coming down out of heaven "is in a manner the bridal procession."²²

There is no reference to the marriage supper taking place in Revelation 19. The only supper described there is of human and animal flesh to which the bride was "invited" (Rev. 19:17, 18). If the marriage took place in chapter 19, Christ took his bride to earth and to the old Jerusalem which after the millennium came

under heavy siege (Rev. 20:9), then passed away with the passing away of the earth (Rev. 20:11). The bride, however, is the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2).

If the marriage supper took place in Revelation 19, those who were converted during the tribulation and the millennium were either not a part of the bride or they were not permitted to be present at their own wedding.²³ If they were redeemed by the blood of Christ, they are a part of Christ's church (Acts 20:28).

Though the marriage supper is not mentioned in Revelation 21, it either took place when the bride came adorned for her husband, or it did not take place.

The fact is it was a long time between the marriage supper and the invitation even if premillennialism were right. Premillennialists have seven years taking place between the coming of Christ for the bride "at the rapture of the church," and the "marriage supper of the Lamb, occurring in connection with the second coming of Christ to establish His millennial kingdom."²⁴ Furthermore, premillennialists who can get several hours out of one hour (the hour of the resurrection of the dead), should have little difficulty with a time lapse between the bidding to the supper and the bride's coming (Rev. 19:7-9; 21:1, 2, 9).

It is a long time between the sending out of the first invitations to the marriage supper and the actual supper (Mt. 22:1-14; Rev. 19:7, 9; 21:2, 9). It is a long time between the espousal and the presentation of the church "as a pure virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2). But why was it so long until the marriage supper? Because Christ had to conquer all of his enemies, and his bride's enemies, before the marriage supper. Revelation 19:11-21 tells of the conquest of the beast, the false prophets, and armies who fought for them. Revelation 20:10 tells of the defeat of the devil, and Revelation 20:11-15 tells of the defeat of the last enemy, death. Then comes the deliverance of the kingdom to the Father, and the bride being received into the place that Christ went to prepare for her, i.e., the new heaven and new earth.

NOWHERE DESCRIBED?

Ladd thought that "Revelation 19 is the only passage in the Revelation which describes the Second Coming of Christ. If this passage be interpreted differently, the Revelation nowhere describes the return of the Lord."²⁵ He overlooked some passages. "Behold, he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they that pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn over him" (Rev. 1:7). Those who pierced him had died long before Revelation 19. Since all of those who pierced him did not repent, and since premillennialists say that the wicked will not be raised until Revelation 20:12-14, these wicked people did not see him and mourn if he came in Revelation 19. His coming to judge the world is set forth after the millennium and little time. "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat upon it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne" (Rev. 20:11, 12).

The evidence is against the position that Christ's second advent took place in Revelation 19.

NOTES

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⁴J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1980), 86, 130, 594, 595-96; Robert Shank, *Until* (Springfield, Mo.: Westcott Publishers, 1982), 383; J. W. Roberts, *Fort Worth Lectures* (Ft. Worth: Ft. Worth Christian College, 1968), 130; Charles Wordsworth, *Lectures on the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Herman Hooker, 1852), 265.

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⁶Lindsey, 174.

⁷Shank, 418-19.

⁸Lindsey, 175.

⁹Scofield, 1372.

¹⁰Ibid, 1373.

¹¹Shank, 444.

¹²Ibid., 448.

¹³Scofield, 1153.

¹⁴John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1959), 211, 317.

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¹⁶Scofield, 1372-73; Walvoord, 302.

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¹⁸Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1911), 246.

¹⁹Archibald T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 1 (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1931), 73.

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²²Ibid., 400.

²³Loraine Boettner, *The Millennium* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1957), 162.

²⁴Scofield, 1371.

²⁵George Ladd, "The Theology of the Apocalypse," *The Gordon Review*, Double Issue, Winter, 1963-64, 34.

J. D. BALES taught in the Bible department at Harding University from 1944 to 1980. He received his B.A. from Harding College, his M.A. from Peabody College, and his Ph.D. from the University of California. He is a well-known author and has written numerous books and received numerous awards for his writing and preaching. He and his wife, Mary, have six children.

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST AND PREMILLENNIALISM (2)

REVELATION 20

J. D. Bales

Premillennialists say that those who do not share their beliefs do not believe it as it is written. It is not a question of believing it as it is written, but of how is it written? Do premillennialists believe Revelation 20 as it is written? Are the key (v. 1), the chain (v. 1), the dragon, the serpent (v. 2), the sealing (v. 3), the beast (v. 4) all literal?

There is no reference to national Israel, the temple, the law of Moses, the Levitical priesthood, animal sacrifices, or the earthly city of Jerusalem. Revelation does speak of literal Jerusalem as spiritually Sodom and Egypt (Rev. 11:8). There is no reference to David's throne or Palestine. Very few premillennialists believe that there is a literal resurrection at the *end* of the thousand years (Rev. 20:5). They think it comes after the little time.

According to their view, the millennial reign will be one of universal peace, prosperity, spirituality, and knowledge of the Lord. Saints will help rule in this perfect government. Nations and individuals will be regenerated.¹

PHYSICAL ISRAEL WILL RULE THE WORLD

If the premillennialists are right, physical Israel will rule the world. The kingdom will be restored to Israel.² "*Israel* means the Jewish people, not the church as such."³ Faussett spoke of "a coming earthly, Jewish kingdom of glory" when physical Israel "stands at the head of humanity."⁴ Gentiles will be in subjection to Israel. The promises to Israel in the millennial kingdom are earthly and national and do not pertain to Abraham's spiritual seed the church.⁵

God will restore the distinction between Jew and Gentile which he had abolished through the cross (Eph. 2:13-22). He

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will build again that which he has destroyed through the cross and the Gospel Age. He will walk backwards and retreat from the system of the substance to the system of the shadow (Col. 2:17; Heb. 10:1; Gal. 4:21-31).

The Gentile part of the bride of Christ will be subservient to physical Israel which shall rule over her.

RULED BY THE LAW OF MOSES

David told Solomon to rule "according to that which is written in the law of Moses" (1 Kings 2:3). How can a different law be administered from David's throne? Scofield said this law would rule the kingdom.⁶ He and others contradict this when they say the new covenant will be made in the millennium with physical Israel.

If all are to worship in Jerusalem, all must be circumcised and keep the entire law of Moses (Ezek. 44:6-9; Zech. 14:16-18; Gal. 5:3). As long as Christ rules, those who do this have fallen away from grace (Gal. 5:4; 3:10).

THE THOUSAND YEARS CANNOT BE AFTER CHRIST COMES

When Christ comes, the judgment of all the nations will take place, and everyone will enter their eternal abode whether with Christ in the kingdom or into eternal punishment (Mt. 25:31-46). There will be no enemies who can rebel against him later for all enemies, including death, have been conquered and the wicked are eternally *separated* from the righteous (Acts 2:34-36; 1 Cor. 15:24-28). If the thousand-year reign in Revelation 20 takes place after the Second Coming and the overthrow of all enemies, how could there be a rebellion of the nations of the earth at the end of this reign? The righteous and the wicked have been eternally separated by the time the thousand years started.

Christ had no enemies left unconquered at the beginning of his reign. Where did all the enemies come from *immediately* after his reign ended? When it ended, the nations rose up in rebellion, and the saints who did not apostatize and who were

not killed were so pitifully few in number that they were all shut up in the camp and the city (Rev. 20:7-9). The kingdom of Christ underwent an almost total collapse in the little time which followed the reign. The saints ceased to reign. *Christ's* millennial reign ended (Rev. 20:3, 6).

Let us be as literal as the premillennialists and say that this reign lasted exactly one thousand years—not one minute longer and not one minute less. Overnight there was a massive enlargement of the forces of the devil and an almost total defeat of the kingdom of Christ. Surely there must have been an internal rotting of Christ's kingdom during the thousand years, for how could there be such mass rebellion of his subjects?

His reign began with the presence of righteous people only; but immediately after it ended, the righteous were persecuted and almost defeated and became a minute minority. During his reign, Christ had the knowledge and the power to know the thoughts of his subjects so that if they even thought about rebellion, he would be able to deal with it immediately. If Christ were still reigning on earth during the little season, he was so weak and powerless that he could not defeat his enemies. He had to be rescued by fire from heaven which devoured his enemies who had almost completely devoured his kingdom. If Christ were on earth during the little time, how was it he became so devoid of power? If he was not still on earth, why did he abandon his kingdom on earth and leave them for a little time without his power and rule? For a thousand years they had been under him in a kingdom of peace and righteousness. Then suddenly either Christ lost his power or he abandoned his kingdom to the international, worldwide rebellion.

Premillennialism is contrary to the Scriptures, for Christ's present reign continues until all enemies are conquered and the eternal separation of the righteous and of the wicked takes place. The millennial reign is not a reign of Christ in person over a kingdom of universal righteousness where law and order are enforced by superhuman power.

AN ANALYSIS OF REVELATION 20:1-9

An analysis of the first and second resurrection in Revelation 20:1-9 can help us to understand the meaning of the passage.

Are two resurrections spoken of in these verses? Yes, the first by direct statement and the second by implication if not by name. "They came to life again, and reigned with Christ a thousand years. . . . This is the first resurrection." A second is implied when it is stated that this is the *first* resurrection (Rev. 20:4, 5). A second resurrection is plainly indicated in the statement that "the rest of the dead did not come to life again until the thousand years were ended" (Rev. 20:5). This implies the resurrection of the "rest of the dead" when the thousand years were finished. They were not to be raised *until then*; but this very fact indicated that they were to be raised *then*. They were to come to life then, thus, this is the second resurrection.

The First Resurrection

The first resurrection in some sense had reference to the martyrs and the persecuted. Those who had a part in the first resurrection are the ones who reign with Christ (Rev. 20:4-6). What takes place during this thousand-year reign? At the beginning of it, Satan is bound and continues to be bound for the duration of it (Rev. 20:2). However, at the *end* of it he is to be loosed for a little while. Being bound indicated that Satan would not deceive the *nations* (Rev. 20:3). Premillennialists will agree that when it says that the nations will not be deceived, that it does not mean that all people will become Christians. For they believe that sinners will live in the millennium, and that the fact that not all are Christians helps explain why Satan was able to raise such a large opposition party after the thousand years were ended.

Not deceiving the nations meant that the devil was not able to deceive them to the extent that they persecuted the saints. During the time of persecution and martyrdom, the souls of the slain were represented as being under the altar. They were told that they would be avenged (Rev. 6:9-11). In Revelation 20:4, the scene had changed and they are represented as being on

thrones. Both Revelation 6:9-11 and 20:4 are symbolical. The saints are not persecuted at this time; for Satan is bound and he deceives the nations no more, till the thousand years are ended (Rev. 20:3). When it is ended, he deceives the nations, and saints are persecuted.

So the period of the reign is a period when Satan is unable to persuade the nations to martyr those who hold to God's Word and the testimony of Jesus. The "reign" symbolizes this fact. This is the time during which certain saints are represented as reigning (Rev. 20:4, 6). This group is blessed and holy (Rev. 20:6).

Over this group the second death has no power (Rev. 20:6). During this time "the rest of the dead" did not come to life (Rev. 20:5). In other words, they are not resurrected and do not live during the thousand years.

They are contrasted with those who are raised and lived. Those with whom they were *contrasted* were blessed and holy, so evidently they, the rest of the dead, were not blessed and holy. They are contrasted with those who reign (Rev. 20:6). Thus, they do not reign. Those with whom they are *contrasted* will not be under the power of the second death. Why would it say that "over *such* [that is, those who share in the first resurrection—the first part of verse 6] the second death has no power" (Rev. 20:6), if the second death also had no power over the rest of the dead who are contrasted with those who have a part in the first resurrection? Why is the distinction made if there is no distinction in the matter of the second death having no power over them? The second death evidently has power over those who are not "such."

The Second Resurrection

What happens when the thousand years ends? Let us consider this first by what is said in anticipation and second what is said about it when it is actually accomplished, i.e., when the anticipation is represented as being fulfilled. What did the passage say would happen at the end of the thousand years? At the end of the thousand years what was to happen with reference to Satan? When it said that Satan was bound for a thousand years,

it implied that he would be unbound at the end of the thousand years (Rev. 20:2). This implication is made explicit in verse 3. "After this he must be loosed for a little time."

What did the "loosed" mean? That he would deceive the nations again. He was bound, shut, and sealed in the pit, "that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years were ended" (Rev. 20:3). This indicates that he would deceive them when it was ended. He deceived them to the extent that they persecuted the saints.

At the end of the thousand years, what was to happen with reference to the first group, the ones who were raised at the beginning of the thousand years? It is clearly implied that their reign with Christ would cease at the end of the thousand years. It is clear that since Satan was bound for but a thousand years, it indicated that he would be loosed after that. It is just as clear that since they "reign with Christ a thousand years" (Rev. 20:4; "they . . . will reign with Him a thousand years," Rev. 20:6) that the thousand years marked the duration of their reign and indicated that at the end of the thousand years their reign would *cease*.

At the end of the thousand years, what was to happen with reference to the rest of the dead? They were to be raised at the end of the thousand years. "The rest of the dead will not come to life again *until* the thousand years were ended" (Rev. 20:5). This teaches that they were to live again, i.e., they were to be resurrected; just as when the other group "came to life again," they were resurrected. This is just a different way of calling it a resurrection. To say "came to life again" or "come to life again" is the same as saying "they were raised"—their resurrection took place. It indicates that their resurrection, their coming to life again, would take place *when* the thousand years were finished. Satan was bound *till the thousand years were ended*. Then what? He was loosed, since his binding was but for a thousand years (Rev. 20:3). The rest of the dead live not again until when? *Until the thousand years were ended*. Then what? Evidently, they lived again. The second death will have power over this group (Rev. 20:6) after the "little season" (Rev. 20:10, 14, 15). At the end of the thousand years, what was to happen

with reference to the nations? They were not to be deceived till the thousand years were ended (Rev. 20:3). This indicated that they would be deceived at the end of the thousand years. What is said about the fulfillment of these anticipated events? What happens when they are accomplished? With reference to Satan, it is stated Satan would be loosed after the thousand years was finished (Rev. 20:7). When we go to the end of the thousand years, what do we find? Satan had been bound so that he deceived the nations no more (Rev. 20:3). When he was loosed, he deceived the nations and lead them *to persecute the saints again* (Rev. 20:8, 9).

But at the end of the thousand years, something was also to take place with reference to those who had a part in the first resurrection, and also those who did not, i.e., the rest of the dead. What happened to those who had a part in the first resurrection? Their reign was to end when the thousand years ended (Rev. 20:4, 6). When we come to the end of the thousand years, what happens? It does not say in so many words that their reign ended, but by the events which took place we see what was meant by their reign ending. What took place? They were persecuted. Satan raised up a host, by deceiving the nations, and marched against the saints (Rev. 20:9). How long this work of Satan went on we do not know, but it was called "a little while" (Rev. 20:3), or a little season. A little season, when contrasted with a thousand years (Rev. 20:3) as this one is, could cover one or two centuries. If the thousand years is not a literal thousand years, it is still a long period in contrast with a shorter one.

The fact that this period of the opposition of Satan to the saints is at the end of the thousand years, and the fact that their reign was to cease at the end of the thousand years, gives us some understanding of the nature of the thousand-year reign. Since its ending was a time of persecution, why wasn't the reign *a time when at least relatively speaking there was no such persecution*? The thousand years was a period in which the nations were deceived no more (Rev. 20:3), and the little season was a period when they were deceived again (Rev. 20:8) and the saints were persecuted. Is it not implied that they were not persecuted in the period of the thousand-year reign?

What happened to the rest of the dead of Revelation 20:5? They were to live again when the thousand years were ended (Rev. 20:5). When we come to the end of the thousand years, what do we find? There is no mention, in so many words, of their resurrection. And yet, they were to live again when the thousand years were finished. What event do we find at the end of the thousand years? We find the raising up of a *powerful and large opposition party who persecuted the saints*. They are represented as marching up "over the broad earth" and surrounding the saints who have been shut up in "the camp" (the "camp of the saints and the beloved city"; Rev. 20:9). *This second resurrection is a figurative one*, i.e., it has reference to the raising up of an evil, God-opposing, saint-persecuting party or nations. It does not have reference to the literal resurrection of individuals.

The second death has power over them, for all were judged and condemned to the second death because they had opposed God and his saints (Rev. 20:6, 9, 13, 14).

What happened to the nations at the end of the thousand years? They were deceived by Satan and made war against the saints (Rev. 20:7-9). These nations constitute the opposition party. The *cessation of persecution* against the saints at the beginning of the thousand years is set forth under the idea of the nations being deceived no more (Rev. 20:3). This cessation is also represented under the idea of their being dead. To say that the nations were not being deceived is the same as saying that the rest of the dead did not live until the thousand years was finished. They are not active in persecution. Once they were alive and the saints were dead, but now they are dead (they are the "rest of the dead" who do not live until the thousand years are finished), and the saints live.

They live again when the nations are deceived and persecute the saints. The revival of persecution is represented as a resurrection from the dead. In other words, the raising up of a wicked persecuting party is the resurrection which was implied when it said that the "rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years should be finished" (Rev. 20:5). For this was exactly what was raised up at the end of the thousand years.

The entire scene is a *symbolical representation* of the triumphs and trials of the church, of the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ. All the way through these verses (Rev. 20:1-10) individuals as such are not spoken of at all. The people mentioned are but representations of the church and the wicked opposition which persecuted the church. The first resurrection did not refer to individuals but to the time when the church was released from persecution by the nations.

The second resurrection, which is implied, is the revival of persecution. The persecutors for a little time attack the saints but are then overcome by God (Rev. 20:7-9).

When we go back to Revelation 6:9-11, we see that saints had been martyred. They cry from under the altar and ask how long it will be before God judges and avenges their blood on them that dwell on the earth. They are told that it will be "yet a little time, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, who should be killed even as they were, should have fulfilled their course" (Rev. 6:10, 11). Surely we are not to conclude that these souls were each given a literal white robe. Instead, this is a symbolical scene. It represents the time when saints have been put to death. The church is being persecuted, and still they are not avenged. Persecution will continue for a time, God says, and others will be martyred.

When we get to Revelation 20, we see that the scene has changed. Evidently the "little time" of Revelation 6:10 has been fulfilled, and the martyrdom of the other brethren has already taken place. Now an entirely different scene is symbolically set forth. Instead of the souls being under the altar and additional brethren being killed, we see that they are raised and reigning with Christ. The nations are no longer deceived, as they were by Satan when they persecuted and martyred the saints; and, therefore, the saints were not being martyred. The nations were not to be deceived by Satan and persecute the saints until the thousand years were finished. And then they were permitted to persecute the saints only for a little season. God then intervened, the world ended, and the Judgment took place (Rev. 20:7-15).

The binding of Satan is co-extensive with the reigning or

comparative peace of a group or cause—the cause of Christ—which was once persecuted even unto martyrdom. During this time the devil is bound, and his party is represented as not being alive. At the end of the time, however, Satan is unbound and he raises up a persecuting party. Thus, his party is represented as living. Then they are judged and sentenced to the second death (Rev. 20:15), just as it was implied in verse 6. There we are told that the ones who had part in the first resurrection would not be under the power of the second death. This implied that those who did not have a part in it would be subjected to the second death.

Revelation 20 thus symbolizes a period of comparative peace into which the cause of Christ was to enter. This period of rest from persecution was to be interrupted before the end of time, but only for "a little time" (Rev. 20:3).

Someone might ask: When did the thousand years begin? When is this period of comparative peace? When is the time when Satan is unable to stir up the nations so that the nations persecute the church? This I cannot answer since the Scriptures do not set a date for it. Some think that it started centuries ago when Rome ceased to persecute the church. After this the Roman Catholic Church developed and persecuted those who opposed her rule.⁷ In some parts of the world today, Christians suffer persecution, as in Red China.

If I knew the entire history of the church, from the Pentecost until the end of time, one could see when the period of the greatest peace took place and when the little season started and when it ended. But I do not know how much longer the world shall stand and thus how much longer the church will exist on earth. Thus, I cannot date this period of the "thousand-year reign." This can easily be illustrated as follows. If you were to ask, concerning a living scholar, who is fifty years of age, what is the decade of his entire life in which he was the most productive, I cannot say the age from forty to fifty, for I do not yet know about his entire life. It may be that he will live until he is seventy, and the greatest period of his productivity may be between the ages of fifty and sixty or fifty-five and sixty-five. If one knew his entire life, one could tell which was the period

of his most fruitful work. But if we do not know that, we cannot tell. Just so, we do not know how much longer the church will exist on earth. It may be that the thousand-year reign is all in the future. It may be that it has already started. It is my opinion that the greatest period of the spread and influence of the gospel is ahead of us. But whether my opinion be right or wrong, one can learn the meaning of Revelation 20 without knowing when the thousand-year reign started. One can know what the passage means without knowing when its fulfillment started.

NOTES

¹C. I. Scofield, ed., *The New Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 1373; Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1970), 177.

²John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1959), 187.

³*Ibid.*, 190.

⁴A. R. Faussett in Robert Jamison, David Brown, and A. R. Faussett, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*, vol. II (Hartford: S. S. Scranton & Co., n.d.), 599.

⁵Walvoord, 145, 159, 165; "The Doctrine of Grace in the Interpretation of Prophecy," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (April-June 1983): 103.

⁶Scofield, 996-97.

⁷See the article on "The Inquisition," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 8:26-38.

⁸Scofield, 883-84; Walvoord, 310.

ARE WE LIVING IN THE LAST GENERATION?

Allen Black

Millions apparently believe we are living in the last generation. Hal Lindsey's 1970 book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, teaches this idea, and its sales have been absolutely phenomenal.¹ Just eleven years after its publication, Lindsey claimed that this book was read by over thirty million people in more than fifty countries.² Lindsey's success is part of a widespread phenomenon. There are a multiplicity of best sellers correlating current events with biblical prophecies. End-time speculation is a major interest of religious radio and television programs. The doctrine that we are living in the last generation is a favorite theme of most of the well-known televangelists. It is everywhere around us, even on bumper stickers ("In Case of Rapture, This Car Will Be Driverless"; "Beam Me Up, Jesus").

Usually the belief that we are living in the last generation is associated with the doctrine of premillennialism, the doctrine that Jesus will return to earth to reign for one thousand years (some would not say literally one thousand) before the Judgment and the final defeat of Satan. Throughout the centuries it has been primarily premillennialists who have proposed specific dates or generations for the end. (I will enumerate several of these later.)

In our own times, such speculations have come primarily from a specific sub-group within premillennialism, the dispensationalists.³ Rooted in the work of John Nelson Darby (1800-82), dispensationalism is a nineteenth- and twentieth-century development in premillennial doctrine which has become the predominant premillennial view. It is the form championed by the Scofield Bible, the Ryrie Study Bible, Hal Lindsey, the

celebrity televangelists, and other leading representatives. Because it is the dominant form and the most prone to speculation about current events, I have chosen to focus on dispensationalism in this essay. My goals are to provide both a description and a critique of dispensationalism as it pertains to the question, "Are we living in the last generation?"

A DESCRIPTION OF DISPENSATIONALISM

In his history of the movement, Timothy Weber explains that in the beginning dispensationalism was quick to distance itself from forecasting dates for the second coming of Christ.⁴ William Miller, America's most famous premillennialist before the Civil War, had become a major embarrassment to evangelical Christianity when Christ failed to return on Miller's predicted date of October 22, 1844.⁵

One of the central doctrines of Darby's dispensationalism was held to eliminate the need for such speculations.⁶ That doctrine, first popularized and possibly invented by Darby, is the pretribulation rapture of all true Christians. Like other premillennialists, Darby believed the millennium would be preceded by a great tribulation on the earth; but unlike others, he held that according to 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17 Christ would return before the tribulation (= *pretribulation*) and take away (= rapture) all true Christians, removing the church from the world before God resumes fulfillment of his prophesied dealings with Israel. Since the rapture would take place prior to the tribulation, it could come at any moment and would not necessarily be preceded by any specific signs. Thus the dispensationalist could describe the (supposed) prophesied series of earthly events leading up to the Judgment and yet hold to the imminent, any moment, return of Jesus (for the Rapture).

The pretribulation rapture is tied closely to the idea that throughout Scripture one must carefully distinguish between God's plan for Israel and his plan for the church, and the parallel idea that the prophecies concerning Israel will have a literal fulfillment—much of which is yet to come.⁷ Leaning heavily on Daniel 7—11, Ezekiel 37—39, Matthew 24, and the Book of

Revelation, the dispensationalists seek to outline the coming events that will occur in connection with the Rapture, the great tribulation, and the millennium.⁸

The way in which dispensationalism evolved from a theory which avoided date speculations to the theoretical basis of numerous contemporary speculations concerning the generation (and even the specific year) of the Rapture can be understood by looking at an outline of the proposed coming events.⁹

Weber's historical analysis of the movement indicates that the proposed future events have followed the same broad outline from Darby to more recent representatives. What continually changes is the way the outline is applied to specific historical events. My survey of this outline is based on several recent books by John F. Walvoord, President and Professor of Systematic Theology at Dallas Theological Seminary from 1952 to 1986, who is widely recognized as one of the leading scholars in the movement.¹⁰

According to Walvoord, the millennium will be preceded by the following prophesied events (omitting, for the moment, the Rapture):¹¹ The Roman Empire will be revived in the form of a ten nation confederacy (Dan. 7; Rev. 13; 17). A dictator will rule this empire and will make a treaty with Israel, which will begin the final seven-year countdown to the millennium (Dan. 7; 9; Rev. 13). Three and one-half years after signing the treaty the dictator will show himself to be the Antichrist, demanding to be worshiped and waging war against Israel (Dan. 7; Rev. 13; 17). The war that follows will lead in three and one-half more years to a great international conflict in the Middle East at Armageddon, during which the second coming of Christ will occur (Dan. 11; Rev. 9; 16; 19). Christ will bring the war to an end, bind Satan, and begin his thousand-year reign in Jerusalem (Rev. 19—20).

This brief sketch omits many important details, but it will permit us to see the roots of the current speculations concerning living in the last generation. The most important factor is the history of Israel. According to dispensational theory, the nation of Israel will play a central role in the end-time events. Before the nation of Israel was re-established, dispensationalists ar-

gued that the Rapture could occur at any time, but it would be quickly followed by a revival of the state of Israel. However, with each new advance in the development of the Israeli state, speculation increases that the end-time clock is beginning and the Rapture must not be far away.

Thus, the beginnings of the Zionist movement at the end of the nineteenth century, various movements by Britain toward beginning a Jewish state in the first half of the twentieth century, the establishment of Israel in 1948, and Israel's expansion and seizure of all Jerusalem in the Six-Day War of 1967 all heightened the sense of expectation that the final years before the millennium were in preparation and thus the Rapture must be rapidly approaching.

It is no accident, therefore, that Lindsey's incredibly successful book was published shortly after the Six-Day War. In the wake of Israel's success, Lindsey was willing to offer a rather specific prediction (based on Mt. 24:32-34) that all the events leading to Jesus' return would probably take place within one generation (roughly forty years) of the re-establishment of Israel in 1948.¹² Lindsey's line of reasoning was taken to further extremes by Edgar Whisenaut in his "88 Reasons Why the Rapture Could Be in 1988."¹³ Both authors are considered sensationalistic by many of their fellow dispensationalists, but the popularity of especially Lindsey's work shows that many were (and still are) quite willing to accept such predictions.

With the establishment of the Israeli state as the cornerstone, dispensationalists have eagerly searched for clues in current events to the anticipated revival of the Roman Empire, the ascendancy of a dictator to rule over that ten nation confederacy, and the roots of a world war in the Middle East. The two world wars and the collapse of the Iron Curtain have been the subject of numerous speculations as developments such as the growth of the European Common Market have been analyzed to see if the new Roman Empire is emerging. Various rulers, such as Mussolini or Gorbachev, have been examined to see if they might become the Antichrist. Conflicts such as the Persian Gulf War have been seen as precursors to the coming world war at

Armageddon, since they demonstrate the growing tensions in the area and at the same time the willingness of various nations to wage war over the oil rich Middle East. Every event is viewed in the light of the end-time outline to see if it forms a piece in the developing puzzle.

Once one becomes convinced that the end-time events are taking shape, it is but a short step to suggest that the Rapture must be on the horizon. Even the less sensationalistic, more scholarly Walvoord, who states, "There is no scriptural ground for setting dates for the Lord's return. . . ." also says, "An understanding of biblical prophecy has led many intelligent students of the Bible to believe that the world has already begun the countdown leading to Armageddon. . . ." and "Our generation may well witness the stirring events described in the dramatic prophecies. . . ."¹⁴

Walvoord's bestselling (over 1,500,000 in print) *Armageddon, Oil, and the Middle East Crisis* is less committal than Lindsey's books, but does not hesitate to identify the prophetic significance of the rise of communism, ecumenism, and occultism; or of Russia's alliances with Arab states, Red China's rise to become a world power, and the rising price of oil. All of these events have their place in Walvoord's "Prophetic Checklist for the Church."¹⁵ And although he stops short of saying that this is certainly the last generation, he leaves that impression.

A CRITIQUE OF DISPENSATIONALISM

I will develop my criticisms along three lines: lessons from history, religious and social consequences, and erroneous interpretations of Scripture.

Lessons From History

Contemporary prognosticators are the current expression of a long line of date setters who based their predictions on correlations of biblical prophecies and the events of their own times. For example, Joachim of Fiore (1132-1200) predicted the end of the present world order in 1260. World events seemed to confirm Joachim's opinions when Frederick II cap-

tured Jerusalem from the Moslems, but the hopes of many died with Frederick in 1250.¹⁶ John Napier, inventor of logarithms, used his Bible and mathematical skills to establish that Jesus would return between 1688 and 1700. His commentary on Revelation was published in twenty-three editions and several translations before 1700.¹⁷ Johann Heinrich Alsted, affected heavily by The Thirty Years War, wrote an influential book which interpreted Daniel 12:11, 12 to say that the millennium would begin in 1694.¹⁸ As previously mentioned, William Miller's prediction of October 22, 1844, was a major event at the time. The "Great Disappointment" he created resulted in a new denomination, Seventh-Day Adventism.¹⁹ Jehovah's Witnesses are well-known for their repeated predictions of specific dates for Jesus' return. Various dates have been proposed from 1874 to 1975. After each date the predictions have been reinterpreted, spiritualized, or abandoned.²⁰

Dispensational literature is also littered with errors. For example, Leonard Sale-Harrison, an Australian dispensationalist, wrote several books on prophecy in 1928 that were quite popular and went through numerous editions over a period of two decades (including *The Resurrection of the Old Roman Empire* and *The Coming Great Northern Confederacy; or, Russia's Future*). In 1939, Sale-Harrison interpreted many of Mussolini's actions as part of the anticipated revival of the Roman Empire and concluded that even if Mussolini were not the coming Antichrist, he was preparing his way.²¹ These speculations about Mussolini are now palpably wrong. If the Lord allows time to continue, it will surely prove contemporary dispensational prognosticators to be just as wrong. Whisenaut's 1988 date has come and gone. Lindsey's "within forty years or so of 1948" is becoming less and less viable.²²

One would think that even those who believe in the dispensational outline of coming events would eventually tire of failed predictions and return to the earlier dispensationalists' avoidance of date setting.

Religious and Social Consequences

Failed predictions have heavy consequences. A good ex-

ample is the Jehovah's Witnesses failure in 1975. According to the history of that movement by Penton, the anticipation of the end of the world in 1975 led vast numbers of people to actions which would later be seen to be mistaken: "Businessmen sold prospering businesses. Professional men gave up their jobs . . . Young couples delayed their marriages or at least refrained from having children if they did marry. Old couples sometimes withdrew all their pension funds at once. Many . . . delayed having surgery or proper medical attention."²³ These consequences are not minor in the lives of the thousands who made such poorly based decisions. After 1975, disillusionment ran high; hundreds of thousands left the Witnesses.²⁴ (What is more surprising is that the majority of Witnesses stayed, as they have after each of the numerous failed predictions.)

Weber points out that dispensational speculation can have negative consequences in other ways as well. The social consequences of dispensational theory have often affected even international politics in disturbing ways. For example, in early 1992 the *Washington Times* carried a full page advertisement with the headline "Seventy Million Christians Urge President Bush to Approve Loan Guarantees for Israel."²⁵ The ad asked Bush to approve ten billion dollars in loans to help settle Soviet Jews in Israel. The fundamental reason for this position is this: "We deeply believe in the Biblical, prophetic vision of the ingathering of exiles to Israel, a miracle we are now seeing fulfilled." The social policy endorsed in the ad is not based fundamentally on concern for Soviet Jews, nor is it concerned about humanitarian standards in Israel's treatment of the Palestinians. It is a matter of bringing about what dispensationalists see as biblical prophecies concerning Israel—which are often viewed as more important than the morality of Israel's behavior. Such thinking leads to unfortunate consequences for international politics.

Erroneous Interpretations of Scripture

Dispensationalism involves numerous errors in biblical interpretation. Four of these are: the radical division between the church and Israel, the parenthesis view of the church, the

pretribulation rapture, and the futurist interpretation of Matthew 24 and the Book of Revelation.

The dispensationalists' "dispensational" approach to the Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel will not allow that many of them were fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus and the history of the early church. Therefore, they are forced to seek a future fulfillment of such prophecies. This is clearly not the way many New Testament writers, including Luke, saw the matter. The early chapters of Luke's Gospel contain several texts which say Jesus will bring about the restoration of Israel (Lk. 1:30-33, 54, 55, 68-73; 2:29-32, 38). Acts then demonstrates how this restoration took place—beginning with the Day of Pentecost. This is made especially clear in James' speech in Acts 15:13-18. There James interprets what has happened in the early years of the church as a fulfillment of Amos' prophecy that "After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; from its ruins I will rebuild it, and I will set it up, so that all other peoples may seek the Lord. . . ." Clearly, James and Luke believed that the history of Jesus and the early church was the history of God fulfilling his promises to Israel. Those promises are not awaiting some future fulfillment.

The dispensational approach to Old Testament prophecy leads to the conclusion that there is very little or even nothing in the Old Testament concerning the church. The history of the church then becomes a great parenthesis in God's plan for history, which is spelled out in the Old Testament and chiefly concerns Israel. This view flies in the face of New Testament writings like Luke-Acts which clearly see the history of the church as part of the fulfillment of God's Old Testament promises to Israel.

The pretribulation interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 did not occur to anyone before the nineteenth century because it has no justification in the text. The text is clearly speaking of the Second Coming. The pretribulation interpretation appeals only to those who need the pretribulation rapture in order to solve problems created by an elaborate and incorrect interpretation of the rest of Scripture regarding the end-times.

Finally, the dispensationalists err in their purely futuristic interpretations of Matthew 24 (and parallels) and of Revelation 4—22. When everything in these chapters is interpreted in regard to events that occur nearly two thousand years after these texts were written, it makes nonsense of the statements in the text that call upon the original audience to understand. In Matthew 24:15 when the reader is called upon to understand the prophecy of Daniel concerning the abomination of desolation, how could Matthew's readers be expected to understand and why are there no indications that this is meant only for readers looking at Matthew some two thousand years later? In Revelation 13:18, the same issue arises when the reader is called on to interpret the meaning of the number "666." Surely ancient readers were the very ones who were in the best position to understand these prophecies and not modern readers with their newspapers and calculators. If not, Matthew and John must have confused their audiences by giving no indications that these things were for readers of the distant future and not for them.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we should note that we may very well be in the last generation. The end of time could come at any moment. But that was true in 1792 and 1892, and if our Lord tarries, it will be true in 2092 and 2192. Dispensational prognostications that we are more likely to be the last generation are based on erroneous biblical interpretations and lead to disillusionment and bad social policies. We should learn the lesson of history and stop making such predictions.

NOTES

¹Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1970).

²Hal Lindsey, *The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon* (King of Prussia, Penn.: Westgate Press, 1980), 4, 11.

³Timothy Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism 1875-1982* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1983) provides an excellent history of dispensationalism which

I have relied upon heavily in several sections of this paper.

⁴Ibid., 16, 24.

⁵Ibid., 15-16.

⁶Ibid., 16-24.

⁷See Weber's summary of dispensational doctrine in *Living in the Shadow*, 17-23.

⁸These Scriptures are identified as the key dispensationalist texts by Timothy Weber, "Premillennialism and the Branches of Evangelicalism," in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, eds. Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnston (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 6.

⁹Weber's *Living in the Shadow* traces this change in historical detail.

¹⁰John F. Walvoord, *Armageddon, Oil, and the Middle East Crisis*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1990); *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1990).

¹¹See especially the outline in Walvoord, *Armageddon*, 23-30, 201-2.

¹²Lindsey, *Late Great*, 53-54.

¹³Edgar Whisenaut, "88 Reasons Why the Rapture Could Be in 1988" (Nashville, Tenn.: World Bible Society, 1988).

¹⁴Walvoord, *Armageddon*, 21, 13, 200.

¹⁵Ibid., 219-25.

¹⁶Stephen Travis, *The Jesus Hope* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1974), 85-86.

¹⁷Ibid., 86.

¹⁸Robert G. Clouse, "The Danger of Mistaken Hopes," in *A Guide to Biblical Prophecy*, ed. Carl Armerding and W. Ward Gasque (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1989), 30-33.

¹⁹Weber, *Living in the Shadow*, 15-16.

²⁰M. James Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed: The Story of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985).

²¹Clouse, 33-36.

²²Lindsey, *Late Great*, 54.

²³Penton, 95.

²⁴Ibid., 8.

²⁵As discussed in Ken Sidey's cover story "For the Love of Israel," *Christianity Today*, 9 March 1992, 46-50.

ALLEN BLACK is an associate professor of New Testament at the Harding Graduate School of Religion, Memphis, Tennessee, and the minister of education at Highland Street church of Christ in Memphis. Black received his B.A. and M.Th. from Harding and his Ph.D. from Emory University. He has published articles in *Gospel Advocate* and *21st Century Christian* and is a member of the Society of Biblical Literature. He and his wife, Nancy, have two children.

REVELATION AND THE CULTS

Ed Sanders

Various cults seriously abuse the Bible in general, and the Book of Revelation in particular.

There is no really simple way to note their chief abuses and reply to them short of reading through the book, noting the context of each passage they abuse, and replying to the specific misuse of that particular passage.

I will note each passage, say which major group or groups misuse it, and then discuss what the response of the Christian should be.

REVELATION 1:7

We do not have to read long to come to a passage that is abused. In the very first chapter, verse 7 is much mishandled:

Look, he is coming with the clouds, and *every eye will see him, even those who pierced him*; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen. (Emphasis mine.)

The Jehovah's Witnesses claim that Jesus returned silently and unseen in 1914 and since then has been gathering 144,000 elite saints to occupy heaven with him. When it is pointed out that at Jesus' return "every eye will see him," they claim the reference is to the alleged "enlightened eyes of understanding" of the Jehovah's Witnesses. They will refer to what is often called the "what" prayer of Paul in Ephesians 1:18, where Paul speaks of the "eyes of your understanding being enlightened."

Their conclusion, of course, is that Jesus could have come silently and unseen as their New York headquarters claims.

This interpretation of the verse is utterly impossible on two grounds: (1) "Every eye" is meaningless if it only refers to *certain* eyes, and (2) the passage goes on to specifically refer to the fact that those who pierced the Lord will also see him and mourn at his coming. It cannot seriously be claimed that these Roman soldiers are Jehovah's Witnesses! Everybody will see the second coming of Jesus! No one will have to be told of his coming. He will make enough noise to wake the dead and be seen by all the living and the resurrected dead. Then the saints will be caught up to meet him in the air and in this way always be with him. There will be no secret, silent, hidden, invisible creeping back to earth for the Redeemer of all creation!

REVELATION 1:10-12

On the *Lord's Day* I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, . . .

I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw *seven golden lampstands* (Rev. 1:10-12; emphasis mine).

Seventh-Day Adventists will claim that any reference to the Lord's Day is a reference to the seventh-day Sabbath. They do this as a result of their misreading of Mark 2:28, 29: "Then he said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.'"

In thirty-seven years of preaching, I have never ever heard a sabbatarian read these two verses correctly. They will invariably read it to say that the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. Of course, it does not say that. It says he is Lord of *every* day—including the Sabbath. I ask them, "Of what day is Christ not the Lord?" This helps to focus their attention on the true meaning of the passage.

The Lord's Day is the first day of the week—the day upon which the Lord (1) rose from the dead (Mt. 28:1ff.), (2) sent the Holy Spirit to be with the apostles forever and guide them into

all truth (Jn. 14:16; 15:26; 16:13), and (3) established his church, the visible expression of the kingdom of God's dear Son (Acts 2:41, 48; Col. 1:12, 13).

The Eastern/New Age Movement people take the phrase "I was in the Spirit" to refer to soul travel, or what are called "out of body experiences." John did not say, "I was out of my body." He did not say, "I was in *my* spirit." He said, "I was in *the Spirit*": that is, under the direction of the *Holy Spirit*. Other biblical characters "prophesied in the Spirit," "were in the Spirit," "were moved by the Holy Spirit," and experienced other things "in the Spirit," without engaging in soul travel. James 2:26 says, "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead." I do not believe anybody can engage in soul travel without dying first. Do you?

The Eastern/New Age Movement cults also seize upon the expression "seven" wherever they find it and claim that it refers to the seven *chakras*, or psychic centers, which are supposed to exist in a person's body. It is claimed that through *yoga* one may send his divine energy, or *kundalini*, up through the *chakras* until the seventh plane is reached, at which point one achieves *satori*, or oneness with God.

REVELATION 2:10, 11

"Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. *Be faithful, even to the point of death*, and I will give you the crown of life.

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. *He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death*" (Rev. 2:10, 11; emphasis mine).

In Mind Science religions and the Eastern/New Age Movement, it is claimed that being faithful until/unto (*achri thanatou* = as far as) death involves working out all of one's bad deeds, or *karma*. This, in turn, is supposed to result in one's being able to avoid reincarnation, and thus, a second death.

An experienced Bible reader will realize that being "faithful

unto death" is simply remaining steadfast in the principles of Christ. The second death is defined in Revelation 20:14 and 21:8 as hell, "the lake that burns with fire and brimstone," so we are not left to wonder what its meaning may be.

REVELATION 3:8

"I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you *an open door that no one can shut*. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and *have not denied my name*" (Rev. 3:8; emphasis mine).

Teachers of the so-called universal religion of Bahai say that Christ will open the door to anyone who does not deny his new name, which is "Bahá'u'lláh." This ignores the fact that the letter is to the first-century church in Philadelphia, the members of which knew the Lord as Jesus Christ, and not denying his name probably means to not deny his power to save from sin and deliver from trouble and evil. In addition, if the name referred to is Bahá'u'lláh, then the Philadelphians could not benefit from it, since Bahá'u'lláh was completely unheard of until he appeared in Persia about 1845. He really did not make his mark in religion until he completed the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* (Book of Laws) in 1873.

Also, Christ says nothing about anyone denying his *new* name. It was his *current* name they were not to deny!

REVELATION 3:9

"I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them *come and worship at your feet* and acknowledge that I have loved you" (Rev. 3:9; emphasis mine).

Members of the Worldwide Church of God say that Revelation 3:9 indicates that humans in the "world of tomorrow" will worship those who are now God's faithful servants. This is possible because God's present-day servants will be members

of the God family and, therefore, proper objects of worship.

In Revelation as elsewhere, only God himself is to be worshiped. Revelation 22:9 says, "But he said to me, 'Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!'" Even the faithful servants of God, including prophets and apostles, are not to be worshiped. Worship is due God alone!

REVELATION 3:12

"Him who overcomes I will make a *pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it*. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name" (Rev. 3:12; emphasis mine).

The Eastern/New Age Movement claims that God will make anyone who overcomes his bad *karma* a pillar in God's temple. He will never again leave it—or, the King James Version: "He shall go no more out," is taken to mean no more reincarnation. This is actually a restatement of Revelation 2:10, 11 for emphasis. There is no new information in it.

The Worldwide Church of God, founded by the late Herbert W. Armstrong, claims that we can only understand this verse and Revelation 21:22 by understanding that the temple of God is what they call the "God family," which presently consists of the Father and Jesus Christ. Christians will be resurrected as pillars of that temple. That is, Christians will be born again only in the resurrection, and that new birth will be a birth into Godhood. We will become God, just as Jesus and the Father are God—not very different from Mormonism. Only the *timing* of the exaltation to Godhood is different.

REVELATION 3:14

"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the

words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, *the beginning of God's creation*" (Rev. 3:14; emphasis mine).

Jehovah's Witnesses cite Revelation 3:14 to support their claim that Jesus is a created being and was the first of all creation to be created. He is, thus, the *beginning* of God's creation. They complete their argument by pointing to Christ's being the "firstborn of all creation" in Colossians 1:15.

Their habit of reading only a verse at a time, with little attention to context, prevents their noticing that "firstborn" cannot mean "first in order of time" in Colossians 1:15. If it does, it must also mean first in order of time in 1:18, where Christ is declared to be the "firstborn from the dead." He surely was not the first in order of time to come forth from the dead. He, himself, raised Jairus' daughter, the son of the widow of Nain, and his own beloved friend Lazarus. Obviously, among those who were raised from the dead, Christ was in some deeper way special.

Comparison with Psalms 89:27 will make the matter clear—"I will also appoint him my *firstborn*, the most exalted of the kings of the earth." Christ is the "highest honored" of those who have been resurrected, just as God made David the "highest honored" of the kings of the earth. David was not the "first in order of time" in any sense—either in the family of Jesse, the family of God, or the family of the kings of Israel. He was, however, made by God to be the highest honored among kings—"the king of the kings of the earth." The word in Colossians 1:15-18 is *prototokos* (Heb., *becor*). Both the Hebrew and Greek words can, and sometimes do, mean "highest honored," not "first in order of time." Context must rule.

Likewise, the expression *'arke* ("beginning"; Rev. 3:14) can mean source. It is from this word that we get our word "architect" which involves a beginning. The architect is certainly the source (beginning) of the building. Since Christ created everything, and without him was not anything made (created) that was made (John 1:3), he is the *source* of God's creation, not the first of it, or any part of it.

REVELATION 3:21

"To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as *I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne*" (Rev. 3:21; emphasis mine).

Mormons say, "God can sit on a throne. Therefore, God has a body of flesh and bone." Heaven is God's throne, and the earth his footstool. Only an extremely materialistic view of God's arrangement has him literally seated on a physical throne. Isaiah 66:1 says, "This is what the Lord says: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be?'"

REVELATION 6:9-11

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. *They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"* Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed (Rev. 6:9-11; emphasis mine).

Jehovah's Witnesses assure us that the dead are unconscious in the grave and this cannot indicate otherwise. It is simply figurative language. Such an explanation ignores the fact that the passage does not end with the souls under the altar crying out. God interacts with them. They say to him, "How long?" and he says to them, "Rest yet for a little season." Figurative language may be involved, but it is not meaningless. How was it that they were anxious and desired justice if they were unconscious of the passage of time and continued injustice?

There is no indication at all that the dead are unconscious in all the sixty-six books of the Bible. Fifty-four times, from Exodus 10:4 to this verse, God or one of his servants cries out, "How long . . . ?" Never once is the crier unconscious. How

could he be? If I were unconscious, I could not cry out, and if I could, I would not know what to cry, or if I had cried it!

REVELATION 7:4-9; 14:1-3

Then I heard the number of *those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel*. From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000, from the tribe of Gad 12,000, from the tribe of Asher 12,000, from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000, from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000, from the tribe of Simeon 12,000, from the tribe of Levi 12,000, from the tribe of Issachar 12,000, from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000, from the tribe of Joseph 12,000, from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000.

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands (Rev. 7:4-9; emphasis mine).

Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except *the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth* (Rev. 14:1-3; emphasis mine).

Early Seventh-Day Adventists (founded 1863, Battle Creek, Michigan) taught that only 144,000 persons would ultimately be saved in heaven. When their total membership approached that number, they gave up the teaching. Jehovah's Witnesses adopted this teaching and still maintain that there will be only 144,000 in heaven. These will be supersaints identified as "the church, the anointed, the heavenly organization, the bride class," or simply as "the 144,000."

By "144,000," the JW's mean exactly 143,999 plus 1 person.

In other words, they see the number in the midst of a very symbolic book as absolutely literal. Strangely, they seem not to notice how the 144,000 is supposed to be a *literal* made up of *symbolic* parts! The 144,000 is the total of 12,000 each from the whole twelve tribes of Israel. If this is literal, not only are these Jews, they are Jewish *men*—and not only Jewish males, but they are not defiled with women. These are 144,000 Jewish male virgins! According to this passage, taken literally, there will not be any women or any married man in heaven! There is not a Jehovah's Witness among them—if the passage is literal. But, if the passage is not literal, they lose the number. If they are right, they are still wrong, and that is an uncomfortable situation to be in.

The Jehovah's Witnesses insist that there are many more saved people than 144,000, but the remainder of the redeemed are not nearly the supersaints that the specially anointed are. These other saints, however, will be rewarded with an eternity, but their eternity will be spent upon the earth, away from Christ, who will be personally present in heaven. These second-class Jehovah's Witnesses are called "Jonadabs," after a righteous man by that name in the Old Testament. They are also referred to in the *New World Translation* of the JW's as "the great crowd."

Biblically, there is *never* a sorting of Christians into the elite and the common. In fact, one of the ways we knew immediately in 1969 that what became the "Crossroads Philosophy," then the "Boston Movement," was false was that it fostered a spirit of elitism. Certainly, some Christians are more mature than others, some are more spiritual than others, some are wiser than others, some are more knowledgeable than others, but this is the result of time and application. Whatever attribute any Christian possesses is *available* to every other Christian! God never made a spiritual blessing available to one Christian and withheld the possibility of it from another.

The truth is, "144,000" is a symbolic number—probably, the twelve tribes of Israel, multiplied by the twelve apostles, and multiplied by a large, indefinite number—"1,000." The reference is to the church—spiritual Israel. Compare Romans 2:28,

29: "A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God," and Galatians 6:16: "Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God."

REVELATION 12:17

Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring—those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus (Rev. 12:17; emphasis mine).

Seventh-Day Adventists, the Worldwide Church of God, and Christadelphians all maintain that the reference to commandments in Revelation 12:17 is to the Ten Commandments, especially the Sabbath restriction. They insist Sabbath-keeping is the sign of all true Israelites and that God's people today are spiritual Israelites. God never changed this sign, nor selected any other day for his worship—especially not the first day of the week.

The fact is, the Sabbath commandment is recorded two places, Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, with the Deuteronomy passage being critical. When Moses preached on the law of the Ten Commandments, he pointed out that the seventh-day Sabbath was given to those who were slaves in Egypt and because of their servitude there. Gentiles have never been slaves in Egypt. Christians have never been enslaved by Egypt.

National Israel was made up of those who had been slaves in Egypt. And it was to national Israel that the Ten Commandment law, including the Sabbath commandment, was given. The Sabbath requirement was never repeated to Gentiles. Jesus, Savior of all mankind, rose on the first day of the week, and that day is memorialized by Christians in the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper on the first day of every week.

REVELATION 14:6

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people (Rev. 14:6; emphasis mine).

Mormons claim the angel in Revelation 14:6 is the "resurrected personage," Moroni, who allegedly appeared to Joseph E. Smith, Jr., in upper New York state several times from September 21, 1823, to September 22, 1827, to guide Smith to some golden plates from which it is claimed the *Book of Mormon* came.

If this passage refers to 1827, to what do the events that precede this refer? It is amazing how few people look to see where they are going to land before they jump with a passage like this. In truth, the biblical angel only fixes the events of chapter 14 in the Christian Age—the age when God's messenger delivers the final Good News, an "everlasting gospel"—to all the nations of the whole world. The covenant given through Moses was for one nation only; the gospel of Christ is for everyone everywhere.

The gospel Joseph E. Smith, Jr., said he got from Moroni was a false gospel. There is no place for it anyhow. If it contains *less* than the biblical gospel, it has too little; if it contains *more*, it is too much.

If it is *different* from the biblical gospel, it is accursed. Paul said:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! (Gal. 1:6-9; emphasis mine).

If the Mormon gospel is the *same* as the biblical gospel that was delivered in the first century once for all, never to be delivered a second time, then it is superfluous. "Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was *once for all* entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3; emphasis mine).

If the Smith gospel is the same as the Christian gospel, why would it need to be delivered again? It is in the Bible!

REVELATION 14:8-10

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

A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "*If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury*, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb" (Rev. 14:8-10; emphasis mine).

Jehovah's Witnesses have devoted an entire large volume to claiming that Babylon is God's spiritual enemy and is composed of the civil government, the Roman Catholic Church, and Protestant denominationalism. For this reason, the Witnesses refuse to participate in civil government, vote in an election, salute the flag, repeat the Pledge of Allegiance, or serve in the military.

It would help them to realize that, in Revelation, Babylon is simply the Roman Empire, especially as symbolized by the city of Rome itself, sited on the famous seven hills. Revelation 17:9 says, "This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits." As God's people were required to worship falsely by the rulers of Babylon during the Old Testament captivity (606-536 B.C.; Nebuchadnezzar's image in the Plain of Dura is an example), Rome was increas-

ingly urgent in Domitian's day, when Revelation was written, that Christians be compelled to participate in emperor worship. This is worshipping the beast.

Those who worship the beast forsake the Lord. That is why Paul said in 2 Corinthians 8:5, "For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth [as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"], yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live."

REVELATION 20:10

And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. *They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever* (Rev. 20:10; emphasis mine).

All materialists—Christadelphians, Worldwide Church of God, Seventh-Day Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses—maintain that Revelation 20:10 is a reference to annihilation, or burning so as to be entirely consumed and made extinct. The fact is, whoever is annihilated cannot be tormented. This passage actually illustrates the falsity of the materialistic position that the resurrected unrighteous will cease to exist as a result of their punishment.

REVELATION 21:1

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea (Rev. 21:1).

Jehovah's Witnesses want to know who will dwell on the new earth if all the redeemed are in heaven. The answer is that this is a description of the new universe where righteousness will dwell and where there will be one dwelling place for God and his redeemed. "The heavens and the earth" is the biblical

designation for what we call the "universe." This existing universe will be done away with in a great fire (2 Pet. 3:10-13), and a new dwelling place will be made by God which he will inhabit with his saints.

Won't it be wonderful to be with him there?

ED SANDERS has been a Professor of Bible at Harding University for nineteen years. He received his B.A. from the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville and his M.A. from Harding Graduate School in 1964. In 1978 he attended the Pennsylvania Hospital Institute for a Scientific Study of Cults. He has conducted genealogical research for the last thirty years. He has published the following books: *The Christian in the 20th Century* and *Prison Letters of the Apostle Paul*, and written for various brotherhood papers. He and his wife, Evelyn, have three children.

PREACHING FROM REVELATION

Mike W. Ireland

Written to declare the eventual end of Rome's power and the ultimate end of evil, Revelation is a preacher's paradise. Its colorful imagery, powerful language, and dynamic themes combine to make it a treasure house for sermons, whether expository, topical, or textual. Action and emotion fill the pages. The changing scenes and unfolding events speak to the concerns and issues of our hearts: fear and courage, guilt and forgiveness, doubt and faith, discouragement and patience, sin and righteousness, death and life, hell and heaven, wrath and love, and many more. John's Revelation, with its strange visions, fantastic imagery, amazing events, and intriguing numbers, is God's message for today too. It deserves the preacher's attention and a place in the pulpit.

CHALLENGES: AUDIENCE AND TEXT

Revelation is not without some significant challenges for God's preacher. Audience analysis is a valuable and even necessary early step to the sermon or to a series of sermons (from Revelation), and it may reveal some unusual information not ordinarily seen as one preaches from other New Testament books. But then, Revelation does not strike any of us as an ordinary book.

Revelation is uncommon literature. Although apocalyptic literature (such as Revelation) was a type of writing familiar to the Hebrew people, it is quite unfamiliar to most in the pew. The abundance of symbols and strange figures of speech seem foreign to our manner of thinking. Couched in obscure lan-

guage, Revelation is often rejected by modern readers for lacking relevance. Helping the audience to both understand and appreciate this literature must be one of the preacher's early goals. If he fails here, it will prove to be a failure which will plague him through all his sermons from this book.

Also, a certain reputation for difficulty precedes the book. There is a natural skepticism on the part of many. "Can anything understood come out of Revelation?" The preacher may find many questioning his judgment and wondering aloud: "Why study a book which is so difficult to understand and subject to so many different interpretations?" This reluctance must be confronted at the outset, maybe before the series actually begins, and replaced by a spirit of anticipation.

The preacher must remember that, unlike other New Testament writings, Revelation will be unfamiliar to many of his listeners. This lack of familiarity is often the result of the tendency to avoid Revelation in the Bible School curriculum and reluctance on the part of preachers to take up the text from the pulpit. While there will always be a sprinkling of folks in the audience who are good students of the whole Bible, many of these hearers have spent far more time in selected parts of Scripture. This awareness by the preacher can make a real difference to the preparation and presentation of each lesson.

An additional challenge growing out of an analysis of the audience is the great variety of views regarding the book which may characterize the people. While little thought may be given to this particular challenge when preaching from other books of the New Testament, the preacher must be sensitive to the modern confusion which Revelation has suffered. Hal Lindsey's name will be familiar to many of the listeners as his published works during the 1970s and 1980s stirred great interest in Revelation. His book *The Late Great Planet Earth* captured the attention of millions of readers (including many in the churches of Christ), and his works, and the writings of others much like him, continue to be read today.¹ While preaching from Revelation will require some acknowledgment of popular writings, care must be exercised so that modern writings do not become the primary text for the sermon.

The listeners' lack of familiarity with this uncommon literary style and the text itself, their natural skepticism as to whether the book can be understood, and their confusion stimulated by modern writers are challenges confronting the preacher as he thinks about the congregation's attitude and approach to his proposed messages from Revelation. An awareness of these hurdles is certain to influence his preparation. His capable handling of these concerns can make a distinctive difference in the reception given the sermons by the audience.

But while these challenges respect the nature of the audience, there are more personal ones facing the preacher who handles the text of Revelation. A cursory reading of the book reveals that the sections or scenes are long. Preaching through most New Testament books often takes the form of paragraph preaching or chapter preaching at the most. Revelation does not easily conform to that pattern. While the first three chapters provide the opportunity for manageable sections of Scripture, the rest of the book challenges the preacher to decide just how much material can be fairly treated in each sermon. For the preacher (and the listeners), time is crucial. The longer the section, the more time the preacher must give to reading, to exposition, and to any related matters or issues he deems important. This may result in an inadequate amount of time devoted to application. Naturally, each preacher will make his decision about the textual division in keeping with the general preaching plan, the purpose of the sermons, and the amount of time he has in the pulpit.

Two different approaches to preaching through Revelation are illustrated in Rubel Shelly's *The Lamb and His Enemies* and Harold Hazelip's sermons on cassettes. Shelly divided the Book of Revelation in the following way:²

1. A Book To Be Understood (1:1-3)
2. Christ's Care for the Churches (1:4-20)
3. Letters to the Churches (1) (2:1-17)
4. Letters to the Churches (2) (2:18—3:22)
5. The Throne, the Lamb, and the Book (4:1—6:17)
6. The 144,000 of God's Israel (7:1-17)

7. Sounding the Seven Trumpets (8:1—11:19)
8. A Woman, a Child, and a Dragon (12:1-17)
9. The Allies of the Dragon (13:1-18)
10. The Triumphant Lamb (14:1-20)
11. The Bowl of God's Wrath (15:1—16:21)
12. Babylon the Great Is Fallen! (17:1—20:10)
13. The Eternal Destiny of the Redeemed (20:11—22:21)

It should be noted that even dividing the book into thirteen lessons still results in lengthy sections of Scripture to handle in the pulpit.

Hazelip chose to cover the book in six sermons, and his excellent series demonstrates how it is possible to cover larger sections while focusing on the primary themes.³

1. Letters to the Seven Churches (1—3)
2. The Book With Seven Seals (4—7)
3. Sounding the Seven Trumpets (8—11)
4. The Woman and Her Enemies (12—14)
5. The Fall of Babylon (15—18)
6. Judgment and the New Creation (19—22)

While this approach enables the preacher to keep an entire scene before the people without having to pick up where he left off the week before, it requires careful preparation, a clear focus, and a disciplined presentation.

The question of how much of the text to cover in each lesson is not the only question facing the preacher as he contemplates his series. For example, how much attention should he give to discussing the various theories and interpretations regarding the book? How much detail should be given regarding the various doctrinal controversies associated with a particular passage (e.g., the thousand years, chapter 20)? How much time should he devote to explaining the symbolism and the imagery in the book? The answers to these questions and others like them will have a profound influence on the final product the preacher takes into the pulpit. His purpose and goals in preaching from Revelation will have to be clear in his own mind.

Faced with long sections of Scripture to discuss, confronted with an abundance of figurative expressions which call for some explanation, and aware of so many interesting, controversial, and related issues to address, the preacher faces a further challenge: the tendency to spend his time explaining without applying the text. But, as many homiletics have noted, exposition is just a lesson; exposition plus application is a sermon. In fact, so significant is the application to the sermon that J. Daniel Baumann believes that "a sermon rises or falls in its application."⁴

Although attention to the symbols may be helpful and explanation of the various millennial theories may be informative, preaching is more than just discovering meanings or providing information. The preacher's task is to link heaven (God's will) and earth (our lives). People want to know what difference Revelation makes to the daily challenges of life. Therefore, the proclaimer must be careful that the sermon is not long on informative detail but short on application. For example, the preacher must distinguish between the significant details of the visions which have special meaning for the hearer and the less important items which simply form part of the scenery.

SOME SPECIAL BENEFITS

Although the preacher who embarks on a series of sermons from Revelation must be alert to the challenges presented by the audience and the text, he will find some special benefits which make the effort worthwhile. Revelation is a book which, by its very nature, arouses a great deal of interest. The natural curiosity which accompanies the book can be used to great advantage as the preacher prepares the congregation for the series. Even the reluctant souls can be won over if the preacher begins to build interest in the series before it ever starts and if the first lesson excites them over what lies ahead. The excitement of anticipation is a boost to any preacher!

Also, Revelation speaks to the needs of people. The preacher will have opportunity in this series to touch the hearts of his listeners. It is his business to address the real concerns of those

who listen each week. His skillful application of the Scriptures can bring hope to troubled hearts.

Although we are free from the persecution which confronted Christians in John's world, ours is an uncertain, often tumultuous time. Feelings of anxiety over national and international problems, concern over the success of evil, discouragement over personal failure, and fears over what lies ahead in this world and the next typify a large number of individuals in the audience on any given Sunday. Revelation speaks powerfully to these and to a host of other problems. James Blevins commends the preaching of Revelation for this reason.

The book has a positive message of hope for people facing despair and persecution. Revelation has a timeless message which transcends the first century and the struggles of the Christians within the Roman empire. A victorious spirit is spread throughout the Apocalypse which gives the modern reader the impression that God is in control of world history.⁵

Living in a communications revolution presents some special challenges for the preacher. The climate today for sermonic communication may seem less favorable than ever before. Yet, preaching from Revelation may enable the preacher to take advantage of the current situation.

In his book *The Anatomy of Preaching*, David Larsen focuses on the factors at work in our society which have a direct bearing on communication, especially preaching.⁶ His observations are typical of those noted by most homileticians. Considering these components with a view to preaching from Revelation will show how timely these sermons can be.

Larsen identifies one component as enervation (that is, lacking vitality or strength). He explains that the average person feels overwhelmed by global events and staggers from the constant upheaval of nations and institutions. Furthermore, people feel helpless against the enormous issues which confront modern societies. But it was into this same kind of world that the Book of Revelation came! John's visions are filled with messages of hope for hopeless people and messages highlight-

ing God's sovereignty. The world is not out of control, the issues are not too great for our God, and our hope does not rest in this world! These are unmistakable themes in Revelation.

Depersonalization is another factor, says Larsen, at work in this culture. The preacher speaks to folks who feel inconsequential. Merely a number among millions and millions, the individual feels his value decreasing all the time. Yet, Revelation emphasizes the value of every person as evidenced in God's redemptive plan. God knows and cares about each person. The Lamb of God is exalted because he has been slain for every person. An incredible place, heaven, is offered as the abiding home for all who would come. Revelation is all about what God has done because people are so very special. People need to hear this!

Larsen cites society's preference for the nonverbal. While preaching tends to be words and propositions, our society has become more accustomed to the visual presentation. In fact, there is an unrelenting barrage of sights and sounds. Larsen argues that preachers are image-poor communicators and this puts them at a disadvantage in preaching. But Revelation is rich in imagery. It overflows with sights and sounds. The very messages so badly needed are framed in compelling pictures. It will require some creative and imaginative work by the preacher, but the use of these pictures can make all the difference in reaching listeners in a society oriented to the visual.

Also, confusion characterizes so many in our society, Larsen says. There are so many conflicting messages, so many competitive voices. How is anyone to know what is true, if anything, in the midst of all the views and philosophies of life? Again, Revelation has something to say. It is Christ-centered. It clearly sets forth the great gulf between the way of God and the way of Satan. It describes the works of both and the outcome of their struggle for the hearts of men and women. Revelation provides clarity in an otherwise confusing world.

CONCLUSION

Preaching from Revelation is a challenging task, but an

exciting one too! The excitement comes naturally as the book unfolds much like a drama on stage. The scenery is beautiful and colorful, the scenes are action-packed and emotion-laden, and the story line is the grandest of all: the victory of the Lord! Revelation is full of passion and power, human need and fulfillment, blood and tears, love and joy. Jesus is the central character from start to finish. After study has brought familiarity with the text, if the preacher cannot get excited about preaching this book, then it is unlikely that any Bible book will excite him!

NOTES

¹Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1970).

²Rubel Shelly, *The Lamb and His Enemies* (Nashville, Tenn.: 20th Century Christian, 1983).

³Harold Hazelip, "Revelation" (Memphis, Tenn.: Riverside Productions, 1980), sound cassettes.

⁴J. Daniel Baumann, *An Introduction to Contemporary Preaching* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1972), 243.

⁵James L. Blevins, *Revelation*, Knox Preaching Guides, ed. John H. Hayes (Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox Press, 1984), 2.

⁶David L. Larsen, *The Anatomy of Preaching* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1989), 39-40.

MIKE W. IRELAND is the pulpit minister for the Pleasant Valley church of Christ in Little Rock, Arkansas. He was formerly minister for the Brownsville Road congregation in Memphis, Tennessee. He received his M.A. from Harding Graduate School of Religion, Memphis, Tennessee, in 1975 and his D.Min. in 1987. He and his wife, Deborah, have six children.

BIBLE FORUMS

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

Edward P. Myers

A study about the second coming of Christ belongs properly to the area of systematic theology called *Eschatology*.¹ But what does "eschatology" mean? The word "eschatology" comes from the Greek words *eschatos* (last things) and *logos* (word) and refers to a study of last things, or end-time events. No one would debate the current popular interest in eschatology. The Middle East Crisis was brought to our doorstep, via television, and caught the attention of many Bible students who claim this is a sure sign of the beginning of the second coming of Christ.² Millard Erickson³ discusses eschatology and gives several reasons he believes there is so much current attention given to eschatological studies. First, the rapid development of technology and the consequent changes in our culture in general have placed a premium on "futurism." What does the future hold for man? What will the world be like with all of its modern technology in the next twenty-five or fifty years? The second reason is the rise of the Third World. For most people who live in developed countries, the future does not have this significance. It is the past that is rich with meaning. In fact, for many people in developed countries, the "good old days" of the past are thought to have been better than things are today. But in Third World countries, it is the future that holds hope and potential. Third, the dialectical materialism of our world has forced us to focus on the future. Fourth, the threat of destruction of the human race (world) has stirred inquiry about the future.

With all of this influence, Erickson sees two dangerous trends. One is the trend of intensive preoccupation with eschatology. This is called "eschatomania." The second trend

he identifies as "eschatophobia," i.e., a fear of or aversion to eschatology. These people avoid teaching or preaching on the subject altogether. Erickson is right when he says, "Somewhere between the two extremes of preoccupation with and avoidance of eschatology, we must take our stance. For eschatology is neither an unimportant and optional topic nor the sole subject of significance and interest to the Christian."⁴ There is a proper balance which comes from an understanding of the true purpose for eschatology as described by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.⁵

A person who studies eschatology first notices that there is a distinction between individual eschatology and cosmic eschatology. Individual eschatology refers to those events which lie in the future of the individual, while cosmic eschatology refers to those future events which involve the human race and the entire creation. Individual eschatology occurs to each individual at death, and cosmic eschatology will occur to all persons simultaneously in connection with cosmic events at the second coming of Christ. Individual eschatology involves a study of death and the intermediate state of the dead. Cosmic eschatology involves a study of the second coming, resurrection, final judgment, millennial views, and the final states (both of the righteous and the unrighteous).

A DEFINITION OF TERMS

There are several different terms used which are synonymous in referring to the second coming of Christ. These terms are as follows:

First, *parousia*, which means "I am beside" or "I am alongside," is translated as "presence, coming, or arrival." This word is used in 1 Thessalonians 4:15 to designate Christ's coming to raise the righteous dead and catch up believers to be with him. This will also result in the destruction of the man of lawlessness, the Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:8) and is not a secret event.

Second is the term *apocalupsis*. This is the noun form which comes from the verb form and means, "I uncover; I unveil; I reveal," and is translated "revelation or revealing." Paul speaks

of waiting for "the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:7). As the word is used in 2 Thessalonians 1:6, 7 and 1 Peter 4:13, it appears this will be a time of relief from great trial.

Third is the term *epiphaneia*, which means "to show, to appear, to become visible," and is translated "manifestation or appearing." This word occurs six times in the New Testament. Once it refers to the first coming of Jesus (2 Tim. 1:10), and five times it refers to Jesus' second coming (1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:1, 8; 2 Thess. 2:8; Tit. 2:13). The object of the believers' hope is the manifestation of the Lord Jesus. To Titus, believers are to live godly lives "awaiting the blessed hope, the appearing [*epiphaneia*] of the glory."

These words are different but indicate a variety of expressions of but one basic idea: the appearing, the revealing, the coming, the presence of Christ.

WHAT THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST IS NOT

Our study begins trying to dispel false ideas about the second coming of Jesus in order to make clear what his second coming is all about.

First, the second coming of Jesus will not be marked by the establishment of a physical kingdom. In his first coming to this earth, Jesus came to establish his kingdom, and he did just that (cf. Mk. 9:1; Col. 1:13). This kingdom is one that is not of this world (Jn. 18:36); that is to say, his kingdom is spiritual in nature and not physical (Rom. 14:17).

Second, the second coming of Jesus will not involve a rapture of the church. The doctrine of the Rapture is usually closely associated with millennial views and is studied as pre-rapture, post-rapture, etc. Neither time nor space will allow for an examination of this subject.⁶ This is a false notion that is perpetuated by wrong doctrine for which there is no evidence in Scripture.

Third, the second coming of Jesus will not be marked by a thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. Others will discuss this issue. One book that may be of interest to readers is edited by R. G. Clouse, *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*.⁷

This book will help you understand the issues of millennialism from an evangelical perspective and have up-to-date arguments that are being given from each viewpoint.

Fourth, the second coming of Jesus will not be marked by a second chance for salvation. Hebrews 9:27, 28 says, "Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him." In Matthew 25:31, 32 we read, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats."

Fifth, the second coming of Jesus is not the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.⁸

WHAT THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST IS

However, the second coming of Christ will be marked by certain important events.

First, the second coming of Jesus will be marked by the resurrection of all the dead. We read, "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thess. 4:16), and "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned" (John 5:28, 29).

Second, the second coming of Jesus will be marked by the destruction of the earth and the material system of which it (the earth) is a part. "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare" (2 Pet. 3:10).

Third, the second coming of Christ will be marked by the judgment of all people (cf. Mt. 25:31, 32).

THE FACT OF THE SECOND COMING

There is no teaching found in the New Testament upon which evangelical scholars agree more than on the second coming of Christ. The fact of his return is found many times in Scripture. It is estimated that the second coming of Christ is referred to over three hundred times in Scripture (that is an average of once every fifteen verses). There are three witnesses to the fact of the second coming of Christ.

The Testimony of the New Testament Writers

First, there are the witnesses of the New Testament writers. These witnesses fall into three categories: the Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles. Some of these may overlap, but this organization may be helpful in remembering the vast amount of material found in the New Testament on this subject.

In the Gospels. In the Synoptic Gospels the writers tell of various parables of Jesus in which the themes of his return are prominent: the parables of the Dragnet (Mt. 13:47-50), the Household Watching (Mk. 13:33-37), the Nobleman and the Pounds (Lk. 19:27), the Servants Watching (Lk. 12:35-48), the Tares (Mt. 13:24-30, 36-43), and the Ten Virgins (Mt. 25:1-13).

In the Synoptics, there is also the testimony of the Olivet Discourse which Jesus gave that discusses his return (cf. Mt. 24:36—25:46; cf. parallels in Mark 13 and Luke 22).

In discussing the Lord's Supper, Paul writes, "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). The indication is that the observing of the Lord's Supper was to be practiced until Jesus returns again.

In John 14:1-4, Jesus says,

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.

In Acts. In the Acts of the Apostles, only a few references to the return of Jesus occur. In the opening chapter, reference is made that is abundantly clear:

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:10, 11).

In Paul's sermon on Mars Hill, we read that Jesus will come as executor of the final future judgment of all people: "For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

In the Epistles. Paul is our first witness to the second coming of Christ. More is written by Paul than by any other writer of New Testament Epistles regarding the second coming of Christ. He gives assurance to the Philippian brethren when he writes, "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Phil. 3:20, 21).

Paul's most direct statement is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:15, 16. He writes,

According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

In 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10, he says,

And give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This

will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you (cf. also Tit. 2:13; 1 Cor. 1:7; 15:23; 1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:1, 8; 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:1, 8).

The writer of Hebrews testifies, "Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him" (Heb. 9:27, 28).

James writes about the second coming of Christ when he pens these words, "Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near" (Jas. 5:7, 8).

Peter adds his testimony. In 1 Peter we read, "These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1 Peter 1:7); and, "Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1 Peter 1:13).

In 2 Peter 1:16, we read, "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty." And in 2 Peter 3:4, 12, Peter writes, "They will say, 'Where is this "coming" he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.' . . . as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat."

The apostle John adds his witness when he writes,

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure (1 Jn. 3:1-3).

The Testimony of Jesus

Second, there is the testimony of Jesus himself. In John 14:1-3, he says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

In his discourse on the end of times (Mt. 24:36—25:46), Jesus speaks of the "coming of the Son of Man" (Mt. 24:37, 39, 44). Toward the end of the discussion we read, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory" (Mt. 25:31).

The Testimony of the Angels

Third, there is the testimony of the angels. Luke records for us in Acts 1:9-11,

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

Without any doubt, one theme which runs throughout the preaching and writing of the apostles is the definiteness of the

Lord's return. In Luke 12:36-40, Jesus warns his disciples to be watchful for the coming of the Son of Man. In Matthew 19:28, Jesus speaks in terms which assumed his second coming. Peter is assured that those who had sacrificed in this life for the Lord will receive everlasting life in the future, and when the Son of Man sits upon his glorious throne in the consummation of God's purpose, then his followers will share his glory with him. When Jesus is before the Sanhedrin (Mt. 26:64; Mk. 14:62), the High Priest asks Jesus under oath if he is the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus' response was, "I am." And then Jesus replied, "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

THE INDEFINITENESS OF THE TIME OF THE SECOND COMING

While the certainty or fact of the second coming of Christ is clearly taught in Scripture, the time is not. From the days of the first century until today, there have always been those who have had a curiosity about the time of the Lord's return. But the Bible makes it clear that no one knows the exact time when Jesus will return. God, the Father, knows the time, but he is the only one who does. Jesus said that neither he, nor the angels, knew the time of his return (cf. Mt. 24:36-44). If Jesus, in the days of his flesh, did not know the exact time, and if the angels had been denied that knowledge, and if no one up to Jesus' time had been given that knowledge, then it is certainly clear that God meant for the exact time to be unknown. Anyone, therefore, who tries to set a time for the return of our Lord is definitely being presumptuous.

Two classes of people who disturbed the early church regarding the time of the Lord's return were the skeptic and the speculator. The skeptic is dealt with by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, and the speculator was dealt with by Peter in 2 Peter 3:1-18.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SECOND COMING

Several characteristics of the return of Christ are important for our study.

First, the second coming of Christ will be *personal*. The fact of the return of Christ being personal is assumed throughout the Scriptures. Jesus says, "I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (Jn. 14:3). Luke tells us the angels said, "This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). Paul wrote that "the Lord himself will descend from heaven" (1 Thess. 4:16). It would seem obvious that these Scriptures would be understood as referring to the personal return of the Lord.

Second, the second coming of Christ will be *visible*. The Jehovah's Witnesses maintain that Christ returned on October 1, 1914, and began his reign over the earth. It was neither a visible or literal return, but his presence is in the nature of an invisible influence.⁹ But this is difficult to accept when Acts 1:11 says Christ's return will be like his going away. His going away was visible, for his disciples watched Jesus being taken into heaven (Acts 1:9, 10).

Third, the second coming of Christ will be *sudden*. The apostle Paul warns, "For you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape" (1 Thess. 5:2, 3).

Fourth, the second coming of Christ will be *audible*. In John 5:28 we read, "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear *his voice* and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned." (Emphasis mine.) Paul speaks in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 of a "loud command" and the "voice of the archangel." There will be nothing silent or secretive about the Lord's return.

Fifth, the second coming of Christ will be *majestic*. We read, "For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with

his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done" (Mt. 16:27). Paul wrote, "On the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you" (2 Thess. 1:10); and "You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: 'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God'" (Rom. 14:10, 11).

THE MOTIVATION OF THE SECOND COMING

In light of what has been said, certain motivations are connected with the second coming of Christ. We should be motivated to watch and pray (Mt. 24:42) and always be ready (Mt. 24:44; 25:1-13). We should be motivated to use our talents (Mt. 25:14-30) and be charitable and benevolent toward the needy (Mt. 25:31-46). We should also be motivated to be steadfast (Jas. 5:7; 1 Cor. 15:58) and to live holy lives (2 Pet. 3:11, 14; Tit. 2:11-13). And we should be motivated with comfort (1 Thess. 4:18).

THE RESULTS OF THE SECOND COMING

Two results of the second coming of Christ that are significant for our study are related to individuals: first, the resurrection and second, the final judgment.

The Resurrection

Scoffers and unbelievers are themselves fulfilling prophecy and making their wrath praise God (Ps. 76:10; 2 Pet. 2:5-9; 3:3-7). They deny the second coming of Christ and the destruction of the world (2 Pet. 3:10-14). Believers, on the other hand, anxiously await the return of Christ, for with it comes the resurrection of the body. Logically, the doctrine of the resurrection should be presented in two phases: the resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection of others. Neither time nor space will allow

us to cover the resurrection of Jesus.¹⁰ Regarding the resurrection of others, we want to establish two things. First, at the second coming of Christ, a general resurrection will take place at which time all will be raised from the dead. The foundational statement for this is from John 5:28, 29, where Jesus speaks of one general resurrection at the last day. While some may insist that two resurrections are included here, no basis exists whatsoever for two separate resurrections at two different periods of time. The contrast Jesus is giving is not between two different times when people are to be raised, but between two different kinds of people who are to be raised; i.e., some who have practiced good and some who have practiced evil.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Paul speaks of the element of hope in the resurrection which is based on the resurrection of Jesus (v. 14). The word "if" in verse 14 is a first-class conditional sentence in Greek grammar, and in this kind of construction the reality of the action of the verb is affirmed. The word "if" raises no question about the certainty of the event but rather affirms it and could be properly translated "since." Paul's statement is that our resurrection is based on the resurrection of Jesus.

In John 14 Jesus spoke of going away to prepare a place for his followers and his coming again to receive them. Verse 19 is the climax of the chapter where Jesus says, "Because I live, you also will live."

One of the common objections of the Sadducees to the preaching of the apostles in the first century was that they proclaimed that through Jesus there would be a resurrection from the dead (Acts 4:2). The writer of Hebrews affirms a resurrection from the dead (Heb. 6:2; 11:35). Paul's belief in the resurrection is found in such passages as Philippians 3:10-21 and 1 Corinthians 15. And, as he comes to the close of his life, he affirms, "If we died with him, we will also live with him" (2 Tim. 2:11).

Second, the resurrection will be a resurrection of the body.¹¹ However faint it may appear, there is an indication in the Old Testament about the resurrection of the body.¹² Daniel declares the biblical doctrine of the resurrection when he writes, "Mul-

titudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12:2). There are examples in the Old Testament of resurrections having occurred: the widow's son of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:17ff.), the son of the Shunammite woman (2 Kings 4:32ff.), and the man whose dead body was cast into Elisha's grave (1 Kings 13:21). Other passages of significance would be 1 Samuel 2:6; Job 19:25, 26; Psalms 16:9-11; Daniel 12:1-4; and Hosea 13:14. We would agree that there is only a glimmer, but it is a glimmer and should not be denied. Add to this the fact that in the opening pages of the New Testament one of the significant differences between the Sadducees and the Pharisees was a belief in the resurrection. Where did the Pharisees get an idea about a resurrection? If not from the Old Testament, from where?

The nature of that resurrection body is significant. The hope of the Christian is not deliverance from the body, but the redemption of the body. There is, perhaps, much misinformation about our resurrection bodies to the point that some deny—if not in belief, at least in the words they use—that there will be a bodily resurrection. We seem to have some concept of a phantom type of existence that is foreign to the biblical teaching about the resurrection. In studying about the resurrection, the conclusion of Scripture is that there will be a resurrection of our personal bodies. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul speaks of the resurrection. The overall theme of this chapter is that our personal, physical bodies will be resurrected. That which is resurrected is what existed before. My spirit does not cease to exist at death, but the body is placed into a grave. At the resurrection, my spirit rejoins my body—this same body that I now have—and is changed.

Paul writes that we "groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, *the redemption of our bodies*" (Rom. 8:23; emphasis mine). When Jesus says, "The time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out" (Jn. 5:28, 29), he is speaking of the resurrection of our bodies that will occur at his second coming. These two events, the second coming of Christ and the resurrection of our bodies, are tied

together. Paul writes, "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Phil. 3:20, 21). John also affirms this when he writes, "What we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 Jn. 3:2).

There are a couple of objections to this position which need to be addressed. It is stated in 1 Corinthians 15:44 that "it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body." Some would say that according to this passage the body is some kind of a spiritual body rather than any kind of body that might be related to our present physical body. But the subject of the verse is that of a "body." The subject under consideration is the design of the body, not the substance. That is to say, the body which is raised will be designed for the spiritual side of man.

Again in 1 Corinthians 15:50, it is stated, "I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable." The term "flesh and blood" refers to the natural body of verse 44. True, the human body does not inherit the eternal abode, but rather a glorious resurrected body. But remember, it is a *body*. It is not a body subject to the physical appetites of this world, but a body subject to the appetites of another world, the world of the spiritual.

The Final Judgment

No truth is more clearly taught in Scripture, no fact more firmly established, and no warning more emphatic than the truth of the coming judgment.¹³ For many people, the fact of a coming judgment is most frightening, and it should be, for those apart from Christ will be judged among the unrighteous. But for the child of God, the coming judgment is a time of vindication for his righteous living.

According to the Scriptures, judgment will occur after the second coming of Jesus. Jesus said, "For the Son of Man is

going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done" (Mt. 16:27; cf. also Mt. 25:31-46).

The idea of the Judgment is found in both the Old and New Testaments.¹⁴ There are two events of which we are absolutely certain: death and judgment (Heb. 9:27; Acts 17:22-31). According to what the New Testament teaches, judgment will be both universal (Mt. 25:31, 32) and individual (Rom. 2:6; 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10). The judge will be Jesus Christ, the Lord (Acts 17:31; Jn. 5:22; 2 Tim. 4:1; Jas. 4:12). His decision will be final and irrevocable. There will be no possibility of an appeal to a higher court. There will be no termination of the sentence; it will be for all eternity.

On that day the books will be opened (Rev. 20:12-14), and there will be gathered before him all the nations (Mt. 25:32). You and I will be there (2 Cor. 5:10), as also will be the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (Mt. 10:15), the people of Nineveh (Mt. 12:41), and the Queen of Sheba (Mt. 12:42). At that time there will be a separation of the sheep from the goats (Mt. 25:32), i.e., the good from the bad. In some cases it will separate a husband from his wife, parents from their children, and friends from friends.

God will be impartial in his judgment (1 Pet. 1:17; Col. 3:25; Rom. 2:11) and will base his judgment not on the outward appearance, but on the heart (1 Sam. 16:7). His judgment will be according to the truth revealed in the gospel (1 Pet. 4:5). No one, therefore, can expect to be surprised when his verdict is rendered.

CONCLUSION

This study is important and should be brought to a close by asking, and seeking to answer, the question, "Are you ready for the Lord's return?" It is important that we realize that a study of the second coming of Christ is not just an academic exercise at which people who attend a Bible Forum at the lectures at Harding University spend their time looking at the subject without making a personal investigation. In fact, a study of the

second coming of Christ is (or at least should be) very evangelistic in nature.

Perhaps we ought to review the thoughts of the great hymn we often sing in our worship services, "There's a Great Day Coming!"

There's a great day coming, a great day coming,
There's a great day coming by and by;
When the saints and the sinners shall be parted
right and left,
Are you ready for that day to come?

There's a bright day coming, a bright day coming,
There's a bright day coming by and by;
But its brightness shall only come to them that
love the Lord,
Are you ready for that day to come?

There's a sad day coming, a sad day coming,
There's a sad day coming by and by;
When the sinner shall hear his doom,
"Depart, I know ye not,"
Are you ready for that day to come?

—Will L. Thompson

NOTES

¹As we begin I want to mention a book that might be of special interest to the readers: Robert P. Lightner, *The Last Days Handbook* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990). This book is a comprehensive guide to understanding the different views of prophecy—who believes what about prophecy and why. Speaking of the evangelical world at large, Lightner's concern is that there has been too much stress on what we disagree about regarding the Second Coming and not enough emphasis on the things about which we all agree. He presents a fairly balanced view of all prophetic views (even Amillennialism) without highlighting his own interpretation of prophecy. If you are interested in an up-to-date overview of prophetic interpretation, you would enjoy reading this book.

²For further information of interest, see Guy N. Woods, *Biblical Background of the Troubled Middle East* (Nashville, Tenn.: Gospel

Advocate Co., 1991).

³Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1986), 1151-52.

⁴Erickson, 1153.

⁵A new book was released on eschatology as I was completing this manuscript. I did not have time to read it before the deadline for submitting this lecture, but one that I am sure you would want to look at is: Ben Witherington III, *Jesus, Paul, and the End of the World* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992). You will not agree with all of his conclusions, but he will challenge you to think about eschatological issues that are of importance to people today.

⁶For further exposition of those who believe in the Rapture, see J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1964 reprint), 156-227.

⁷R. G. Clouse, ed., *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1977).

⁸Within the Restoration Movement the one who takes the A.D. 70 view is Max King of Warren, Ohio. Max and his followers are getting quite evangelistic about their beliefs to the point of setting up displays at brotherhood lectureships and distributing freely some of their material. His views are presented in the following: Max R. King, *The Spirit of Prophecy* (Warren, Ohio: Max R. King, Publisher, 1971); Max R. King, *The Cross and the Parousia of Christ* (Warren, Ohio: Parkman Road church of Christ, 1987). Two debates have been conducted on this issue, one with the late Gus Nichols and the other with Jim McGuiggan. Discussions regarding this teaching have been held at various lectureships, but some books have also been written about it. I think of the following: W. Terry Varner, *Studies in Biblical Eschatology*, vol. I (Marietta, Ohio: Therefore Stand Publications, 1981); Wayne Jackson, *The A.D. 70 Theory: A Review of the Max King Doctrine* (Stockton, Calif.: Courier Publications, 1990); Jim McGuiggan, *A.D. 70 Revisited* (Lubbock, Tex.: International Biblical Resources, 1991); James D. Bales, "The Death of King's A.D. 70 Hypothesis" (Unpublished manuscript, Searcy, Ark., 1991).

⁹Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Let God Be True* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1952), 41.

¹⁰Two of the most recent and important studies about the resurrection of Jesus are: William Lane Craig, *The Historical Argument for the Resurrection of Jesus During the Deist Controversy* (Lewiston/Queenston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1985) and William Lane Craig, *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus* (Lewiston/Queenston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989). A popular edition of much of the same material is in William Lane Craig, *Knowing the Truth About the Resurrection* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Servant Books, 1988).

¹¹One important work regarding the body is that of Robert H. Gundry, *Soma in Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan,

1987). A new study regarding the existence of the person between death and the resurrection is John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, & Life Everlasting* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989).

¹²An interesting article about this comes from George Mark Elliott, "Future Life in the Old Testament," *The Seminary Review* 3 (3-4):41-93.

¹³Three pictures in the New Testament that describe the coming judgment are (1) the sheep and the goat judgment (Mt. 25:31-46); (2) the judgment seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10); and (3) the great white throne of judgment (Rev. 20:11-15).

¹⁴Ecclesiastes 12:14; Matthew 3:12; Matthew 11:20-24; Acts 17:31; Romans 2:5; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; et. al. Other testimony is that of Jesus (Mt. 12:36, 37; 25:31-46), Paul (2 Cor. 5:10), Peter (1 Pet. 1:17; 4:17, 18; 2 Pet. 3:10), and John (1 Jn. 4:17; Rev. 20:12-14).

EDWARD P. MYERS is Dean of the Harding Graduate School of Religion in Memphis, Tennessee. He received his B.A. from Lubbock Christian University, his M.A. from Cincinnati Christian Seminary, his M.A.R. from Harding Graduate School of Religion, and his Ph.D. from Drew University. He has served as pulpit minister for twenty years as well as fulfilling his role as professor of religion at White's Ferry Road, Ohio Valley College, Alabama Christian, and Magnolia Bible College. He served as director of the lectureship at White's Ferry Road and Ohio Valley College and Academic Dean at Alabama Christian. He has authored or edited ten books. He and his wife, Janice, have three children.

ARMAGEDDON AGAIN?

Stafford North

The very word "Armageddon" conjures up in the minds of most people the thought of a nuclear holocaust which plunges the world into final destruction. In fact, *Webster's* defines it as "the scene of a final battle between the forces of good and evil, prophesied in the Bible to take place at the end of the world."¹ Such, then, is the most commonly held view of "Armageddon."

But is this the biblical view? Does the Bible actually prophesy that a great battle is coming between forces of good and evil which will destroy the world as we know it?

In this lesson we will study "Armageddon" as used in the Bible to determine what it teaches about this topic and, from that, we will learn whether or not the popular perception is correct.

Four truths from the Scriptures about "Armageddon" will bring us to a conclusion.

THE TERM "ARMAGEDDON" MUST BE TAKEN FIGURATIVELY

The expression "Armageddon" appears only once in the Scriptures, Revelation 16:16. Revelation, as we know, presents a story filled with figures—a seven-headed red dragon, a seven-headed beast, a second beast with horns like a lamb, a lamb with seven horns and seven eyes, a volcano that erupts into the sea turning the water to blood, locusts with faces like men and hair like women, horses with heads like lions that belch forth smoke and fire and have scorpion-like tails. Surely if the Bible's only use of "Armageddon" is in the midst of such a book, we would

expect the term "Armageddon" also to be figurative.

But what might "Armageddon" symbolize? Revelation 16:16 reads: "And they gathered them together into the place which is called in Hebrew Armageddon." The expression "called in Hebrew" likely refers to a similar word in Zechariah 12:11 which tells of "mourning . . . in the valley of Megiddon." This is clearly a reference to Megiddo, a hill in the Carmel range near the center of ancient Israel. Megiddo overlooked both the valley of Jezreel and a pass through the mountains leading from that valley to the coastal plain.

Because of its strategic location, then, the hill of Megiddo was an outpost to guard the northern approach to lower Palestine, and many important battles were fought in the valley beside it. In this valley Deborah defeated Sisera, Gideon overcame the Midianites, King Saul died, Jehu killed King Ahaziah, and the Egyptians killed King Josiah.

To those knowing Old Testament history, then, the site of Megiddo conjures up the memory of *decisive battles*—even to the point that "Megiddo" can have a symbolic significance. If we, for example, say someone has "met his Waterloo," no one thinks we are suggesting a trip to Waterloo in Belgium. Napoleon's great defeat at Waterloo, rather, has caused the very name of the battlefield to have symbolic significance.

Similarly, the term "Armageddon" does not necessarily suggest that one is literally going to Megiddo, but indicates, rather, that the moment of a decisive struggle has arrived, that a strategic stand is about to be made. Symbolically, then, to "go to Armageddon" means to make a final defense against an enemy as so many did in that location.

THE TERM "ARMAGEDDON" MUST DESCRIBE SOMETHING THAT FITS THE TIME SCHEDULE REVELATION GIVES FOR ITSELF

The term "Armageddon" is an integral part of the story line of Revelation. If, then, the writer of Revelation says that its events will occur a long time after his day, then Armageddon could still be future from our day. If, on the other hand, the

writer suggests that the story it tells will happen soon from his standpoint, then we have to look for a fulfillment of "Armageddon" in the years soon after the book was written.

In point of fact, Revelation speaks in very specific terms about whether its story will be near or far away from the time it was written. In the very first verse of the very first chapter, John is told the book will reveal "the things which must shortly come to pass" or, as in the NIV, what "must soon take place." Again in verse 3, the writer says "the time is near" when these events will occur.

Not only do such statements appear at the beginning of the book, but the last chapter is filled with the same. In Revelation 22:6, John is told that he had heard about "the things that must soon take place." In Revelation 22:10, John is told not to seal up the book he has written, as if he might put it away for a while, because "the time is near." And in verses 7, 12, and 20, the word from Christ is that he is coming "quickly." Obviously, Jesus did not intend to say that his second coming was soon to happen because that clearly has not been the case. What he meant, rather, is that he would soon or quickly come to carry out the predictions he makes in this book.

It is not unusual for God to speak of carrying out a prediction he has made as his "coming" to do it, even though he is not coming literally. In Isaiah 19:1, for example, God says he will come on a swift cloud to carry out his pronouncement on Egypt. So in Revelation, Jesus says, in effect, "I will come quickly to carry out the destruction I have predicted in this book."

"Armageddon," then, must refer to something which was to happen soon after the time Revelation was written. Surely no event happening in the twentieth century could be "soon" from the point of the first century. This means that whatever event is depicted by the term "Armageddon" must have happened centuries ago.

THE TERM "ARMAGEDDON" MUST BE UNDERSTOOD AS A PART OF THE STORY LINE Revelation tells a story, a story of persecuted Christians who

are wondering "How long?" before God will right the wrongs done to them and show them to be victorious while the persecutors are defeated (Rev. 6:9). It is a story that takes us into the spirit realm where we get a glimpse of the continual struggle between Christ and Satan. In Revelation, Satan is pictured as a great, red dragon (Rev. 12:9; 20:2) who has developed a plan to defeat Christ.

Although Satan failed to keep Christ from completing his mission on earth to make salvation available to all, Satan knows that if no one knows what Christ did, the benefits of his sacrifice will be nullified. Satan's plan, then, is to persecute the church out of existence. This way no one will be left to tell the story of Jesus' atoning blood and thus, no one can do what is necessary to receive it. Then, Satan wins.

In Revelation, Christ reveals Satan's strategy so Christians will be encouraged to be faithful during the persecution. Satan will, the book says, utilize a beast, the Roman Empire which sits on seven hills (Rev. 13:5-7; 17:9), as his tool to carry out this persecution. By requiring worship of its emperor, the Roman Empire will create a situation in which Christians will be forced to violate national laws and customs and, in so doing, become subject to severe persecution. Satan, who is really behind this, is using this strategy to wipe off the face of the earth all who know and could tell of Christ. If he can remove the knowledge of Christ, then Jesus' death will mean nothing.

In chapters 4 and 5 the story begins. God is on the throne in the center of the universe with all creation praising him. Then enters Christ, a sacrificial lamb, the only one found worthy to break the seals on a scroll and thus to reveal the first half of the story of Revelation. As this scroll is opened, early Christian martyrs, now in heaven, ask a question which Revelation is written to answer: "How long, O Master, holy and true, do you not judge and avenge our blood on those who are on the earth?" (Rev. 6:9, 10).

God's answer is that he will not immediately bring the persecution to an end but will, rather, allow more Christians to suffer martyrdom before he ends the persecution. Through a series of plagues introduced by trumpets, God next sends

warnings to the persecutor, a beast symbolizing the Roman Empire.

The warnings, however, go unheeded (Rev. 9:20, 21), and, in fact, the persecutor initiates an even stronger persecution lasting a symbolic 1,260 days. Then God decides the time has come to end the persecution and to bring down the persecutor. After an announcement in Revelation 14:8 that the fall is imminent, the Christians in heaven who have been martyred under the beast, Rome, sing a song of joy and triumph because their long-term persecutor is about to be destroyed.

In chapter 16, the actual destruction begins to take place as seven angels, in turn, pour out the seven bowls of wrath. The bowls are poured out upon the beast and his followers, thus clearly indicating that the destruction is directed against Rome. The first four bowls suggest, with such figures as sores, seas, and rivers turning to blood, and the sun becoming very hot, that God is going to employ forces of nature to destroy the Roman Empire.

The fifth bowl is poured out directly on the throne of the beast to turn it dark, suggesting that the leadership of the empire would contribute to Rome's fall through its own darkness, immorality, and corruption. The sixth bowl dries up the Euphrates River, Rome's eastern boundary, thus allowing armies from outside its borders to attack the empire.

Thus, through strikingly apt symbols, God reveals not only that he will destroy the Roman Empire, Satan's tool for trying to persecute the church out of existence, but that he will do it (1) through natural disasters (floods, earthquakes, fires, volcanic eruptions); (2) through Rome's own corruption and immorality; and (3) through attacks from outside of Rome's borders.

The record of history is clear. These very three factors were major elements in the eventual downfall of Rome about A.D. 450. Through the symbolism of the pouring out of the bowls, then, God is announcing not only that Rome, Satan's agent for trying to remove the church from the earth, will *fall*, but also that it will *fail* to destroy the church. God will win this struggle; Satan will lose.

But the story is not over. In verses 13 through 16, we have an

interlude in which Satan will make a final, desperate struggle to keep from losing this fight. He never gives up easily. To depict this strategic effort, the writer describes the dragon (Satan) meeting with his allies, the beast (Rome) and the second beast or false prophet (emperor-worship). These send unclean spirits, pictured as frogs, out of their mouths to send a message to their vassal kings to gather for war at a place called "Armageddon."

As noted earlier, this must be taken as a *figurative passage*: It is part of a story told in figures, and this part is pictured as a dragon and two beasts meeting to initiate a plan to be communicated by frogs which come out of their mouths. The term "Armageddon" is to be understood as a figurative for a final, desperate struggle—not an actual gathering of forces in the valley beside Megiddo.

The meaning of Armageddon, then, is that as Satan sees his agent for destroying the church about to be defeated by God, he resists, making a last ditch effort to stand. This final struggle is, figuratively, a "fight beside Megiddo," as were so many strategic battles of the Old Testament.

The passage, of course, never mentions an actual battle for no such battle takes place. It only says the forces are to gather at Armageddon. Immediately, however, the seventh angel pours out his bowl and a voice from heaven says, "It is done." And the great city is divided into three parts, and Babylon is given the cup of God's wrath. "Babylon," of course, is a code-word for Rome.

So Rome is destroyed, Satan is defeated, and God has vindicated his martyred saints who, through their faithfulness, have assured the continuation and triumph of the church. This declaration of victory for the saints is the fundamental message of Revelation; and Satan, even by gathering his forces, as it were, to Armageddon, will not stop it.

THE TERM "ARMAGEDDON" DOES NOT REFER TO A FINAL BATTLE BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL THAT BRINGS THE WORLD TO AN END

As seen in the previous section, "Armageddon" is to be taken

as a figurative expression to indicate that Satan will not allow God to destroy Rome and end the persecution of the saints without a fight on his part. This event took place centuries ago when God brought the corrupt Roman Empire down to defeat. There is no reference at all in this passage to the end of the world and what happens then.

It would, in fact, be entirely out of harmony with other passages of Scripture if this passage taught that the world would come to an end with a great battle which could be anticipated and observed as the final moment approached. In truth, the Bible teaches that the final end will come *unexpectedly*, not only to the wicked but even to the servants of God. In Matthew 24:50, Jesus says that the lord will come when his servants do not expect and do not know. His coming, in fact, is commonly depicted as being like the coming of a "thief" who comes as a complete surprise, and certainly never with signs to signal his coming. (See Mt. 24:43; 25:13; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10.)

Jesus himself said that he did not know the day nor the hour of his own return (Mt. 24:36). The time is, he says, known only to God. In fact, Jesus compared his coming to the time when the flood came. Before the flood, he says, life went on as usual with people eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. Then, without warning, the flood came. Likewise, before the return of Christ, life will go on as usual with no warnings. There is no build-up of political and military forces and no war that finally reaches a climax as the end comes. And one day, with no warning to precede it, Christ will return.

CONCLUSION

The expression "Armageddon," then, is a term used symbolically to bring to mind those many strategic battles in the valley beside the Hill of Megiddo, north of Jerusalem. As God starts the process of bringing to an end the Roman Empire, which Satan has used as a tool to persecute the church, Satan will put up a fight "at Armageddon," just as nations did in the past. This resistance will not, however, deter the plan of God. Immediately, the seventh bowl is poured out and a voice cries, "It is

done." God wins; Satan loses. And the effort of Satan to wipe the knowledge of the gospel from the earth has failed.

In no way can the term "Armageddon" in Revelation 16:16 be taken, then, as a statement that the world will end with a great final battle between good and evil. What Revelation does picture, rather, is a struggle between Satan and Christ over the minds of men. Christ will win, and we should make every effort to live and die on his side.

NOTE

¹Webster's II, *New Riverside University Dictionary*, s.v. "Armageddon."

STAFFORD NORTH has been Executive Vice President at Oklahoma Christian University of Science and Arts in Oklahoma City since 1971. He has taught at Oklahoma Christian since 1952 and has preached in many churches of Christ for forty-five years. He received his B.A. at Abilene Christian, his M.A. at Louisiana State University, and his Ph.D. at the University of Florida. His current book release is *Armageddon Again*, published in 1991. He has delivered a series of sermons on Revelation over sixty times throughout the United States. He and his wife, Jo Anne, have four children.

SCHOLARS' FORUM

THE WOMAN AND THE RED DRAGON

(Rev. 12:1-6, 13-17)

Kenneth M. Chadwell

The imagery of Revelation 12:1-6, 13-17 reflects international dragon myths which circulated widely at the time of the writing of Revelation. From these ancient myths, particularly the Greek versions, John borrowed the symbols suitable for expressing his Christian message in vivid metaphorical representations with which his original readers were familiar. The symbol of the dragon communicated to the readers the cosmic conflict of good and evil. This study is restricted to the dragon motif in Revelation 12:1-6, 13-17.¹

THE DRAGON IN ANTIQUITY

The thematic element of a *drakon megas pyrrós* (Rev. 12:3) pursuing a pregnant woman or prostitute is common in ancient mythology. The term *drakon* may be translated as "dragon" or "serpent" and, in Revelation 12:3, 4, 7, 9, 13, 16, 17; 13:2, 4; 16:13; 20:2, is used figuratively for Satan.² Parallels to the dragon imagery in Revelation 12 exist in numerous forms which include Akkadian, Hittite, Ugaritic, Egyptian, Greek, and other sources.³ In antiquity, the dragon was regarded as demonic, and its role was "always the same; it is a power of chaos which opposes God either in the beginning or at the end of things, or both."⁴

Pagan references to the dragon symbol are replete: Yam in the Ugaritic Baal cycle, Tiamat in the Akkadian creation epic, Azhi Dahak of Persia, the Phoenician Ophion, the Sumerian Kur, Vritra of India, Greek Python, Egyptian Typhon (Seth), and others.⁵ Early evidence for the existence of the dragon

symbol comes from Mesopotamia. A cylinder seal from Tell Asmar, depicting the defeat of a seven-headed dragon, dates from the Akkad dynasty in the twenty-fourth century B.C.⁶ The Old Testament speaks of dragonic creatures such as Leviathan (Ps. 74:14; Job 41:1-34; Is. 27:1), Rahab (Ps. 89:10; Job 9:13; 26:12; Is. 30:7; 51:9), Behemoth (Job 40:15-24), and *tannin* (Job 7:12; Ps. 91:13; Ezek. 29:3). When the motif was absorbed into expressions of faith in the early decades of Christianity, the symbol of the "satanic dragon monster" was associated with "pride, the sin of rebellion and the glorification of self over against God."⁷

Numerous parallels to Revelation 12 exist, but some with greater similarities than others. "The description of the dragon in Revelation 12 would have been intelligible in a Semitic, Graeco-Egyptian, or Graeco-Roman context."⁸ Though the dragon combat imagery in Revelation 12:1-6, 13-17 is not borrowed "wholly and directly" from any of the foregoing sources,⁹ it most closely resembles Hyginus' version of the Leto myth, which includes Poseidon sending the sea and Zeus sending the north wind to protect Leto from Python.¹⁰

The degree to which Revelation 12 adapts pagan sources and the particular sources which are used are points of division among students of Revelation. Charles, who assigns the imagery to the Jewish adaptation of a primitive international myth, provides an early survey of opposing advocates.¹¹ Gunkel argued for a Babylonian source, Völter for a Persian source, Dietrich for a Greek source, and Bousset for an Egyptian source. Though various alternatives are advanced for the source of the imagery, its role is widely recognized to be that of religious, universal symbolism of tragedy and disorder.¹² John adapts mytho-poetic language to communicate his message of present and impending trouble.

The dragon motif of Revelation 12 maintains strong affinities with a "mythic pattern of combat which was widespread in the ancient Near East and the classical world."¹³ A common pattern of these myths involves a struggle between two beings for universal reign. One being, usually a dragon, represents disorder and sterility, and the other being represents order and

fertility. The dragon's pursuit of the pregnant woman in Revelation 12 is a reflection of the pervasive combat myths of the first century and, more specifically, the dragon myth.

The recurrence of similar themes in combat myths assumes the following pattern: the dragon pair, chaos and disorder, the attack, the champion, the champion's death, the dragon's reign, recovery of the champion, battle renewed and victory, and restoration and confirmation of order.¹⁴ When the foregoing themes are placed against Revelation 12, comparisons reveal explicit parallels which are outlined by Collins in the following form:¹⁵

- A. The Dragon (3)
- B. Chaos and Disorder (4a)
- C. The Attack (4b)
- D. The Champion (5a)
- E. The Champion's "Death" (5b)
- F. Recovery of the Champion (7a)
- G. Battle Renewed and Victory (7b—9)
- H. Restoration and Confirmation of Order (10—12a)
- I. The Dragon's Reign (12b—17)

John does not preserve the traditions and sources unchanged, but he revises and adapts them for their Christian context.¹⁶

THE DRAGON IN EGYPTIAN AND GREEK MYTHOLOGY

Revelation 12 resembles closely the myths of Seth's attack on Hathor and Horus and Python's pursuit of Leto. Fusion between the Greek and Egyptian dragon myths occurred as early as the fifth century B.C.¹⁷

In Egyptian mythology, the mother of the child is Hathor, who is represented with the sun upon her head.¹⁸ The child is Horus, the son of Osiris, and the dragon is Seth, who appears as a pig, antelope, gazelle, crocodile, hippopotamus, fish, serpent, and the mythic griffin.¹⁹ Egyptians believed that Seth was red in color, and he took the form of a red hippopotamus in one of his

battles with Horus.²⁰

According to Plutarch's account, Seth kills Osiris, but Osiris is later restored to life by Hathor.²¹ The ghost of Osiris trains Horus to defeat Seth and bring him in chains to Hathor. Eighty years of combat ensue between Seth and Horus.²² Other parallels include the flight of Hathor to Chemnis, the birth of her child in solitude, and the defeat of Seth by Horus.

Greek mythology provides striking parallels. Python is described as a treacherous dragon with many heads.²³ Note the following summary of the Python cycle:

The great dragon Python, son of Earth, learned that he would be killed by the (as yet unborn) son of Leto, whereupon he pursued Leto to do away with her. She was carried off to Poseidon, who placed her on the island Ortygia and sank the island beneath the sea. After a vain search Python went away to Parnassus, and Leto's island was brought up from the depths. When the infant Apollo was born he immediately attained to full strength, and four days later he went to Parnassus and killed the dragon.²⁴

Fontenrose identifies at least five major versions of the myth of Apollo's combat with Python.²⁵ Space does not permit a detailed analysis of the versions.

The woman of Revelation 12 reflects the role of Leto in that both are mothers of heroic figures and are being attacked by a dragon because of threats posed by their offspring. A synthesis of the conflicting versions of the Greek myths provides distinct parallels which include the pregnant woman, the child, the persecuting dragon, "the assisted flight of the woman, the waters menacing the woman, the help given by the earth to the woman."²⁶ The transition of the dragon motif of chapter 12 from pagan mythology to apocalyptic prophecy may have roots in the link by Judaism of Old Testament prophecy with the international dragon myth.²⁷

THE DRAGON IN REVELATION 12

A few observations should be made concerning the interpre-

tation of chapter 12, a transitional chapter which begins a cycle of visions that explain the underlying cause for the "hostility about to break upon the church."²⁸ Both the woman and the dragon are described as portents (*semeion*), and the verb *ophthe*, in reference to the portents, indicates the introduction of a new vision.²⁹

The glorious woman (Rev. 12:1) stands in contrast to the great prostitute (Rev. 17:1). The description of the woman has been associated with the signs of the zodiac, Roma, Ephesian Artemis, Isis, and a fusion of Isis and Artemis.³⁰ The symbolism surrounding the woman is reminiscent of both the Old Testament (twelve patriarchs, tribes, and Joseph's dream in Gen. 37:9) and pagan mythology. Prophetic material such as Isaiah 26:17, 18; 66:7-9 and the association of the church with the woman's offspring point to the messianic community, including the true Old Testament Israel, as the identification of the woman. Noting the elasticity of the symbolism, Morris states that "here the woman is undoubtedly Israel who gives birth to the Messiah, but later in the chapter she is the church who is persecuted for her faith."³¹

The dragon, whose horns are parallel to the ten horns of Daniel's fourth beast (Dan. 7:7) and seven heads are not unlike Hydra or Tiamat, wears seven diadems as "blasphemous claims to sovereignty."³² His red color brings to mind the murderous work of Seth, Typhon, and Python in their pursuit of the male child. The plans of Satan, the dragon, are foiled in the completion of the ministry of Christ, the child, which culminates in his resurrection, ascension, and exaltation. The "birth" of the child likely has more to do with the cross than the Nativity.³³

God's provision for the sustenance of the church and protection from ultimate harm are demonstrated in the desert haven prepared for the woman (Rev. 12:6). The "desert" or "wilderness" connotes divine care, though it is used elsewhere for the free reign of chaos.³⁴ While Exodus typology (Ex. 14:8; 19:4) is manifest (Rev. 12:6, 13, 14), direct associations with divine aid in the combat myths cannot be dismissed. The time, times, and half a time of Revelation 12:14 correspond to the 1260 days of verse 6.

The river of water from the serpent's mouth in his attempt to sweep away the woman is a direct reflection of Hyginus' account of the Leto myth. Though the imagery may be related to Genesis 3 and other passages,³⁵ no direct parallels exist in Jewish literature. The wrath of the dragon, intensified by his thwarted attempts to destroy the woman and male child, is directed against the rest of the woman's offspring, who are identified in Revelation 12:17 as those who are keeping the commandments of God and holding the testimony of Jesus.

The scene closes with the dragon taking his stand on the sand of the sea (Rev. 12:17). The phrase *kai estathan* of the Textus Receptus is inferior to *kai estatha* which may have been corrupted when "copyists accommodated *estatha* to the first person of the following *eidon*."³⁶

CONCLUSION

Revelation 12 is a prelude and transition to the visions which follow it. The chapter provides an answer for questions concerning the source and reason for the persecution of the saints. In language which could be understood across the Roman Empire, John uses the dragon myth to depict effectively the legendary fiend behind Christian suffering. The ancient combat myths well illustrate the battle, between Satan and the children of God, from which Christians will emerge as victors.

NOTES

¹For the rationale for the exclusion of verses 7 through 12, see G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, New Century Bible (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1974), 191-7; R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 1:298-314; Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, Harvard Dissertations in Religion, no. 9 (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976), 1-38.

²Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2d ed., rev. William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 206.

³Joseph Fontenrose, *Python* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of Califor-

nia Press, 1959), 2-3.

⁴Werner Foerster, "Drakon," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), 2:281.

⁵For summaries of primary sources, see Ivan M. Benson, "Revelation 12 and the Dragon of Antiquity," *Restoration Quarterly* 29 (April 1987): 97-100; Charles, 310-14; Collins, 1-64; Theodor H. Gaster, *Thespis* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1950), 137-42.

⁶Cyrus H. Gordon, "Leviathan: Symbol of Evil," in *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformations*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 4.

⁷Nicolas K. Kiessling, "Antecedents of the Medieval Dragon in Sacred History," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 89 (June 1970): 172.

⁸Collins, 79.

⁹Charles, 313.

¹⁰Collins, 67.

¹¹Charles, 308-13.

¹²Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 257-58.

¹³Collins, 57.

¹⁴Fontenrose, 262-4.

¹⁵Collins, 60.

¹⁶Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Composition and Structure of the Book of Revelation," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 39 (July 1977): 359.

¹⁷Fontenrose, 177.

¹⁸Plutarch *Isis and Osiris* 12.

¹⁹H. te Velde, *Seth, God of Confusion*, Probleme der Ägyptologie (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 26.

²⁰Plutarch 31.

²¹*Ibid.*, 12-14; Diodorus *The Library of History* 1.21.2.

²²"The Contest of Horus and Seth for the Rule," trans. John A. Wilson, in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3d ed., edited by James B. Pritchard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 14-17.

²³Apollodorus *The Library* 1.6.3; Hesiod *The Theogony* 868; Homer *The Iliad* 2.305.

²⁴Beasley-Murray, 192.

²⁵Fontenrose 21-22; Apollodorus 1.4.1; Euripides *Iphigeneia in Taurica* 1230-59; Hesiod *To Pythian Apollo* 3.254-309; Lucan *The Civil War* 5.75-85; Macrobius *The Saturnalia* 1.17.50-53; Nonnos *Dionysiaca* 2.130-45, 245-68, 581-86; Pausanias *Corinth* 2.7.7.

²⁶Charles, 312.

²⁷Concerning the reading of messianic and eschatological hope into the international myth, see Charles, 299-314.

²⁸Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), 234.

²⁹Austin Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images* (Glasgow: University Press, 1949), 47.

³⁰Philip Carrington, "Astral Mythology in the Revelation," *Anglican Theological Review* 13 (October 1931): 290; Ronald Mellor, *Thea Roma, The Worship of the Goddess Roma in the Greek World*, Hypomnemata, no. 42 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1975), 128; R. E. Witt, *Isis in the Graeco-Roman World* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1971), 151.

³¹Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation*, 2d ed., The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 153.

³²Beasley-Murray, 199; Pliny *Natural History* 8.21.33.

³³George B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, Harper's New Testament Commentaries (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1966), 149.

³⁴Shemaryahu Talmon, "The 'Desert Motif' in the Bible and in Qumran Literature," in *Biblical Motifs*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 31-32.

³⁵Paul S. Minear, "Far as the Curse Is Found: The Point of Revelation 12:15-16," *Novum Testamentum* 33 (1991): 71-77.

³⁶Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), 746.

KENNETH M. CHADWELL is a pulpit minister for Athens church of Christ in Athens, Tennessee. He graduated from Freed-Hardeman University with a B.A. in Bible and Biblical Languages, and a M.Div. from Harding Graduate School of Religion in 1991. He received the M.Div. Academic Excellence Award from Harding Graduate School. He has published articles in the *Gospel Advocate* and *Power for Today*. He and his wife, Carol Ann, have two children.

OTHER SUBJECTS

CHURCH GROWTH THROUGH FRIENDSHIP EVANGELISM

Jack English

It is not enough to search for lost sheep. The Master Shepherd is not pleased with a token search; He wants His sheep found. The purpose is not to search but to find.¹

The motto for many churches on evangelism is: "doing it more but enjoying it less." There seems to be an unlimited number of methods, gimmicks, and programs being marketed to increase our church roles. Lots of searching activity but little finding of the lost. The announcement of another door-to-door campaign strikes fear and trembling even in the most faithful.

Why did New Testament outreach seem so much fun and natural while today's evangelism is often forced, dutiful, and unnatural? The answer may be found in some of our inherited attitudes about evangelism.

PROBLEMS WITH TODAY'S EVANGELISM

First, some believe that evangelism is "for a specialized people." If you are not trained in public speaking, communication, or sales, the perception may be that soul winning is not your gift in the kingdom. We sometimes forget that the church has one mission but many ministries. Paul wrote, "He gave some to be evangelists" (Eph. 4:11). To others he gave varying gifts but all were designed to contribute to the one mission—"to seek and save the lost."

Second, some view evangelism only through "a specialized method." A variety of methods have all proven some effectiveness under certain conditions—be it door-knocking, bus minis-

try, visitation, filmstrips, television, or gospel meetings. The problem has been if you were not competent in these areas you were often made to feel guilty for not being more evangelistic.

Third, our methods have sometimes been "more program-oriented and less people-oriented." A survey of our brotherhood publications will reveal several programs for sale, but too often they are not saving anyone. A program that does not put people as the primary focus will not be effective.

FRIENDSHIP EVANGELISM DEFINED

Research conducted by the Institute for American Church Growth (Pasadena, Calif.) has often been cited to show why people have come to Christ and the church.² Over ten thousand people were asked the question, "What was responsible for your coming to Christ and the church?" Here are the results:

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| Campaigns, crusades, revivals | 1/2 of 1% |
| Door-knocking | 1-2% |
| Special need | 1-2% |
| Church programs | 2-3% |
| Walk-in | 2-3% |
| Sunday school | 4-5% |
| Preacher | 5-6% |
| Friend/Relative | 75-90% |

George Barna, in a nationwide study conducted by Barna Research, found that on any Sunday morning, "one out of four unchurched people would willingly attend a church service if a friend would invite them to do so."³ Call it whatever you want—lifestyle evangelism, relationship evangelism, friendship evangelism—it is the most effective means of introducing people to Christ and his church.

Lynn Anderson has defined friendship evangelism as the "sharing of matters of mutual value and concern with a friend."⁴ My favorite definition is simply "one beggar telling another where to find bread."

I love to hunt. If I find a sporting goods store selling shotgun

shells for a dollar a box, I would call every hunting buddy I know and tell them about it. I probably would not stop strangers on the street or go door-to-door with this good news however. That is the difference between friendship evangelism and stranger evangelism.

POWER OF FRIENDSHIP EVANGELISM

We must have a message. I do not mean just some memorized facts and a few Scriptures. I am talking about experiencing and knowing what it means to be lost, hurting, and guilty, and then to have those needs met and forgiven by Jesus. We must tell our friends about the Lord, how he has specifically blessed us and how he can bless them. That does not take special talent, but it does take a "heart that set apart Christ as Lord" (1 Pet. 3:15).

We must have friends. We must have friends and relationships outside of the church. These may be found at our jobs, at school, in the neighborhood, at civic clubs, or in recreational interests. The example of Jesus reveals that he spent much of his life making friends. The Samaritan woman, Nicodemus, Zacchaeus, and Mary Magdalene are but a few. The key to Paul's success in evangelism is summed up in the words, "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Cor. 9:22). My personal practice has been to make others my friends before teaching them to be my brothers.

We must be sensitive to others' needs. Many people we meet are trying to cope with one or more of the big "Ds"—debt, divorce, depression, drugs, diets, disease, doubt, or death. These are just some of their felt needs. They do not yet understand their real need is freedom from sin. We must first discover their felt needs and share how God can help them. Memorize or underline a favorite Scripture that has spoken to a specific need in your life and freely share that with others. My favorite is Romans 8:28: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

We must build credibility—credibility for the message and

the messenger. Before we can "give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have," Christ must be our Lord (1 Pet. 3:15). If our personal lives reflect the message we preach, the receptivity of that message will increase a hundredfold.

We must confront with the gospel. This is the real goal of our relationships. Friends whom we love are lost in sin and separated from God. This is the real need that is often clouded by the felt need. Because they trust us and we have proven to be a genuine and sincere friend, they will now be ready to receive our message. It is important that we confront "with gentleness and respect" (1 Pet. 3:15) but confront, nevertheless. A true friend will not permit another to face eternity without the opportunity to respond to the gospel.

We must then lead this friend to other friends. One of the strongest appeals to Christianity is the bonding of friends that have "set apart Christ as Lord." The church meets the needs of having a place to belong, having value, and stability. The support of friends in the church who share a common goal and value system is vital to a new Christian's faithfulness and spiritual growth.

WHY FRIENDSHIP EVANGELISM IS EFFECTIVE

It provides a natural network. Friends, relatives, associates, and neighbors are the most natural ones with whom to share new joy. We do not usually tell strangers even good news.

Friends are more receptive. As a trusted friend, you are a credible witness. The gospel does not become a religious story from a total stranger but a life-changing opportunity from a trusted friend. Friendship is something that is not immediate but is earned. I have helped build houses, hauled hay, worked cattle, and even learned to play golf, and all for one reason—to build credibility through shared experiences in friendship.

It is an unhurried and natural sharing. Friendship evangelism is a time investment in people. According to research done by The Church Growth Institute, a person hears the gospel 3.4 times before he becomes a believer.⁵ Just as there are nine

months of preparation before a physical birth, so a person must be prepared for a spiritual birth. I maintained an active friendship with a man for five years before he became a Christian. He now serves as a deacon, teacher, and preacher and has influenced hundreds.

It provides natural support for new Christians. Since at least one Christian—the one who originally shared the gospel—is close to the new convert, new Christians are not left alone. They already have friends when they come into the church that can provide nurturing and support. When I convert a friend who now becomes my brother, I naturally feel a stronger sense of obligation and responsibility for his spiritual welfare.

It incorporates new Christians. New Christians will more quickly begin attending Bible classes and other church-related activities with a friend or relative. This, in turn, becomes a natural bridge to meet and make more Christian friends. Research by Dr. Flavil Yeakley, Jr., has revealed that new Christians who do not make at least seven new friends in the first six months of conversion often drop out.⁶

It tends to win entire families. When one or two people in a family become Christians, it often begins a process that results in dozens of conversions. As the entire family grows together, it becomes stronger and more stable in the Lord. A story that could be repeated many times is the one about the Larry Chrisman family in southeastern Oklahoma. Larry was the first in his family to become a Christian. But as a result there have been over twenty conversions in a few short years among brothers, sisters, parents, children, in-laws, and friends of this family. Larry serves as an elder in the church today in Kiowa, Oklahoma.

It provides a constant source of new contacts. On the average, each new Christian has twelve people among his friends and relatives who are not Christians.⁷ Because long-time members have fewer non-Christian friends, the new convert is needed for a continuing source of new prospects. This never-ending process insures that the church will never run out of potential converts.

CONCLUSION

Friendship evangelism is timely, not timeless; planned, not contrived; natural, not canned; honest, not deceptive; scriptural, not sold.

George Barna, founder and president of Barna Research Group, has conducted extensive research for many corporations and organizations including churches. When writing about tactics that work for growing churches, he says:

The most effective means of getting people to experience what a church has to offer is having someone they know who belongs to the church simply invite them to try it. Call it whatever you wish—word-of-mouth, personal invitation, friendship evangelism—this is indisputably the most effective means of increasing the church rolls. Why? Because it builds upon an established relationship, which means that the recommendation or invitation springs from a credible source. More often than not, if the person being invited has any interest in the church, the mere fact that the church has the endorsement of a trusted friend or associate is sufficient to cause “product trial.”⁸

Jesus Christ expresses the principle of friendship evangelism best when he tells a man healed of demon-possession, “Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you” (Mk. 5:19; RSV).

I had the privilege of preaching for a congregation where two of the elders and all four of the deacons were my friends before they were my brothers. Friendship evangelism works!

NOTES

¹Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), 15.

²Charles Arn, Donald McGavran, and Win Arn, *Growth: A New Vision for the Sunday School* (Pasadena, Calif.: Church Growth Press, 1980), 76.

³George Barna, *The Frog in the Kettle* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1990), 37.

⁴Lynn Anderson, *Steps to Life* (Abilene, Tex.: Biblical Research Press, 1977), 136.

⁵Elmer Towns, *Winning the Winnable* (Lynchburg, Vir.: Church Growth Institute, 1989), 13.

⁶Flavil R. Yeakley, Jr., *Why Churches Grow* (St. Louis, Mo.: Andersons, 1971), 54.

⁷Win Arn and Charles Arn, *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples* (Pasadena, Calif.: Church Growth Press, 1982), 52.

⁸George Barna, *Marketing the Church* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Navpress, 1988), 109-10.

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JACK ENGLISH is a pulpit minister of the Clarksville church of Christ in Clarksville, Arkansas. He conducts a daily radio program called “Lifetalk” and serves as chaplain for the Johnson County Jail and Johnson County Regional Hospital. He is active in numerous community activities. He was named to “Who’s Who in American Christian Leadership” in 1989. He and his wife, Patricia, have two children.

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Our 1992 lectureship theme, "Vision of Victory," will explore one of the most intriguing books of the New Testament. The book of Revelation has frequently been viewed with confusion because of its prophetic overtones and its symbolism.

However, found throughout the book is the basic theme of an assurance of victory. Our 69th annual lectureship will explore different facets of the Christian's victory as recorded in the book of Revelation.

More than 60 teachers, panelists, lecturers and theme speakers have been selected to participate in this year's lectureship. Their presentations will provide a thought-provoking and informative study of the book. Through these lectures and classes we hope that all Christians, both young and old, will catch a clearer vision of their victory in Christ.

I am grateful for the many months of work that has been done to prepare and present these messages. I know that you will be strengthened spiritually by them.

David B. Burks, President

For Reference

Not to be taken from this room

