



Revelation - simply

J a m e s C D a v i d s o n



Revelation - simply

Also by James C Davidson:

This Happy Gift of Tongues the Christian and the Spirit Dimension Hearing God

Biography

a Bairn's War – 1939-45

James C Davidson

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Chapter 1 : "God's Spirit had opened a window"

Glen Doll, Angus-shire – August, 1955. It was a lovely autumn evening, the screes and cliffs of Craig Mellon russet in the last of the day's light, with the Scorrie of Dreish black to my left and before me the White Water, dark and seeming still in the shadows. From the Forestry Commission hostel's window I could see the beginning of Jock's Road leading to the head of the glen, on the way to the upper plateau and lonely Tolmount. Beautiful but remote, the glen with its saucer rim of summits and ridges had not a sign of life as far as the eye could see, not even the soaring shapes of the golden eagles which nested at the western end.

I turned back to my Bible. In the spring of that year I had become a Christian. Billy Graham meetings in the Kelvin Hall, Glasgow, had been relayed to my home town, and in one held in the Congregational Church, I responded when an opportunity was given to commit my life to Jesus Christ.

Following that decision, life took on new meaning for me. I wanted to pray and read my Bible – to tell others about Him, to serve Him. I undertook a reading plan to go through the Bible from cover to cover, starting at Genesis, reading a few chapters each day. In months, or a year or more, I hoped to reach Revelation chapter 22.

But for now, I was in 2nd Chronicles: “Now these are the divisions of the sons of Aaron. The sons of Aaron: Nadab, and Abihu, Eleazar - “ (1)

A list of names of men, dead long, long ago... “But Nadab and Abihu died before their father, and had no children: therefore Eleazar and Ithamar executed the priest's office - ” (2)

Then suddenly, these names became real people for me. As I worshipped God, so had they. A different way, a different age, but the same God. And with this revelation, I felt God's presence in the room. Every other awareness faded – the room, the window, even that magnificent view of the glen, the autumn evening. It all became a shadowy background, for God was here!

As the experience came, it went. I was in the room again, alone. Everything was back as it had been. Except me. God had come so close that I was marked for life. I was bursting to tell others about it.

I was a Forestry Commission labourer at the time, living in the hostel. I went downstairs to the long room which was the kitchen, dining-room and sitting-room combined, where my work-mates were relaxing after a day cutting drains on the mountain slopes. And I told them about my experience upstairs.

Some laughed, but others wanted to hear more. And later that evening, one of them, a teenager, knelt beside me on a bridge over the river and prayed to God, asking forgiveness for his sins and inviting Jesus to be his Lord and Saviour.

What had happened in that upstairs room? Later when I could stand back from it, I realised that God's Spirit had opened a window for me to His reality by making the Bible come alive for me. It is God's Spirit Who makes the Bible live. Even if we have read a passage over and over again and it seems just words. Even when over-familiarity has dulled the significance of the passage – even then, God can fill it with life-changing meaning.

That is how it happened with Bob, a bookmaker. Bob had no interest in religion. His wife and children went to church, but without him. He was more interested in gambling.

Until God intervened through a young friend of the family, a Christian fisher-lad. The young man gave Bob a pamphlet with a message from the Bible, headed: "If the Blood had not been shed." It described what man's predicament would be if Jesus Christ had never died on the cross. It was backed up by quotations from the Bible. But Bob could not understand it – its meaning was beyond him. Yet he kept the pamphlet in a drawer of his desk, looking at it occasionally.

Then the fisher-lad was drowned at sea and his body never found.

One Sunday evening while his wife and children were at church, Bob laid down his racing-guides and form-books and searched out the pamphlet: "If the Blood had not been shed."

It puzzled him. "What's it all about?" he asked himself.

"Then it happened," he told me later, "like a flare in the darkness. I could see, I could understand. It all made sense, and I knew it was for my sins that Jesus died on the cross. He took the blame for my sins." Bob sank to his knees and wept before God and asked to be forgiven.

When his family came home from church, they found him a changed man. Previously, he had no interest in God – now, Jesus Christ was the centre of his thoughts. He had dismissed Christianity as self-delusion: now it had become his way of life.

Bob and I had experienced something similar. Both times, God had lighted up His word to us, had revealed its relevance in our respective situations. With me, it was the Bible – with Bob, verses quoted from the Bible in a Christian tract. Each of us had a personal revelation, as God knew what we needed and what we would accept.

The early Church needed something from God as it faced persecution and imprisonment for its loyalty to Jesus Christ. And God gave it a revelation: what we call the Book of Revelation, the final book in the Bible. And that Book of Revelation has a timeless message for all the Church because it affirms that God is working in all the affairs of men, His hand is upon all history – and the present and the future, with the past, are under His control.

That is why Paul the Apostle could say: “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.” (3)

To a small Church, helpless under the threatened evil of the mighty Roman Empire arrayed against it, the Book of Revelation came as strength and encouragement to remain faithful to God, even in the face of death. The Book of Revelation is still an encouragement to the Church today.

And so it is so for me. As I glimpse the hand of God in the affairs of men and nations, my faith is encouraged and made stronger. Even in a world of poverty and economic recession, of terrorism, of falling moral standards and increased interest in the occult and Satanism, and even, in recent decades, of state-sponsored atheism.

God is on His throne. He controls. His plan is working towards its fulfilment.

This book is not meant to be a commentary: many good ones already exist, and I give below a list of some I used in preparing this work. But it is an attempt to share something of what the Book of Revelation means to me, an everyday Christian – this Revelation, a God-given overview of human history, which when held up against contemporary events, enables me to see God's hand in the

newspaper headlines as they break in the world press.

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(1) and (2) 1 Chronicles 24: 1 and 2 (3) Romans 8: 28

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Chapter 2 : Alpha and Omega

During the 1939-45 War, my parents had a letter framed and hanging on our living-room wall. They cherished it for two reasons: one, because it was a letter thanking them for their contribution to the war effort.

The second reason they valued the letter was because of the signature it bore. The signature had been printed, the letter sent out in its thousands, but nevertheless, the identity of the writer made it valuable to my parents. For the signature was that of King George VI.

Revelation was sent from Jesus Christ by hand of His servant, John. When John saw visions, they were given by Jesus Christ, and it was Jesus Who initiated the words the apostle wrote. Revelation is infinitely more important than the letter the King sent to my parents, for Jesus Christ is not merely a king – He is King of Kings.

We often have a mental image of Jesus as depicted on Sunday School posters, of a kind looking gentleman with dreamy eyes and flowing auburn beard, gathering children around Him. But the Apocalyptic self-portrait presents a different picture altogether. In Revelation chapter 1, Jesus Christ emphasises His authority, His sternness, His holiness, His divinity. He speaks here as God the Son, Second Person in the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In Revelation , when Jesus promises reward or threatens punishment when He says He will come in wrath or in blessing, He speaks not only as Jesus the Man, but also as God the Son. That is what the first chapter of Revelation tells us.

So Revelation was dictated by God! Read it, listen to it, as a direct message from God. No wonder it is the only book in the Bible with such a blessing at the beginning: “Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.” (1)

And to underline the importance of the Book of Revelation, it has a sting in the tail, a warning in the closing verses – again, the only book in the Bible with such a threat: “I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city -” (2)

It begins with a promise: it ends with a threat! What is in between must be important.

So we begin by looking at Jesus' self-portrait in chapter 1. First of all, we must note that parts of Revelation are often linked with or reflect other parts of the Bible. And nowhere is this more true than in how Jesus reveals Himself to John.

The parallel Bible description is found in another apocalyptic book, one in the Old Testament, the Book of Daniel. In Daniel, the description is of a man-like person who comes in a vision to Daniel to tell him: “ - what will happen to your people (the Jews) in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come.” (3)

Compare the two descriptions given below, the first from Revelation, and the second from Daniel, and the similarities are obvious...

Revelation Daniel

"dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest"

"dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold around his waist"

"his eyes were like blazing fire" "his eyes like flaming torches"

"his feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace"

"his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze"

"his voice was like the sound of rushing waters"

(4)

"his voice like the sound of a multitude"

In Revelation 1 verse 14, we have another part of the description of Jesus Christ in glory - "His head and hair were white like wool as white as snow. . ."

Again, this is linked with a description in the Book of Daniel, but this time it is not of the man-like being who was the messenger to the prophet. Instead, it is in a different part of Daniel, a part describing God: " - the Ancient of Days – His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool." (5)

Why should there seem to be a confusion in Jesus' selfportrait in Revelation, which compared with the Book of Daniel, describes both the messenger sent from God, and God Himself ?

The answer is in the opening of John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning."

(6)

The Word is Jesus Christ, God's message to us. The Word is sent to show us divine love in action and to let us know what God is doing to rescue us from the pit our sin has landed us in. The Word – Jesus Christ – is God's offer to us of forgiveness and salvation. But the Word is also God. So God sends the Message – and He is the Messenger. That is why in Revelation chapter 1, borrowing from the imagery of Daniel, Jesus Christ can be identified both with the One Who brings the message, and with God Who sends the message.

Yet Revelation chapter 1 has more to say about Jesus Christ's divinity. In verses 17 and 18, He says: "- I am the First and the Last; I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever!"

In another Old Testament book which is linked with Revelation – the Book of Isaiah – we read: "This is what the LORD says – Israel's King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last: apart from me there is no God -"and again in Isaiah: "I am the first and I am the last." (7)

Almighty God describes Himself with these words: yet Jesus Christ describes Himself with the same words in the Book of Revelation. What Jesus is doing in

chapter 1, is giving us a self-portrait which emphasises His divinity. It is essential that we never down-grade Jesus Christ to a position of lesser importance than being God, because if we do, not only are we in error but we also reduce the value of His sacrifice in dying for our sins.

To help explain it to myself I think of this analogy: if I were to get into a difficulty with a government department and it took the help of a minor civil servant to put things right, then we could assume the difficulty was not too serious. But if it took the personal intervention of Queen Elizabeth herself, and no one else could do it, then I would know my situation was very serious.

My difficulty is my sin. And it takes the Son of God Himself to deal with it. No one less!

Another verse in Revelation chapter 1 also indicates the divinity of Jesus Christ. It is the words which Almighty God says in verse 8: "I am the Alpha and the Omega." That's just like saying: "I am the First and the Last!" because Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet.

Later in Revelation, God repeats these words: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End." (8)

If Jesus were also to call Himself "the Alpha and the Omega", then He would be taking to Himself the same title as Almighty God. He would in effect be saying that He is God the Son. So does He ever call Himself "the Alpha and the Omega"? The answer lies in the last chapter of the Bible: "Behold I am coming soon - I am Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End - I Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches - " (9)

Jesus is "the Alpha and the Omega". There is no doubt when we read Revelation that we are reading a message sent to us by God Himself – God the Son. And we must pay close attention to what God Himself says to us.

Do not abandon your mental image of the Sunday School poster Jesus, kind and gentle, surrounded by children of every nation and colour, because that image of Jesus is true. But there is more to Him. There is the picture Jesus gives of Himself in Revelation.

This Jesus has eyes like blazing fire, feet as of white hot bronze, and a voice like the roar of mighty waters. King Herod and Pontius Pilate would have cringed in

fear of this Jesus, they would have called upon the rocks to fall upon them and hide them from His eyes. The kings and leaders of the earth would quake before Him. Caesar and his mighty legions would cower from the Jesus Christ of the Book of Revelation .

And that is how Jesus revealed Himself to His servant, John, for the encouragement of His Church in their time of tribulation.

A final point to end this chapter : In some parts of their empire, the Romans were persecuting the Christian Church. Soon that persecution would be widespread. An example of this was the banishment of the Apostle John to the Island of Patmos, probably because he refused to burn incense to Caesar or to say: “Caesar is Lord.” At that time of their need and suffering, the Church received Revelation from God, and it was sent via the exiled Apostle John.

The Christians responded to the Revelation, for it affirmed that God is in command of the affairs of the world, no matter how much Satan schemes and manipulates the behaviour of men. So the Church was strengthened. Many Christians resolved to be true to their Lord, even to death. And it was of them that Tertullian later said: “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church - ”

In the western world, we Christians today are not called to suffer like that for our faith in God. But there is still the possibility of having to suffer for upholding Christian principles in a materialistic world. So Revelation is a relevant message for us also. We have to allow God's Spirit to teach us God's message for today from the Book of Revelation.

References

- 1) Revelation 1:3
- 2) Revelation 22:18,19
- 3) Daniel 10:14
- 4) Revelation 1:13-15 and Daniel 10: 5-6
- 5) Daniel 7:9
- 6) John 1: 1
- 7) Isaiah 44:6 and 48:12
- 8) Revelation 21:6
- 9) Revelation 22: 12-16

Chapter 3 : The Seven Churches

In the days of the New Testament Church, letters usually began with the name of the sender, then went on to say who the letter was for. You can see this in the letters in the New Testament. For example: “Paul, an apostle . . . to the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus.” (1)

The Book of Revelation begins with the sender – Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Then it goes on to say who it is for: “To the seven churches in the province of Asia . . . “ (2)

There were more than seven churches in Asia Minor, what is today's Anatolia region of Turkey. So why were only seven named here? The answer may be that the number '7' is important in Revelation for to the people of those days, it represented the number of completeness. It was used 54 times in Revelation, as in: '7 candlesticks', '7 stars', '7 churches', '7 lamps', '7 seals', '7 years', '7 horns', '7 eyes', '7 spirits', '7 plagues', '7 trumpets', '7 bowls', '7 angels', and so on.

So although Revelation is sent to the '7 churches', it is actually sent to the whole and complete Christian Church. This is confirmed by the phrase with which Jesus closes each one of the 7 letters in chapters 2 and 3: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

That broadens the scope of the Book of Revelation; it is for everyone who 'has an ear' And that phrase means: everyone who is spiritually sensitive to the things of God. As the Bible puts it: “ - no-one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us - The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (3)

So the Book of Revelation was sent to the whole church of Jesus Christ. But it also has a message to non-Christians, for the Holy Spirit can speak through it to anyone. When I was a youngster, folks used to speak of 'seeing the light': that was when the Spirit of God lighted up people's minds with God's truth, just like Bob's experience in chapter 1.

So to you, whether you are a Christian or not, God may speak from the pages of the Book of Revelation. If you open yourself to God's truth, don't be surprised when it is revealed to you.

To continue . . . Revelation chapters 2 and 3 contain letters, one each for 7 individual churches: at Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. A Bible map of the area shows that these churches form a rough rectangle . . . from Ephesus northwards to Smyrna, then on to Pergamum, change direction southeastwards to Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, then Laodicea, after which it is a short journey westwards to the coast and Ephesus again. A round trip going onwards from one church to the next without having to retrace one's steps.

In composing the letters, Jesus had a purpose. He wanted to encourage the Christians to be faithful to Him, even if it meant dying for their faith. Not many people could ask that of their fellow-men, but Jesus Christ can, for what He offers is worth more than life itself. It is Eternal Life. Our time in this life is limited, whether it be 7 minutes or 77 years – more or less – it has a limited duration. And Jesus is saying to all of us who have ears to hear - “Consider your time on earth as belonging to Me; live to do my will – and I will give you more than life itself.”

As we read the letters we see that each one begins with a fragment of Jesus' self-description found mainly in Revelation chapter 1. And the specific fragment is chosen because it is relevant to the situation in the church the letter is addressed to.

For example: Ephesus – Jesus threatens that if the Christians there do not improve and start loving each other again, He will remove their candlestick from its place. (The candlestick was a symbol for the church itself. (4)) so in His letter to the church at Ephesus, He described Himself as walking among the candlesticks.

To the church at Pergamum, Jesus described Himself as carrying a sharp two-edged sword. Then when He urged them to repent of tolerating members who were teaching wrong beliefs, He threatened that He would punish disobedience with the sword of His mouth.

But He also promised rewards which linked with His selfdescription.

To Smyrna, He described Himself as the One Who died and came to life again, and later, He promised the Christians of Smyrna that their faithfulness would be rewarded by not being “hurt at all by the second death.”

Here is a list of these points for each church and it shows that Jesus revealed Himself to each of the 7 churches in the way which was best for them.

Church and its situation
Description of Jesus

Promised Reward Threatened Punishment

Ephesus:
intolerant of
error, lost their first love
Holds seven stars; walks among seven Candlesticks Right to eat of the Tree of Life
Candlestick taken from its place

Smyrna:
suffering and poverty
First and Last; died and rose again
Crown of Life not hurt by
second death None

Pergamum:
tolerates
Balaanism and Nicolaitanism Has short twoedged sword Hidden manna: white stone and new name
Jesus will fight with sword
from His
mouth

Thyatira:
tolerates
Jezebel who
leads God's
servants into sexual
immorality and idolatry
Eyes blazing fire feet whitehot brass
Authority over nations;
morning star Jezebel to
suffer - her children killed

Sardis:
reputation for being alive, but is dead
He holds seven spirits and
seven stars
Dressed in
white - name not blotted out Philadelphia: had kept Jesus' word and not denied His Name.
He is holy, true, and holds key of David.
Pillar in Temple None
- no more
going out

Threefold
name

Will come like a thief upon them

Laodicea: lukewarm Amen, faithful and true
witness, ruler of God's
creation
Sit with Christ Spew them out in His throne

From the letters to the 7 Churches, we see that Jesus knows all about us – our strong points, our weaknesses, our virtues, and our faults – and He reveals Himself to us in the way most likely to help us. Why does He do this?

For two reasons: because He is God and is therefore able to do it, and because He loves us and wants to do it for our good. Within each actual letter, He reveals just how much He knows about us by His inferences and allusions – to our history and experiences and the culture and background which have shaped us. He is not insensitive. Everything He does in regard to us is for our good, even when He punishes us. Part of the last letter, the one to Laodicea, says: “Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline.”

Why? So that we should - “be earnest and repent.” (5)

An example of His all-knowingness can be found in His letter to Pergamum: “I know where you live – where Satan has his throne.” (6)

Pergamum was one of the great centres of religious worship in the ancient world. Firstly, it was the centre of Emperor worship for Roman Asia. The first Asian temple for the worship of Caesar was built there. Secondly, it was the centre for the worship of the god of healing and medicine, whose symbol was a serpent – Aesclepius, sometimes known as “Aesclepius, Saviour”. And thirdly, high above the city was an altar to Zeus, an altar which looked very like a seat or throne, and which smoked constantly from the sacrifices offered to Zeus.

It is possible that these three religions, each an enemy of Christianity, and in Emperor worship, a threat to the lives of Christians, are lumped together and symbolized by the throne-like altar that brooded over the city, the city “where Satan has his throne.”

For each of the 7 churches, there are allusions to their background and history which throw light on the aptness of Jesus' message to them. There are some

notes on this at the end of this chapter.

Jesus speaks to us knowing what we are, in the way which will help us to make the right response. And if that means using ideas and allusions individual to us, then He does that – for Jesus starts where we are at, and He takes it from there.

We read in the Bible that He always made the approach which struck the right chord – to the woman at the well who was rejected by her neighbours for her affairs with men, He said: “Go, call your husband!” - to Nicodemus, who tried to hide concern for his own spiritual condition behind a smokescreen of intellectual discussion: “You must be born again” - to Zacchaeus, traitor to his own people who would hardly speak to him, far less visit and eat with him: “Come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” - to Matthew a tax-collector like Zacchaeus, but obviously longing to be out of it and doing something worthwhile: “Follow me!” (7)

The right approach – the effective opening remark – always with our good at heart.

So what is God's message to us, if we “have ears to hear”? Broadly speaking the 7 letters teach us four things: The first lesson is that Jesus is not complacent about our faults. He does not turn a blind eye if we do not love our fellow-men, especially if we don't love Christians – even of other denominations! And we dare not have an easy attitude towards compromise with worldly values, whether in the name of business expediency or social friendliness, or keeping the peace within the church. Having a good reputation with the world or with other Christians does not compensate for dead Christianity. And finally, from the letter to the church at Laodicea, Jesus says He so detests lukewarm Christianity that He will vomit out so-called followers who are wishy-washy and lack fervour.

So the first message from these letters is: Jesus demands genuine discipleship, and nothing less will do.

The second lesson is that Jesus loves us enough to chastise us if we do wrong. Some years ago I read a true-life story in an issue of “The Readers' Digest”, in which a small girl was adopted into a family. One day her new mother found her alone, crying. When asked why she was crying, the little girl replied: “Because you don't love me.”

“But of course, we love you,” her mother assured her “Well, you spank the

others when they do wrong, but you don't spank me.”

Jesus says to us: “Those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline.” (5)

The next lesson we can take from the letters to the 7 churches is that Jesus does everything possible to get His errant followers back to a right relationship with Him revealing Himself in the way most likely to succeed, directing the message which gets the right response. He is not limited in how He does this, using circumstances or people . . .

Some years ago I was working as a Salvation Army officer in a Scottish border town. I had been collecting money doorto-door for an annual appeal. At one small cottage, an elderly lady put her money in the envelope and I thanked her, and as was my custom – regardless of the response I might meet with – I said: “God bless you.”

A few days later, my door-bell rang and there on the doorstep was the same old lady.

“I had to see you,” she explained. “After my husband died a few years ago, I became very bitter against God and I stopped going to church. But after you said: “God bless you”, I went into my house and thought about it. I realized that God had blessed me, so I got down by my fireside and I prayed and asked God to forgive me for being a foolish, ungrateful woman. I've been up to see my minister, and I'm going back to church on Sunday.”

Jesus loves us enough to make the effort to reach our hearts, and He can use a simple remark like: “God bless you.”

The fourth lesson we may take from the letters to the 7 churches is that of all the good things awaiting Christians in eternity, Jesus reminds us of that particular blessing that most appeals to us.

The Christians of Smyrna faced martyrdom and they were promised a crown of life. They would not be hurt by the second death. Philadelphian Christians, whose city was insecure because of frequent earth-tremors and the occasional earthquake, who often had to flee to the nearby countryside, away from the buildings of the city, were promised that they would never have to leave the Temple of God for they would be pillars helping to hold it up.

But the most significant promise was made to Laodicea, the one church Jesus

had nothing good to say about – a promise which embraced those made to the other churches, but went further. To the Laodicean Christians, He promised: “the right to sit with me on my throne -”

That is how much Jesus loved His followers, the Christians. He will not tolerate waywardness, lukewarmness, disobedience, lack of love, or any compromise with sin. But He will always do everything in His power to help us be the best we can be. And if we should forget that, the letters to the 7 churches stand as a continual reminder

Fault-Finder Check List for your Church – with the Remedies

Symptoms and the Fault Remedy

Loving God but not people - at least, claiming to love God! More keen on their interpretation of the truth and criticising faults in others than in loving people.

Must repent and begin loving again. Type of Church

Ephesus

Tolerant of the permissive attitude held and practised by some Christians.

Christians who 'cut corners' - 'turn a blind eye'

- compromise, because it's good for business.

Church appears to be bright - full of 'zing' - but a shallow spirituality. In fact, it is spiritually dead! Repent - your fault is bad - but the loose-living Christians' fault is worse.

Those who are not involved, hold on to what you have. God will deal with the faulty ones.

Wake up - be healed - get alive! Before it is too late!

Sardis

Lukewarm Christianity. No wish to be totally committed to Christ. "Don't go overboard about religion!

Don't be fanatics!"

Repent sincerely or else Jesus Christ will "spew" you out!

Pergamum

Thyatira

Laodicea

Additional information on the 7 Churches which is reflected in Jesus Christ's letters to them:

Ephesus

a. Although Jesus holds or grasps the stars firmly, He does not hold the candlesticks – the churches. He walks among them..

b. In Ephesians 4:15, Paul exhorts the Christians to speak the truth in love; truth without love is not enough.

c. Bishop Ignatius of Antioch in Syria, writing about 105 A.D., while on his way to Rome to be martyred, in his letter to the church at Ephesus, wrote: “ - truth is the guiding principle of your lives, and heresy is so far from gaining a foothold among you that any speaker who goes beyond the simple truth about Jesus Christ is refused a hearing.” (8)

d. The Temple of Artemis, four times larger than the Parthenon in Athens, and one of the ancient world's seven wonders, had in a manner of speaking, been removed from its place. Originally, the temple had stood within the city walls, but in 286 B.C., the city was extended to nearby high ground to save it from the occasional flooding the area suffered from. By this move, the temple was left outside the city – that is, it was removed from its place.

e. The symbol of Artemis, which appeared on the coins of Ephesus (in addition to the Temple of Artemis), was a tree – not the tree of life, but a date palm.
Smyrna

a. Smyrna, now renamed Ismir, is one of Turkey's largest cities, and the location today of a Christian church.

b. One of its bishops was Polycarp, who was martyred for his faith on Saturday, 23rd February, 155 A.D. The Roman proconsul had urged him: “Curse Jesus, and live.” But Polycarp replied: “Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King Who saved me?”

c. Smyrna was built round a bay facing west, and above and behind it, encircling it on the landward sides, were hills. The summits of these hills were crowned with magnificent buildings, and so beautiful was this lofty circlet, that it was called: 'The Crown of Smyrna'.

d. Following its destruction by the Lydians in 600 B.C., Smyrna had been a dead city for four hundred years, then about 200 B.C., Lysimachus had rebuilt it according to a carefully worked plan, so that it was one of the first planned cities in the world.

Pergamum

a. Because Pergamum was a provincial capital city, the Roman proconsul carried the short sword, the symbol of his authority to sentence convicted criminals to be executed.

b. The great altar of Zeus which may symbolize the conjunction of pagan religions in Pergamum as Satan's throne, is now in the Pergamon Museum in

Berlin. (9)

c. Numbers chapter 21-25 shows how the Hebrews were seduced by the influence of Balaam to moral and religious adultery with the Moabites and Midianites. The teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans, if lumped together, would suggest some form of accommodation with the pagan religions of Pergamum.

Thyatira

a. Thyatira had the most Trades Guilds mentioned of any city of Asia Minor. To belong to one meant taking part in heathen religious rites, yet not to belong meant economic suicide.

b. The word for “Trades” is linked with the word for “works”, used many times in this letter.

c. The Trades Guilds religious rites sometimes involved sexual immorality, and always, the eating of food sacrificed to idols, the charge levelled against Jezebel.

Sardis

a. The city had an almost impregnable fortress on the summit of a sheer-sided rock. But twice in its history – 549 B.C and again in 218 B.C - it had been captured by besieging armies because its over-confident guards had slept while on duty.

b. The word for “Wake up!” includes the meaning of “don't be asleep, but be watchful, cautious!” (10)

c. The Christians at Sardis encountered no religious persecution, but they had an easy life; they did not have to struggle to exist. Five roads met at Sardis, and trade poured into the city. Even the River Pactolus which flowed through the market place, brought gold dust. The city became wealthy with little effort.

Philadelphia

- a. Twice in its history, Philadelphia had changed its name (meaning 'brotherly love'), first to Neocaesarea, then again to Flavia, out of gratitude to Rome for assisting it to rebuild after earthquakes had largely destroyed it.
- b. Philadelphia had been founded as a missionary city on the remote edge of Greek civilisation and culture, to be a doorway through which Hellenism could influence and convert the surrounding barbarians.

Laodicea

- a. Near the city were two springs of water, a hot medicinal one at Hierapolis and a cold one at Colossae. As the hot one flowed from its source, it became lukewarm, and with its bitter alum taste, was an effective emetic. (11)
- b. In 61 A.D, the Laodicean authorities refused Roman help to rebuild their city following an earthquake: they were rich enough and needed no help!
- c. Laodicea was renowned for making expensive outer garments from the wool of the glossy black sheep of the region.
- d. There was a medical school at Laodicea, famous for its eye powder and salve which were exported round the Roman world as a cure for eye-trouble.
- e. The word for “earnest” comes from a verb which means heating water so that it boils. (10)

References

- 1) Ephesians 1 : 1
- 2) Revelation 1 : 4
- 3) 1 Corinthians 2: 11,12,14
- 4) Revelation 1: 20
- 5) Revelation 3: 19
- 6) Revelation 2: 13
- 7) John 4:16, John 3: 7, Luke 19: 5, Mathew 9: 9
- 8) Ignatius of Antioch, in *Epistle to the Ephesians*, paragraph 6, in M. Staniforth (1972) *Early Christian Writings* Penguin Classics
- 9) Mounce, R.H (1978) *The Book of Revelation* London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott (page 95)
- Blacklock, EM. (1975) *The Archaeology of the New Testament* Grand Rapids, Zondervan (page 133)
- 10) Thayer, JH (1976) *Greek-English Lexicon* Grand Rapids, Zondervan
- 11) Mounce, R.H., Ibid (pages 125, 126) and Barclay W. (1960) *The Revelation of John*, Vol 1 Edinburgh, St Andrews (page 179)

Chapter 4 : Angels

We don't fully understand God! If we did, He would not be God! And heavenly things are different from things on earth. Heaven is on a different plane, a different kind of reality. We live in a material world, we are subject to time, with its change and decay and death. But Heaven is spiritual and eternal. So when we try to visualise it, we cannot expect the language and experiences of this world and existence to be adequate..

The apostle John faced this dilemma. He had been invited up to heaven (1) and he saw the throne room of God. He saw God. And he did not attempt to describe God except as colours – the colours of diamond and ruby, piercing white and gleaming red, encircled by a rainbow of emerald green.

Around the throne he saw twenty-four elders, crowned and seated on lesser thrones. Lightning and thunder came from the throne. Before the throne seven lamps burned steadily – the seven spirits of God, or as it may also be translated, the seven-fold Spirit of God. That number 7 reminds us of completeness and perfection and describes the Spirit of God who is the perfect giver of light to lighten up the darkness of men's minds.

What looks like a sea of glass or crystal is before the throne – a beautiful, indescribably awe-inspiring sight. And four angelic beings. In sequence, they resemble a lion, an ox, a man, and an angel. And they have six wings each, and they are covered with eyes.

Bible scholars tell us what the twenty-four elders and the sea of glass, and the four angels represent. Various representations are proposed but they often don't agree because no one really knows for sure what they stand for.

It is possible to get so tied up with speculating what these heavenly beings mean that we forget what is actually happening up there in heaven.

The four angelic beings are continually saying day and night:

“Holy, holy, holy
is the Lord God Almighty, Who was, and is, and is to come.”

Then when they thank and glorify God, the twenty-four elders fall down and

worship Him. And they are saying:

“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things
and by your will they were created and have their being.”

Here is a mighty antiphony of praise – from angel beings and from men. For men and angels unite in praising God. Don't let us discount angels, or refuse to believe they exist. The Bible teaches that angels are real and are closely linked with men. Jesus believed in angels. He often spoke of them or experienced them.

After His temptations, angels served Him
He said He would send out angels to reap at the endtime harvest -
And when He comes to pay men according to their deeds, angels will come with Him -
In the Garden of Gethsemane, He refused to be defended, saying He could have more than twelve legions of angels to help Him if He wished. (2)

Many instances prove that Jesus Christ believed in angels as spiritual beings who serve God. And each of His letters to the 7 churches: at Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea – begins with the words: “To the angel of the church. . . “

It's been suggested that the word “angel” here means “bishop” or “leader”, but the only basis for believing that would seem to be an unwillingness to accept the existence of angels as spiritual beings.

A more plausible explanation is that it refers to “messengers” to the churches, who carried the writings from John, because the word for “angel” also means “messengers”. However, in every instance in more than 50 other references to “angels” in the Book of Revelation, the meaning is clearly that of spiritual beings, angels in the accepted use of the world, and never human messengers.

There is a reference in the New Testament to “messengers of the churches” (3) but it used the word for “apostle”, not “angel”. That same reading is also rendered as “representatives of the churches”. (4) It could never be confused with “angels”.

Once you get over the intellectual stumbling-block against believing in spiritual beings, it is easier to believe that Jesus actually meant “angels” when He

addressed them so in the 7 letters. And if Jesus meant “angels” in the sense of spiritual beings, then that helps to explain three other mysterious references to angels in the Bible.

The vast majority of the 260 references to angels in the Bible, and most of them are in the New Testament, are straightforward and refer to the usual use of the word. But there are three instances when what is meant is not straightforward.

The first is from Daniel; the second from the words of Jesus Himself; and the third from Paul the Apostle, in 1 Corinthians. In Daniel chapter 10, Michael, who is a mighty angel or spiritual being, is described as the Prince of Israel. When Daniel prayed to God, an angel being who is the Prince of Persia, tried to hinder those prayers. But Michael, Prince of Israel, helped to answer the prayers. The passage implies that angels represent or mount guard over nations or countries. Some angels serve God; others are His enemies and serve Satan. If an angel can stand over or represent a country, then it should be easy to believe that an angel may stand over or represent a church.

The second mysterious reference to 'angels' is in Matthew 18 verse 10, where Jesus said that the angels of children constantly see the face of His Father in heaven. This indicates that there are angels responsible for children, either individually or collectively. Because this depicts angels as having a guardianship or other responsible role for human beings, it agrees with the view that the phrase -“To the angel of the church -” means an 'angel' and not a human intermediary.

The third reference is in 1 Corinthians 11 verse 10: “For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head.”

The “sign of authority” apparently means a head covering which symbolised that she accepted her husband's authority, and her relationship with him. Paul says she should wear this symbol because of the angels. If each church has an angel responsible for it then this text may mean that a woman should cover her head when she prays or prophesies in church so as not to offend the angel of that church.

The 'throne room scene' of Revelation chapter 4, brings us into the realm of angels, where we are in a mysterious environment. There is much we do not understand, but that does not mean we therefore ignore angels or refuse to

believe in them. They have a special relationship with us – guarding us, responsible for us in some way, and joining with us in praising God.

The throne room scene in heaven sums this up. The four living creatures – perhaps of the highest order of angels – join with men to worship God. We may feel weak and inadequate in praising God, but let us remember that we are part of a mighty spiritual throng – in heaven above and on the earth beneath – and that our personal contribution of praise, far from being feeble and inconsequential – provides our unique tone which creates the perfect harmony of worship.

References

(1) Revelation 4:1

(2) Matthew 4:11; 13:41; 16:27; 26:53 (3) 2 Corinthians 8:23 ; (AV) and (Amplified) (4) 2 Corinthians 8:23 (NIV)

Chapter 5 : The Seven Seals

Part 1 : “The Lamb of God”

In his vision, John saw a rolled up manuscript which was held by One Who sat on the throne in heaven. The manuscript or scroll had writing on it but no one could read it for it was sealed with 7 seals – pieces of wax impressed on it as it had been rolled up.

In order for the scroll to be opened out, the seals had to be broken in sequence, each seal as it was broken allowing a further portion of the scroll to be unrolled.

“Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?” asked an angel in a loud voice. There was no answer, so John wept. It appeared there was no one good enough to open the scroll. But then an elder told John not to weep, for . . . “See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its 7 seals.”

Then John saw Jesus Christ standing in the centre of God's throne. He is the Lamb of God Who has been offered as a sacrifice, and He is seen with seven horns and seven eyes. Symbolically, it means:

a) the perfect Sacrifice, the Lamb Who died taking the blame and punishment for

the sins of the world;

b) with complete power. The horns represent power and strength, and the number 7 signifies completeness;

c) and perfect knowledge, for the seven eyes mean that He sees and knows everything.

The four angelic beings and the twenty-four elders fall down and worship Jesus Christ in song. And in their song, and in the songs of the myriad of angels, and of the uncountable host of created beings in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, is our first clue to the meaning of what the broken seals reveal..

Jesus Christ is worthy to open the seals because He was sacrificed, and the shedding of His blood has purchased from among all mankind, a kingdom and a priesthood to serve God on earth. The hundreds of thousands of angels echo this song: “Worthy is the Lamb Who was slain.” It is Christ's death and rising from the dead and what it achieved that qualifies Him to open the seals. Then all created beings worship – first, their Creator, and secondly - “the Lamb of God Who died to take away the sins of the world.” (1)

Behind these words is a clue to the secret of the 7 seals: Jesus Christ has triumphed, for by His death and resurrection, He “ - has destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” (2) Because of this, He alone is entitled to break the 7 seals and read or reveal the contents of the scroll.

Part 2 : The Four Horsemen

Jesus breaks the first seal and what is hidden is revealed: “ - a white horse! Its rider held a bow and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest.” (3)

The symbol is of a warrior-king setting out to conquer his fellow-men. This lust to conquer, to impose one's will on others, has inflamed men throughout history and resulted in immeasurable suffering and death. It has infected international politics and the nursery playground alike. And whenever one person tries to violate another, whether in wartime combat or in peacetime dispute, the rider on the white horse is riding forth. Death is inseparable from conquest, for it is the ultimate conquest by one man of another.

Then comes the second seal: “ - another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider

was given power to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other. To him was given a large sword.”

This horse is the colour of blood. And its rider is given power to take peace from the earth. . . to incite men to kill each other. Because not only the desire to conquer can drive men on to kill. Fear, self-preservation, greed, lust, suspicion, hatred, jealousy – the list is long – they all spawn violence and death. Whether between countries or neighbours or even within families, the blood-red horse with its armed rider can trample and kill. Where peace is banished, killing is at hand.

The third seal is broken and reveals :

“a black horse. Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand. Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures, saying, 'A quart of wheat for a day's wages, and three quarts of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!’”

Famine! Ruined harvests – the blackness of rotting wheat and blighted potatoes – the blackness of corruption – of claw-like ribs and eyes too huge for sunken faces, and the dreaded lethargy when even hunger shrivels beneath despair. Even today, when modern techniques have increased yields from land and sea far beyond the richest plenty of the past, and there is more than enough for everyone on earth, even today, the rider on the black horse reaps his harvest.

The olive and the vine, although their deep roots are well below the level of drought which wastes the crops, give smaller yields, and the voice counsels - “- do not damage the oil and the wine!” A day's work, when it is found, provides bare subsistence for the worker only, not enough to feed dependants. Hunger is widespread, and death by famine is commonplace.

The fourth seal is broken and a horse of yellowish green – the word for “chlorine” comes from this colour – appears. It is the colour of a poisonous gas used in World War I, and of putrefying flesh.

“It's rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.” The themes of the first three horsemen are intensified in the fourth – but there is added: “ - plague – wild beasts -”

Ezekiel said that Jerusalem would be scourged by “sword and famine and wild beasts and plague -” (4) In the fourth unsealing, “plague” and “wild beasts” are transposed, but the effect is the same. Sword, famine, sickness, wild beasts – then every other cause of death is wrapped up in this fourth rider whose very name is “Death”. And close behind him comes “Hades”, the unseen world or place of the dead.

Kings rode on horseback, and these four riders represent the sovereignty of death – sovereignty, that is, before Jesus Christ's death on the cross. For by His sacrifice and resurrection, He has defeated death and brought eternal life to all who depend on Him for their salvation. It is because Jesus Christ has defeated death, and only He has accomplished this, that only He is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll.

Part 3 : The final three seals

The opening of the fifth seal introduces a new phase in the vision – a new aspect of death. Not that the means of death is new – but its significance for those who are dead “- who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained.”

This is usually taken to mean Christians who have died for their faith. But Old Testament martyrs also died for the word or teachings of God and for being faithful to God, so that this fifth seal could refer to all the servants of God who have been martyred . . . Jew and Christian alike.

They cry out: “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” These words have been criticised as showing an unChristian attitude because they appear to go against that reflected in Jesus' words from the cross : “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (5) and also contrary to Stephen's prayer when he was being stoned to death : “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” (6)

But these martyrs in this fifth seal address God as holy and true, and a holy and true God can not close His eyes to sin, or be put off from doing what is right. The martyrs do not plea for God to avenge them – that is already decided on – but they ask how long it will be for vengeance to take place.

The first four horsemen revealed the means by which men suffer death. Before Jesus' death on Calvary, death in its various forms rode on horseback – but what

Jesus did on the cross and afterwards has unsaddled it.

In the fifth seal, the focus of death is on the triumph of God's servants. These martyrs are given white robes and told to rest until the number of those who die for God is complete . . . until the number is complete!

No one dies for God by chance. Each suffering, each pain, each death – endured by a Christian because he is faithful to God – is part of God's eternal plan. There is a pre-ordained number, and God knows it all, the end from before the beginning. Satan, even in his wildest rage and orgy of killing the servants of God is 'toeing the line' – though he fume against it and work the destruction of everything good – even he ends up conforming with the will of God. Just as he plotted and connived at the death of Jesus Christ, then must have realised too late that that death was the one sacrifice which truly achieves God's purpose and brings forgiveness and eternal life to men, while spelling the defeat of everything evil.

So Satan stirs up men to persecute and kill the followers of God and of Jesus Christ, perhaps unable to realise that this very persecution and killing is permitted by God to achieve greater good for His followers. Or it could be that Satan knows what he is doing, but cannot halt the terrible consequences of his own nature. Like a drug addict who knows he is destroying himself, but cannot stop taking the drug, so Satan may be addicted to evil.

“ - wait a little longer, until the number – was completed ”
Satan toils to fulfil that quota, a rebellious agent of God's plan. From this viewpoint, death is no conqueror....

Then there is the sixth seal. When it is opened, there is a great earthquake, the sun becomes black, the moon as red as blood, and the stars fall to earth. The sky rolls up like a scroll and every mountain and island is moved from its place. This is the Day of the Lord, when vengeance is wreaked, godlessness punished, and cosmic forces unleashed to upset the balance of nature. The leaders of nations and their peoples are terrified and try to hide from God and the anger of Jesus Christ.

In Isaiah 34 verses 1 to 8, not only are the enemies of God punished, but the earth and the heavens are also involved. The heavens will be rolled up like a scroll, and on earth, the mountains and the islands will be moved around: the

whole universe will be touched and reshaped by God. The sixth seal reveals something worse than death for the enemies of God – for they will see the face of God and experience the anger of Jesus Christ.

Before we look at the final seal and what its opening reveals, let us see again what the first six seals have unfolded:

the first four showed death as a universal experience, suffered even by those who inflict it on others. Death – the common experience – from the beginning of mankind;

the fifth seal revealed the secure position of those who died because they were faithful to God. Their death, their martyrdom, sprang from that relationship. It also asked the question: 'How long will it be until the Day of God's Wrath?'

the sixth seal does not answer the 'when' of that question, but it does partly describe the 'how' of it: God's wrath coming upon all the enemies of God. No one escapes the Judgement, not even the mighty kings and rulers of the earth.

And then comes the seventh seal, from chapter 8 verse 1: "When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour."

After all the death and the persecution and the martyrdom of the servants of God, after the tumult of cosmic forces unleashed, after the Day of God's Wrath on the enemies of God – there is silence. Nothing stirs.

There is no need for frenzied activity or questioning by men. Instead there is a resting, a security in the peace which stems from knowing that God is in control, and everything is in His hand. In the silence there is also rest from knowing that death is past. And in the silence, there is worship, the adoration of hearts rather than the praise of lips.

In that silence, there is acceptance that God's judgement is just, and that right has been done. There is the relief which follows when guilt is brought to light and punished.

So the broken seals allow the scroll to be opened and read, to reveal the whole history of man's suffering and death, from the beginning of mankind, until the end of time and the end of death, and point to the outcomes of both the friends of God, and of His enemies. And at the end is the silence of God's peace.

References

(1) John 1:29

(2) 2Timothy 1:10 (3) Revelation 6:2 (4) Ezekiel 14: 21 (5) Luke 23: 34 (6) Acts 7:60

Chapter 6 : Israel in Revelation

I hope I may digress for a chapter, because many Christians I've met assume that Christians alone have a part in God's plan, and ignore the Jews except as a people of God who had their chance and lost it. If you also believe that then much of the Book of Revelation will not make sense to you, and you may not even see the hand of God in contemporary international events on behalf of the Jewish nation.

What I have to say here is that God still has a plan for the Jews and it is in process of being fulfilled.

Paul wrote to the Romans: "I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brethren, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.'

As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable" (1)

If we see the Book of Revelation as including information on God's workings towards His people, Jew as well as Christian, then we'll understand it better. For although the Jews rejected their Messiah when they rejected Jesus Christ, yet they have not lost the special place accorded them from the days of Abraham. God's plan for them is being worked out and one day will be completely fulfilled. God may accomplish His will even from the actions of men inspired by anger and hatred directed against His people.

The number one communist country in the world was the U.S.S.R. It was founded on atheism, which motivated it to fight God – sometimes openly, sometimes secretly – by fighting against the servants of God. But even the

powerful nations of the world cannot frustrate the will of God. As one translation of Psalm 76:10 says in addressing God: “Surely the wrath of men brings you praise . . .”

And even the anti-God activities of the Soviet Union was used to render up their tribute in the out-working of God's plan for mankind. Former President Nasser of Egypt revealed that in early May, 1967, the USSR gave false information to Syria, supposedly obtained by a Soviet spysatellite. This said that Israeli forces were gathering near the border with Syria, and the implication was clear: Israel was preparing to invade Syria.

Jordan, Egypt and Syria went on war-alert and began to prepare for war against Israel. United Nations officials tried to defuse the crisis by contradicting the Russian report, but it was too late. Even Russia, in a change of tactics, tried to withdraw their information. But war between Israel and her three Arab neighbours became inevitable.

In any such war , Israel would face two formidable handicaps: First, its armed forces were outnumbered by those of the nations arrayed against it, and Second, Israel did not have the depth of territory on which a modern land battle could be sustained. There was not enough space to manoeuvre in, nowhere to retreat to, nowhere to re-group. Shells from the front-line could reach the centres of Israel's civilian population. The Mediterranean was at their backs. So armed engagement with an enemy had to be fought outside Israel's borders, if possible.

Israel solved these problems by a bold stroke. They decided to make the first move, a surprise attack, while their enemies were still preparing to invade Israel.

At 7.10a.m on 5th June, 1967, Brigadier Hod ordered Israeli Air Force planes into the air and less than fifty minutes later, flying in low from the north to avoid detection by Egyptian radar, they hit the major Egyptian air bases near Cairo, by the Suez Canal, and in the Sinai Desert. At the end of that first day of what became known as the Six-Days War, Israel had lost 19 planes, but in reply they had destroyed 286 Egyptian planes, 52 Syrian, 27 Jordanian and 9 Iraqi. The success of this air campaign assured Israel of victory.

But the most important single event of the war, and one whose significance spans almost two thousand years, and some would say, even back to the captivity of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC, did not involve the Israeli Air

Force.

On the Mediterranean coast of Negev-Sinai is the town of El-Arish, held at that time by Egyptian soldiers. As Israeli troops drove southwards, they encountered stiff resistance from the Egyptian garrison of the town. To reinforce their ground troops Israeli High Command ordered its 55th Paratroop Brigade to prepare for an air-drop into the town. But before the paratroops emplaned, around midnight on the 5th June, Colonel Shmuel Gonen's 7th Armoured Brigade captured El-Arish.

The paratroops were withdrawn and sent instead to help in the battle for Jerusalem which was held by elements of the Jordanian Army. And it was there, just before 10am on the 7th June, that an armoured personnel vehicle carrying Colonel Gur, leading his 55th Paratroop Brigade, crashed through the Lion's Gate into the Old City of Jerusalem. They met only scattered resistance, because the Jordanian troops had withdrawn from the city during the night. The Temple Mount and the Mosque of Omar were captured, and soon afterwards, the flag of Israel, a replica of a prayer shawl with the white Star of David on a blue background, was flying over the Western Wall.

For the first time in many centuries, Jerusalem was under the control of the Jews. It was the first stage towards the end of the Times of the Gentiles and the domination of Jerusalem by non-Jewish peoples, and Colonel Gur's paratroops had achieved it. The Soviet Union, with its false intelligence to Syria, had unwittingly set in motion the process of fulfilling Jesus Christ's prophecy. (2)

In 135 AD, following an unsuccessful uprising against the Romans, most of the Jews were driven out of Palestine, and only small isolated communities remained in Galilee in the north. But by the mid-19th century thousands of Jews had resettled in Palestine, and in 1914, the Jewish population was some 85,000.

In 1917, in what some claim was a move to win Jewish support in the war against the Kaiser, Britain issued the Balfour Declaration which affirmed Britain's support for the creation of a Jewish national homeland in Palestine, without violating the rights of the non-Jews who already lived there. Then on 29th November, 1947, Britain, because it held the Mandate over Palestine, abstained from voting when the United Nations decided in favour of setting up the independent State of Israel, with Palestine divided into a Jewish and an Arab state. Jerusalem was to be deep in Arab territory, and under international control.

At 4pm on 14th May, 1948, the State of Israel was born, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 66:8:

“Can a country be born in a day or a nation be brought forth in a moment? Yet no sooner is Zion in labour than she gives birth to her children.”

That a nation could be born in a moment had seemed impossible at one time, yet that is how Israel came into being.

On May 15th, 1948, when Israel was only hours old, troops from Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, attacked with the intention of destroying the new-born nation. The Jews had to win, or suffer a new holocaust. They did win, against all odds. The Arab nations were thrown in confusion from Israel. And Israel gained a larger slice of land, including the western modern part of Jerusalem. But the Eastern part with all the holy sites remained under Arab control.

No peace treaty was signed after the conflict of 1948, for the Arab nations refused to recognise the existence of the State of Israel, and from that day onwards, Israel has faced hostility from one or other of its Arab neighbours, hostility usually smouldering, but which sometimes bursts into flaming war. Of recent days it is mostly from Hamas from within the West Bank.

Still the Jews return to Israel from their scattering among the countries of the world. Still the prophecy that they would return to their own land is being fulfilled.

“This is what the Sovereign LORD says: 'I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. I will make them one nation in the land.'”(3)

Bible prophecies continue to be fulfilled in the Israel of today. We read in the Prophecy of Isaiah, that - “The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom.”
(4)

Already, the desert places of Israel are being irrigated, and burgeoning with crops and flowers – the parched land is rejoicing, the wilderness blossoming like the crocus.

Since I know little about growing flowers, I decided to read up on the crocus, to learn if I could, why God should have used it to illustrate the blossoming of the wilderness. It gladdened my heart when I read in a book on gardening that the crocus is a flower which flourishes in rich well-drained soil. And so the wilderness of Israel is being transformed today.

Today, in Scotland, I was eating grapes grown on the slopes of Mount Carmel, and when I remember the oranges and grapefruit stamped 'Jaffa' which we used to buy in Hong Kong, I know that another Biblical prophecy that probably seemed an impossible dream when it was first uttered some 2,500 years ago is also now coming true: "In days to come Jacob will take root, Israel will bud and blossom and fill all the world with fruit." (5)

So as we read the Book of Revelation, we must not forget that Israel also has a place in it, and as we observe today's events on the international stage, especially as they refer to the State of Israel, we may be more aware of how God is at work in present times.

References

- (1) Romans 11:25-29 (2) Luke 21:24
- (3) Ezekiel 37:21,22 (4) Isaiah 35:1,2
- (5) Isaiah 27:6

In addition, the following books, along with various military journals, provided useful information.

Herzog, C. (1975) *"The War of Atonement"* London, Futura Rothenberg, G.E. (1979) *"The Anatomy of the Israeli Army"* London: Batsford

Another useful book, one which I discovered some time after this chapter was written is *"The Complete Idiot's Guide to Middle East Conflict"* by Professor Mitchell G. Bard (2003) Alpha Books

Chapter 7 : The Trumpets and the Bowls

"And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets." (1)

Now we are going to look at these 7 trumpets, and because they have much in common with them, we will also look at "the seven bowls of God's wrath." (2)

We should begin by asking these questions:

When will the events happen which are symbolised by these Trumpets and

Bowls?

Who will they happen to?

And why?

And finally, what are these Trumpets and Bowls, or the events they introduce?

The first question is not too difficult to answer because the Bible tells us, at least by inference. “The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshipped his image.” (3)

The Beast, whom we will consider in a later chapter – Satan's representative on earth – has not yet appeared on earth, but when he does, and when people worship him and acknowledge his authority – then it will be time for the 7 Bowls to be poured out.

The Trumpets are also for the end days. In fact, when the seventh trumpet is sounded, loud voices in Heaven say:

“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever.”

And other voices say:

“The time has come for judging the dead -” (4)

The next question – 'Who will they happen to?' is also fairly straightforward to answer. It has been partly answered already - “- the people who had the mark of the beast and worshipped his image.”(3)

The 7 Trumpets introduce suffering upon “the inhabitants of the earth” (5), but this is made more specific as we see in the sounding of the fifth trumpet

“They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads.” (6)

A seal was usually fixed to something to indicate ownership by the person whose name or sign was on the seal. People with the seal of God on them belong to God; that is, they have accepted Him as their God, and yielded themselves to be His servants.

This leads on to the next question: What is the purpose behind the Trumpets and

Bowls? We have one definite lead to an answer, and that is in the accounts of both the Trumpets and the Bowls (7) - of the sixth trumpet - "The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent - Nor did they repent of their murders -"

And of the fourth and fifth bowls "- they cursed the name of God – but they refused to repent and glorify Him - Men gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven – but they refused to repent of what they had done."

We may assume that at least part of the purpose of these 7 Trumpets and 7 Bowls was to get men to repent – in fact, almost the last attempt by God to win men to Himself – but it was rejected.

Now we turn to the final question. "What are Trumpets and Bowls, or the events they introduce?"

Some years ago I was the Salvation Army captain in a small corps (or church) where I had an unhappy relationship with one of the men. Our personalities rubbed each other up the wrong way, and for most of my time there, he did not come to the meetings. But something happened, I forget what, and he had a spiritual revival – he became so keen about loving and serving God that he was able to tolerate me.

We met each other in the street one morning and he greeted me with a smile. I was overjoyed. We talked together about what had happened, he wanted to tell me all about it, and then I'm afraid I made a mistake. I said something like: "Now we can work together and there's so much to do. What about..?"

I forget what I said next, but I remember a coolness descended, then Jack – that was not his name – strode off looking offended. I learned later that he had told someone, "I was telling the Captain about my spiritual experience and all he could speak about was what I could do for him -"

I thought I was speaking about one thing, and he heard something different.

The 7 Trumpets and the 7 Bowls may be two ways of looking at the same events: the Trumpets from God's viewpoint, the Bowls from men's. The difference between my experience with Jack, and that of the Trumpets and Bowls, is that Jack and I could be wrong in our perception, but God never makes mistakes: the distortion is in men's perception and understanding.

We are going to compare the Trumpets and Bowls, but we have to remember that behind it all, God wants men to repent of their sins and turn to Him. God never gives up on us, not until it is too late and the time for saying: 'Sorry!' is past.

7 Trumpets 7 Bowls

Hail, fire and blood poured out upon earth
Bowl poured out on land, and people get painful sores.

Blazing mass falls into sea; 1/3rd turned to blood, and 1/3rd of sea creatures die, and 1/3rd of ships destroyed.
Sea turned to blood and all sea creatures die.

Rivers and springs become bitter, causing many deaths.
Rivers and springs become blood.

Sun, moon and stars are affected, losing light.
Sun's heat intensified, burning people.

An army of locust-like creatures from Abyss torture mankind. 200 million cavalry from area of River Euphrates kill 1/3rd of mankind.
River Euphrates dried up so that kings from East can come, and they gather for battle at Armageddon.

Darkness in kingdom of Beast, and men in agony.

Kingdom of God set up, and time of judgement announced.
Great earthquake; the great city is divided into three; Babylon the Great suffers God's anger; islands and mountains move; and a plague of monstrous hail.

At the seventh trumpet, the twenty-four elders say: "The time has come for judging the dead -" (8) By that time, it is too late to repent. But between the Battle of Armageddon of the sixth bowl and the time of judgement, at least a thousand years have to elapse.(9) That is a long time for us, but for God Who is eternal : "...a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day." (10) That is beyond our comprehension. We need to remember that. And if we think we can put God and all His works into neat compartments devised by our puny minds, we are light-years from the truth. But if I have suggested a way of reading about these Trumpets and Bowls which will encourage the reader to think your own thoughts about them, and perhaps intuitively glimpse the truth for you, then this will have been worthwhile.

In the meantime, may I offer in the next chapter an interpretation of these visions of Trumpets and Bowls. And I shall begin with the Mariner 9 space-probe to Mars in 1971, and in particular the vital information it beamed back to earth when its mission seemed bound to fail. . .

References

- (1) Revelation 8:2
- (2) Revelation 8:6 to 9:21 and 11:15-19 and 16:1-21 (3) Revelation 16:2
- (4) Revelation 11:15,18
- (5) Revelation 8:13
- (6) Revelation 9:4
- (7) Revelation 9: 20,21; 16: 9-11
- (8) Revelation 11: 18
- (9) Revelation 20: 7-12
- (10) 2 Peter 3:8

Chapter 8 : Nuclear Winter

In 1971, the American Mariner 9 project was the first space probe to another planet. While still on its way there, it seemed certain to fail for two reasons: Firstly, engineers expected the space capsule to have a useful life of only three months while it circled Mars, and secondly, a global dust storm had shrouded the whole Martian surface, and from past observations, it was expected the storm would outlast the active life of the space-craft.

As it so happened, although the dust-storm did last for three months after the Mariner 9 arrived at Mars, the engineers' estimate proved pessimistic, and it managed to beam back information to earth for about a year. But it was during the three months when the surface of the planet was hidden under the cloud of dust that an important clue to one interpretation of the trumpets and bowls of God's wrath came to light.

Scientist and astronomer, Carl Sagan, tells of how an oncraft measuring device compared temperatures of the surface of Mars with the atmosphere above it. The surface was cooler than expected, the atmosphere was warmer. But as the dust settled, the surface warmed up again and the atmosphere cooled down.

What was happening? As Carl Sagan says, the causes were not difficult to figure out: the dust in the atmosphere was absorbing the sun's heat, preventing it from reaching the planet's surface, but when the dust settled, then the sun's heat reached the planet and it warmed up again. This was the first indication that since the late 1950's, the USA and the USSR had unknowingly in their nuclear arsenals, sufficient megatonnage to effectively extinguish life on earth, and not necessarily by nuclear heat or radiation.

Even more significant, if either the USA or the USSR had successfully carried out a surprise nuclear strike against the other, destroying all the military and strategic sites targeted so that the victim nation could not retaliate, the aggressor nation would have effectively committed suicide.

But before all this horror could be fully comprehended, one more chance occurrence had to happen. The Swedish scientific magazine "Ambio" invited Dutch scientist, Paul Crutzen, and his American colleague, John Birks, to submit an article for publication in their November, 1982 issue. The subject of the article was to be the effect of a nuclear war on the atmosphere of the earth.

It was anticipated that the article would deal with the increase in dangerous ultra-violet radiation reaching the earth, but Crutzen and Birks felt that the amount of smoke in the atmosphere would influence the passage of the ultra-violet rays, so they decided to postulate the amount of smoke which could be expected following a nuclear war. The ultra-violet question became less important when they discovered what this new line of inquiry was unfolding. To their astonishment, they discovered that nuclear fireballs could ignite sufficient of the earth's combustible materials to create smoke which could blot out nearly all the sunlight over half the earth for weeks on end. (1)

Later research showed that if only 75% of the USA's and the USSR's nuclear warheads were exploded, there would have been enough smoke and dust in the stratosphere to bring temperatures on earth down to those of Mars, about -47C or -53F for most of a year. In addition, smoke and dust would soon cover the southern hemisphere even if no nuclear devices were exploded south of the Equator, in much the same way as dust storms on Mars soon shrouded that whole planet. To add to the suffering caused by low temperatures, there would be little daylight, and at times, even darkness at mid-day. Fresh water streams, rivers, reservoirs would freeze to a depth of between 3 to 6 feet. There would be no crops; famine would be world-wide. Many species of animal and plant life would become extinct, except for some insects and creatures such as rats which are likely to increase in numbers.(2)

After the pall of smoke and dust had cleared, high concentrations of ethane, methane and other gases, would cause a greenhouse effect, allowing the sun's heat into the earth's atmosphere, but reducing the reflection of heat from the earth. The result would be that temperatures would rise an average of 4 degrees C. all over the earth. This would lead to serious long-term changes in climate,

disruption of whatever agriculture existed, and the rendering of some parts of the earth well-nigh uninhabitable.

Place these scientific theories alongside the Trumpets and Bowls of the Book of Revelation and we have a hypothetical explanation for some of them.

Trumpets Bowls Nuclear War aftermath

Hail, fire and blood poured on earth - not on men.

Poured upon land, people get painful sores.

Fall-out and radiation burns - large-scale fires.

Blazing mass into sea a third of creatures die.

Sea to blood and all sea creatures die. Initial radioactive fallout into sea. Ultraviolet beta radiation kills of phytoplankton and first link of aquatic food chain.

Rivers and springs become bitter "Wormwood" - many die.

Rivers and springs become blood.

See note on "Chernobyl". Thawing out of countless corpses in once-frozen waters.

Sun, moon and stars lose their light.

Darkness in kingdom of Beast. The darkness at midday of the nuclear winter.

An army of locust-like creatures from the Abyss.

Cockroaches, similar insects, and rats, likely to increase in numbers after a nuclear war.

To the first readers of the Book of Revelation, and surely for many in the intervening centuries, the idea of an army of 200 million cavalry – as foretold in the sixth trumpet – would have seemed impossible. But recent estimates of the strength of China's People's Liberation Army puts it into the region of 200 million. That figure seems much more credible today.

The seventh bowl tells of an earthquake: “No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake.” (3)

There is a very significant geological feature in the Middle East. It is a rift valley. . . A rift valley is a narrow valley caused by land sinking between two parallel faults or cracks in the earth's surface. The longest rift valley in the world is the Great Rift Valley which stretches from Syria in the north, down the length of the River Jordan, taking in the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea which is the lowest place on earth, the Gulf of Aqaba, the Red Sea, and down through East Africa to Mozambique. Earthquakes often occur along faults in the crust of the earth, and many have been recorded along the African part of the Great Rift

Valley, and up into the Red Sea.

The Jordan Valley is an area of seismic activity, and an average of four major earthquakes are recorded every century.(4) The Bible refers to the earthquake in the days of King Uzziah of Judah, and God may have used some form of earth eruption to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, with burning debris which had been thrown upward falling upon the cities from the sky.(5)

The Great Rift Valley has the potential for a superearthquake. But could it happen? To find a possible answer, we turn to the subject of man-made earthquakes, and in particular to the Rocky Mountain Arsenal district of Colorado, USA. In 1962, US military personnel pumped large quantities of waste fluids from the Arsenal into a deep well in the area. Soon afterwards, earthquakes began happening there, although previously that part of America had been considered seismically quiet. Many of the earthquakes happened within 10 kilometres of the dumping site, and some of them registered more than 5 on the Richter Scale.

Earthquake scientists now believe that the pumping of liquid into the earth released giant forces underground, causing the earthquakes. Scientists also suspect that pumping large quantities of liquid out of the earth may have a similar effect, thus causing earthquakes, especially along weak parts of the earth's crust. Weak parts, such as the Great Rift Valley...

The Great Rift Valley runs parallel to the western and part of the northern boundaries of Saudi Arabia, a country which is said to have the largest reserves of oil in the world. In fact, Saudi Arabia is said to float on a sea of oil. And that oil is being pumped out of the earth, hourly, day after day, week after week, for years on end. If the scientific suggestion is true, then eventually under Saudi Arabia, there will be an immense pressure which must be released. Next to it would be the longest crack in the earth's surface, the Great Rift Valley

In addition, research in America into seismic activity following nuclear testing has shown that a large enough underground explosion can cause earthquakes along fractures in the crust of the earth. It is scientifically feasible that the combined effects of decades of pumping oil from underneath Saudi Arabia, and the explosion of nuclear devices in the vicinity of the Great Rift Valley, could result in a huge earthquake. Such an earthquake could excite volcanic activity, as happened when the Great Chilean earthquake of 1960 caused the long-dormant

volcano, Ruyehue, to erupt. A large enough volcano could throw up rocks and ash, sufficiently destructive to be described as a plague of hail.

“Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found.”(6)

In the 1811 New Madrid earthquakes, parts of the Mississippi river bottom sank, other parts were pushed upwards, and several islands vanished completely. Regional warping, elevation and depression of terrain, and huge landslides could greatly alter the shape of mountains -

“- and the mountains could not be found.”(6)

There are now on earth the required conditions for some at least of the 7 Trumpets to blow and the 7 Bowls to be poured out.

But God can do it all without man's help or involvement. It is just that He has used men in the past to further His will, even men who were not intentionally serving Him - as He used Cyrus to bring the Jews home from exile in Babylon and Judas Iscariot and the Roman authorities who did their part in the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ on the cross where He was crucified - and the Roman governors Felix and Festus who sent Paul to Rome.

So God may also use men to fulfil the visions of the 7 Trumpets and the 7 Bowls. But however it is accomplished, God's will shall be done.

Note on Chernobyl

The Daily Telegraph of Monday, 28th August, 1986, had a front-page story headlined:

“Chernobyl turns Russians to the Bible”

It quotes a New York Times report from Moscow, that many Russians were poring over Bibles and Ukrainian dictionaries in an effort to determine whether the Chernobyl nuclear disaster was linked with the third trumpet of Revelation 8:11, for the Ukrainian word “Chernobyl” means “Wormwood”.

If the Chernobyl radiation were to pollute underground waters and springs which are said to lie deep beneath the plant, then it could result in making many rivers and streams “bitter” and causing the deaths of many people. It is, however, not likely that this disaster is in fulfilment of the third trumpet. A more likely explanation is that the name “Chernobyl” may come to mean in future the radio-

active poisoning of drinking water by nuclear fission, by accident or otherwise.

References

(1) P.J.Crutzen and J.W.Birks, *“The atmosphere after a nuclear war: twilight at noon”* *Ambio* 11, pp 114-125 (1982) referred to in Owen Greene, et al (1985) *“Nuclear Winter”* Cambridge: Polity

(2) S.Bergstrom, *“Effects of Nuclear War on Health and Health Services”* (Rome: World Health Organisation, 1983) Publication NA36.12, referred to in: Paul R.Ehrlich, et al (1985) *“The Nuclear Winter”* London, Sidgwick and Jackson

(3) Revelation 16: 18

(4) Kathleen Kenyon (1971) *“Archaeology in the HolyLand”* London,

Ernest Benn (page 105)

(5) Amos 1:1

(6) Revelation 16: 20

In addition to books listed above, other very useful books are: T.Cook and I.Stacey (1970) *“Global Geophysics”* London: EUP; and, *“The Medical Effects of Nuclear War”* (1983) The Report of the British Medical Association's Board of Science and Education: Chichester. Wiley

Chapter 9 : Sweet and Bitter

The most tiring work I ever did was ministering as a Salvation Army officer. Tree-felling among the oak forests of Perthshire or cementing a tunnel through a mountain to a power-station in Wester Ross, labouring in factory or fish processing plant or teaching in school or college – nothing I have ever done drained me as much as preaching and counselling, year after year, to my fellow-men and women.

God renews our strength. He encourages, gives new vision – lifts us up when we are down. But you do get worn out. Part of the cost of doing God's work. Then when you see contemporaries with more down-to-earth jobs, living their settled lives, putting down roots where they can expect to see their children marry, settle and set up home, and where their grandchildren will grow up – then you have to fight the envy that stirs in your heart.

And at these times, the message from God, sweet in your mouth because you know it is from God, and it is always a privilege to be called to do God's work, may become sour in your stomach. I know an evangelist who tells of an incident in his early days in the ministry. He was working as a temporary assistant at a mission station in Africa. One day, he and the leader of the mission were visited

by two policemen, one uniformed, one a plain-clothes detective.

Since he was the assistant and new to Africa, the young missionary remained quiet while the policemen quizzed his colleague about what they were doing in the area. Then the young man felt God prompting him to speak. He was glad yet afraid, for he had to speak to the detective, a message from God.

“Excuse, me,” he interrupted, “but God wants me to speak to you, a message He has given me..”

The detective and his companion were surprised but intrigued.

“God has told me of a problem you have and He wants to deal with it.”

There was a frozen silence.

The young missionary continued - “It is your secret which no one knows about – but you have a drink problem.”

The detective's eyes filled with tears and his head drooped. “Yes,” he confessed, “that is true.”

Before they left the mission station, the two policemen had knelt on the office floor and asked Jesus Christ to be their Lord and Saviour, and asked for God's forgiveness. It was not an easy message for the missionary to give and it could have had serious consequences for him and his companion; it had its bitterness. But it also had its sweetness, because it was from God.

Whatever else Revelation chapter 10 means – it reveals both the privilege and the price of speaking for God. John heard the message of the 7 thunders, and when he was about to write down the words, he was stopped:

“Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down.” (1)

Sometimes the message the servant gets from God is for the servant's ears alone. He is not to share it. The sweetness, and the bitterness, are stored within his own heart. Then God gives a message and tells him to “prophecy again about many people, nations, languages and kings”. (2)

The messenger must be sensitive to God's voice, so that he hears the instructions before he speaks the message. There is a time to be quiet, and there is a time to speak; the time to keep the message to oneself, and the time to share it with others. And neither the sweetness nor the bitterness shall decide what one does, but only what God has commanded. There is no substitute for the listening relationship with God.

Paul the apostle and his companions had a message to preach, but they were: "kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia -" and when they wanted to go and tell the people of Bithynia about Jesus Christ - "the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to -" (3)

Paul and his companions had a close listening relationship with God and a sensitive response to His will. And John, the writer of the Book of Revelation had it. Twenty-first century Christians must have it too, if we are to serve God as He wants us to. To speak, or to remain silent, as He wishes. Even if it costs us. Even if the message, sweet in our mouths, is bitter in our stomachs.

References

(1) Revelation 10: 4 (2) Revelation 10: 11 (3) Acts 16: 6,7

Chapter 10 : Two Witnesses

While Roy was in the Royal Air Force, he had two experiences that made him think about God. The first was when as a member of an R.A.F. Mountain Rescue team in Scotland he was traversing a mountain ridge in snowy conditions.

“The snow gave under me and I slid down a gentle slope. It was pitch dark and I couldn't see a thing. I tried to get my axe into the ice to stop me but I was on my back. The slope became steeper and I was going really fast and helpless to do anything. Then I hit a knob of ice or rock and was thrown into the air. I fell on my stomach and automatically dug my ice-axe in. I came to a sudden stop, with the lower half of my body hanging over a precipice into space.”

Roy, who had little time for religion, began to think about it then! The second experience was over the Bay of Biscay in dense cloud and he was navigator in an RAF Coastal Command Shackleton.

“Without warning, all my navigation instruments went dead. We were flying blind and the skipper asked me for a course. If I made a small error, we would end up in the sea. I don't know how we did it, but we got back to base. By this time, I was ready to believe in God.”

These experiences shook him out of his apathetic atheism. But it took a servant of God speaking about Jesus Christ's sacrifice for the sins of mankind, to help

Roy become a Christian. And that happened in a Billy Graham meeting in the Kelvin Hall, Glasgow, in 1955.

Experiences like Roy had can shake us up and make us think about God and what we owe Him. But we need someone to tell us what God has done for us and what we have to do about it.

“ - how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” (1)

We need to get the message, whether we hear it or read it or however . . And after the Trumpets and the Bowls which are to help mankind to repent, we still need to know how to do it. John was told to speak God's message to “peoples, nations, languages and kings.” Then as a further sign of the nearness of Jesus Christ's coming to set up His kingdom on earth, the apostle was given a rod and commanded to measure God's temple and altar.

In the Book of Ezekiel, the temple of Jerusalem was measured just before the glory of God came and filled it.(2) In the Book of Revelation, this measuring of the temple comes between the blowing of the 6th and 7th Trumpets. But before the 7th Trumpet, something else happens.

We read that the Gentiles will trample on the Holy City for three and a half years. During most of this time – for 180 weeks, or 35 days less than three and a half years – two men will preach and prophesy for God to all the world. They have the power of the Holy Spirit both in their words and their actions. In fact, they replicate the miracles done by Elijah and Moses – causing a drought as Elijah did in the days of King Ahab, and plagues upon the land as Moses did in Egypt.(3)

When they have completed preaching God's message, the Beast kills them. Their corpses lie in the open in the city “called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified,” (4) and for three and a half days they are denied burial. Men are glad to see them dead; there will be a carnival atmosphere. Then God arouses the corpses, they come alive again, and go up to heaven just as Jesus did, in view of His disciples. (5)

That same hour, an earthquake destroys part of the city and thousands of people are killed in it. Then the survivors glorify God. At the very last gasp as it were –

with the message of the Two Witnesses fresh in their memories, the great earthquake tips the balance for many people. Given a last opportunity before the 7th Trumpet, the survivors glorify God.

This has to tell us something about how God deals with men. That long period of delay between the 6th and the 7th Trumpets (6), is all about God sending His servants to persuade mankind to repent. God gives men chance after chance to repent, and these final messengers from God are further proof of God's love, that He is not willing that anyone should die without eternal life and without His forgiveness.(7)

Before we leave this vision there are two questions we could ask: "Why are there two witnesses?" and "Who are they?"

The first is not too difficult to answer. In the Book of Deuteronomy, we can read: "One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offence he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses -" (8)

And from the Gospel of Matthew: "- every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." (9)

On the Mount of Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appeared talking to Jesus Christ while God the Father said: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" (10)

There are two witnesses in this final appeal by God to mankind in order to give it a special authenticity. And their doing the miracles of Elijah and Moses gives their words the guarantee that they are from God.

The second question is more difficult to answer: "Who are they?" In the Bible, a real person can be the symbol of a wider truth. An example is Gomer, the wife of Hosea. She was unfaithful to her husband and became a prostitute. But Hosea brought her back from her adultery and reinstated her as his wife. They were real people and the story tells of a real relationship. (11)

But the story also represents God's relationship with His unfaithful people, the Children of Israel. Hosea was told to love Gomer - "- as the Lord loves the Israelites -" and "- afterwards the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their

God.”(12)

In the same way, the Two Witnesses may be real people who speak out for God in the power of His Spirit, who do the miracles Elijah and Moses did. But they may also represent something greater – they may represent all those servants of God who armed with the Spirit of God have kept on telling men and women the message that God has given them to declare even if it cost them their lives. Their coming back to life and going up to Heaven underlines God's satisfaction with them and the completeness of what they have done.

There is no point in trying to name the Two Witnesses because the Bible does not tell us who they are or give definitive clues to their identities. But when they come with God's message, those who have the Spirit of God in their lives, will recognise them.

An important point to note is this: the Two Witnesses are martyred after they have completed their God-given task: “Now when they have finished their testimony the beast – will attack them, and overpower and kill them.” (13)

Note these words: “..when they have finished their testimony...” God controls world events! The forces of evil do not have a free hand. They have to wait until God's will is done; these forces must keep to His timetable. And even then, what they do is part of a greater plan. God is in every situation working for the good of His servants, (14) so that they will become like His Son.

And a final point: the death of the Two Witnesses, their resurrection after three and a half days, and their ascension into Heaven bring to mind the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. Or in the words of the worldrenowned Bible commentator, Professor William Barclay: “The great interest of this passage lies in the fact that the unbelievers were won by the sacrificial death of the witnesses and by God's vindication of them. Here is the story of the cross and of the resurrection all over again.” (15)

References

- (1) Romans 10: 14
- (2) Ezekiel chapters 40, 41 and 43
- (3) 1 Kings 17: 1,7, 18: 1 and Exodus 7: 14 to 11: 10
- (4) Revelation 11: 8
- (5) Luke 24: 51 and Acts 1: 9
- (6) Revelation 10: 1 to 11: 14
- (7) 2 Peter 3: 9

- (8) Deuteronomy 19: 15
- (9) Matthew 18: 16
- (10) Mathew 17: 1-5
- (11) Hosea 1: 3 to 3: 1
- (12) Hosea 3: 1,5
- (13) Revelation 11: 7
- (14) Romans 8: 28,29
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Chapter 11 : The Woman clothed with the Sun

The sign of the woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head, stands central in the Book of Revelation. Who is she? What is this sign? And what does it mean for us today?

To answer these questions, we turn to chapter 12 in Revelation, to a passage which shows God transforming tragedy into triumph, against a panorama of human history – a passage meant to encourage God's persecuted followers through the ages. So, who is the woman?

Clues in chapter 12 point to her identity. Of her is born the One “who will rule all the nations with an iron sceptre – the One “snatched up to God and to his throne -” the Messiah. Some would claim it is Mary, the mother of Jesus, but apart from giving birth to Jesus, nothing else in this passage indicates that she is the woman of Revelation chapter 12.

Can it be the Jewish nation, then? This is more likely, but for verse 17 which says that her offspring are “those who – hold to the testimony of Jesus..” That indicates that the offspring are Christians. The phrase - “those who obey God's commandments -” seems to refer to Jews who are faithful to God, and those two descriptive features: “who obey God's commandments” and “hold to the testimony of Jesus” linked together in this way may mean that the woman clothed with the sun is the symbolic embodiment of the faithful people of God, both Jew and Christian. The offspring would then be the servants of God as they live for Him here on earth.

Later in Revelation we read that the bride of Christ is clothed in fine linen which is the righteous acts of the saints (1), and this, linked with Malachi chapter 4 verse 2 which speaks of “the sun of righteousness” suggests that the sun which

covers her is righteousness, not her own, but that which only God can give.(2)

The next piece of description is “the moon under her feet”. Under the feet is the place of subjection, (3) and whatever this moon stands for, it is in subjection to the woman. Perhaps the moon refers to evil and the powers of darkness, for as the sun is to daytime and light, so the moon is to the night and the dark. Or the moon may stand for paganism: the Roman goddess, Diana, was identified with the moon. So to the early Christians who first received the Revelation, the moon under the woman's feet may have represented the victory of the Church over the powers of darkness, and paganism.

From the time that the church at Ephesus came into being, the Holy Spirit had been active there, both in people's hearts and lives, and outwardly in miracles and prophecies and other gifts of the Spirit. Many Ephesians believed in Jesus Christ and forsook the occult which was prevalent there, abandoning their previous pagan practices and the worship of the local deity, Diana or Artemis, the mother goddess of Asia Minor.

This led to a decline in the trade of silver models of the Temple of Diana of the Ephesians, and aroused the enmity of the local traders. They persecuted the Christians and this became so bad at one point that Paul was forced to leave the city.(4)

In his letters to the Ephesians and to their pastor Timothy, Paul encouraged them to be faithful soldiers of Christ, armed for spiritual warfare, because their enemies were not human but spiritual beings.(5) These beings are symbolised here, under the woman's feet, and pictorially represent the Christian's potential victory summed up in the words of the Apostle John: “You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world”.(6)

The woman wears a crown of twelve stars. These stars may stand for both the twelve tribes of Israel and for the twelve Apostles of Jesus Christ. Such a combined image reinforces the idea that the woman represents the faithful people of God, both Jew and Christian.

After the sign of the woman, there appeared another being in heaven – that of an enormous red dragon, Satan. Its heads and horns and crowns symbolise its power and influence on earth in the affairs of men.

Satan is on earth because after his unsuccessful attempt to usurp the throne of God, he and his followers, a third of the angels in heaven, were cast out of heaven.(7) It is here on earth that he attempted to destroy the Man-Child. Manipulating the unholy triad of Judas Iscariot, the Jewish religious leaders and the Roman authorities, he succeeded in having Jesus Christ crucified, but his scheme, although it was his greatest victory, was for him, his catastrophic defeat.

The woman fled from the dragon/Satan into the wilderness where she is protected by God. The duration of Satan's attack on her and her children is half of a complete time – three and a half years, half of seven years – and this is a symbolic way of saying that God does not allow him to attack the woman for as long as he wishes to, that God cuts the time in half, reduces it, for the woman's sake.

A stream of water goes out of Satan's mouth to destroy the woman, but the earth soaks it up, so in frustration, he turns upon the remainder of her children. Satan goes about to destroy the people of God – both Jew and Christian. He seeks to destroy the woman with the flood of water from his mouth. But what is this water, how can it sweep away the woman, and how does the earth swallow it? What does this mean?

In the Bible, a stream or river or sea of water can symbolise a nation or people who are opposed to God. (8) From the mouth of Satan? This can mean that the lies and slanders of Satan stir up men and nations to attack and kill the servants of God. For centuries, Jews have been persecuted for their religion.

For example, in Moslem countries they were herded into ghettos, forced to wear yellow patches (the colour of shame) on their clothes, and often denied the right to lift a hand in their self-defence. The Moslem persecution of Jews erupted into whole-scale murder in Fez in 1033AD, when more than 6,000 Jews were massacred. Later that same century, some 5,000 Jews were killed in Spanish Granada which at that time was under the rule of Islam.

In more recent times, the Jewish community in Egypt has been reduced by 1969 from nearly 80,000 to 2,000, and by 1972, to only 450, who are mostly old people. In the four years up to 1973, the once prosperous Jewish community of Iraq of around 150,000 had been reduced to less than 400: 129,000 sought refuge in Israel, and nearly 5,000 fled to Britain and the United States

The Gentile-Christian peoples have also persecuted the Jews. In many European countries they were not allowed to become farmers, land-owners, to join trade-guilds, to enter professions. Because Christians were forbidden by their religion to lend money for profit, the Jews were encouraged to become money-lenders, the only 'profession' open to them. And in many cases anti-Semitism was used as an excuse to get rid of the debts by getting rid of the moneylenders.

Shakespeare's Shylock was almost certainly a moneylender because no other work of equal status was available to him, and the cancellation of the debt owed to him probably reflects real-life events of a less literary nature.

In the late 1400's, the Spanish Inquisition burned Jews, and in 1492, Ferdinand and Isabella expelled all Jews from Spain. Many of those exiles found refuge in the Netherlands. During the 1600's, Jews in Poland were hounded, and along with Jews in Russia, were massacred in Pogroms, until the 1900's.(9) In the 1930's, Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party in Germany instituted anti-Semitism as part of the official racial purification programme, and by the end of the Second World War in 1945, about six million of Europe's ten million Jews, men, women and children, had perished in Nazi extermination camps.

Today, anti-Jewish hatred continues, from the open hostility of Arab states, to the deliberately slanted reports of so-called neutral news reporters who see every tragedy in the Middle East as being the criminal fault of the Israeli nation. Even today, neo-Nazis attempt to prove that the Holocaust of Auschwitz, Belsen, Buchenwald, Dachau, Treblinka and many other camps, did not happen, or was greatly exaggerated. Although many of these neo-Nazis were not born until after the 1939-45 War ended, they dismiss the Holocaust as the invention of International Jewry, designed to win the sympathy for the State of Israel.(10)

If they had the opportunity to do it, there are many who would hasten to have another Holocaust and to consign world-wide Jewry and the State of Israel to their gaschambers and crematoria.

The Jordanian English-language daily newspaper Jerusalem Times of April 24, 1961, published an "Open letter to Eichmann", congratulating him on the mass murder of Jews and promising him that the surviving six million Jews in the world would be liquidated in their turn.(9)

The water still spews from the dragon's mouth.... yet the earth continues to swallow up the flood. In Revelation, the "earth" may represent mankind in

general, and not specifically mankind in revolt against God, which is better represented by “sea” or “water”.(11) So when the earth helps to protect the woman it could mean that there are always those who for one reason or another will protect or advance the interests of the Jews.

Britain once played a major role in setting up the State of Israel, but relations between the two nations have cooled since 1948, possibly because Britain's economy and foreign policy require friendship with the Arabs. The mantle of 'friend of Israel' now rests upon the USA, although Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and Switzerland are also prominent in helping to swallow up the flood from the dragon's mouth.

Christians are also the targets for Satan's hatred, on both the spiritual and physical fronts. In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul wrote: “- our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”(12)

In the Western world in particular, Christians are bombarded by influences and propaganda to accept lower moral standards. In the United Kingdom, the so-called new permissiveness is really a symptom of a much more subtle and more dangerous movement - the movement to judge an attitude, an action, even a law on its way through Parliament, not by whether it is essentially right or wrong in relation to a higher moral law, but by assessing the results from it: are they less painful than what would result if we did not say or do that thing, or pass that Act of Parliament.

Homosexual acts between consenting adults in private were legalised because regardless of whether the legislators thought these acts were wrong, it was felt that less harm would come from legalising homosexuality than from treating it as a crime.

Gambling, ease of divorce, obscene publications and obscene performances on stage or TV or in films – new laws in favour of these were passed because it was felt they were less harmful than the old laws restricting or prohibiting them. It is an offence to have sex with a girl under the age of sixteen, yet in the UK a medical practitioner can give the girl contraceptive pills without telling her parents, because it would cause less problems than not to do so. Moral values are irrelevant today. What is relevant is: which option would be more popular.(13)

In the USA, morals are still important. It is basically a Christian country, and it is not incongruous to hear an American President speak feelingly about faith and dependence on God - but it is a country of double standards. Where both spiritual and material values are influential. Where the phrase “land of the free” has a heart-felt significance, yet where rioting college students were shot dead by the forces of law and order on the campuses of Kent State University in Ohio and Jackson State College, Mississippi.(14)

Double standards exemplified in the case of President Nixon, who in October 1972, in the run-up to his re-election, could say:“- I campaigned for President with a pledge to restore respect for law, order and justice in America. I am pleased to be able to report to you today that we have made significant progress in that effort We have fought the frightening trend of crime and anarchy to a standstill.”

Yet less than two years later - 8th August, 1974 – he had to resign following the Watergate scandal. What is positive, however, is that he had to resign. In many countries, the head of government can do worse than "Watergate" and yet remain entrenched in office. So the influence of the Christian culture is still significant in the USA.

In the West sex is up for grabs. And new drugs experiences are lusted after, even by children. “Crack” is 'cool'. Satan's water spews out. “Being a Christian is square!” A tide of propaganda assaults our thinking: in the UK, not moral law, but political expediency - in the USA, moral law, but bend it where you can!

In the West, Christians are under spiritual attack, even from within the church where respected leaders may attack without reproof some of the foundation doctrines of the church. As for example, one UK church has recently given permission for one of its ministers, a practising homosexual, to set up home with his homosexual partner in church property and to be responsible for ministering to his congregation all the sacraments of his church.

We see today some fulfilment of the Bible's warnings: “ - in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons – people will be – lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God – having a form of godliness but denying its power – in the last days scoffers will come - ” (15)

During the Communist decades, the war against the church was more physical.

In some countries of Eastern Europe, Christians were persecuted, imprisoned, incarcerated in psychiatric institutions, even killed, because of their faith. Examples were: a husband and father, jailed for thirteen years for his Christian witness : a Pastor of a Baptist Church, imprisoned for ten years, because he refused to stop preaching : the 18 years old, Alex, who was thrown into prison for eight months after becoming a Christian, then subjected to psychiatric injections, driven temporarily insane, when after he recovered his sanity, was so badly tortured that he died of his injuries. . . just some examples of Christians suffering in the flood from the dragon's mouth. (16)

And in the post-Communist era, throughout the Moslem world, the Christians who are persecuted, treated as secondclass citizens, raped, tortured, murdered, for bearing the name of Christ: in 2007, the twelve-years-old Christian boy crucified in Baghdad for his faith: Christians murdered by the Taliban in Afghanistan: the Christian villages destroyed in Indonesia, and so on. . And a few days before this was written in 2009, reports of six churches being attacked in Baghdad.

The early Christians reading this passage would have found it difficult to accept that Jews were also offspring of the woman, especially as they recalled the earlier passage on those who considered themselves Jews but were really a synagogue of Satan.(17)

But God has never cast aside the Jewish nation. He has always had a purpose to be fulfilled in and through them, and they are always His chosen people. His promises to Abraham have never been rescinded, (18) but are to be developed in a spiritual and more wonderful way.

Jews and Christians have suffered at the instigation of Satan, and many have died for their faith. But those who overcame him, who transmuted their deaths into the gold of martyrdom, are those who did so - "by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."(19) Most Jews who were killed for being Jews had not accepted Jesus as their Messiah, and we must leave them to the all-knowing, allloving God.

For us, no matter what our circumstances are, if we are Christian, then we need never be defeated in the inner citadel of our beings. Satan may attack us, persecute us, we may be stricken by sickness or injury, our outer casing ravaged

and destroyed, our minds subjected to stress beyond endurance, yet our inner selves remain victorious through the awareness of our relationship with God. We are victorious by depending on Jesus Christ and His sacrificial death on the cross, victorious by declaring our faith and trust in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour.

Pastor Richard Wurmbrand of Rumania, who spent fourteen years in prison for preaching the Gospel, the first three of them in a pitch-dark cell in solitary confinement, tells of many Christians in a former Communist country who shared his faith and his sufferings. One was the girl who distributed Gospels and taught children about Jesus. The secret people waited until her wedding day to arrest her. She was in church, wearing her bridal dress, when police burst in and arrested her in the presence of her bridegroom and family. She kissed the handcuffs that were put on her, and said: "I thank my heavenly Bridegroom for this jewel He has presented to me on my marriage day. I thank Him that I am worthy to suffer for Him." (20)

Then she was dragged away to five years imprisonment. Yet she and her bridegroom remained true to Christ.(20)

During the Korean War, North Korean soldiers over-ran a Salvation Army boys' home in Seoul. They assembled all the boys, then ordered the husband and wife officers who were in charge of the home to deny their faith in Jesus Christ for all the boys to hear, or else the husband would be shot. They refused, and the husband was executed on the spot. He died for his faith, the boys were marched away to North Korea and never heard of again, but that heroic witness lives on, and the blood of that martyr will produce its harvest, who knows where – perhaps in the very citadel of atheistic communism itself.

"They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."(19)

A final point about this "him", this "accuser of our brothers".(21) He is "- an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads." These symbolise its power over men who accept its rule. For it is dependent on men This it – this dragon – or him – this Satan – needs men to do his work for him. Satan could not put one Jewish child into a gas-chamber, could not torture one Christian with psychiatric drugs, could not destroy one marriage relationship, could not get one teenager hooked on drugs, nor say one hurtful

thing to someone you love.

Satan needs us, people like us, to do his work for him. And every time we yield to the whispered inner voice which is not of God, those heads and horns and crowns stand up more proudly, more firmly, more arrogantly. He is the great liar, the manipulator, the cheat – who influences men to do his bidding – and when he tries to destroy the woman and her offspring, it is by the lies and distorted truths that spew from his mouth to fill the minds and cloud the judgements of those who are his flood of water.

The vision of the woman and the red dragon is at the heart of the Book of Revelation to encourage us in the fight and to point the way to victory. But let it also put us on our guard, in case we find ourselves unwittingly serving Satan's purposes.

References

- (1) Revelation 19: 7,8
- (2) Isaiah 64: 6 ; Romans 3: 21-23; Romans 4: 3-5
- (3) Joshua 10: 24; Psalm 8: 6 ; Psalm 47: 3; 1 Corinthians 15: 25 (4) Acts 19: 1 to 20: 1
- (5) 1 Timothy 1: 18; 6: 12; 2 Timothy 2: 3; Ephesians 6: 10-18 (6) 1 John 4: 4
- (7) Isaiah 14: 12f; Revelation 12: 4 and 9
- (8) Isaiah 8: 7,8; 17: 12,13; Jeremiah 46: 8
- (9) T Prittie and W.H. Nelson(19178) *“The Economic War against the Jews”* London, Secker and Warburg
- (10) Channel Four Television: *“The Other Face of Terrorism”*- Thursday, 29th March, 1984
- (11) Revelation 12: 15,16
- (12) Ephesians 6: 12
- (13) Christie Davies (191715) *“Permissive Britain”* London: Pitman (14) Daniel Snowman (1980) *“America since 1920”* London: Heinemann (15) 1 Timothy 4: 1; 2 Timothy 3: 1-5; 2 Peter 3: 3
- (16) Marguerite Warburton(1978) *“A Kingdom which cannot be shaken”* Slavic Gospel Association, Ewart House, 27 Vicarage Road, Eastbourne
- (17) Revelation 2: 9
- (18) Genesis 17: 4-8; Jeremiah 31: 31-37; Romans 11: 25-26; Hebrews 8: 8; 10: 16,17
- (19) Revelation 12: 11
- (20) Richard Wurmbrand *“Tortured for Christ”* New Delhi, Love in Action Society
- (21) Revelation 12: 10

Chapter 12 : The Two Beasts and “666”

I had more problems with Revelation chapter 13 than with any other chapter in writing this book. But eventually, I came up with what I believe is a brief summary of what had to be said about the chapter, and here it is:

In Revelation chapter 13 we meet two Beasts. The first comes out of the Sea. This Beast represents a body of people, an organisation or world power. Because it comes from the sea which is symbolic of mankind opposed to God, the Beast is totally the enemy of God and His people. Then there is the second Beast. It comes from the Earth, and since the earth is usually symbolic of mankind in general, to first appearances it is not specifically anti-God or anti-religion, but it could be of religious or even Christian origin, though it soon reveals its true hatred for God and His servants. It is the mouth-piece or servant of the Beast from the Sea, and it has a name, 666, or the False Prophet, and may even be the Man of Sin and Lawlessness of 2 Thessalonians 2 verses 3-10

So firstly, to the Beast from the Sea. This Beast has ten horns and seven heads with ten crowns on its horns and a blasphemous name on each head. This description could identify it as a confederation of nations. However, another interpretation of it suggests it represents ten Caesars of Rome, and for those who believe this explanation, the Beast from the Earth may be the Emperor Domitian. If this were true, then the significance of chapter 13 is historical and reveals how the early Church came to terms with the persecution it suffered under the Roman empire. However, if it is a confederation of nations or a world power, then that could still impact on the contemporary Church. Some support for this latter view may be found in the apocalyptic book of the Old Testament, the Book of Daniel.

Part 1 : The Book of Daniel

We learn something that could be relevant to the first Beast in the Old Testament's Book of Daniel. The prophet Daniel had a dream, a vision of Four Beasts that came out of the sea.(1) And they represented empires that would come in time. These empires are now identified as:

the Babylonian empire,
the Medo-Persian empire
the Greek empire of Alexander the Great, and the Roman empire.

The fourth Beast had ten horns (2) which represented ten kingdoms – and these ten kingdoms would rise up from the remnant of the Roman Empire. Then

another small horn would rise up and it would annex the power or authority of three of the ten. And so the power and influence of the small horn would grow.

It was to become “more imposing than the others” (3) so that it speaks boastfully and blasphemes against God. It would oppress the “saints” (4) and vent its hatred on them. Then it would try to change the “set times and the laws”. This may refer particularly to the feast days and religious ordinances of the Jewish nation.

This oppression of the “saints” is to last for three and a half years. (5) That time may be an actual 42 months, but it may be symbolic of a time that is cut short before its purpose is accomplished, since three and a half is half of the perfect number seven. Then God kills the 4th Beast and throws its body into the fire. (6)

So what we learn from the Book of Daniel about the Beast is this:

- i. The Beast from the sea could be a leader of a nation who will overpower three other nations – although one of the three nations may be his own one. This will be part of a group of ten nations which probably arises from the lands of the old Roman Empire.
- ii. The Beast will probably be anti-Jewish.
- iii. He may become leader of a federation of ten nations.
- iv. After three and a half years of persecuting the servants of God, the Beast will be destroyed.

We look next at the Beast from the Earth. Revelation 13 verses 11-17 says it had two horns like a lamb, perhaps a feeble imitation of the Lamb of God, but it spoke like a dragon, representing Satan, and it became the spokes-person for the Beast from the Sea, even forcing people to worship that Beast under pain of death if they did not do so. It also forced everyone to bear a mark on the right hand or forehead without which buying or selling could not take place. Later in Revelation, it is identified as the False Prophet. (7) But it may also be identified with the Man of Sin or Lawlessness found in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2.

Part 2 : Second Thessalonians 2 verses 3 to 12

A clue to identifying the Beast from the Earth is in Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians. In this passage, Paul is encouraging these Christians because they were afraid that Christ had already come back to earth for His servants, and for some reason they had been left behind. In fact, they thought that the Day of the

Lord as it is known, had already happened.

But Paul reassured them that the Day of the Lord has not come, that it cannot come until some events first happen, including the coming of the Man of Sin or Lawlessness. This man will set himself up in God's Temple and claim to be God. This could be the pagan or abominable form of worship the Beast will try to inaugurate in Jerusalem – the “abomination that causes desolation” mentioned in the Gospels.(8)

The force or power behind this Man of Sin is in the world now, but it is being restrained by one who will later leave the world. When the restraining one goes, the Man of Sin will be revealed - something like the school bully who keeps out of sight until the big boy goes away. The Man of Sin will perform all kinds of “counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders.” He will also do “every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing”.

So the Man of Sin will try to convince mankind that he is God, or at least the human representative of God, by performing miracles. And the Bible says he will have widespread success.

It was the apostle Peter who said to the crowds on the Day of Pentecost, that Jesus of Nazareth “was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him -” (9) In the same way, the Man of Sin will convince many people that he is divine by the miracles, wonders and signs he will do. But he will also do evil. So there will be this contradiction in his behaviour: he will do the kind of miracles that would be done by the power of God, yet he will commit sins which are contrary to the nature of God. Signs by themselves do not prove that God is working! There must also be a demonstration of the nature of God, and the outcome must be that God is honoured.

The Man of Sin – he is also called a Man of Lawlessness, that is, against God's Law - does works that “will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles -”(10) So we know that from the first, he will be seen as an agent of Satan by those Christians who are sensitive to spiritual things.

But he will be successful in deceiving people, those “who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.” In fact, what he represents is what they

want to worship wickedness and sin. In the end, he will be destroyed – overthrown, the Bible says, by the breath of Jesus' mouth, and destroyed by the splendour of His coming. But before the earth is finally rid of him, the focus of his activity will be Jerusalem and the Temple. This Man of Lawlessness may be the Beast from the earth, who is also identified as the False Prophet.

Now we turn to the main source of information about this Beast who came from the Earth, the Book of Revelation.

Part 3 : The Book of Revelation

The main references to the two Beasts in Revelation, are:

chapter 13 verses 1 to 18

chapter 16 verse 10

chapter 17 verses 3 and 7 to 17 chapter 19 verses 19,20

chapter 20 verse 10

Chapter 13 provides the most information about the Beast. In it we read that John saw a Beast come out of the sea. This can mean that this Beast comes from amongst humanity who are the enemies of God. (11)

Then follows a description of him. He has ten horns, each wearing a crown, and seven heads, each with a name of blasphemy. The ten horns are ten kings who receive their authority along with the Beast, and the seven heads are also seven kings or nations. (12) The Beast is linked in a special way with the seven for he is described as an eighth king. These two groupings suggest federations of nations which are linked in a larger united alliance.

The names of blasphemy could mean that these countries are anti-Jewish, anti-Christian, such as Islamic countries, or wherever the name of Jesus Christ is dishonoured and His followers are persecuted for their faith, or they could be atheistic countries such as having a Marxist philosophy of government. The ten countries with the crowns, if we compare this account with the one in Daniel, are countries which originated from the ruins of the old Roman Empire.

A possible interpretation of this is that seven countries such as referred to in the previous paragraph will join in a federation with ten European countries which may loosely be described as Christian countries, united under one leader who would be the Beast, '666'. Another clue which may be significant is that one of the seven heads had a fatal wound, but the wound is healed. (13) Because of this

healing, “the whole world was astonished and followed the Beast.”. The wound had been inflicted by a sword (14) and this may symbolise a wound made by war. So we would have a country which had been fatally wounded by war, being healed. Examples of countries that have been severed by war are such as Germany - now re-united, and Korea, still divided into two.

The healing or re-uniting of this country appears to be credited to the Beast because it wins for him world-wide adulation. Is it too fanciful to suggest that the Beast will be admired for his skill in international dealings and his conciliatory abilities, seen as a great internationalist able to bring peace where previously there was strife, or unity where there was division? The obvious country divided and seemingly impossible for peaceful reconciliation is the land of Palestine, but there is little point in speculating. It will be enough for the Christian to interpret the signs with the guidance of the Holy Spirit when the time is right

A warning against speculating which country is the severed one that is healed may be taken from this chapter when it was first written at the height of the Cold War, when it was speculated that the severed head was Germany, divided in two as a consequence of war. At that time, it made sense for the re-unification of Germany to lead on to the coalescing of the NATO western alliance and the Eastern communist bloc. That would have made sense of the Beast with ten horns and seven heads: a large federation of two smaller federations each of which had a form of government or attitude to God very different from the other.

An intriguing small fact with regard to the re-unification of the divided Germany was that East Berlin as it was then, housed in its Pergamon Museum, the great altar of Zeus, which scholars identify with the Satan's throne of Pergamum referred to in the 7 Letters to the Churches. (15) Such speculating could go on, seeing the USA and the USSR not involved in the new alliance, taking as a significant factor that the USA was not part of the old Roman Empire. One could go on looking for 'clues' and significant coincidences. But it should serve as a warning against trying to read too specifically the meaning of clues that the Bible leaves veiled in mystery. It is enough to acknowledge that the Beast '666' has apparently not put in an appearance yet.

Revelation chapter 13 verse 2 says that “the Dragon gave the Beast his power and his throne and great authority.” Just what Satan offered Jesus at the third temptation “- all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour -” which our

Lord promptly rejected with:“- Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ' Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.” (16)

Jesus refused to be the Dragon's representative on earth, so Satan appears to have successfully tempted someone or something else – the Beast from the Sea. It may be that a man with political ambitions heads up this union of nations, one who hates both Jews and Christians. Or it may be the Beast from the Earth, the spokesperson for this union, will be approached by Satan in much the same way as Jesus was. And this individual will yield to the temptation, to the offer of power and authority and popularity. He will worship Satan, and then as the Man of Sin or Lawlessness, he will appear on his national, and then on the international, scene.

From Daniel's vision, it could be that this political leader will be from a lesser nation, yet he will swallow up three nations. This may mean that his nation is one of the three. If we link this with the healing of the wound, we visualise a scenario thus:

a political leader arises in a small nation, and by his persuasive and apparently miracle-working powers, achieves both the healing of a nation severed by war, and that re-united country's federation with his country in a large federation of countries based on the lands of the old Roman Empire. This may involve countries in both Europe and the Middle East.

Leaving aside further speculation, this may be a good stage to re-cap by comparing the Daniel vision with the two Beasts of Revelation.

Daniel Revelation

Lion - bear - leopard are the first three beasts
The Beast will have characteristics of lion, bear and leopard

Eyes of a man The Beast is also a man
A mouth that speaks boastfully He utters proud words
A federation of ten kings Includes a federation of ten kings

The little horn will speak against God
He utters blasphemies - wears names of blasphemies

He tries to change religious practices of God's servants
He demands worship
He will make a treaty and break it after three and half years

He will wage war on the saints and defeat them

He will wage war on the saints and defeat them

He oppresses the saints for three and a half years

He will exercise authority for three and a half years

After the three and a half years he will be "thrown into blazing fire" and destroyed

He will be thrown into the Lake of Fire

After he is destroyed, all the world is handed over to the saints and God's Kingdom will be setup, an everlasting kingdom

After he is destroyed, there will be a thousand years of peace from Satan's attacks, during which Christ and the "priests of God" will reign (17)

An interesting description of the Beast is: “ - once was, now is not, and will come -” (18) This is a deliberate comparison with Almighty God (19), but the description of the Beast may suggest a clue to his identity. He may be hailed as the reincarnation of a great political leader – especially one whose death was not obviously clear-cut, so that suspicion lingers afterwards: “Did he really die?”

Another point to make about Revelation chapter 13, is that it contains a blasphemous parody of the Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For in this chapter we have Satan, there is the Beast from the Sea, who is Satan's representative on earth, and the mouthpiece, the Beast from the Earth, also known as the False Prophet. The third person in this unholy triad enters the scene in the second half of the chapter (20). He is the Beast out of the earth, and also the False Prophet.(21) The 'earth' may represent all mankind and include servants of God and those sympathetic to God's will.(22)

So as the First Beast came from a background of mankind against God, the Second Beast or False Prophet will come from mankind in general and will include those who are religious. Since he will be a prophet, he may have either Christian or Jewish connections, but as a False Prophet, while he gives the appearance of serving and speaking for God, he in fact will be speaking for Satan.

His two horns like those of a lamb suggest a similarity with Christ, the Lamb of God. In fact, he may be an accepted Christian leader. But he speaks like a dragon! In other words, despite his obviously religious appearance, even Christian appearance, he says un-Christian things. He persuades men to worship the Beast, and he performs miracles to authenticate his position as Prophet. He also introduces idolatry in the worship of the image of the Beast, with death as the punishment for those who refuse to worship.

It seems he will be an innovator, and perhaps an organisational genius, for he institutes a means of controlling mankind by marking men's foreheads and right hands with the mark of the Beast. Only those who worship the Best will get the mark. And without this mark there can be no buying or selling. In other words, those who refuse to worship the Beast from the Sea will be unable to buy or sell.

So there is the evil triad of Satan, the Beast, and the False Prophet. And the end of each of them will be the same – though the Beast and the False Prophet precede the Dragon/Satan by a thousand years. Each is thrown into the Lake of Fire: the Beast and the False Prophet right after the Battle of Armageddon, and the Dragon after an ineffectual last attempt to destroy God's people. (23)

Part 4 : “666 – it is a man's number”

I saw only the back view of the student in front of me. She was in a group, walking along a corridor of the college. Nothing outstanding about her, except what was written on her T-shirt. On its back, in large print and superimposed over the profile head of a striking looking man, were the numerals “666”. Underneath it was a text from the Book of Revelation, but I was so surprised that I didn't read it. I often wonder what was written on the front of the T-shirt.

It's been said that no verse in the Bible has had so much study and work done on it as Revelation 13 verse 18 has had. "This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the Beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666." (24)

In the Roman, Greek and Hebrew world of the first century AD, it was a common practice to calculate the numerical value of a name. Arabic numerals were not in use and the Greek and Hebrew letters were given numerical equivalents. (25) An often-quoted example is this graffiti from the ruins of Pompeii: “I love her whose number is 545.” Only the writer and the young lady and perhaps their close friends would have known the number referred to her. (26) The practice of concealing names or truths in numbers was called 'Gematria', and learned scholars delighted in looking for hidden meanings in numbers in the Scriptures.

One example of this which would have been known to early-days Christians was the number '888', which is claimed to be the number of Jesus Christ's name in Greek.

But despite a great deal of researching and probing, Christian scholars down the centuries have not been able to find a completely satisfactory interpretation of the number '666'. The best known and perhaps most widely accepted one is that '666' refers to 'Nero Caesar'. However, this requires a Greek form of a Latin name transliterated into Hebrew, with a spelling error.. So, to say the least, there are grounds for not accepting this explanation. And of course, the Beast '666' has not yet appeared, while Nero Caesar is long dead. To confuse the issue further, some scholars say the number should actually be “616”.

We cannot calculate names using our own alphabet; it should be done in the language the Book of Revelation was written in – what we call New Testament Greek. There are many alphabets, and there are languages without an alphabet, such as Chinese. If we use our own alphabets we could get some strange answers. I have seen in print two answers based on the English language alphabet involving personalities of recent decades – Adolf Hitler, and Henry Kissinger. I must admit, however, I was not able to duplicate the methods which produced these answers.

There is another way of considering this number '666'. As the number '7' is the number of completeness, or perfection, and '777' would be perfection again and again, and as Jesus Christ's number is said to be '888' which is greater than perfection, so '666' is falling short, again and again. Satan tries to copy God. He forces men to worship his agent on earth, and he sends a mouthpiece to do miracles and to organise his perverted religion. But Satan is doomed to failure: even the number of the Beast betrays this.

Of course, Satan would not deliberately choose or accept a number meaning 'failure'. But this introduces a second practice of the ancients. Not only did they practise Gematria, they also used triangular numbers. A triangular number was very significant to them. How it worked was like this: example:

the triangular of 5 is 15
made up of: $5 + 4 + 3 + 2 + 1 = 15$
and the triangular of 7 is 28
made up of: $7 + 6 + 5 + 4 + 3 + 2 + 1 = 28$

A simple way to calculate the triangular of a number is by this formula:

Example:

triangular of 7 = 7 multiplied by 7+1
divided by 2
 $= 7 \times 8 = 56 = 28 \ 2 \ 2$

To return to the Beast '666'

The Beast is an eighth king (27). And 8 is better than 7 more valuable. So if Satan wished to have the Beast better than perfection he would be numbered '8' – but Christ is numbered '888' . So better than simply repeating a number is to triangulate it. And to double triangulate it for good measure.

To do this, we triangulate 8, then triangulate the answer.

The Triangular of 8 = $8 \times 8 + 1 = 72 = 36 \ 2 \ 2$

and the Triangular of 36 = $36 \times 36 + 1 = 1332 = 666 \ 2 \ 2$

In the world of commerce, the numeral '666' is said to recur frequently. With the advent of credit cards and other forms of 'plastic money', the time may not be far distant when all commercial transactions will be done by card. Money may not need to change hands, as is often the situation even now. And money may become obsolete. In order to have cash cards accepted by banks and other commercial bodies, some identification mark in addition to a personal one may have to be displayed. An invisible mark on the forehead or hand, discernible to ultra-violet scan, may be sufficient. And without it, no buying or selling could take place.(28)

The reign of the Beast '666' may not be far off The international political scene - to some degree - is ready for it. The commercial technology exists. His appearance on the human stage may be delayed by only one final requirement: the departure of the one whose presence now holds him in check.(29)

Who is this one who holds the Man of Sin – the Beast, '666' – in check? We cannot be sure of his identity. But one well-supported view is that he is the Holy Spirit. Whoever he is, when he goes, the Beast '666' will appear. And if we are here then, we shall recognise him for what he is because the Holy Bible gives clues to his identity.

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(9) Acts 2: 22
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Chapter 13 : The Lamb and the 144,000

After the chaos and rampant evil of Revelation chapter 13, where the "inhabitants of the earth" worship the Beast and wear his mark, after the anarchy as the two Beasts do the work of the Dragon in the world, and evil appears to triumph, we get the other side of the picture in the opening five verses of chapter 14. For here, counterbalancing the Beast and the False Prophet and those who wear the mark of the Beast, comes the Lamb, accompanied by 144,000 men

The Lamb is Jesus Christ; who are these 144,000 men? We must not confuse them with the 144,000 of Revelation chapter 7, who are symbolic of the servants of God from the twelve tribes of Israel. The 144,000 with the Lamb are those who have the Lamb and the Father's name written on their foreheads. This contrasts with the followers of the Beast who bear his mark on their right hand or forehead. And this 144,000 sing a song which only they know. It is likely to be about their being "redeemed from the earth", and is, therefore, probably about Christ's death and what it means for them personally. This is implied by

referring to Jesus Christ as the Lamb, the Lamb Who died to take away the sins of the world. And this 144,000 have not defiled themselves with women, and have kept themselves pure.

Does this mean they have never had sexual intercourse? A story from the Old Testament suggests an alternative explanation. The story is about when David was being hunted by King Saul who wanted to kill him. The story tells us that when David and his men were hungry, David asked the priest Ahimelech for bread. The only bread available was holy bread from the sanctuary. But Ahimelech said they could eat the holy bread - "provided the men have kept themselves from women". (1)

"David replied, 'Indeed women have been kept from us, as usual whenever I set out.'" Or as an alternative reading translates it: "Indeed women have been kept from us in the past few days since I set out."

So having kept themselves from women need not mean never having been intimate with women, but rather never having broken any religious law regulating behaviour between the sexes; in David's case, not having had sex for a set number of days before eating holy bread.

In the New Testament, sex is not sinful. Within marriage, it is God's will, His way for us to have children. "Marriage should be honoured by all and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral." (2)

The alternative to sexual purity in marriage, is adultery and sexual immorality. So one can be married and yet be sexually pure. As the warriors in the Old Testament story kept themselves pure and followed David their leader - so the 144,000 in the New Testament also keep themselves pure and "follow the Lamb wherever He goes." And as the small band of David's men were the fore-runners of a mighty army, so the 144,000 in Revelation are the first-fruits to God and the Lamb.

Years ago, I lived for a while in a house with a large wild garden. I spent weeks cleaning and preparing the ground and feeding it, then planting it. Then I waited for the harvests. The crops were good, and each autumn, I gave the best of the vegetables to the Harvest Festival displays. For me, they were the first-fruits. But they were only a small part of the total crops. We Christians are in the total

crop if Jesus Christ is our Lord and Saviour. We are the redeemed out of the earth. And the 144,000 who follow the Lamb are the firstfruits of us, they represent us.

The last characteristic to look at of those 144,000 men is: no lie was found in their mouths. They are blameless. Yet the Bible says that if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.(3) And in Romans chapter 3 we read: “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (4)

How can the 144,000 men be blameless? We cannot make ourselves blameless! And we cannot keep ourselves blameless! Only God does that. And we must cooperate with Him. For He is “able to keep you from falling and to present you without fault and with great joy -” (5)

So we start off by confessing our sins - because then He cleanses us from all sins.(6) Then we depend on Him to keep us from falling. And so He keeps us without fault, and blameless. The work is all by Him, the credit is all His. For in Christ, our weakness become strength, our sinfulness becomes His righteousness, and our slavery to doing wrong becomes the freedom of the sons of God. Regardless of how short we have fallen from being what these 144,000 men are, yet because Jesus Christ is our Lord and Saviour, we too are blameless.

References

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Chapter 14 : The Whore of Babylon

Next we have the vision of the Whore who is Babylon the Great.

“One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, 'Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters. With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries.’” (1)

Two images are combined: adultery and drunkenness. And both are sins. (2) Yet both are corruptions of gifts which God has given to mankind. Wine is a gift. The first miracle of Jesus Christ was to change water into wine, (3) And sex is a gift: “And Lord God said, 'It is not good for man to be alone -' then the Lord God

made a woman – and He brought her to the man – and God said – 'Be fruitful and increase in number -'" (4)

Babylon the Great is symbolised as having twisted and corrupted what is good. We should remember that as we search for clues to what this vision means and discover its message for today. The first clue is that the Woman is a city, a metropolis sited on seven hills. (5) There can be no doubt that this alludes to Rome, the ancient city built on seven hills. But while early Christians who were suffering at the hands of Rome may have exulted in identifying Babylon the Great with Rome, we must take a wider view because : “In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth”. (6) Not even Rome could boast of having caused the death - “of all who have been killed on the earth.”

So what we are looking for is not a geographical or historical Rome, although that city did eventually suffer a fate similar to the one predicted here, but a wider interpretation of the vision, and an influence or principle behind all the wrongful killing of men by one another. “Wrongful killing” because we read in the Bible of many killings which were not “wrongful ” but were commanded by God: the deaths of the Egyptian first-born and later, the Egyptian army in the Red Sea – the deaths of the citizens of Jericho and Ai – deaths commanded by the laws of retribution and against blasphemy – deaths throughout history, right up to the deaths of the enemies of God at Armageddon. (7)

The next clue is that she is “the great city that rules over the kings of the earth ”. (8) If Babylon the Great is not a geographical or historical place, then it is a principle or influence which controls the affairs of men, of kings and governments – an attitude or ideology that has become the foundation of an organised system. Yet it is symbolised as Rome, therefore some of the qualities of Rome must be reflected in it.

Rome was ruthless, self-seeking, strong, counting human life as of little value. It was greedy for new conquests, rapacious, seizing whatever it could take, by force if necessary. It was dedicated to self-interest, the worship of self above all else.

Babylon the Great is this principle controlling the affairs of kings and nations, and it is easy to see how this motivation could be blamed for all the injustice and

murder on the earth.

Another clue is in the three classes of people who mourn over her destruction:

kings who committed adultery with her;
merchants who received their wealth from trading with her;
and sea-captains who see in her destruction the end of their source of wealth.

They represent an economic system, and when linked with the other clues, suggest a system of trade and business which is dedicated ruthlessly to self-interest. Yet profit is not sinful! A just reward is not iniquity. If the land of farmer A is good and he works hard, and he produces better crops than his neighbour, farmer B, then he becomes wealthier than B. This is not the spirit of Babylon the Great. This is honest gain and the fruit of one's labours.

But if A is seduced by the spirit of Babylon the Great and uses his wealth to put B out of business, and then buys his land, then with his monopoly of produce and employment forces prices up and wages down then A is exploiting his fellow-men. In order to get more wealth for himself, he causes suffering for others: that is, he commits adultery with the Whore who is Babylon the Great.

Greed, acquisitiveness, self-interest – these are the motives that control the affairs of men, of states, of international relations. And the lust for this has stained the earth with blood from the dawn of time.

The Whore is drunk with the blood of the saints who bore testimony to Jesus Christ. (9) A basic expression and requirement of Christian life is to demonstrate love for God and Jesus Christ by loving your fellow-men; other Christians; anyone who needs your help – even your enemies. This runs counter to the motivation of Babylon the Great which is selfinterest at any cost to others.

A Christian girl I knew rejected self-interest. She refused to go along with dishonest practices in her office. She was cajoled, then threatened. They told her it was for the good of the firm, then of the staff, finally of herself. She refused to act contrary to her Christian principles, and was dismissed.

That girl suffered for her faithfulness to Christ some fifty years ago. Perhaps today's laws would have protected her from unfair dismissal. But the principle is still with us. It is still possible to suffer for living by Jesus Christ's standards in today's world, even in a so-called Christian country. For Babylon the Great is all

around us. Ordinary people and leaders of governments and business affairs alike are still seduced by her.

An important clue to identifying Babylon the Great is that she is personified as a woman likened to a city. She is not a formless principle or idea – she has structure and form. And her domain is in the economic world. She is the drive of ruthless self-interest within the realm of profit and gain – an organized system of trade in which the end always justifies the means. She may be likened to what has been dubbed 'The Unacceptable Face of Capitalism'. Then if the Beast “that was covered with blasphemous names” were to represent an international political-economic system such as Marxism once was, we can easily understand why it hates her. (10) In such a situation we could easily visualise a nuclear war with its aftermath which we envisaged in the scenario of the Trumpets and the Bowls of God's anger.

However, the main thing that is condemned in Babylon the Great is not an economic system as such, whether it be Capitalism or a form of neo-Marxism, but rather an attitude towards God which is revealed by one's behaviour towards one's fellow-men.

God condemns those who: “trample on the heads of the poor and deny justice to the oppressed -” (11) and Proverbs puts it succinctly in: “He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker -” (12)

Where men are exploited, God is offended. And any political or economic system which does that – which values things and property more than people – is a system of sin, and is anathema to God.

Jesus put a value on the human soul which is God's valuation, and we devalue it at our peril: “What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?” (13)

The list of items of merchandise which helped form the basis of Babylon's wealth may provide the final clue! It begins with the most valuable :

“ gold, silver, precious stones and pearls” then goes through to -
“cinnamon and spice, incense, myrrh and frankincense” and on to
“cattle and sheep; horses and carriages -” and finishes with the least valuable -
“bodies and souls of men.”

Something to be bought and sold. That is the worth of a human being to the High Priests of Profit, the devotees of Self-Interest. Is it any wonder that the destruction of such a system is important within the plan of God? In every man there is a divine residue, a relic of his Creator: the economic system of Babylon the Great denies its value and treats it with contempt - while the ideology of the Beast denies its very existence.

God will not tolerate such treatment of man whom He made in His own image. Both Babylon the Great, and the Beast with the names of blasphemy, are destined for destruction at the end of this age, for there can be no place for them in a world in which God reigns supreme.

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- (8) Revelation 17: 18
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- (12) Proverbs 14: 31
- (13) Matthew 16: 26, Mark 8: 36,37

Chapter 15 : Gog and Magog

In the chapter on the Beast, “666”, I said that neither the USA nor the USSR as it was formerly known, need be identified with the Beast, the USA because it was not of territory which had been part of the old Roman Empire, and the USSR for another reason. And that other reason is that the former USSR had another destiny in the fulfilment of God's plan.

“ - Satan – will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth - Gog and Magog – to gather them for battle.” (1) “Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal –

Persia, Cush and Put will be with them – also Gomer with all its troops, and Beth Togarmah from the far north with all its troops -” (2)

These extracts, from Revelation and Ezekiel, have one thing in common – a name, or perhaps names - “Gog and Magog”. What do we know about them?

Early Arabian and Syrian writers identified Magog as the Scythian or Tatar nation, and gave it as a name for ancient nations in northern Europe and Western Asia. (3) A note in the Jerusalem Bible identifies Gog as a prince of nations from the far north of the Black Sea. The New Catholic Edition of the Holy Bible (4) describes Magog as Scythia or Tartary, which is an alternative spelling for Tatar.

The Tatars were originally a people under Genghis Khan and their descendants are now scattered throughout what was formerly the USSR, but concentrated mostly around the central Volga region about the junction of the Volga and Kama rivers in the Republic of Tataria

Meshech and Tubal are identified as the Moschi and Tibareni tribes who lived in the Caucasus (5); Beth Togarmah, one of Gog's allies, is synonymous with Armenia, a republic on the north eastern border of Turkey. Armenia is home of one of the earliest Christian civilisations dating back to the fourth century.

What evidence there is points to Magog and Meshech and Tubal, with their ally, Beth Togarmah, being in the European and western Asia parts of the former Soviet Union. In other words, some lands that were parts of the USSR are described as providing the final and most terrible human foe of Israel.

A note in the Amplified Bible says (6) that:

“Gesenius observes that it can scarcely be doubtful that the first trace of the Russians is here given” while “Gengstenberg could not bear to see 'the poor Russians' ranged among the enemies of the kingdom of God.” (7)

To the nineteenth century theologian, it may have seemed unthinkable that 'poor Russia' could be an enemy of God, but the twentieth century presented a different picture that would not have suggested 'poor Russia' an appropriate description for that country. It remains to be seen how postCommunist Russia will develop in the twenty-first century.

Towards Israel, what we may call “Russia”, has in decades past generally presented a generally hostile face. In addition to continually arming Israel's sworn enemies in the middle east, in particular Egypt and Syria, it on one occasion actually contributed to the war by giving false satellite information to the Syrians that Israel was massing a large army on their border with Syria. The attitude of the former Soviet Union towards Israel may be summarised as being - “- the Soviet political position – is to assist and support the Arab countries and the Palestinian people, that have been victims of Israeli expansion and aggression”. (8)

That policy was claimed to be part of the normal pattern of Soviet relations with other countries based on : “- the principles of peace, mutual respect, scrupulous observance of sovereignty, and non-interference in other countries' internal affairs.” (8) Linked with this was the USSR's insistence that Israel return to the Arabs all territory which has been annexed by force, as a result of war: and this included territory occupied in the 1967 War.

In his speech at the 16th Congress of the Trade Unions of the USSR, Leonid Brezhnev stressed “that the acquisition of territory by means of war is impermissible.” (8)

The problem for the Soviet propagandists was that they were haunted by their own history:

1939 - Following Germany's invasion of Poland on 1st September, Russia followed its ally's example and invaded Poland from the east on the 17th. On 28th September, after Poland had been over-run, Germany and Russia carved up the land between them, Germany taking 72,000 square miles in the west, and the remaining 78,000 miles in the east being claimed by Russia. After the 1939-45 War, Russia did not relinquish most of this land.

1940 - Latvia, an independent country, was seized by Russia and incorporated into the Soviet Union.

1940 - Lithuania, an independent country also seized by Russia and made part of the USSR.

1940 - Estonia, an independent country, seized by Russia and made part of the Soviet Union.

1950 - Russia and China supported the North Korean attempt to annex South Korea by force of arms.

1956 - Hungary – an independent Communist country, was invaded by Russian tanks and infantry in November when it showed signs of wanting a greater degree of freedom from the repressive Russian influence, but its experience of freedom was short-lived.

1968 - Czechoslovakia, a communist ally of the USSR, which had been moving towards more internal freedom and better relations with Western countries, was invaded by 400,000 troops from Russia, Poland, East Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria, in order to enforce hard-line communist principles on the Czech government and people.

So Russia's principles of “peace, mutual respect, scrupulous observance of sovereignty and non-interference in other countries' internal affairs” towards the Arab-Israeli situation was shown to be a mask, worn to hide the face of Gog and Magog underneath. And Brezhnev's assertion that “the acquisition of territory by means of war is impermissible” has an unreal ring to it.

In the West, the secular view was that the Soviet Union as a super-power, was using the Middle East conflict to weaken Western influence, and especially that of the United States, with Arab countries, so as to permit communist power to be extended there. Tied to this was the USSR's strategy which was to disrupt or cut off Arab oil supplies to Western countries.

Viewed in this light, the Soviet support for the United Nations resolution on 29th November, 1947, agreeing on the partitioning of Palestine into two separate states – one Arab, one Jewish – was part of a long-time plan, the aim of which was to create continual instability in the Middle East. And the reason for wanting that instability was not hard to find: it was that communism was believed to thrive where national and international situations were unstable.

In support of this policy, the USSR always portrayed the Arabs as an oppressed people, and whatever the Arabs had done in Palestine against Israel had always been in response to their suffering at the hands of the Jews. But two months before the U.N. Resolution for dividing Palestine, a secret meeting of Arab League governments, held in Lebanon (September 1947) planned the invasion of the expected future State of Israel, and a centre for the training of the Arabs for the invasion was set up in Damascus.

In the months before the State of Israel came into being at 4pm on 14th May,

1948 – it should have taken place at midnight, but that would have been during Sabbath – the Jews were under constant attacks by Arab militia. These were dark months as Arabs and Jews fought over police stations and other fortified positions being vacated as British police and troops left Palestine. The Arab Higher Executive urged all Arabs in Haifa to leave the city because Arab armies would invade Palestine and “drive the Jews into the sea”. Arabs who remained in Haifa would be regarded as renegades. Some 55,000 Arabs yielded to this pressure and so became Palestinian refugees.

The Arab intention, in contrast with the Russian claim that they simply react to Jewish aggression, has from the first been to destroy the State of Israel. In a Top Secret 'Battle Orders' for the Egyptian 3rd Infantry Division, dated 15th February, 1956, the orders have eight sub-headings. Numbers 1 – 7 each deals with military matters but the final order is:

“(8) - Our aim is always “the destruction of Israel.” Remember and act for its attainment.

(Signed) Liwa (Major General) Ahmed Salem, Staff Officer.” (9)

It was deception – self, or otherwise – for the Soviet Union to justify its anti-Israel attitude on the grounds of Jewish aggression against the Arabs: history irrefutably proves otherwise. In the campaign to harm American and Western influence in the Middle East, the Soviets were spectacularly unsuccessful. For a time the Arab petroleum exporting states had placed an embargo on oil sales to the United States and the Netherlands, another traditionally proIsraeli nation, following the 1973 October Arab-Israel War. The Arabs also introduced sharp price increases for crude oil: by January, 1974, some prices were four times the September 1973 figures.

America's untiring support for Israel has earned it fanatical enemies among the Arab countries, examples including Colonel Gadaffi of Libya, and more dangerously, Osama Bin Laden. The Twin Towers of New York attack of 9/11 is the most outstanding example of anti-American feeling from those who would wish only harm for Israel and those countries who are friendly with Israel.

Even King Feisal of Saudi Arabia, traditionally a friend of the USA, condemned its support for Israel, saying to the United States Secretary of State following the 1973 War: “I speak as a friend, and I want you to know how painful it is to me to make steps which injure our friendship.” (8) King Feisal went on to ask the

Americans to change their policy in the Middle East.

It is difficult to understand why the former Soviet Union was so opposed to the State of Israel, and even towards those Russian Jews who wished to emigrate from the USSR to Israel. The Russian Jew who applied for an exit visa for the purpose of settling in Israel attracted ostracism and persecution for himself and his family at the hands of his country's authorities. The simple anti-capitalist, antiimperialist attitude of the Soviets towards Middle East affairs fell short of justifying the enmity that country's leadership felt for Israel. One would be forgiven for suspecting a spiritual component or motivation behind that enmity.

Israel is a small country, tiny in size, population, wealth and weaponry – minute compared to the combined might of the Arab countries: Saudi Arabia is one of the richest countries in the world, Syria has one of the largest, best armed forces in the world – yet the USSR constantly considered Israel to be a significant threat to its policies in the region. And while the communists believed that : “- in terms of history, Zionism is doomed, just like any other bourgeois chauvinistic ideology -” (8) Zionism is still with us, and the USSR as the leading proponent of Marxist atheism, has been consigned to history. For reasons that the Soviet leadership might not have fully understood themselves, the State of Israel was continually a thorn in the flesh of their political consciousness. But perhaps there is an explanation, and it does not depend on an exaggerated dose of anti-Semitism

The Russian attitude towards Israel is explicable when we see Russia as the Magog of the Bible, the final human foe of Judaism, plotting and carrying out its schemes against God's People, but in actual fact, being duped and drawn about like men with hooks in their mouths by the arch-fiend, Satan. The irony of it is – Marxists do not even believe that Satan exists.

A final point to note: some commentaries point out a difference between the account of Gog and Magog in Ezekiel and that in Revelation. In Ezekiel, the allies of Magog are specified – known to us today as Iran, Ethiopia and Libya. But in Revelation, the reference is to “the nations in the four corners of the earth – Gog and Magog -” (1)

From this it is surmised that two separate alliances are referred to, but since Russia, Ethiopia, Iran and Libya are north, south, east and west of Israel, they could be what is referred to as the “four corners of the earth.”

What we can be sure about, basing our views on the Bible's teaching, is that some parts at least of the former USSR, will figure in the last act of human violence. And other neighbouring countries of Israel will also be involved. We must pray for these peoples, that a spiritual revival will sweep these lands that as many as possible will not be involved in that final act against the Jews, and against God.

Meanwhile, the monstrous evil of Gog and Magog which has lurked for thousands of years in the lands of the north, waits its turn to strut its part upon the human stage, contenting itself for now by hiding behind the policies of those states that have an age-long hostility towards God's Chosen People.

References

- (1) Revelation 20: 8
 - (2) Ezekiel 38: 1 to 39: 16
 - (3) Bagster's Miniature Quarto "*Authorized Version*" London: pages 904 and 1335
 - (4) New Catholic Edition "*Holy Bible*" New York: page 933 (5) "*The Amplified Old Testament*" (Part Two) Grand Rapids: Zondervan, page 972
 - (6) *ibid*
 - (7) Gesenius, (Heinrich Friedrich) Wilhelm (3/2/1786 to 23/10/1842, was a German Biblical scholar and a leading exponent on Hebrew and other Semitic languages. Hengstenberg, Ernst Wilhelm (20/10/1802 to 28/5/1869) was a German theologian who defended the Lutheran orthodoxy against the rationalism in the Protestant church of his day. He was a well-known writer of Old Testament commentaries (Compiled from "*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*", vol 5, 1985, 'Micropaedia')
 - (8) Y.M. Primakov (1979) "*Anatomy of the Middle East Conflict*" Moscow: "Nauka" Publishing House (in translation)
 - (9) Frank Gervasi (1967) "*The Case for Israel*" New York: Viking Press
- Appendix 14

Chapter 16 : The Divided Stream

There is a stream in the Rocky Mountains of America whose onward flow is interrupted by a large boulder. The stream has to divide, passing on either side of the obstruction, but before the waters can merge again on the far side, the ground falls away to the right and the left. The stream is now divided into smaller ones

and they never join up again. The story is that one stream flows into the Pacific Ocean, and the other into the Atlantic.

That boulder was a place of dividing, the point where future courses and destinies were decided. Revelation chapter 19 also divides into two, and the place of division is verse 10. The first part, verses 1 to 9, goes in one direction, and the second part verses 11 to 21, goes in another. They may be summarised like this:

Verses 1 to 9 Verses 11 to 21

It is about God and His friends It is about the Word of God and His enemies

God and the Lamb are praised The Beast and the False Prophet are destroyed

It ends with a wedding feast It includes a feast on human flesh

John perceives them both differently, too: the first, he hears, but he sees the second.. What is it that decides whether you are in the first part, or in the second part of chapter 19? Whether at the Wedding Feast of Jesus Christ and His Church – or destroyed along with the enemies of God? Surely no one would deliberately choose destruction in preference to eternal life with God. Then why so many in the second group?

Whatever superficial reasons may be given, at bottom, there must be disbelief – disbelief in God or in what the Bible teaches of life after death. Or perhaps it is a deep-down apathetic atheism. Not so much saying that God does not exist - but that He is not relevant. That even if God should exist – so what! We can afford to ignore Him!

That contrasts with the urgency of the preaching of the Gospel. Jesus came from His Temptations in the Wilderness: “- proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' He said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news.'” (1) And from Paul's letters to the Corinthian Christians: “ - I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation.”(2)

The disciples were commanded to go and preach the good news to men everywhere, spurred on by the parable of the servant who was sent into the streets and alleys and country lanes to compel the people to come his master's banquet. (3)

No one phones '999' without a sense of urgency. But there is no greater emergency than man's estrangement from God, with death and eternity just a

breath away. Whatever the reason for man ending in either half of Revelation chapter 19, we know that the boulder which divides this particular stream is Jesus Christ. He came and died to give us the choice, for before His sacrifice on the cross, apart from the Children of Israel, there was no means of restoration to God on offer. Now the means of restoration is open to all men, and by our response we can opt for eternal life with God, or an eternity without Him.

The chapter divides at verse 10:

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

Most of the verse is proving that although he could describe what he had been saying as “- the true words of God” (4) yet he was not God and therefore, must not be worshipped. But the significant words for us here are these: “- you and – your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus.”

We can interpret this in two ways: First, it may be the testimony of Jesus is what He said about Himself, and that He is Lord and Saviour; or second, it refers to our public confession that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Saviour.

However we explain it, if we hold to it, it must mean that we are Christians, and that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Saviour. That is the Rock which divides the stream of life. Whether to pass on the one side, into the first half of chapter 19, or on the other, into the second half. And if people do not believe the testimony of Jesus Christ, or think that even if it is true, that it is not worth bothering with – perhaps because they have a distorted idea of what being a Christian is about – then they have rejected God's offer of salvation; they have chosen, not so much to be enemies of God, as not to be His friends.

And Jesus said: “He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.” (5)

Revelation chapter 19 emphatically declares that there is no fence to sit on. There are two alternatives – before or after verse 10. For those of us who know the alternatives and believe, there is no hesitation about choosing Jesus Christ and life with God.

Another question: why is the first part of the chapter about what John heard,

while the second part is about what he saw? Verse 1 begins: “After this I heard -
“ and Verse 11 begins - “I saw heaven standing open -”

An obvious answer has to be that the first part is about what is said – no, not 'said' – shouted:

“- a great multitude in heaven shouting -” verse 1 “And again they shouted -”
verse 3

“- and they cried -” verse 4,

but “saying” in verse 5, then back to shouting in verse 6 - “a great multitude shouting-”

It is to do with sound because people are praising and worshipping, and the main impact is on hearing.

The second part is about seeing because it is about action rather than words. An angel does cry with a loud voice at one point, but mainly it is about doing rather than saying.

Romans 10 verse 9 does say: “ - if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord', and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

Revelation chapter 19 emphasises confession, while placing it against a backdrop of eternity.

References

- (1) Mark 1: 14,15 (2) 2 Corinthians 6: 2 (3) Luke 14: 16-24
- (4) Revelation 19: 9
- (5) Matthew 12: 30

Chapter 17 : Armageddon

Satan's hold on earth has never been stronger by the time the 6th Bowl of God's anger is poured out. The Beast and the False Prophet are at their most influential. And when the evil spirits summon the kings of earth, they readily respond – they assemble at Armageddon to fight God's people. (1) The outcome seems assured; the vastly superior numbers following the Beast must win.

Armageddon - “the hill of Megiddo” - in the Valley of Jezreel, south east of Mount Carmel and some 50 miles north of Jerusalem – is well chosen for the

great battle. Since early times it has been a battleground. It was there that the soldiers of Israel, inspired by the prophetess, Deborah, defeated the Canaanite army led by Sisera. (2) It was there that King Ahaziah of Judah, an idolater was fatally wounded by Jehu, and died in nearby Megiddo.(3) The good king Josiah of Judah, in an act of folly, went out to fight Pharaoh Neco and the Egyptian army at this site, and was wounded and later died from his wound, in Jerusalem. (4)

So great was the mourning for King Josiah, that it was likened to how the Jews will mourn when they realise that they have sacrificed their Messiah -

“On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be great, like the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo.” (5)

Armageddon is a place of violence and mourning. And this is where the Beast and the False Prophet along with the Kings of the earth and their armies assemble to rid the earth of God's people. The anti-Semitism of millennia is to reach its climax. What the persecutions in Islamic and Christian countries, the pogroms of Russia and Poland, the Holocaust of Nazi-dominated Europe, and the countless murders of the centuries have failed to do, the Beast is now determined to achieve for his master, Satan.

But Armageddon is not to be a battle as we think of battles. It will be a spiritual conflict with a supernatural ending. For the battle is not the people's battle. It is to be God's battle. As King Jehoshaphat was told in the days of the Moabites and Ammonites who came to fight him - “This is what the LORD says to you: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's.'”(6)

And as God destroyed the armies of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir, so Jesus, Who is the Word of God (7), destroys the Kings and their armies, while the Beast and the False Prophet are thrown into the Lake of Fire. (8) After Armageddon, Satan is chained and locked in the Pit – or the Abyss – for a thousand years. This is the Abyss which the demons cast out from the Gadarene madman were frightened of, preferring to be put into the pigs instead. (9)

With Satan removed from earth, there is a period of peace for 1,000 years – the Millennium. Isaiah spoke of it as a time when peoples come to Jerusalem to the house of God, when He judges between nations, when swords are recycled into

ploughshares, and there is universal peace. (10) For a thousand years, mankind experiences the Kingdom of God on earth. Then Satan is released from the Abyss.

Will the world reject him, preferring instead the security and peace of God's rule? Sadly, no! Satan deceives the nations, and he gathers them for battle, exciting their ages-old hatred for God and His people – and as a vast army, they come . . .

“In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city He loves.” (11)

Back they come to Jerusalem, not to worship, but to destroy. Unless men are changed by God's Spirit, deep down within themselves, they prefer sin. Even when they know what the consequences will be. They are willing to be deceived, and Satan is the great deceiver. (12) Then fire from heaven destroys them, wipes out their armies, and Satan is thrown – not back into the Pit – but into the Lake of Fire. And so evil is finally eradicated from earth.

Men's last chance to choose God and His kingdom will be rejected by “nations in the four corners of the earth -” This need not mean all the nations, or every citizen of these nations which do come against Jerusalem – but it does mean a vast company of people who have experienced the benefits of the Kingdom of God on earth. And their hatred of Jerusalem and all it stands for will be stronger than their selfinterest.

God's plan is pre-ordained: it cannot be frustrated. It will be fulfilled. And we who accept it, acknowledging Him as our God – we have a destiny that will outlast evil, and is forever safe with God.

References

- (1) Revelation 16: 12-16 and chapter 19: 19
- (2) Judges 4: 14-16 and 5: 19
- (3) 2 Kings 9: 27
- (4) 2 Kings 23: 29 and 2 Chronicles 35: 22-24
- (5) Zechariah 12: 11
- (6) 2 Chronicles 20: 15
- (7) John 1: 1
- (8) Revelation 19: 20,21
- (9) Luke 8: 26-32
- (10) Isaiah 2: 1 – 4
- (11) Revelation 20: 8,9

Chapter 18 : Gold and Silver or Wood and Straw

Here is a problem: Mary B had been a Christian for as long as she could remember. At school she was bullied by other children for being a Christian, but she persisted in turning the other cheek and not retaliating. In later years, she served as a missionary and lived without home-comforts and loved ones. Then when she was old, she returned to her home country to live her last days in an old folks' home without family and friends, until she died.

Jack R. was a wealthy businessman, making his money by shady deals and living only for pleasure. He had no time for religion until he was an old man, when just before he died, he put his trust in Jesus Christ and asked to be forgiven for his sins.

So Mary and Jack both died as Christians.

Jesus said in His parable of the land-owner who hired workers for his vineyard, that whether workers worked from early morning, or from mid-day, or late in the day, they would all be paid the same wages in the evening. Their wages would not be related to how much they had worked or endured, but whether they had accepted the offer of employment. (1)

Do Mary B. and Jack R. get the same reward from God because they both dies as Christians? Is that what the parable teaches? Or does Mary get a better reward commensurate with her lifetime devotion and service to Christ, even to suffering for Him?

Then there is the other side to the problem. Sally L. was a decent person who quite often went to church and supported its 'good' works with her money. She was kind and helpful, but she had never accepted Jesus Christ as her Lord and Saviour, nor ever felt the need to ask God for forgiveness, for she had never felt she had ever sinned. Most certainly she would have rejected any idea that she was a Christian. No, she claimed to be a humanist with a social conscience.

Rudolf M., on the other hand, had been a terrible person most of his life. Even as a child he had been a horror. He had had a prison record for crimes against children, eventually murdering two of them, and he died in prison. He had

ridiculed religion all his days and one of his last acts before he died was to curse God and Jesus Christ and “the whole band of holy willies.”

Both Sally L. and Rudolf M. died as non-Christians. (Of course, we never really know if someone has died as a non-Christian for we are not privy to the very last thoughts or response of a dying person towards God. But for the sake of this story...) Since they both die as non-Christians, do they suffer the same condemnation and punishment after this life? Or is Rudolf M's worse than that of Sally L.? Our God is a just God. Abraham was convinced that God, the Judge of all the would “do right”. (2) So what is justice for these four people?

Although Jesus taught in the parable of the employer that regardless of how long the employee worked they would receive the same wage, what this parable means is that if people accept God's offer of salvation, they will receive it. There is no age or other qualification required – only repentance and faith.

But the Bible says more about this in 1 Corinthians 3 verses 11 to 15:

“For no-one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he builds survives, he will receive his reward.”

So the salvation through Jesus Christ is the foundation for all Christians; and what is built on that foundation, if it is gold, silver or gems, will survive death. Wood, hay and straw will perish. Therefore, Mary B. would have much to take into the next life, much to be rewarded. But Jack R. would be empty-handed. They would both, however, be in the Church, the Body of Christ.

When we consider the other side of the problem – will Sally L and Rudolf M. both suffer identical punishment – we get help from the teaching of Jesus Christ:

“Woe to you, Korasin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgement than for you.” Matthew 11 verses 21, 22

From this, we can see that there will be graded punishment, some more bearable than others. So Sally L and Rudolf M. will probably not suffer the same degree of punishment, although as non-Christians they will be punished like anyone else whose “name was not found in the book of life.” They will be “thrown into the lake of fire”. (3)

This is what it means in the Judgement Scene of Revelation chapter 20, when. . “The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.” (4) There is one division into two peoples; one side is of the friends of God – the other is the enemies of God. And the enemies of God are thrown into the Lake of Fire.

So what is the Lake of Fire? It is the final destiny of the enemies of God. Jesus described it as “hell, where 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'”(5) And again, as - “outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (6)

'Hell' in the New Testament, borrows its name from the Valley of Hinnom, a narrow gully outside the southern wall of Jerusalem, a place polluted from olden days by the sacrifice of children by fire to the god Moloch, (7) and where in New Testament days, offal was dumped for burning. Hell was a cursed place, a rubbish dump for the discards of the city. Hell, the accursed place, the place of rejection, for those who reject God and the destiny they could have shared with Him. And perhaps, a place of regret over lost opportunity and destiny spurned.

Death and Hades will no longer be required, and they too will be thrown into the Lake of Fire.(8) And finally, two characteristics of hell we can be sure of. Jesus said: “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”(9)

First, Hell will be a place of punishment! And second it will last as long as eternal life.

References

(1) Matthew 20: 1-16

(2) Genesis 18: 25

(3) Revelation 20: 15

(4) Revelation 20: 12

(5) Mark 9: 48

(6) Matthew 8: 12; 22: 13; 25: 30 (7) 2 Chronicles 28: 3; Jeremiah 7: 31 (8) Revelation 20: 14

(9) Matthew 25: 46

Chapter 19 : “Madge” and the Hereafter

I knew an old lady, let's call her Madge - not her real name who suffered from Multiple Sclerosis. She was a cantankerous lady, described by those who had most to do with her as eccentric, and by herself as “an auld crab” - which translates as “an elderly bad-tempered person.” But she was a Christian and she looked forward to dying, to leaving this life with all its suffering and loneliness and frustration, and going to Heaven. She'd be able to walk properly there . .

The problem was that sitting around on clouds or marble staircases listening to choirs and harps and the occasional trumpet voluntary would not have suited her one bit. If that were what Heaven is to be about, I could easily imagine Madge having a word or two to say to whoever was responsible. She wasn't easily cowed when it came to delivering a few of her 'home truths'. Nevertheless, that seems to be the usual view of Heaven as depicted on cinema and TV screens, and the image that many folk conjure up of the 'land that is fairer than day'.

When I was preparing for this chapter, I found it difficult to focus on my gut-reaction to Revelation chapters 21 and 22. Commentaries and Bible dictionaries and reference Bibles can swamp you in a sea of scriptural texts and cross-references and theories and opinions – so that you are able to say something wise-sounding about every verse, but lose what it all means to you.

I was on my way to visit a relative in hospital, and I was thinking about dying and what comes after and I was surprised by the thought that the conventional picture of Heaven did not attract me one bit. I thought of Madge, the “auld crab”, then of what I had been trying and not managing to do about this chapter . . . and I knew what I had to say about it. . . .That the future life of the Christian is not going to be perpetual unemployed luxury.

Chapter 22 verse 3 says: “ - his servants will serve him -”

Although “servants” and “serve” are almost the same in English in Greek they are two entirely different words: “servants” usually means “slaves”, while “serve” in that verse means “work for” or “worship” God. So in Heaven, Christians will be actively employed by God. Doing what?

There is going to be a new earth and the nations will walk on it in the light from God and the Lamb, and the leaves from the tree of life will be for the healing of

the nations. (1) That suggests a future existence, a world recognisably similar to earth just now, but immeasurably better. There will be no sin, no evil – no suffering, no sorrow, no death. An ideal world in which nations serve God, a world of universal peace.

But Christians will not be citizens of those nations. Christians will be the Bride of the Lamb, and will reign with Christ forever. (2) But reign over what? Over the nations, perhaps?

The Bible does not say. It remains tantalisingly silent on details. But the 'reigning' part is important, for it is about 'reigning' that the actual descriptive part of the future life ends -“And they will reign forever and ever” (2) There will be an existence of serving and reigning.

Psychologists speak of men's highest need being the need to express their beings, their existence, in useful and fulfilling ways. That is what Heaven is going to be for Christians. The parable of the talents tells us the reward given by the Master to the faithful servants is being put in charge of many things and to share their Master's happiness.

“- everyone who has will be given more -” (3)

And Revelation says it is to reign with Christ. Which helps explain Paul's “desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better”(4) No wonder Paul could say that to die is gain!

Denominational barriers will be non-existent. There will be no church roll – only the Lamb's book of life. No Anglicans or Baptists or Roman Catholics or Presbyterians or Plymouth Brethren or Pentecostals or – you name them – no more denominational titles – only the servants of God – all brothers and sisters in Christ. (5)

And Jews, who now know their Messiah.

The Holy City, the New Jerusalem, the Bride of Christ – has twelve gates and each gate bears the name of a tribe of Israel; and has twelve foundations, each of which has a name of one of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. (6)

Jesus Christ's - “purpose was to create in Himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through

the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.” (7) The Jewish people and the Christian Gentiles are united in Christ and form part of the Bride of Christ. But the Jews do not lose their identity, and there may be a specific work for them to do . . . for gates are means of entry and exit. And the Tribes of Israel are the gates of the New Jerusalem . . . and foundations are for building upon, and that may be the function of Gentile Christians in the Bride of the Lamb.

Together, we will reign forever.

The Book of Revelation ends with a sense of urgency -

“Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near -” (8)

This sense of urgency is accentuated by the advice for those who read, to continue unchanged in their present conditions – strange advice indeed - “let him who does wrong continue to do wrong -” (9) But it is simply a way of emphasising the shortness of the remaining time; God's desire for people to accept eternal life is obvious later in the chapter

“Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.” (10)

And Jesus' last words to us are: “Yes, I am coming soon.”

To which the writer adds - “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.” (11)

Whatever our circumstances, if we love Jesus Christ and look forward to being with Him, then we must pray for His Coming, for the Coming of Jesus Christ will bring the reign of God over the earth, the ultimate defeat of evil, and the everlasting blessing of all who love God. The God-given instinct in everyone for a relationship with God will only be fully satisfied when Christ comes again And in eternal service of God, reigning with Christ, we shall completely fulfil our whole beings.

That is what lies ahead for us. That is what Heaven means for us. In fact, that old lady, Madge, without all the problems and handicaps of her Multiple Sclerosis, will be totally satisfied in Heaven. And so will my loved ones. And me, too. Hallelujah!

References

- (1) Revelation 21: 1,23,24 and 22: 2 (2) Revelation 22: 5
(3) Matthew 25: 14-30 (4) Philippians 1: 21-23

- (5) Revelation 21: 27 and 22: 9 (6) Revelation 21: 12,14
(7) Ephesians 2: 15,16 (8) Revelation 22: 10
(9) Revelation 22: 11
(10) Revelation 22: 17
(11) Revelation 22: 20

Chapter 20 : “Romans 8 verse 28 writ large... ”

The Book of Revelation forces me to readjust my ideas about God. The New Testament picture I held was heavily weighted on the side of the loving, forgiving nature of “our Heavenly Father”. But Revelation shows God as the One who has another side to His Fatherhood.

It does indeed show God as loving - “Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline -” (1) but it also emphasises that God will rebuke and discipline where it is needed. He is a Father, but He is not an indulgent Father. Even John 3 verse 16 - “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son -” and 1st John 4 verse 8 - “God is love - “which tell us of the loving nature of God, go on to speak of the need for an atoning sacrifice so that sinners might not perish. If it is easy to overlook the sternness of God in the remainder of the New Testament, the Book of Revelation redresses the balance.

God's holiness demands that sin be dealt with. And nowhere is this more clearly seen than in the Book of Revelation. God does not fudge distinctions between His followers and His enemies, nor is there a fence to sit on. One is either in the Lamb's book of life, or one is not, and if not, then there remains only the Lake of Fire. (2)

The Book of Revelation shows God as awesome and powerful. He is uniquely high and lifted up, dwelling in splendour no one can approach. The impression is of the Eternal God for whom time is laid out in panoramic view with the beginning to the end all equally accessible, and equally known.

Which is why the Psalmist could say: “All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” (3)

And why Jesus Christ, Who was crucified some 2,000 years ago by our reckoning, is portrayed in the Book of Revelation as “- the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.” (4)

The Book of Revelation also demands that we readjust our mental image of Jesus Christ if we think of Him only as the loving Saviour of the Gospels, Who refused to defend Himself, but Who turned the other cheek and was led as a lamb to the slaughter. Revelation shows Him as the Word of God, riding out to make war, with eyes like blazing fire, destroying His enemies with the sword from His mouth. (5)

With this wider view of God and Jesus Christ, it is easier to see how God is in every situation, working in every situation for the good of those who love Him and have been called by Him to fulfil His purpose. (6) It is easier to believe He truly is in control, even when anarchy and evil seem to reign; and that nothing can happen to the Christian without God's foreknowledge and permission. The Book of Revelation is Romans 8 verse 28 writ large upon a backcloth of both time and eternity.

Revelation also reveals Satan as a dynamic evil targeted against mankind. But He has restricted scope and a limited timetable. He can only do so much and no more. We see this in the vision of the Two Witnesses, who complete their work for God before Satan's representative may attack them.(7) And again in the number of servants for God killed for their faith. God has fixed the exact number, and Satan cannot exceed it, not by one saint. (8)

God's servants who are faithful unto death, have a wonderful future revealed in the Book of Revelation. Language cannot describe it, but we are privileged to have a vision of the life which fulfils our highest aspirations, of serving and worshipping God; it is significant that the final comment on our after-life is this - "And they will reign forever and ever". (9)

So how should I respond to what the Book of Revelation teaches me?

I must love God and serve Him faithfully without regard to what it may cost me. To die for Christ is a small price to pay when compared with the future awaiting the one who overcomes and is a victor for Christ.

With my love for God, there must also be a love for my fellowmen.. Especially for Christians. Even those I do not get on with, who irritate me, who dispute my cherished truths, who even question that I am a Christian. I must love all Christians without exception.

I must love the Jews also. God has a plan for them. They have not been cast

aside by God. They also figure in the Book of Revelation. For example, they are the 144,000 of Revelation chapter 7. And again, they will be among those “- who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name,” because they - “- sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb.” (10) These songs identify both Jews and Christian singers.

And the New Jerusalem of chapter 21 includes Jews as well as Christians, for - “On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel,” (11) while “The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.” (12) There they are, Jews and Christians, united in the New Jerusalem.

And we must love non-Christians, even anti-Christians. And pray and work to persuade them to accept God's offer of salvation. The awareness of the Lake of Fire must stir us to action; that place of eternal punishment. We must not be complacent about souls who continue blissfully unaware towards it. It does not matter if the Lake of Fire is a place of burning sulphur – or something of which fire is just the symbol – perhaps an eternity of unmitigated regret – it is still a terrible choice for men to make in ignorance.

The Book of Revelation gives me a new perspective on the Bible of both the Old and the New Testaments; it gives an eternity-eye-view of life and death and after-life. And the lives of all the men and women of God, and even of His enemies, right back to Genesis, take on new significance in the light of its teachings.

And finally, for me, the Book of Revelation gives added credibility to dedication, to self-denial, to martyrdom And in so doing, it reinforces my determination to live for Christ, both in this life and in the life to come.

References

(1) Revelation 3: 19

(2) Revelation 20: 15

(3) Psalm 139: 16

(4) Revelation 13: 8 (This verse may also be translated to read: “- written

from the creation of the world in the book of life belonging to the

Lamb that was slain” - from note in New International Version) (5) Revelation 19: 11-15

(6) Romans 8: 28

(7) Revelation 11: 7

(8) Revelation 6: 11

- (9) Revelation 22: 5
- (10) Revelation 15: 3
- (11) Revelation 21: 12
- (12) Revelation 21: 14