

## CHAPTER 17

In chapter 17 we go back in time. It may help to remember Tregelles' observation, from Part I, that often, as with the writings of the Old Testament, we are given the final outcome first in a summary statement and then the details which lead up to it afterward. We are, now, before the pouring out of the bowls of wrath described in chapter 16, and it is very likely we are at the beginning of the tribulation period itself. Verses 1 and 2 speak of "the great harlot" with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication. *"Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, 'Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters'."*

After this we read, in verse 3, that the angel now carries John to another place--a wilderness, and another time--one long past: *"And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns . . . . And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."*<sup>1</sup> The phrase "abominations of the earth" would seem to imply she is the mother of *all* the abominations of the earth, that is, from the earliest days of mankind. John records that this "mother of harlots" was drunk with the blood of the saints. Do the Old Testament scriptures provide any light?

Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before Yahweh . . . . And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar [Babylonia]. . . . And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name<sup>2</sup> for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." But Yahweh came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built . . . . So Yahweh scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name is called Babel . . . ."<sup>3</sup>

The Genesis records tells us that Nimrod became a powerful tyrant, subjugating and enslaving men into his service. It was this aspect of his personality that is being referred to when he is called a mighty hunter; he was a "hunter of men." Seiss writes that Nimrod was the organizer of an arbitrary imperialism over and against the patriarchal order and the divine institutes. A brazen offender, who did not hesitate to withstand God to his very face, he and his followers built the great tower of which we just read. And he also states that, according to extrabiblical records that have been preserved, Nimrod's wife, Semiramis, was a high priestess of the so-called Babylonian mysteries, which consisted of secret religious rites developed as a part of the worship of idols in Babylon. She gave birth to a son, Tammuz, whom she claimed was conceived miraculously and who, according to legend, was killed and brought back to life. There seems no doubt that here in Genesis chapter 11 we have the beginning of a new religion--an idolatrous one--which was to contend with the divine worship of the patriarchs. This religion was not the gradual growth of unenlightened thinking but was conceived in intentional rebellion against Yahweh.

---

1 According to Walvoord, "the word *mystery* is a descriptive reference to the title, not a part of the title itself."

2 According to Seiss, "*a Sem*, token, sign, banner, ensign, or mark of confederation, fellowship and organized unity as an undivided people."

3 Gen. 10:8-10; 11:4-9.

Yahweh punished man for this great sin. He confused their language and scattered them over the earth. But the seeds of this idolatrous religion were dispersed with them to take root in every new settlement. Who was the ensign of all the Assyrian princes? *Semiramis*, the Dove Goddess.<sup>4</sup> And in Ezekiel 8:14 we read of the Israelites weeping for her son Tammuz.

John records, in verse 3, that the harlot he saw was sitting on a beast which had seven heads and ten horns. According to Walvoord, "The fact that the woman is riding the beast and is not the beast itself signifies that she represents ecclesiastical power as distinct from the beast which is the political power."<sup>5</sup> Archer states: "She seems to represent . . . the secularized religious establishment, closely linked with the government (and yet sufficiently distinct from the government to be capable of rejection and destruction by the government and citizenry of Antichrist after they feel her to be no longer useful)."<sup>6</sup>

Accepting this as a valid conclusion, we will leave the ecclesiastical aspect and concentrate on the political--the seven heads and ten horns. What, or who, do they represent? Starting with the seven heads, we read: "*The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. There are also seven kings.*"<sup>7</sup> *Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come*" (17:9,10).

Most commentators agree that the seven heads represent seven empires. Zahn states:

"The heads are consecutive phases of the greatness of the world kingdom at enmity with God through all changes of history . . . the seven heads cannot be individual rulers of one and the same kingdom, but only kingdoms which follow each other, together with their respective kings."<sup>8</sup>

What are these seven kingdoms or empires? Daniel, during the reign of Belshazzar, had a vision of four beasts which represented four empires. They were Babylon, Medo-Persian, Greece, and Rome, the first reaching back only as far as the period in which Daniel was living. According to Zahn, "since the time of Daniel the idea of the kingdoms had become inseparably blended with that of their founders or representatives."<sup>9</sup> These four empires of Daniel's vision must certainly be included in the seven empires of Revelation. Here in Revelation, however, the empires must of necessity reach back farther than Babylon, for as we noted above, the seven heads are also seven kings of which five have fallen and "one is." This "one is" can be no other than Rome, the empire in which John was living. Therefore, five empires have already fallen. Preceding Rome there were but five great ones: Greece, Persia, Babylon, Assyria, and Egypt. After Rome (the sixth empire), another kingdom will follow (the seventh), but it will not reign long. Upon this follows the eighth--that of the antichrist--which is a revival of one of the earlier kingdoms. But which earlier kingdom? We will come back to this point.

Looking at the seven mountains (hills), Seiss notes that if the seven kings and their kingdoms go

---

4 J. A. Seiss, *Lectures on the Apocalypse*, vol. III, pg. 117.

5 John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pg. 245.

6 Gleason Archer, unpublished class notes.

7 Walvoord points out that in the Greek there is no word for "there" as given in the KJV. Translated literally the phrase is "and are seven kings." The NIV translation is "They are also seven kings." *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pg. 251.

8 Theodor Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. III, pg. 441.

9 Theodor Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. III, pg. 441.

back to the time of Egypt's ascendancy, so must the seven hills: "The seven imperial mountains on which she rides must therefore fill up the whole interval; or there was a time, and the most of her history, when she did not ride at all, which is not the fact."<sup>10</sup> Walvoord agrees with him that the seven mountains refer to successive imperial governments. Since the woman has been "riding" since the time of Egypt's greatness, then her idolatrous religion must go back to that time also. The origin of her idolatry was very likely the apostate and idolatrous religion of Nimrod, which had spread with the people to new localities when Yahweh confused their language.

In regards to the beast, it is clearly declared three times in verses 8-11 that the beast does not exist in the present; and twice it is declared that it will appear in the future. The pertinent phrases follow:

*"The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend. . ."* (vs. 8).

*"And those . . . will marvel. . . when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is"* (vs. 8).

*"The beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth . . ."* (vs. 11).

Is there an allusion here to 13:3? *"And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast."* Walvoord states that this wounding of one of the heads is a reference to the Roman Empire: *"Though the wound by the sword apparently refers to the decline of the historic Roman Empire and its revival is indicated by the expression 'did live,' the man who serves at the head of the empire is the symbol of this miraculous restoration."*<sup>11</sup> Ladd writes: *"The fact that both one of the heads and the beast himself received the mortal wound suggests that the beast is in some way to be identified with his ten heads."*<sup>12</sup> Seiss disagrees and says that *"this Beast is a man who once was living, who was fatally wounded . . . and who . . . returns again to take the lead in the activities and administrations upon earth."*<sup>13</sup> Archer agrees with Seiss: *"His rise to power in the Roman Confederacy is marked by one serious conflict in which he was gravely wounded (an assassination attempt?) apparently unto death."*<sup>14</sup>

Which is the better view? That still remains to be decided.

Returning to verse 3, it was stated that the beast had seven heads and ten horns. The ten horns are generally interpreted to mean ten kings who are allied with the beast. According to verse 12, they have *"received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast."* According to Archer,

The ten horns, then, represent the ten nations who will combine at the beginning of the 70th week (Dan. 9) as a revived Roman Empire, with Antichrist emerging as their supreme leader through his speedy triumph over the rest of them. Thus they share authority with the Beast for only a short time ("one hour"). Note that they are described to John as having "not yet received a kingdom" (by 95 A.D.), and are

---

10 J. A. Seiss, *Lectures on the Apocalypse*, vol. III, pg. 128.

11 John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pg. 207.

12 George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, pg. 179. Note that the quote actually has "his ten heads," but this is obviously a simple mistake and not Ladd's intent.

13 J. A. Seiss, *Lectures on the Apocalypse*, vol. II, pg. 400.

14 Gleason Archer, unpublished class notes.

therefore yet future (in contradistinction to the five of the seven kings of v. 10 who have already fallen). Thus the seven kings are not to be confused with the ten horns of this verse.<sup>15</sup>

Walvoord essentially agrees:

Further detail is given concerning the final stage of the world empire as having a nucleus of ten kings apparently joined in a confederacy represented by the ten horns. These kings in contrast to the seven heads of the beast are kings who rule not in succession but simultaneously at the end time. By comparison with chapter 13, it will be seen that this is the form of the Roman Empire just preceding the world empire. The ten horns' rule as kings is subject to that of the beast itself, and their sphere of power is brief. They are a phase of the transmission of power from the various kingdoms to that of the beast itself."<sup>16</sup>

Zahn states: "The antichrist and his kingdom are a power which had already appeared once in history, had then disappeared, and at the end of the times is to appear again in life."<sup>17</sup>

Most commentators agree that this kingdom which once existed and will exist again is a revived Roman empire. Frost agrees with this, but he does have an interesting viewpoint in regards to the Antichrist himself.

Who the Antichrist will be, nationally, is a difficult question, but there is reason to believe that he will be a Greek. The evidence in this direction is as follows: First, if there is no Scripture to the contrary, it may almost be taken for granted that Antichrist will be of Grecian extraction from the fact that he will represent the highest development of human wisdom, for Greece stands for this (1 Cor. 1:18-22). Second, the Antichrist will not be a Jew but a Gentile, the Revised Version of Daniel 11:36, 37--which passage plainly refers to the Man of Sin--correcting the Authorized and making it plain that his "fathers" have been Gentile idolaters, worshipping not God but the gods, and that he himself is like to them. Third, when Antichrist comes he will rule over a "small people," which presumably is Greece (Dan. 11:21-23). Fourth, in the last days and at the time of the Antichrist, the children of Judah and Jerusalem will be sold as slaves to the Grecians, which indicates that this people, at the time, are in political and commercial power (Joel 3:1-6). Fifth, the figure in the Revelation which portrays the Antichrist is a leopard (13:1, 2), and it is plainly stated in Daniel that this beast represents the king and country of Greece (Dan. 7:6; 8:21). Sixth and finally, the most full and detailed account of the Antichrist is found in the eleventh chapter of Daniel, the description there passing from the type to the antitype; and the antitype is the Antichrist and his type is that Grecian general, Antiochus Epiphanes, who followed Alexander the Great and ruled over Syria, inclusive of Palestine (11:1-4, 20-39). This last evidence seems conclusive. Incidentally, it gives strong indication of the fact that the Antichrist will not be the last pope of Rome, for no Grecian, and

---

15 Gleason Archer, unpublished class notes.

16 Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pg. 255.

17 Theodor Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. III, pg. 440.

particularly, no Grecian general has ever been a pope, and it is inconceivable that any ever will be.<sup>18</sup>

In his exposition of Matthew twenty-four, Frost makes clear that although he believes the Antichrist will be Grecian and will rule at first as king of Greece over an extensive European and Syrian territory (like Antiochus Epiphanes), toward the middle of his career he will become Emperor of a tenfold kingdom-confederacy which probably will be a revived and enlarged Roman Empire (Dan. 2:40-45; Rev. 17:7-13).<sup>19</sup>

Only Zahn, and possibly Ladd, disagree with the revived Roman Empire viewpoint, believing it will be a revival of the Greek empire instead. The view of so preeminent a scholar like Zahn cannot be dismissed lightly. Ladd has an excellent summary of it, so I shall quote him in full.

John has also said that the beast had seven heads, one of which was wounded unto death and then healed (13:3). He has also said that the beast itself received the mortal wound but was healed (13:12,14). Now he adds a new fact: the beast is an eighth head, yet it belongs to the seven heads. The symbolism is made difficult by the fact that the beast is sometimes identified with his heads, but is sometimes differentiated from them. The solution to this involved symbolism lies in the interpretation that the beast is the Antichrist, and yet he is not the Antichrist; he is the Antichrist in two of his heads only. As the Antichrist, he has already appeared in history (he was); he does not exist in the present, but he is yet to arise in an embodiment of satanic power. This is why John can say that one of the heads was wounded to death, but the death wound was healed; and also that the beast itself had received a death stroke and had come to life again. In other words, the beast is identified with two of its heads more closely than with the other five. In one of the heads, the beast had himself appeared in history; this head--and the beast himself--had been slain (i.e., had disappeared from history) but is to be revived in a final appearance, which will be a more complete manifestation of the beast than the first (i.e., he shall ascend from the abyss). Still, the other five heads are also heads of the beast, yet it is not identified with them as with the two. The heads are successive manifestations of the worldly kingdoms at enmity with God through all the changes of history. The beast, then, has a twofold meaning: broadly, it is the anti-God worldly power; narrowly, it is one particular kingdom which has a twofold manifestation. Five of the heads are manifestations of the worldly kingdoms as such; two of the heads are specific embodiments of the beast himself. The clue to the understanding of this is the prophecy of Daniel, on which John draws for his symbolism of the beast. In Daniel, the great enemy of God's people is Antichrist, who has previously been manifested in history in the person of Antiochus Epiphanes (Dan. 8:9,21). In typical prophetic manner, these two figures are sometimes blended together so that they seem to be practically one. The beast that you saw was, i.e., it was embodied in Antiochus Epiphanes; it is not, i.e., it does not now exist in this same malevolent form; it is to ascend from the abyss in the person of Antichrist.

---

18 Henry W. Frost, *Matthew Twenty-Four and the Revelation*, pp. 174-175.

19 Henry W. Frost, *Matthew Twenty-Four and the Revelation*, pg. 72.

John adds a further specific detail about the last appearance of the beast--the Antichrist: "the beast . . . is an eighth, but it belongs to the seven." This is difficult language. The second and final manifestation of the beast is in an eighth king; but it is not *the* eighth king for there are only seven; it is an eighth king which is one of the seven. This suggests that one of the seven is to experience two stages of his existence. This apparently is why John says that the seventh king "will remain only a little while" (vs. 10). He will be shortly followed by an eighth, who is the seventh in his full antichristian manifestation. John means to say that the eighth is like the seven, but yet is different from them. It belongs to the seven in that it succeeds them in world domination; but it stands apart in that it ascends from the abyss as the full satanic embodiment of the beast.<sup>20</sup>

Now is a good time to recall the opening sentence of this study on The Revelation: ***One's eschatology must be based first on the Old Testament, and then the Epistles of Paul and Peter, together with the Olivet Discourse and the parables of Jesus, will add many details to it.*** If we go back to the book of Daniel, we find that the final empire described in Nebuchadnezzar's image (ch. 2) and in Daniel's vision of the four beasts (ch. 7) is Roman. On the identity of the four kingdoms in Daniel 2 and 7, all conservative commentators agree, even Zahn (the four empires of Daniel beginning with (3) in this quote):

Of subordinate importance is the question as to the succession of world empires presented in Rev. Probably (1) Egypt with Pharaoh as the typical name of the king, (2) Assyria with Sennacherib, (3) Babylon with Nebuchadnezzar, (4) the Medo-Persian empire, (5) the Graeco-Macedonian empire, (6) the Roman Empire with its Caesar, (7) the shortlived empire which is to come, to be followed by a renewal of the fifth empire of which Antiochus is the antitype, who is the antichrist of the last days. This is the eighth kingdom.<sup>21</sup>

Today we are living in a "Roman" age, and according to Daniel's interpretation of the image, it is during this Roman phase when the stone demolishes the image. Let's read what Culver has written:

The Roman emperors, and even the early kings who reigned before the republican and imperial periods, ruled largely by the will and choice of the populace. Republicanism, which followed the monarchical period, soon degenerated into something like mob rule, especially after it merged into the imperial period. Some of the greatest emperors were affected by the passing opinions of the Roman mobs. In our own times, which if they appear in the prophecy must be in the fourth period, government in the West has tended to become nearer to the dead level of socialism, and even "the dictatorship of the proletariat." Our American republic (ofttimes miscalled democracy) is based on the supposition that sovereignty rests in the people--that government is only by the consent of the governed . . . Now comes the denouement. The last, or eschatological portion of the prophecy is reached. When the final, that is, the Roman, age of Gentile history is prevailing, when a climax of division of sovereignty has been reached, presumably many

---

20 George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, pg. 230-231.

21 Theodor Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*, pg. 447.

nations being organized into some kind of a loose union in which all men give *their* authority to a ruler or head of some kind, when Gentile power is at its height of strength (though dangerously brittle by reason of a low grade of sovereignty, *then* the end comes. *"And in the days of those kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall the sovereignty thereof be left to another people; but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever"* (Dan. 2:44, A.S.V.).<sup>22</sup>

How can the Roman Empire be both the sixth and the seventh? If kings and their kingdoms are thought of as one and the same, then the text in Rev. 17:10 states that the sixth, that of Rome, "is" and that "the other," that again of Rome, has yet to come. Does some other empire intervene of which nothing is written? The answer must lie in differentiating, to some extent, between kings and kingdoms.

Using Culver's analysis of governments, quoted above, there is a possible interpretation of 17:10-11 that makes sense. First, let's look at how the verses are given in the NKJ:

*There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time. The beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition.*

Bringing in Culver's observation, we can now expand the above:

*There are also seven kings. Five have fallen [Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece], one is [sovereign Rome], the other has not yet come [confederate Rome]. And when he [confederate Rome] comes, he [the man, not the empire] must continue a short time. The beast that was [the man with the mortal wound, 13:3], and is not, is himself also the eighth [ruler of a kingdom, that of Antichrist] and is of the seven [not Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, sovereign Rome, but confederate Rome].*

It appears, then, that a revived Roman empire, though precariously aligned as a 10-nation confederacy, must be the empire of the last days; there will be no revival of a Grecian one. Antiochus Epiphanes was a type of Antichrist. The true Antichrist will mirror him, but this does not of necessity mean that he has to be Greek. Melchizedek was a type of Christ, but one was a Gentile and the other a Jew. Antiochus is a type of Antichrist, but one was a Greek and the other will be a Roman.

Turning our interest now to the final verses of the chapter, 15-18, we learn that the 10 kings (horns) which John saw on the beast will *"hate the harlot, make her desolate, and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire."*

The ten horns are the ten nations of the Latter Day confederacy, which after using the harlot (the religious hierarchy devoted to Beast-worship) for brainwashing the people, will finally discard and destroy her with the contempt she deserves and confiscate and pillage all of the assets of the religious establishment. Ruthless and blatant atheism (the logical result of humanism) will completely take over, in

---

22 Robert D. Culver, *Daniel and the Latter Days*, pp. 120-121.

scornful derision of all pretense to religion. This suppression of the "harlot" will be marked by unrestrained excesses (represented as cannibalism and burning at the stake).<sup>23</sup>

The Beast and his coalition will be victorious for a short period. But the end is perdition when the Lamb overcomes them, "*for He is Lord of lords and King of kings.*"

---

<sup>23</sup> Gleason Archer, unpublished class notes.

CHAPTER 17  
Additional Notes  
Kenneth J. Morgan

## **The Great Prostitute: 17:1-2**

*1 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. 2 With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries."*

How is harlotry used metaphorically in the OT? The metaphor is used in two different ways. First, harlotry is used to describe the sin of Israel worshiping other gods:

*See how the faithful city has become a harlot! <sup>24</sup>*

*Long ago you broke off your yoke and tore off your bonds; you said, 'I will not serve you!' Indeed, on every high hill and under every spreading tree you lay down as a prostitute. <sup>25</sup>*

However, it is not Israel that is symbolized here. The symbolism is all wrong: Israel could never be pictured as a harlot committing adultery with the kings of the earth.

Second, the metaphor of harlotry is applied to Gentile cities and nations, but in these cases it was not for spiritual unfaithfulness to God. Several different types of behavior are called harlotry. The description of the "harlotry" of Tyre is very similar to the symbolism here in Revelation 17:

*At the end of seventy years, Yahweh will deal with Tyre. She will return to her hire as a prostitute and will ply her trade with all the kingdoms on the face of the earth. <sup>26</sup>*

The context of this verse in Isaiah 23 describes the judgment on Tyre at the hand of the Babylonian Empire. However, seventy years after the city is destroyed, Yahweh will "visit" Tyre, and she will be rebuilt. That allows her to return to her trade as a harlot.

Why...is the trade [after Tyre's restoration] still designated by the term *commit fornication*? The answer would seem to be that the purpose of Tyre still was self-gratification, the making of money. She was not concerned at this point with the welfare of the kingdom of God, but only with what she could obtain. She would, therefore, sell her goods for what she could receive in exchange. Despite her downfall [seventy years earlier], she still would act as a harlot. <sup>27</sup>

So the harlotry of Tyre consists of "the prostitution of everything to commercial gain." <sup>28</sup>

---

24 Isa. 1:21.

25 Jer. 2:20 and many other references.

26 Isa. 23:17.

27 Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3 vols., (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969), II:140.

28 Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, p. 221.

Nineveh is another city called a harlot. The prophet Nahum describes her destruction and states that it is

*all because of the wanton lust of a harlot,  
alluring, the mistress of sorceries,  
who enslaved nations by her prostitution  
and peoples by her witchcraft.<sup>29</sup>*

Of what did Nineveh's harlotry consist?

Of primary significance in this context...is the prostitute's motive of personal gain and the ominous attraction that she exercises to attain it, with fatal consequences for the victims....Nineveh's attraction is specified by the word "alluring," for her iniquity is overlaid with the splendor of her wealth and power. As Ahaz had been lured into unholy relations with Assyria formerly (cf. 2 Kings 16:7-18), so Nineveh had drained the life of those enticed by her smooth ways (cf. Isa 36:16-17). Both her quest for personal gain and the fate of the one attracted is evoked by the word "enslaved" ...<sup>30</sup>

Put more concisely, Nineveh had played the harlot in that she had "enticed weaker nations by her display of power and splendor only to scorn and enslave them."<sup>31</sup>

However, the specific OT background to the symbolism in Revelation 17 is historical Babylon.

*Babylon was a gold cup in Yahweh's hand;  
she made the whole earth drunk.  
The nations drank her wine;  
therefore they have now gone mad.  
Babylon will suddenly fall and be broken.  
Wail over her!<sup>32</sup>*

Thompson comments,

The theme of the cup of Yahweh's wrath is given a slightly different twist here....Babylon is pictured as a golden cup in Yahweh's hands. In a former day she had been Yahweh's instrument of wrath which was poured out on the nations...it was Babylon who gave them the cup to drink....The effect of drinking the potion was to make those who drank it behave like madmen.<sup>33</sup>

To summarize, Tyre prostituted herself for commercial gain, Nineveh was a harlot in that she enticed the nations and then enslaved them, and historical Babylon made the nations drunk with the wine of the wrath of God. The woman in Revelation 17 is said to have "committed adultery with the inhabitants of the earth" and also to have made the nations drunk "with the wine of her

---

29 Nah. 3:4.

30 Carl E. Arerding, "Nahum," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), VII:481.

31 Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, p. 221

32 Jer. 51:7-8.

33 J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), pp. 750-751.

adulteries." Who is this woman and in what exactly did her harlotry consist? Before drawing any conclusions, however, more of her description should be noted.

First, the harlot in John's vision is said to "sit on many waters." This description is helpful in identifying the harlot. Jeremiah described ancient Babylon as "you who live by many waters."<sup>34</sup>

This description ["who sits on many waters"] does not fit historical Rome, for while the Tiber flows through the city, Rome was not built upon many waters. The phrase does describe the historical Babylon, because the city was built on a network of canals.<sup>35</sup>

Second, in verse 15 the angel gives John additional information about the "many waters": "The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages."

Third, the woman is explicitly called "Babylon" in the next section.

### **Babylon the Great: 17:3-6**

*3 Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. 4 The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. 5 This title was written on her forehead:*

*MYSTERY*

*BABYLON THE GREAT*

*THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES*

*AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.*

*6 I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly astonished.*

There is little doubt that this woman is the same as the "great prostitute" in verses 1-2. There is also little doubt that the Beast described here is the same as the first Beast in Revelation 13, that is, the Antichrist. The woman is said to be sitting on many waters in verse 1, while in verse 3 she is sitting on the Beast.

There is no problem in the fact that in vs. 1 the woman was seated upon many waters while here she is seated upon the scarlet beast. The fluidity of apocalyptic language allows it to represent different facts by the use of concepts which may seem to be logically contradictory. That she was seated upon many waters reflects her relationship to the nations of earth; that she is seated upon the scarlet beast reflects her relationship to the Antichrist. As the seat of godless civilization, the great harlot has achieved her glory because she has been made great by the beast and is completely dependent on it.<sup>36</sup>

---

34 Jer. 51:13.

35 Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, pp. 221-222.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 223.

Based on the metaphorical use of harlotry in the OT when applied to Gentiles, the woman represents "eschatological Babylon" who will, according to verse 2,

- Commit adultery with the kings of the earth
- Make the inhabitants of the earth drunk with the wine of her adulteries (the enticements by which she seduces the nations<sup>37</sup>)

Thus the woman represents the eschatological manifestation of ancient Babylon who will seduce all the nations of the world and make them drunk, this time not with the wine of the wrath of God as did historical Babylon, but "with the wine of her adulteries," the enticements by which she seduces the nations to worship the Antichrist.<sup>38</sup> She herself was drunk, but with the blood of the saints killed by the Antichrist.

But is this harlot a real city, a religious entity, or a political entity? This question is answered after the Beast is discussed.

## **The Beast: 17:7-14**

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

*9 "This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. 10 They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. 11 The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction.*

*12 "The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. 13 They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. 14 They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."*

### The Data Summarized

Table 1 compares the description of the Beast given in Revelation 13 with that of Revelation 17. Both state that the Beast has seven heads and ten horns (the phrases in **red**; see also 17:7 in Table 3). Premillenarians generally agree that this Beast represents the Antichrist who will reign during the seven-year Great Tribulation.<sup>39</sup>

---

37 Ibid., p. 222.

38 Ibid.

39 See also 2 Thess. 2:1-12.

Table 1

Revelation 13	Revelation 17
<p style="text-align: center;">Verses 1-2</p> <p>1 And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had <b>ten horns and seven heads</b>, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. 2 The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Verse 3</p> <p>3 Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and <b>had seven heads and ten horns</b>.</p>

Table 2 highlights the ***first*** point about this Beast: one of its heads "seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed" (the phrase in **green**). This observation is made three separate times, once in verse 3 and then with a subtle difference in verses 12 and 14.

Table 2

Revelation 13	Revelation 17
<p data-bbox="375 333 586 365">Verses 3, 12-14</p> <p data-bbox="172 409 776 548"><b>3 One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed.</b> The whole world was astonished and followed the beast.</p> <p data-bbox="172 590 786 978"><b>12</b> He [the second beast, the "false prophet"] exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship <b>the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed...</b><b>14</b> Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of <b>the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived.</b></p>	

Table 3 highlights a ***second*** rather curious fact about this Beast: he once was, now is not, and yet will come" (the phrases in **blue**). In fact, this observation is made three separate times: twice in verse 8 and once in verse 11.

Table 3

Revelation 13	Revelation 17
	<p style="text-align: center;">Verses 7-8</p> <p>7 Then the angel said to me: "Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of <b>the beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns</b>. 8 The beast, which you saw, <b>once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss</b> and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, <b>because he once was, now is not, and yet will come</b>.</p>

Table 4 points out the ***third*** descriptive statement: "The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits" (phrase in **purple**). Many expositors take the seven hills as a reference to Rome, since Rome is often referred to as the city on seven hills in Roman literature. However, it is difficult to connect Rome with the ***fourth*** interpretive description of the seven heads: "They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while" (phrase in **brown**).<sup>40</sup>

---

40 For the difficulty in identifying the "seven kings" as seven Roman emperors, see Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, pp. 227-229. For a much lengthier defense that the seven kings represent seven successive world empires, see Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, III:125-132.

Table 4

Revelation 13	Revelation 17
	<p style="text-align: center;">Verses 9-11</p> <p>9 "This calls for a mind with wisdom. The <b>seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits.</b> 10 <b>They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while.</b> 11 <b>The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven</b> and is going to his destruction.</p>

As an alternative, a hill or mountain is often a symbol of power or rule in the OT.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, the seven hills more likely stand for seven successive empires. This comports well with simultaneous interpretation of the seven heads as seven kings. But is it legitimate to take "king" to mean "kingdom" or "empire"? Yes, this is common biblical usage. For example, in Daniel 7:17, the four beasts are said to represent "four kings," yet the vision is fulfilled by the empires of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome.<sup>42</sup>

Which kingdoms or empires are represented by the seven heads? The four empires depicted in Daniel 2 and Daniel 7 must be included. In view of the fact that John lived under the sixth empire ("five are fallen, one is, the other has not yet come," vs. 10), this kingdom must be the historical Roman Empire. Thus, the first six empires would be Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome.<sup>43</sup>

Table 4 concludes with the **fifth** characteristic of the Beast: "The beast...is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven" (phrase in **pink**).

Table 5 shows the **sixth** and final statement describing the Beast: "The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast" (phrase in **turquoise**).

41 See, e.g., Isa. 2:2; 41:15; Jer. 51:25; and Dan. 2:35.

42 Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, pp. 227-228: "It may be objected that John says the hills are also *seven kings*, not seven kingdoms; but this is common biblical language. The four beasts of Dan. 7 were said to represent four kings (Dan. 7:17) when, more precisely, Daniel means the kingdoms over which they rule." Similarly, Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 199: "The identification of a head with the government over which he has authority is not a strange situation. The person is often the symbol of the government, and what is said of the government can be said of him."

43 This is the conclusion of J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, III:129, Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 253, where he endorses Seiss' view, and Theodor Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*, III:447.

Table 5

Revelation 13	Revelation 17
	<p style="text-align: center;">Verses 12-13</p> <p><b>12 The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast.</b>  <b>13 They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast.</b></p>

These ten kings rule simultaneously, and their domains form some sort of confederation under the Antichrist. According to Archer,

The ten horns, then, represent the ten nations who will combine at the beginning of the 70th week (Dan. 9) as a revived Roman Empire, with Antichrist emerging as their supreme leader through his speedy triumph over the rest of them. Thus they share authority with the Beast for only a short time ("one hour"). Note that they are described to John as having "not yet received a kingdom" (by 95 A.D.), and therefore yet future (in contradistinction to the five of the seven kings of v. 10 who have already fallen). Thus the seven kings are not to be confused with the ten horns of this verse.<sup>44</sup>

Walvoord agrees:

Further detail is given concerning the final stage of the world empire as having a nucleus of ten kings apparently joined in a confederacy represented by the ten horns. These kings in contrast to the seven heads of the beast are kings who rule not in succession but simultaneously at the end time.<sup>45</sup>

Before commenting further on these various aspects of the Beast, here is a summary of his characteristics and what has been concluded so far:

- (1) One of the seven heads seemed to have a fatal wound, but the wound was healed (13:3, 12, 14).
- (2) The Beast once was, is not now, but will yet come (17:8, 11).

<sup>44</sup> Gleason Archer, unpublished class notes.

<sup>45</sup> Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 255.

- (3) The seven heads are seven hills that (4) represent seven successive empires: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and a seventh yet to be discussed (17:9-10).
- (5) The Beast is an eighth king but belongs to the seven (17:11).
- (6) The ten horns represent ten contemporaneous kings that form an alliance of nations and give their authority over to the Beast (17:12-13).

What remains to be explained among these six points represents the *crux interpretum*<sup>46</sup> with regard to the Beast.

### The Use of the Word "Beast"

In both 13:1 and 17:3, "the beast" is said to have seven heads, and therefore the word is used to represent the entire creature that John saw. However, in 13:3 one of the heads is said to have a fatal wound, while verses 12-14 state that "the beast" itself had the fatal wound. The following conclusion seems inescapable:

The fact that both one of the heads [13:3] and the beast himself [13:12, 14] received the mortal wound suggests that the beast is in some way to be identified with his seven heads....In the present passage [17:8], John makes it clear that the beast itself is to be identified with its heads. The slaying of one of the heads means the slaying of the beast.<sup>47</sup>

There is more to say about this identity between the beast and his heads, but it must await the discussion under the next heading.

### The Fatal Wound

As just noted under the previous heading, 13:3 states that "one of the heads of the beast" had the fatal wound, while verses 12 and 14 attribute the fatal wound to "the beast" himself. However, in some passages the "beast" is clearly *a man*, namely, the Antichrist, the eschatological world ruler.<sup>48</sup> Yet the seven heads of the Beast represent seven kingdoms or empires. Therefore, in view of the common interchangeability between "king" and "kingdom," the question arises: Who or what receives the fatal wound, the Antichrist (the man) or one of the seven kingdoms?

Archer opts for the former, making both the death and revival to life apply to the eschatological Antichrist personally:

---

46 A common phrase used in exegetical writing. Originating in Medieval times, it is Latin for *interpreters' cross*, referring to the "torment" of the interpreters or to a perplexing difficulty of interpretation.

47 Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, pp. 179, 226; cf. p. 183. Note that the quote actually has "his ten heads," but this is obviously a simple mistake and not Ladd's intent. Walvoord writes, "The solution to this intricate problem is that there is an identification...of the [future] world ruler with his world government" (*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp. 249-250).

48 Cf. Rev. 19:20; 20:10.

"His [the Antichrist's] rise to power in the Roman Confederacy is marked by one serious conflict in which he was gravely wounded (an assassination attempt?) apparently unto death."<sup>49</sup>

Note that this view must take the wounded head to be the seventh, eschatological head.

Walvoord opts for the latter:

The wounding of one of the heads seems instead to be a reference to the fact that the Roman Empire as such seemingly died and is now going to be revived. It is significant that one of the heads is wounded to death but that the beast itself is not said to be dead. It is questionable whether Satan has the power to restore to life one who has died, even though his power is great.<sup>50</sup>

This view seems more likely. Note, however, that Walvoord takes the wounded head to be the sixth head, representing the historical Roman Empire. As pointed out under the next heading, this is not the only option, although it too is probably the more likely.

### Was, Is Not, Will Be

It was pointed out above that the interchange between the fatal wound to one of the Beast's heads in 13:3 and the fatal wound to the Beast itself in 13:12, 14 implies that the Beast in a general sense is to be identified with his seven heads. However, Ladd, following Zahn,<sup>51</sup> carries this a step further by combining the fatal wound descriptions with the additional statement that the beast "once was, now is not, and yet will come" (17:7-8, 11).

The seven heads with which the Beast in a general sense is identified represent seven anti-God, worldly kingdoms or empires. However, Ladd and Zahn argue that the Beast is in some special way more closely connected to two of the seven heads. The argument is based on 17:8, 11, which state that the Beast "once was, now is not, and yet will come." These three "stages" of the Beast suggest:

- The Beast was somehow directly related to one of the heads, one of the historical kingdoms ("he was").
- The Beast, through that head, received a fatal wound, and he, together with this kingdom, passed off the scene ("he was not").
- The beast will have another direct connection with another head or subsequent empire ("he will yet come").

This view raises two questions. First, in what sense is the Beast related more closely to these two

---

49 Gleason Archer, unpublished class notes. Seiss, *Lectures on the Apocalypse*, II:299-300, agrees with this position.

50 Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 199.

51 Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, pp. 179, 229-231, and Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*, III:440-441.

heads or kingdoms than to the other five? According to Ladd, it is in his role as the Antichrist.

The symbolism is made difficult by the fact that the beast is sometimes identified with his heads, but is sometimes differentiated from them. The solution to this involved symbolism lies in the interpretation that the beast is the Antichrist, and yet he is not the Antichrist; he is the Antichrist in two of his heads only. As the Antichrist, he has already appeared in history (he was); he does not exist in the present, but he is yet to arise in an embodiment of satanic power. This is why John can say that one of the heads was wounded to death, but the death wound was healed; and also that the beast itself had received a death stroke and had come to life again. In other words, the beast is identified with two of its heads more closely than with the other five. In one of the heads, the beast had himself appeared in history; this head--and the beast himself--had been slain (i.e., had disappeared from history) but is to be revived in a final appearance, which will be a more complete manifestation of the beast than the first (i.e., he shall ascend from the abyss).<sup>52</sup>

Based on this analysis, Ladd suggests a twofold meaning to "the Beast":

Still, the other five heads are also heads of the beast, yet it is not identified with them as with the two. The heads are successive manifestations of the worldly kingdoms at enmity with God through all the changes of history. The beast, then, has a twofold meaning: *broadly*, it is the anti-God worldly power; *narrowly*, it is one particular kingdom which has a twofold manifestation. Five of the heads are manifestations of the worldly kingdoms as such; two of the heads are specific embodiments of the beast himself.<sup>53</sup>

The second question is this: Which heads are which? Which two heads, or which two kingdoms, represent the first and final manifestation of the Beast himself, the Beast as Antichrist? The identity of the second head is simple: it must be the final, eschatological kingdom, the kingdom of Antichrist during the tribulation period. Concerning the first manifestation of the Beast, both Ladd and Zahn are adamant that it is the fifth head, Greece. Their argument is based on Daniel 8, where Antiochus Epiphanes is quite clearly a type of the eschatological Antichrist.

However, it is exactly at this point that their view runs into serious difficulty. Although Ladd is strangely silent on this point, Zahn pushes this view to its logical conclusion: the seventh, eschatological kingdom of Antichrist is a revived Greek kingdom. This simply is impossible for the following reasons.

- Both Daniel 2 and Daniel 7 make it clear that the worldly kingdom destroyed at the second advent is the fourth kingdom--the Roman Empire. This point is sufficient by itself; the next two arguments simply lend support.<sup>54</sup>
- The imagery in Daniel 2 strongly suggests a twofold form of the fourth and last kingdom, the Roman Empire: legs of iron and feet and toes of iron mixed with clay. In Daniel's

---

52 Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, p. 230.

53 *Ibid.*; emphasis mine.

54 For the following two arguments, I am indebted to Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973), pp. 197-198.

interpretation, the "toes" are specifically singled out, and it is on the feet that the image is struck by the rock and destroyed. The toes would clearly seem to correspond to the ten horns on the fourth beast of Daniel 7 and the Beast in Revelation 13 and 17.

- According to Daniel 9:26 in the prophecy of the seventy weeks, "the people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary." This is taken by virtually everyone, Jewish and Christian, to be the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in A.D. 70. The "people" who did this were the Romans. Now it is common among premillenarians to take "the ruler" to be the Antichrist who appears in the seventieth week. Therefore, this "ruler who will come" must be a Roman, and the seventh head must represent a revived Roman Empire.

Therefore, the intricate view of Ladd and Zahn must be rejected.

As Walvoord suggested, the head that received the fatal wound was the sixth kingdom, the Roman Empire. The wound was healed in the sense that the Roman Empire in some form is revived in the seventh and final head. Robert Culver offers a few additional observations:

The Roman emperors, and even the early kings who reigned before the republican and imperial periods, ruled largely by the will and choice of the populace. Republicanism, which followed the monarchical period, soon degenerated into something like mob rule, especially after it merged into the imperial period. Some of the greatest emperors were affected by the passing opinions of the Roman mobs. In our own times, which if they appear in the prophecy must be in the fourth period, government in the West has tended to become nearer to the dead level of socialism, and even "the dictatorship of the proletariat." Our American republic (ofttimes miscalled democracy) is based on the supposition that sovereignty rests in the people--that government is only by the consent of the governed . . . . Now comes the denouement. The last, or eschatological portion of the prophecy is reached. When the final, that is, the Roman, age of Gentile history is prevailing, when a climax of division of sovereignty has been reached, presumably many nations being organized into some kind of a loose union in which all men give *their* authority to a ruler or head of some kind, when Gentile power is at its height of strength (though dangerously brittle by reason of a low grade of sovereignty, *then* the end comes. "*And in the days of those kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall the sovereignty thereof be left to another people; but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever*" (Dan. 2:44, A.S.V.).<sup>55</sup>

However, on the basis of taking the wounded head to be the sixth or Roman head and the seventh head a revived Roman Empire, interpreting 17:8, 11 is more difficult: "the beast...once was, now is not, and yet will come." Was the Beast not present ("now is not") during John's time because one of the heads received a fatal wound as Ladd suggests? If so, that would make it impossible for the wounded head to be the sixth Roman head, which was indeed present during John's time.

---

<sup>55</sup> Robert D. Culver, *Daniel and the Latter Days*, pp. 120-121.

However, if the two statements are disconnected and interpreted separately, another interpretation is possible. Not all of what Ladd argued is wrong. Antiochus Epiphanes is almost certainly an intended type of the eschatological Antichrist. So the Antichrist in a sense made an appearance through Antiochus ("once was"), who was obviously not around during John's time ("now is not"), but will definitely return to the scene in his final, eschatological manifestation during the tribulation ("yet will come").<sup>56</sup>

### The Eighth King

Revelation 17:11 presents one final interpretive problem. If the Beast only has seven heads, how can there be an eighth king or kingdom? Ladd offers the following answer:

John adds a further specific detail about the last appearance of the beast--the Antichrist: "the beast . . . is an eighth, but it belongs to the seven." This is difficult language. The second and final manifestation of the beast is in an eighth king; but it is not *the* eighth king for there are only seven; it is an eighth king which is one of the seven. This suggests that one of the seven is to experience two stages of his existence. This apparently is why John says that the seventh king "will remain only a little while" (vs. 10). He will be shortly followed by an eighth, who is the seventh in his full antichristian manifestation. John means to say that the eighth is like the seven, but yet is different from them. It belongs to the seven in that it succeeds them in world domination; but it stands apart in that it ascends from the abyss as the full satanic embodiment of the beast.<sup>57</sup>

This answer is somewhat complicated, but it is a possible explanation. One could add that the first "stage" might be the first three and a half years of the seven-year tribulation period during which the Antichrist makes his treaty with Israel and amasses his power. The second "stage" would then be the reign of the Antichrist during the second three and half years of the tribulation during which he breaks his treaty with Israel and unleashes his full wrath against Israel and all believers in Jesus Christ.

### **The Judgment of the Great Prostitute: 17:15-18**

*15 Then the angel said to me, "The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. 16 The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire. 17 For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God's words are fulfilled. 18 The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth."*

Chapter 17 began with an angel summoning John to witness "the punishment of the great

---

56 Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament* 4 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958, reprint 1871), IV:711, takes the "once was" stage of the Beast to be the pagan Roman Empire, the "now is not" stage the Christian phase of the empire beginning with Constantine, and the "will yet come" stage the eschatological Roman Empire. The problem with this view is the difficulty in explaining how the pagan stage was in the past for John.

57 Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, p. 231.

prostitute." The chapter now reaches that climax.

After discussing the great harlot in 17:1-6, these questions were raised: Is this harlot a real city, religious entity, or a political entity?

Walvoord's view can be summarized in the following particulars:<sup>58</sup>

- The "Babylon" of chapter 17 and the "Babylon" of chapter 18 are not the same.
- Babylon, and thus the great harlot of chapter 17, is an ecclesiastical entity.
- Babylon of chapter 18 is a political entity.
- The Babylon, and thus the great harlot of chapter 17, is not a literal city but an apostate Christendom, an ecumenical world church that has united all religions.
- During the first three and a half years of the tribulation, the Antichrist uses the apostate church (the harlot) to persecute believers and consolidate his power.
- At the middle of the tribulation, he no longer needs her and destroys the world church, proclaiming himself dictator of the whole world and demanding the worship of himself.

Walvoord's view is common in dispensationalism, but Ladd's view is preferred:<sup>59</sup>

- The "Babylon" of chapter 17 and the "Babylon" of chapter 18 are the same.
- Babylon, and thus the great harlot, represent a literal city, "eschatological Babylon," although the identification of this city with a historical city cannot be made.
- This city will be the capital of the Antichrist, the seat of godless civilization. As such, it will be the capital city of a complex civilization consisting of many nations and the center of the seduction that entices the nations to worship the Beast.
- As the capital city of the Antichrist, she will be the city primarily responsible for the persecution and martyrdom of the saints.
- John gives no reason why the Beast and the ten kingdoms under him suddenly destroy this city except that it is God's will.

The Beast and his coalition will be victorious for a short period. But the end is perdition when the Lamb overcomes them, *"for He is Lord of lords and King of kings."*

---

58 Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp. 243-249, 255-257.

59 Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, pp. 221-228, 232-234.

## CHAPTER 18

### *"BABYLON THE GREAT IS FALLEN, IS FALLEN"*

We will now answer the question, "Who, or what, is Babylon the Great"?

There are two aspects to Babylon the Great--the religious and the political. Nearly all conservative commentators agree with this. Three excerpts shall suffice to make this point.

The twice-repeated word describes two separate parts or stages of the fall, answering to the two aspects in which Babylon is contemplated, referring first to Babylon in mystery, as *a system* or spirit of false worship, and second to Babylon as *a city*, in which this system or spirit is finally embodied...The first fall, or the fall of Babylon in mystery, is accomplished through the agency of the Beast in confederation with the ten kings.<sup>60</sup>

The destruction of the harlot in chapter 17 is the fall of Babylon in its ecclesiastical or religious sense . . . it probably occurs when the beast assumes the role of God at the beginning of the great tribulation . . . . It seems that chapter 17 deals with the religious aspect and chapter 18 with the political and economic aspects of Babylon.<sup>61</sup>

The two Babylons described in the seventeenth and eighteenth chapters, representing the two systems which first fall under God's judgment, do not appear to be the same. . . . "Mystery Babylon" is, in a special sense, Rome (17:9, 18), and it stands first, for the apostasy which characterizes the Roman Catholic Church, and second, for all apostasy, whether Roman, Greek or Protestant Catholic, such as will prevail in the last days of this age. "Great Babylon" is evidently the ancient city which Nebuchadnezzar built and named (Dan. 4:28-30), which, in the record, is set forth as rebuilt and glorified. These cities--Rome and Babylon--will be two centres to which Antichrist will give his kindly favor and from which he will exert his powerful but corrupting influence over the kings and nations of the earth, the one from a religious standpoint and the other from a commercial one (17:1-5; 18:1-3).<sup>62</sup>

But do the commentators agree on where the city called Babylon the Great is located? (That there is a real city seems obvious from the fact that her demise is bewailed by men in every station of life.) The answer is "no." From Frost's quote above, we know he thinks it is ancient Babylon rebuilt. Seiss and Walvoord agree:

I conclude, then, that such a great commercial city, different from all that now exist, will yet be, and that it will be old Babylon rebuilt . . . . And when the wisdom, progress, and harlotries of this world come to their final culmination and embodiment in Great Babylon, there is corresponding reason to believe that it will be centralized upon the very spot where it first started, and meet its ultimate

---

60 J. A. Seiss, *Lectures on the Apocalypse*, pg. 165.

61 John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pg. 259.

62 Henry W. Frost, *Matthew Twenty-Four and the Revelation*, pp. 258-259.

doom in the selfsame locality in which it was born.<sup>63</sup>

The destruction of Babylon according to Jeremiah 51:8 was to be sudden . . . . As far as the physical city of Babylon was concerned, this was not true of ancient Babylon as it continued for many years after its political downfall. Further, it is pointed out that the prophecy of Isaiah 13:6, 9-11 . . . indicates that the destruction of Babylon would be in the day of the Lord . . . . It is simpler to postulate a rebuilt Babylon as fulfilling literally the Old Testament prophecies as well as that embodied in this chapter."<sup>64</sup>

What does Archer think? "She seems to represent . . . the city of Latter-Day 'Babylon', the capital of Antichrist's empire."<sup>65</sup>

Zahn is in agreement with Archer:

Babylon . . . is the capital of the world empire as such. It was situated formerly on the Euphrates, now on the Tiber, in the language of the prophets later perhaps it will be on the Seine or the Bosphorus; but through all historical changes it retains its old name.<sup>66</sup>

Chapter 18 reveals a disturbing picture. There we see the kings of the earth "living in luxury," merchants trading in the "bodies and souls of men," and men in all walks of life weeping and wailing because the city on which they depended for their wealth was destroyed. It was, no doubt, profit by illicit means; otherwise Babylon would not have been so utterly destroyed.

*After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!" For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury . . . . For her sins have reached to heaven and God has remembered her iniquities. Render to her just as she rendered to you, and repay her double according to her works; in the cup which she has mixed, mix double for her (vss. 1-3, 5-6).*

*The merchants of these things, who became rich by her, will stand at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, and saying, "Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls! For in one hour such great riches came to nothing. Every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, "What is like this great city?" They threw dust on their heads and cried out,*

---

63 J. A. Seiss, *Lectures on the Apocalypse*, pg. 157.

64 John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp. 262-263.

65 Gleason Archer, unpublished class notes.

66 Theodor Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*, pg. 446.

*weeping and wailing and saying, "Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth! For in one hour she is made desolate." (vss. 15-19).*

Though men will weep, those in heaven will rejoice. God will have avenged the *"blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth"* (vs. 24).

Back in 1865, Joseph Seiss wrote the following, so pertinent for today.

Naked covetousness is not attractive. Even the natural heart is repelled by it and is ready to condemn and denounce it. When the possession of wealth is made the final end, when it is treasured in the coffer and not expended, or when means disreputable are adopted for its attainment, [then] the pursuit of riches is regarded with disdain. The acquisition under such circumstances . . . meets openly with frowns and disfavor. To array it in honorable garb, to dignify it, to make it appear good and praiseworthy so that men may love, bless, and follow it as something noble and beneficent--this is what calls for the magician's wand and the wizard's power. And here it is that Great Babylon's delusive witchery comes in. If a godless and unscrupulous commerce can be made to appear as the great and only availing civilizer; if it can show its end to be not only the welfare of individuals but the prosperity of nations and people; if its office is the development of the resources of the whole earth, and for that end [it] visits every land and traverses every sea; if it is really the great stimulant to intellectual effort, the helper of science, the procurer and disseminator of all useful wisdom and intelligence, the rewarder of inventive genius and engineering skill, the self-sacrificing handmaid of all social, moral and legislative improvement; if it is not the mere possession of wealth for its own sake, but to secure the beneficent power and influence and glory to result from its wise and proper employment that makes up the end and aim of its endeavors; then will the ugliness of avarice be voided, bitter will have been made sweet, and all attendant deflections from right and truth swallowed up in the grandeur and beauty and beneficences of its purposes. The demon of covetousness would then have become an angel of light . . . . And here is the sorcery with which Great Babylon leads all the nations astray. Linking the false doctrine of human progress and perfectibility to the worst of passions, she lures the world to her support and makes mankind the willing slave of her base idolatry. And already, from pulpit and platform, from philosopher and political economist, from orator and poet, are we compelled to hear just these very glorifications of the cupidities of man as the forerunner, if not the instrument, of this world's regeneration."<sup>67</sup>

---

67 J. A. Seiss, *Lectures on the Apocalypse*, pp. 184-186.

## CHAPTER 19

Chapter 19 presents the glorious coming of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. His kingdom of righteousness is now to be ushered in, to the joy of all who have been waiting for his coming.

Tyrants, despots, and faithless and burdensome governments shall then be no more. Like wild beasts, full of savage instinct for blood and oppression, have the world-powers roamed and ravaged the earth, treading down the nations, their will the only law, the good and happiness of men the furthest from their hearts.<sup>68</sup>

The marriage of the Lamb is announced in verses 6-9 (but not yet described):

*And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude . . . saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!"<sup>69</sup> Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he [a voice from the throne] said to me, "Write: Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!"*

Who is the bride of the Lamb? Who are those invited to the marriage supper? Are they one and the same?

Ladd states in plain terms that they are one and the same: "So the church is both the bride and those invited."<sup>70</sup>

Walvoord states, though less dogmatically, that "the wife of the Lamb is distinguished from the attendants at the wedding, the wife *apparently* being the church, and the attendants at the wedding the saints of past and future ages."<sup>71</sup>

What about Seiss? There is much to be admired in Seiss' commentary, but his "multi-stages" rapture theory (a minimum, I believe, of five "raptures," the most faithful going first) is not persuasive. This convoluted theory comes out in his interpretation of the marriage supper. He writes:

Just as the Bridegroom comes not alone, but with attendants, companions, and a long train of rejoicing ones who make up his party, the whole of whom together are called the Bridegroom's coming, whilst, strictly speaking, there is a wide difference between him and those with him; so it is on the side of the Bride. She has her

---

68 J. A. Seiss, *Lectures on the Apocalypse*, vol. III, pg. 211.

69 According to Ladd, "Both the AV and the RSV miss the idea, rendering the word in the present tense: **the Almighty reigns**. The Greek verb is a past tense and is what grammarians call an inceptive aorist, emphasizing the initiation of an action. the NEB correctly renders it: 'The Lord our God . . . has entered on his reign!' At this point in the Revelation, the reign of God has in fact not yet been fully established; it awaits the return of Christ, the chaining of Satan, and the inauguration of Christ's messianic reign--all events yet to be described. This is a proleptic statement analogous to the announcements in 14:8 of the fall of Babylon and 11:15ff. of the establishment of God's reign." *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, pg. 246.

70 George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, pg. 250.

71 John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pg. 273, emphasis mine.

companions and attendants too--"virgins which follow her." They make up her company and train. In coming to wed her the Bridegroom comes also into near and close relation to them. To a blessed degree they share the Bride's honors. And in general terms we must include them when we speak of the Bride, although, in strict language, they are not all the Bride. The Bride has relations to the Bridegroom which belong to her alone, and it is only because of her and their association and companionship with her, and not because they are the Bride in actual fact, that the whole company of the saved Church of God is contemplated as the Lamb's Wife.<sup>72</sup>

Turning to Gundry, we read:

We should not expect to find rigid consistency in the biblical use of metaphors . . . . Thus, since Israel as well as the Church is both bride and wife, we should not jump to the conclusion that the Lamb's bride and wife consists of the Church alone. On the contrary, the context indicates that at the marriage supper of the Lamb the bride includes Israel: "Come here, I shall show you *the bride, the wife* of the Lamb. And he . . . showed me *the holy city, Jerusalem* . . . with twelve gates . . . and names were written on them, which are those of *the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel*" (21:9, 10, 12). If, therefore, the marriage supper does not require a pretribulational resurrection and rapture of the Israelitish segment of the bride, neither does it require a pretribulational resurrection and rapture of the Church.<sup>73</sup>

Reese points out that Sir Robert Anderson, and several others, held the belief that Israel was the bride of Christ.<sup>74</sup>

Could Israel, in fact, be the bride of the Lamb? Are the terms "bride" and "wife" used interchangeably? Turning to the Old Testament, we find that several texts indicate that Israel is a bride. Isaiah 61:10 states, "*I will greatly rejoice in Yahweh, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.*" Other references to Israel as a bride are found in Isa. 49:18; 62:5; Jer. 2:32; and Hosea 2:19,20. In the New Testament we find that the church is likened to a wife (Eph. 5:22-33). Nonetheless, the point itself may not be relevant since, as Ladd points out, the word rendered "bride" is literally "wife" (*gune*, not *numphe*).<sup>75</sup>

We look next at Psalm 45, which tells of the glories of the Messiah and His bride.

*Listen, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; forget your own people also, and your father's house; so the King will greatly desire your beauty; because He is your Lord, worship Him. And the daughter of Tyre will come with a gift; the rich among the people will seek your favor. The royal daughter is all glorious within the palace; her clothing is woven with gold. She shall be brought to the King in robes of many*

---

72 J. A. Seiss, *Lectures on the Apocalypse*, vol. III, pp. 220-221.

73 Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, pg. 85.

74 Alexander Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ*, pg. 263.

75 George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, pg. 246.

*colors; the virgins, her companions who follow her, shall be brought to you. With gladness and rejoicing they shall be brought; they shall enter the King's palace. Instead of your father shall be your sons, whom you shall make princes in all the earth. I will make your name to be remembered in all generations; therefore the people shall praise you forever and ever (Psa. 45:10-17).*

Kaiser's remarks on this Psalm are noteworthy:

Verses 9b-15 describe the bride. If the Messiah is the bridegroom, then the bride must be his people, the believing body of the ancient offspring mentioned since the days of Eve, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David.<sup>76</sup>

The "bride" comes up again in chapter 21. For now, it seems wise not to press the analogy of a bride to strongly. She, in all likelihood, encompasses all the redeemed of all ages--both Jew and Gentile. Yet all the same, I feel the Scriptures teach that there is a *special* place for the nation of Israel, and this may very well be alluded to here in Revelation 19 in the phrase "*His wife has made herself ready.*" The Jewish nation was cast off because of unbelief, but as Paul writes, "*God is able to graft them in again*" (Rom. 11:23). "*Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!*" (Rom. 11:12.) That fullness will be seen, perhaps, at the marriage supper of the Lamb. The Church too will be there, not in that *special* place of blessing reserved for Israel, but nonetheless in a place of blessing: "*Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!*" It will be a time when the Church can graciously and happily repeat those words of the Apostle Paul, "*Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!*" (Rom. 11:33.)

Moving on to verses 11-21, John now once again goes back a bit in time and sees the heaven opened and a white horse.<sup>77</sup> The rider is none other than Christ himself. Back in chapter 6, John saw an impostor seated where he did not belong. That rider--Antichrist--would conquer the world with peace, albeit a false peace, and proclaim himself the Messiah. Now John sees Jesus, the faithful and true one, riding the white horse of which He alone is worthy. And in righteousness he judges and makes war.

We recall that back in chapter 6 the riders of the red, black, and pale green horses brought judgment. Only the white horse, according to the view taken here, did not. Now we see a white horse and rider coming to judge the world. "*Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war*" (vs. 11). Christ does not come alone: "*And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses*" (vs. 14). Can the "armies of heaven" be identified?

---

<sup>76</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, pg. 129.

<sup>77</sup> Surely the marriage supper of the Lamb could not occur until after Christ returns. Otherwise, those saints on earth still "overcoming" could not participate. Gundry writes: "Though recognizing the earthly setting of the marriage banquet, Walvoord nonetheless maintains that the bridegroom must have come for the bride before the marriage supper (*BibSac*, 123:102,103). That is true, but the posttribulational advent itself may be the coming of Christ for His bride. A pretribulational argument has to rest on two premises, occurrence of the banquet during the tribulation and a setting in heaven. Both premises are bad." *The Church and the Tribulation*, footnote on pg. 86.

Turning first to Gundry, we read:

The white linen worn by the armies has been ascribed to the saints a few verses earlier. It is more natural, then, to assume that the saints are in view here, too . . . . Are we to think that the OT saints, not yet resurrected, will be excluded from these armies? Where are most of the saints, where is most of the Church, *now*? In heaven. Either John does not distinguish living Christians because of the preponderating number of deceased saints, or he sees Jesus descending with the disembodied saints just before those on earth have been raptured. In the latter case he means the designation "in heaven" to distinguish the deceased in heaven from saints on earth who have not yet joined the heavenly train.<sup>78</sup>

Archer claims the armies "include not only the mighty legions of angels . . . but also the glorified saints . . . members of the Bride of Christ."<sup>79</sup> Walvoord agrees with this, seeing no justification for limiting the armies to the Church. "The church is not alone in having righteousness in the form of righteous deeds, and it is more probable that here not only the saints but also the holy angels are meant."<sup>80</sup> Seiss' view is, "These armies are saints, and not angels."<sup>81</sup> We will address this issue again in chapter 20.

A terrible scene is described in verses 17-21. It is the Battle of Armageddon, first mentioned in 16:16. What exactly is it that causes Antichrist and his followers to gather there for battle? Does Christ come to the battlefield first, and then Antichrist rises to the challenge? Or does Antichrist wage a final war against all those who refused yet to worship him, and Christ then comes on their behalf? Verse 19 does not give any particulars: "*And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army.*"

Seiss has a noteworthy comment:

How they were gathered, we were told in what occurred under the pouring out of the sixth bowl of wrath (chap. 16:12-16). Devil agents working devil miracles were brought into requisition. They went forth "unto the kings of the earth, even of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty." It was through these devil oracles that they learned of Christ's coming to unseat and destroy them; and by these devil miracles they were led to believe themselves competent to withstand all the armies of the heaven . . . . Let the Rider on the white horse come; let him be supported by myriads of his white-robed cavalry on their white horses; if he did work miracles in his lifetime, neither he nor his followers ever wrought such as those which the potencies now urging them to armed resistance had shown . . . . "*Strong delusion*" was upon them, "that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned." (2 Thess. 2:9-12.)<sup>82</sup>

---

78 Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, pg. 86.

79 Gleason Archer, unpublished class notes.

80 John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pg. 277.

81 J. A. Seiss, *Lectures on the Apocalypse*, vol. III, pg. 251.

82 J. A. Seiss, *Lectures on the Apocalypse*, vol. III, pp. 252-253.

If we turn to Zechariah chapter 14, we will there find more details of this great battle.

*Behold, the day of Yahweh is coming, and your spoil will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then Yahweh will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south. Then you shall flee through My mountain valley . . . . And Yahweh shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be--" Yahweh is one," and His name one (vss. 1-5b, 9).*

This text seems to speak of Jerusalem being the object of God's judgment. It is Yahweh himself who gathers the nations to fight against her. Feinberg comments as follows:

There will be an alliance of the northern powers (Eze 38 and 39); a union of the nations in the south of Europe (the revived Roman Empire of Dan 2 and 7, and Rev 13 and 17); the king of the north (Dan 11); and an entente of the kings of the east or sunrising (Rev 16). And the initial stages of the conflict will witness the success of the arms of the enemies of Israel . . . . Then in Israel's plight the great Champion of Israel, the Lord Messiah, goes forth, as kings go forth to battle, Himself to fight against those nations, as He fought in many a battle before this time.<sup>83</sup>

One thing we do know: *"Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all"* (Jude 14,15).

Chapter 19 closes with the capture of the beast and the false prophet. "As a token of the final destiny of all who reject the lordship of God, the two leaders (the Beast and the False Prophet) are cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, a thousand years before the rest of unbelieving mankind."<sup>84</sup>

Let us take to heart these closing words of Joseph Seiss:

"Our contemplations tonight will fail of their end if they do not serve to teach us, and to write it indelibly upon our hearts, that rebellion against God is death; that no weapon formed against Jehovah can prosper; that those who will not have Christ to rule over them must perish! Though the wicked should wield the power of archangels, they cannot withstand the punitive majesty of the Warrior Judge and King who rides upon the white horse. His sword is mightier than Satan, mightier than the Beast deemed invincible, mightier than the command of infernal miracle over nature's laws, mightier than all the forces of earth and hell combined. And that sword is pledged to drink the life-blood of all who neglect his mercy,

---

83 Charles L. Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets*, pg. 340.

84 Gleason Archer, unpublished class notes.

despise his laws, and stand out against his authority. All may seem well and promising now. People may indulge their unbelief and passions during these days of forbearance and grace, and see no disadvantages growing out of it. They may get angry at our earnestness, and account us croakers and fools when we put before them the demands and threatenings of the Almighty. But "*woe to him who strives with his Maker!*" There is a deluge of bottled fury yet to be poured out on them that refuse to know God, and on the families that call not on his name, from which there is no escape and from whose burning and tempestuous surges there is no deliverance. God help us to be wise, that we come not into that sea of death!

*Righteous Judge of retribution,  
Grant thy gift of absolution,  
Ere that day's dread execution!*<sup>85</sup>

---

85 J.A. Seiss, *Lectures on the Apocalypse*, vol. III, pp. 261-262.

## CHAPTER 20

*Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, which is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while (vss. 1-3).*

Chapter 20 is a "battleground" chapter. The issue is the millennium, a period of 1000 years when Satan is bound and imprisoned and when the Lord Jesus Christ rules the earth in righteousness. However, as noted in the introduction to this paper, the amillennial interpretation will not be addressed. Over the centuries amillennialists have failed among themselves to come to any consensus as to what the binding and imprisonment of Satan means. When so many theories are offered, it seems clear that they themselves are essentially at a loss as to what it means. A future and literal 1000 years provides the only foundation on which to build.

Walvoord makes a most relevant observation:

Much has been made of the fact that these verses are found in a book largely given to symbolic presentation and visions. It is true that John is seeing a vision in these early verses of chapter 20. The passage reveals, however, something more than what he saw. John visually saw the angel bind Satan and cast him into the pit. John could not see visually how long Satan was to be in the pit nor could he see the purpose, namely, that the devil should deceive the nations no more and that he should be loosed again after the thousand years. This purpose had to be given to John by divine revelation which constituted an interpretation of the vision. If the record had given only what he saw without any indication as to the meaning of the passage, it might have lent itself to diverse interpretation. But with the vision recorded as it is, accompanied by the divine interpretation, expositors are not free to inject their own preconceived ideas but must accept the plain statements and interpretations of the passage as given.

It is most important to observe that while the thousand years are mentioned in verses 4 and 5 in the vision of John, they are also mentioned in verse 6 in the interpretation. The expositor is not free to spiritualize the interpretation of the vision but must accept the interpretation in its ordinary and literal meaning. If this is done, there is no other alternative than the premillennial interpretation which holds that at the second coming of Christ, Satan will be bound for a thousand years.<sup>86</sup>

Why is Satan bound? The text gives the answer in plain and simple language: "*so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished.*"

*And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them.  
Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and*

---

86 John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pg. 293.

*for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years (vss. 4-6).*

These three verses prompt four specific questions. (1) How many groups are being distinguished? (2) To whom does the pronoun "they" ("they sat"/"they lived and reigned") refer? (3) When is the first resurrection? (4) Who participates in the first resurrection?

Questions (1) and (2) necessarily must be considered together. How many groups are we to distinguish, and to which group, if not all, does the pronoun "they" refer? According to Ladd, there are two groups set apart:

Many interpreters recognize only one group and limit this "first resurrection" to the martyrs, maintaining that God has some special blessing for those who have died because of their faithful witness to Jesus. However, the RSV correctly reflects the Greek idiom, which could be literally translated: "And I saw thrones, and [people] sat upon them, and judgment was given to them; and [I saw] the souls of those who had been beheaded . . ." The language suggests two different groups: one group to whom judgment was given, and a smaller group who are the martyrs of the great tribulation. In Greek, the language is quite ungrammatical, which leads Charles to treat the first phrase as a gloss. However, it may well be that John actually envisaged two groups: a larger group of all the saints and then a smaller group--the martyrs--whom he singles out for special attention. This would accord with the biblical theology as a whole, which gives to the saints a share in the eschatological rule of Christ. Christ himself had promised through John the prophet a share in his throne to all who overcame (3:21); and we found no reason to limit this promise to martyrs. It is a promise to all victorious believers."<sup>87</sup>

It is hard to determine whether Tregelles sees two or three. He uses the following translation in his book *The Hope of Christ's Second Coming*:

In Rev. 20 we read of "the first Resurrection". The whole scene is thus described: "I saw thrones, and they sat upon them; and judgment was given unto them; and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God, and [those] which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years" . . . This is not only a vision, but also an explanation. John is taught what the thrones with certain sitting on them meant. They are the faithful in Christ in general (i.e., the whole family of faith from Abel onward), and one special class, those suffering for the witness of Jesus; and the glory given to them is explained to be the first resurrection."<sup>88</sup>

---

87 George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, pp. 263-264.

88 S. P. Tregelles, *The Hope of Christ's Second Coming*, pg. 29.

According to Reese, there are three groups set apart; but he is not clear (a typo perhaps?) as to how many of these groups reign with Christ:

There are three distinct classes mentioned in the passage [20:4-5].

(a) First, there are those of whom John says: "I saw thrones and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them" (4a).

Who are these? The whole body of saints who live to see the Parousia at this time; they are transferred from earth to occupy thrones in the kingly rule of Christ; it is the Rapture of the survivors in 1 Thess. 4:17. It is not said that this class was raised from the dead, but simply that they took the thrones prepared for them. We have seen them suffering and enduring throughout the book. Now they are seen as overcomers who inherit the sovereignty in the kingdom . . . . The language is clear and decisive on the point. John says: "I saw thrones"; obviously they were empty. Then he adds: "and they sat upon them"; that is, he sees a company *in the very act of sitting down on their thrones*.

(b) John mentions a *second* class that is honored at this time: "I saw the souls of them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God" (R.V.).

(c) Thirdly, he speaks of "such as worshipped not the beast neither his image, and received not the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand."

Of these two [sic; "three"?] classes we read that "they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years . . . ." <sup>89</sup>

Canon Faussett definitely agrees with three groups and makes it clear that all three shall reign with Christ:

"Three classes are designated to live and reign with Christ as 'priests of God and of Christ, a thousand years'; first, the saints caught up to meet and return with the Lord: 'they sat upon thrones'; secondly, the martyrs beheaded for the witness of Jesus; thirdly, 'such as worshipped not the beast' (world-power)." <sup>90</sup>

I can find only two commentators who remark specifically about the pronoun "they" used in verse 4, those being Robert Culver and Merrill Tenney. According to Culver,

John writes that following his vision of the binding of Satan he "saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark on their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a

---

89 Alexander Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ*, pp. 82-83.

90 Cited by Reese from the *British Weekly* debate of 1887. See *The Approaching Advent of Christ*, pg. 87.

thousand years" (Rev. 20:4).

Many of the Amillennial writers argue from the use of the word "soul," as does Hamilton, [that] ". . . the first resurrection is the new birth which reaches its culmination and consummation when the soul of the believer leaves the body and goes to reign with Christ in heaven. The deliberate choice of the word "soul," which almost universally means soul as distinct from the body, as applying to the believers now reigning with Christ in glory, seems to make it plain that the first resurrection is just that (*The Basis of Millennial Faith*, 132).

The answer to this will not be in denial that the word "souls" does probably refer to disembodied souls. The obvious connection with Revelation 6:9-11 where disembodied souls is clearly meant makes it very likely that the same is meant here. Rather, the answer will be found in determination of the relationship of these "souls" to the group who are said to have "lived and reigned."

Observe that whoever the "souls" are, the ones of whom it is said at the end of verse 4, "they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years," [they] are obviously the same persons of whom John says in the beginning of verse 4, "I saw thrones and they sat on them, and judgment was given unto them." Who are these? Who are the ones entered as subject of the verb *ekathisan* (they sat) and who must be the antecedent of the pronoun *autois* (unto them)? They are not the devil (20:2) or the angel (20:1) or the slain beasts and their armies (19:19-21). They can hardly be other than those described in 19:14 as follows: "the armies which are in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and pure." Commentators unite in recognizing these as the redeemed of the ages. The clear necessity for some antecedent to the pronominal subject of the first verb, and to the pronoun "them" in verse 4, is the reason why the "recapitulation" theory cannot be adduced to make a break between chapters 19 and 20. So whoever the "souls" are, they are certainly not the total of participants in the first resurrection. They are mentioned only by way of eminence, to show the fulfillment of their prayer for deliverance and vindication before their enemies (6:10).<sup>91</sup>

Tenney writes,

Two aspects of resurrection are connected with the establishment of the millennial kingdom. One concerns the souls of the righteous that "lived, and reigned with Christ a thousand years" (Rev. 20:4). The verb *lived* can equally well be rendered "came to life," implying a sudden event rather than a process. Since the subject is "those who had been beheaded," the verb cannot mean "they had lived and reigned," for their death occurred before the thousand years began. The sentence refers to the future and demands a restoration of the righteous dead who will share in the rule of Christ.

The second aspect relates to "the rest of the dead [who] lived not [did not come to life] until the thousand years should be finished" (20:5). Since the resurrection of

---

91 Robert D. Culver, *Daniel and the Latter Days*, pp. 207-208.

the second group is manifestly an event, and not a process, a correct analogy demands that the resurrection of the first group also be an event. The righteous, then, will be summoned back to life in order that they may reign with Christ; the wicked, "the rest of the dead," will be haled to judgment. When they shall have been judged and their final status fixed, death itself will be destroyed (20:13,14). That which the resurrection of Christ began the resurrection of men will conclude.<sup>92</sup>

Questions (3) and (4) also need to be addressed together. When is the first resurrection and who participates in it?

Resurrection is spoken of in Daniel chapter 12, so we go there first.

*At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever (12:1-3).*

We note, first, that we are reading here of the last days. Resurrection, judgment, and rewards make this obvious. Second, it will be a time of trouble for the Jews, "your people," that is, Daniel's people. Third, a physical resurrection of literal bodies will take place following the tribulation, when Daniel's people are delivered; in other words, at the Day of the Lord.

That Daniel 12:2 records literal and physical resurrection cannot be doubted. "If a resurrection of the body is not here declared, it will be difficult to find where it is, or to imagine words in which it can be."<sup>93</sup> Tregelles notes, "If the language of this verse be not declaratory of a resurrection of the dead, actual and literal, is there any passage of Scripture at all which speaks of such a thing as a resurrection?"<sup>94</sup> One more quote, this one from Reese, should settle this matter:

If the terms used in Dan. 12:2-3 do not describe a literal resurrection, with the heavenly glory that follows, can our opponents tell us what terms can describe such a resurrection? We read of "sleepers" in the "dust of the earth" "awaking" to "everlasting life," and then of their "shining" like the brightness of the stars in the firmament. If these expressions do not mean literal resurrection from the dead, then literal resurrection must be something different from the idea usually entertained.<sup>95</sup>

Can one resurrection be spiritual and the other physical?

---

92 Merrill C. Tenney, *The Reality of the Resurrection*, pp. 89-90

93 Robinson, quoted by Biederwolf, *Millennium Bible*, 236, and cited by Culver, *Daniel and the Latter Days*, pg. 172.

94 S. P. Tregelles, *Remarks on the Prophetic Visions in the Book of Daniel*, pg. 168.

95 Alexander Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ*, pg. 42.

As regards the text itself, no legitimate treatment of it will extort what is known as the spiritual interpretation now in fashion. If in passages where two resurrections are mentioned, where certain *psuchai edzesan* (souls lived) at the first, and the rest of the *nechroi edzesan* (dead lived) only at the end of a specified period after the first--if in such a passage the first resurrection may be understood to mean spiritual rising from the grave--then there is an end of all significance of language, and Scripture is wiped as a definite testimony to anything.<sup>96</sup>

Since physical resurrection is in view, to what resurrection do these verses refer? There are four views propounded:

- (1) To the general resurrection at the end of all things.
- (2) To a limited resurrection immediately after the tribulation, and prior to the last and general resurrection, and one confined to Israel.
- (3) To a resurrection of the righteous just before Christ's second coming, and of the wicked at the end of time, no notice being taken by the angel of the hiatus between them.
- (4) To a resurrection of all that sleep in the dust after the time of great tribulation; the good, at that very time (immediately after), and the wicked later, at the end of all time, with no notice taken by the angel of the hiatus or intervening time.

These four views were given by Culver. He holds to the second, a resurrection confined to Israel.

Tregelles has a rendering of verse 2 which is preferable to that of the King James: "*And many from among the sleepers of the dust of the earth shall awake; these shall be unto everlasting life; but those the rest of the sleepers, those who do not awake at this time, shall be unto shame and everlasting contempt.*" Culver has a good section in his book, *Daniel and the Latter Days*, on this translation, and he closes this section as follows:

If Daniel 12:2 were the only verse in the Bible on the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, a case for a "general resurrection" at the end of time might be constructed. But, as the facts stand, the doctrine of two resurrections taught clearly in the New Testament remains as the best interpretation of Daniel 12:2--and I think the *only* acceptable one.<sup>97</sup>

Resurrection is also spoken of in Isaiah 26:19. "*Your dead shall live; together with my dead body they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust; for your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.*" Reese writes:

Now the question that concerns us is whether we have any indication in this section of Isaiah concerning the time when this momentous event takes place? To an impartial mind there can be no doubt about the answer; this resurrection is to take place at the Day of the Lord, when Jehovah shall come, and Israel shall be reconciled to Him. The proofs of this are incontestable. The principal signs and events of the whole prophecy move, to use figurative language, within the cycle of

---

96 Henry Alford, *Greek Testament with a Critically Revised Text*, 4:732-733.

97 Robert D. Culver, *Daniel and the Latter Days*, pg. 176.

the sixth and seventh seals of the Apocalypse. Here we have the Coming of the Lord, the conversion of Israel, the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom, and the sidereal signs in heaven that immediately precede them. Living Israel is restored, and the sleeping saints are brought to life, at the beginning of the Messianic Reign, not some years or decades before.<sup>98</sup>

Turning now to the New Testament and the Apostle Paul, we find resurrection mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15:50-54:

*Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I show you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed--in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."*

What is the time of this resurrection?

Paul not only describes the resurrection and transfiguration of the saints; he emphatically indicates the time for the fulfillment of these wonderful events. Here are his words: "So WHEN this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, THEN shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory'" (v. 54).

Nothing could be clearer than the Apostle's argument here. The resurrection and transfiguration of the faithful dead will take place in fulfillment of an O.T. prophecy. This occurs in Isaiah 25:8, which we have already considered . . . the resurrection of the saints, and the victory over death, *synchronize with the inauguration of the Theocratic Kingdom, the Coming of Jehovah, and the conversion of living Israel*. Following are Isaiah's words (25:6-9 R.V.): "And in this mountain shall the Lord of Hosts make unto all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined." Here we have the inauguration of the Kingdom under the figure of a banquet. "And He will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering that is cast over all peoples, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He has swallowed up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces." Here we have the resurrection, which, according to Paul, includes the raising of Christians.<sup>99</sup>

Paul mentions resurrection again in I Thessalonians 4:13-18:

*But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus*

---

98 Alexander Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ*, pp. 35-36.

99 Alexander Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ*, pp. 63-64.

*died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.*

Paul speaks of the rapture here only in order to show the relation of the sleeping to the living saints at the one Advent in glory. He is, in particular, comforting those who will survive until the Advent with the news that they will have no advantage over their dead loved ones. Does this passage speak of the time of this resurrection? It does not.

His [Paul's] point being established that the dead in Christ shall be on terms of equal advantage with those found alive at Christ's coming, he leaves undefined here the other events foretold elsewhere (as not being necessary to his discussion), Christ's reign on earth with His saints (1 Cor. 6:2-3), the final judgment and glorification of His saints in the new heaven and earth.<sup>100</sup>

It is interesting to note that in this passage we have mentioned the last trumpet (there is only one "last trumpet"), Christ's coming in the clouds (he comes only once), and (3) the resurrection of the saints. This resurrection is the first resurrection (of which there is only one "first resurrection," but of necessity implying at least one more).

*But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power (1 Cor. 15:20-24).*

The text points out three groups in the resurrection: (1) Christ the firstfruits, a group of one only; (2) they that are Christ's at his coming, namely, every saint from the creation to the last saint to die before Jesus' return; (3) the end group, that of the wicked dead.

Tregelles makes the following comment:

In Rev. 20 we read of "the first Resurrection". The whole scene is thus described: "I saw thrones, and they sat upon them . . . . They are the faithful in Christ in general . . . and one special class, those suffering for the witness of Jesus; and the glory given to them is explained to be the first resurrection. This is in full accordance with other Scriptures; for instance, 1 Cor. 15:23, where the *order* of the resurrection is taught: "Every man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits; afterward (*i.e.* next in order), they that are Christ's at His coming." The

---

100 Canon Faussett, cited by Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ*, pg. 67.

concluding part of 1 Thess. 4 equally connects the resurrection of the Church with the coming of Christ, so that there can be no resurrection of the saints till then. And so in this passage in Rev. 20; for the narrative, both in vision and in explanation, runs on from the time when He whose "name is called the Word of God" is seen on the White Horse, when the beast and the king of the earth and their armies are gathered to make war with Him, and when destruction falls upon them: then it is that those recently suffering under the persecuting power of this beast are sharers in the first resurrection. Until the beast and his persecution are destroyed together, there can be no first resurrection.

Moving now to verses 7-10, we read,

*Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.*

The 1000 years of Christ's righteous rule are not described for us in this passage, but much is said of this period in the Old Testament.<sup>101</sup> John is taken directly to the end of the millennial period when Satan is loosed from his prison.

Will not a thousand years under the beneficent sway of Christ and the manifested glory of God suffice to render men immune to his [Satan's] temptations, will they not have radically changed for the better, and become by the altered conditions of life and the absence of Satanic temptations, children of God and lovers of His will? Alas! It will be proved once more that man whatever his advantages and environment, apart from the grace of God and the new birth, remains at heart only evil and at enmity with God.<sup>102</sup>

Living under the reign of the most loving king imaginable and the most perfect of all possible administrations, we find that man is, in his heart, rebellious.

*Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire (vss 11-15).*

---

101 Psalm 72 gives us a picture of abiding peace, nations bowing before the Lord, abundant crops, and prosperity.

102 William Hoste, *The Visions of John the Divine*, pg. 161. Cited by Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pg. 302.

Why is the Book of Life mentioned in this passage when the dead are being judged according to their works? Archer writes: "Note that the book of life is also consulted; hence there must be at least some true believers among this throng. These can only be the generations that have grown up and died during the Millennium itself . . ." <sup>103</sup> The Revelation does not give us many details of the 1000 years, but surely Archer must be correct what he states that there will be true believers among the inhabitants. Walvoord adds,

The question has been raised concerning the judgment of those who die in the millennium. It is clear that the unsaved who die in the millennium are included in this judgment. The Scriptures are silent, however, concerning any rapture or translation of saints who survive the millennium and concerning the resurrection of saints who may die in the millennium . . . . Though men are judged according to their works, the book of life is introduced as the deciding factor as to where they will spend eternity . . . . The resurrection of the wicked dead is in sharp contrast to the resurrection of the righteous dead. Although the passage does not state so explicitly, the implication in this judgment is that there are no saved. Nothing is said here of the reward of the righteous. <sup>104</sup>

Gundry gives his view on this matter:

The judgment of the sheep and the goats becomes the pattern for the great general judgment at the end of time. Epistolary writers refer to that aspect which has to do with Christians simply because they address only Christians in their letters (Rom. 14:12; 1 Cor. 3:12-15; 2 Cor. 5:10). In Revelation 20:11-15 John mentions only the wicked dead because he has already mentioned, repeatedly and prominently, the saints of the first resurrection (vv. 4-6,9). Even in a pretribulational scheme, we would have to place here the final judgment of both the righteous and the wicked who will live on earth as subjects of Christ's millennial rule. The conditional clause "And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life" (v. 15) naturally implies the presence of believers whose names *will* be found written in the book of life. <sup>105</sup>

We close this discussion of Revelation chapter 20 with this sobering thought: "The only revelation that has been given concerning the eternal state recognizes two destinies only: one of blessedness in the presence of the Lord, the other of eternal punishment." <sup>106</sup> Have you been washed in the blood of the Lamb?

---

103 Gleason Archer, unpublished class notes.

104 John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp. 307-308.

105 Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, pg. 167.

106 John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pg. 310.

## CHAPTER 21

In chapter 21 John receives a most glorious vision--a new earth, new heavens, and a heavenly Jerusalem. After so many visions of horror and carnage, how overwhelmed he must have been to see the unparalleled magnificence of the holy city, the New Jerusalem!

Is this New Jerusalem a millennial city or a city that descends after the millennium?

I do not see how it can be a millennial city, for we read in Ezekiel chapters 40-48 of a millennial temple built in Jerusalem. Since the New Jerusalem has no temple, it would appear this city must be the Jerusalem of the eternal kingdom.

Who will dwell in this New Jerusalem? We are not definitely told here in Revelation 21, but we are told who will be free to enter. *"And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). And they shall bring the glory and honor of the nations into it. But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life" (24-27).*

A problem now arises: If this is not the millennial city but one that descends after the millennium, then there would not be anyone alive who could defile it, since only the saved will be there.

Perhaps there is some merit to Frost's view, that there are two distinct visions in this chapter--the first of the "new Jerusalem" and the second of the "holy Jerusalem," also called the "holy city." He states, "the first vision is of the city in its unending state, as the abiding place of the redeemed for all eternity; and the second vision is of the same city in its millennial state, as the abiding place of the redeemed for the one thousand years."<sup>107</sup>

Moving on, we notice that those who shall enter are the saved of the nations--Gentile believers. What an honor and privilege it will be for us to freely enter such a glorious city, the residence of the King! What about the Jews? I believe they are the ones who shall dwell as permanent residents within the New Jerusalem. In Exodus 4:22 Yahweh says, *"Israel is My son, My firstborn."* As the firstborn son, Israel receives a double inheritance.

In John 14:2-3, Jesus told the disciples that he would prepare a place for them. *"In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if [because] I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."* Speaking as Gentiles, we must be wary of appropriating all of Jesus' promises to ourselves. These verses were spoken to his disciples at the same time as verses 13-14, where they were promised: *"And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it."* Who, other than the disciples, could claim such power in prayer?

Out of all the nations, Yahweh chose Israel. His promise to David, recorded in 2 Samuel 7:10

---

<sup>107</sup>Henry W. Frost, *Matthew Twenty-Four and the Revelation*, pg. 302.

states: *"Moreover I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own and move no more."* This promise will be fulfilled during the millennium when Israel takes her rightful place in the land of promise, the land of Palestine. At that time they will worship Christ in the millennial temple, built according to the instructions given to Ezekiel. At the millennium's end, the earthly temple will be destroyed in the renovation and regeneration of the earth. Then in the eternal kingdom to follow, Israel will worship Christ in the New Jerusalem, where the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

All of chapter 21 seems to me to have special significance for Israel. The twelve gates have the names of the twelve tribes; the twelve foundations have the names of the twelve Apostles, who according to Matthew 19:28 will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel; the fact that there is no temple in the New Jerusalem would not be of significance to the Church, but it would hold great significance for Israel. Israel is special to God. We read in Zechariah 2:8,9:

*For this is what Yahweh Almighty says: "After he has honored me and has sent me against the nations that have plundered you--for whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye--I will surely raise my hand against them so that their slaves will plunder them. Then you will know that Yahweh Almighty has sent me."*

John is given a wonderful vision of the New Jerusalem, and we all shall enjoy its beauty for an eternity. It is a city whose base is close to 1500 miles square, and it rises 1500 miles into the heavens. Streets made of translucent gold extend outward and upward as far as the eye can see. Precious stones are seen everywhere, and one enters through one of twelve gates, each made of a single pearl. The city has no need of the sun or moon for its light, for the glory of God illuminates it-- *"The Lamb is its light."* Eternity shall be a time when all God's people--Jew and Gentile--abide in loving harmony with the never-ending desire to praise the Lamb who bought them with his own blood.

Before closing this chapter, let us take a minute to address two questions relating to the new earth. First, will we be living on the new earth or in some ethereal heaven? We turn to Hoekema for help.

Are we to spend eternity somewhere off in space, wearing white robes, plucking harps, singing songs, and flitting from cloud to cloud while doing so? On the contrary, the Bible assures us that God will create a new earth on which we shall live to God's praise in glorified, resurrected bodies. On that new earth, therefore, we hope to spend eternity, enjoying its beauties, exploring its resources, and using its treasures to the glory of God. Since God will make the new earth his dwelling place, and since where God dwells there heaven is, we shall then continue to be in heaven while we are on the new earth.<sup>108</sup>

Second, is the earth as we now know it completely destroyed and a new one created, or does this earth undergo a renovation of staggering proportions so as to bring it back to its original perfection? Hoekema again provides the answer.

We must, however, reject the concept of total annihilation in favor of the concept of

---

108 Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, pg. 274.

renewal, for the following four reasons:

First, both in II Peter 3:13 and in Revelation 21:1 the Greek word used to designate the newness of the new cosmos is not *neos* but *kainos*. The word *neos* means new in time or origin, whereas the word *kainos* means new in nature or in quality . . .

A second reason . . . is Paul's argumentation in Romans 8. When he tells us that the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God so that it may be set free from its bondage to decay (vv. 20-21), he is saying that it is the present creation that will be liberated from corruption in the eschaton . . .

A third reason is the analogy between the new earth and the resurrection bodies of believers. Previously we pointed out that there will be both continuity and discontinuity between the present body and the resurrection body . . . . By way of analogy, we would expect that the new earth will not be totally different from the present earth but will be the present earth wondrously renewed.

A fourth reason . . . is this: If God would have to annihilate the present cosmos, Satan would have won a great victory. For then Satan would have succeeded in so devastatingly corrupting the present cosmos and the present earth that God could do nothing with it but to blot it totally out of existence.<sup>109</sup>

---

109 Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, pp. 280-281.