

The Word of Righteousness

The Government of God and the Day of the Lord (1)

In the previous issue of this journal we considered many details related to the Christian life under the government of God in 1 Peter and the divine provision and the divine government in 2 Peter.¹ God is a God of government. The governing, administrating, and judging God is judging everyone and everything according to His righteousness and holiness. In particular, God's government begins with His own household. First Peter 1:17 says, "If you call as Father the One who without respect of persons judges according to each one's work, pass the time of your sojourning in fear," and 4:17 says, "It is time for the judgment to begin from the house of God." Through all the judgments of the Father, the believers are tried and proven in their faith (1:7) and made holy in all their manner of life to have a life that expresses the holy nature of God (vv. 15-16). "The Holy One, who as the Father has called us, has regenerated us to produce a holy family—a holy Father with holy children" (Recovery Version, v. 7, note 1). As holy children we should walk in a holy manner of life. Otherwise, the Father will become the Judge and will deal with our unholiness according to His governmental administration. By exercising His judgment first on the members of His household, the Lord gains the strong ground to judge, in His universal kingdom, those who are disobedient to His gospel and rebellious toward His government.

Peter begins his second Epistle with an encouraging, supplying, and high word concerning the divine provision for the suffering believers sojourning under God's government. This provision is both by the impartation of the divine power (1:3-11) and by the shining of the divine truth (vv. 12-21). Peter's word in chapter 1 proves that he was wholly in the line of God's economy, as revealed elsewhere in the Epistles (Eph. 1:10; 3:9; 1 Tim. 1:4). Following this, he returns to the subject of the divine government, particularly God's judgment on the false teachers (2 Pet. 2:1-3, 10-22), on both angels and men in the ancient times (vv. 4-9), and on the heretical mockers (3:1-9). Finally, he speaks of God's final judgment on the heavens and the

earth themselves. The time of this judgment is called "the day of the Lord." Verses 10 through 12 say,

The day of the Lord will come as a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the elements, burning with intense heat, will be dissolved, and the earth and the works in it will be burned up. Since all these things are to be thus dissolved, what kind of persons ought you to be in holy manner of life and godliness, expecting and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens, being on fire, will be dissolved, and the elements, burning with intense heat, are to be melted away?

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The day of the Lord in verse 10 is the day of God in verse 12. In the Bible this day is known by several names. In the Old Testament it is most often called the day of Jehovah and, as such, pertains to Israel and the nations at the end of the present age (Isa. 2:12; 13:6, 9; Ezek. 13:5; 30:3;

Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18, 20; Obad. 15; Zeph. 1:7, 14; Mal. 4:5). It is the day that is coming for Jehovah (Zech. 14:1), the coming day (Mal. 4:1), and in many portions of the Prophets it is simply "that day," as in Jeremiah 30:7. In the New Testament it is the day of the Lord, the day of God, the day of Christ, and the day of our Lord Jesus (Acts 2:20; 1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Thes. 5:2; 2 Thes. 2:2; Phil. 1:6, 10; 2:16; 1 Cor. 1:8; 2 Cor. 1:14). It is also the day of judgment, the great day, and the day of the wrath of the Father and the Son (2 Pet. 2:9; 3:7; Jude 6; Rev. 6:17). In these instances, *day* is used mainly in the sense of judgment for governmental dealing.

God's judgment began from the angels and passed through the generations of man in the Old Testament. In the New Testament age it begins from the house of God and continues until the coming of the day of the Lord, which will be a day of judgment on the Jews, the believers, and the Gentiles before the millennium. After the millennium all the dead, including men and demons, will be judged and will perish, and the heavens and the earth will be consumed by fire. In this way, God will clear up the whole

earth and even the whole universe to produce the new heavens and new earth, in which righteousness dwells (2 Pet. 3:13). In this issue we will consider the day of the Lord from this point of view, and in the following installment we will examine further details. As we will see, the results of the various judgments in God's universal government are not the same. Some judgments result in a disciplinary dealing, some in a dispensational punishment, and some in eternal perdition. Thus, the details concerning the day of the Lord are the word of righteousness, the "solid food" that embodies the deeper thought of God's justice and righteousness in His governmental dealings with His people, including the New Testament believers (Heb. 5:13-14).

The Divine History within the Human History

"The Bible is a record of two histories: the history of man, the human history, and the history of God, the divine history. The former is like an outward shell, and the latter, like the kernel within the shell" (Recovery Version, Joel 1:4, note 1). The divine history, as the divine mystery of the Triune God in humanity, began in eternity past with the eternal God and His eternal economy, in which He chose and predestinated a people for Himself (Eph. 1:4-5, 9-11) so that in time He might work Himself into man to be one with man, to be man's life, life supply, and everything, and to have man as His expression. Thus, from the beginning of God's plan, the divine and human histories have been interlaced together as one. When man fell, however, these two histories diverged into two lines that extend separately almost to the end of the Bible. Moreover, at least from the time of Babel, the two histories fell into opposition and even direct contention. In the books of the Prophets, the outward shell of human history is represented by the four sections of the great human image (Dan. 2:31-33), four great beasts (7:2-7), four kinds of locusts (Joel 1:4), and four horns (Zech. 1:18-19). These represent four great human kingdoms with their kings—Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome—each of which in succession damaged and devastated God's chosen people, Israel, and in the future, through the final manifestation of human government in the form of the revived Roman Empire, will directly oppose God and continue to persecute both Jews and believers.

The books of the Minor Prophets are crucial in unveiling the intrinsic, divine history within the outward human history. In these books the divine history that began in eternity past continues with the incarnation of Christ, the One whose goings forth are from the days of eternity (Micah 5:2). From eternity the Triune God prepared to come with His divinity into humanity by being born in Bethlehem as a man so that He might ultimately be dispensed into His chosen ones for His corporate manifestation and His full glorification. Christ's goings forth

continued with His human living and His death, burial, and resurrection for the spreading of God's redemption and salvation to all the nations on earth (Jonah 1:17; 2:10; Matt. 12:39-41). In the divine history Christ also poured out the consummated Spirit to produce the church as the corporate expression of the Triune God (Joel 2:28-32). In the future the divine history will continue with Christ's second coming as the Desire of all the nations and the Sun of righteousness (Hag. 2:7; Mal. 4:2), His coming with His overcomers as His army to defeat Antichrist and his army (Joel 3:1-15), and His reigning in Zion in the thousand-year kingdom (vv. 16-21; Micah 4:7). Eventually, the kingdom will consummate in the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth as the ultimate, consummate step of God's history (Recovery Version, Joel 1:4, note 1).

God's Chastisement of His Elect People and His Punishment of the Nations

To understand the destinies of Israel and of the nations in the day of the Lord, we must know their place in the divine and human histories. These histories are revealed throughout the Old and New Testaments in four items—God's chastisement of His elect people, His punishment of the nations, the manifestation of Christ, and the restoration of all things in the coming millennial age (Matt. 19:28; Acts 3:21). This is the controlling factor for the interpretation and understanding of the prophecies in the Bible.

God called His people Israel to be a great nation and a blessing to all the families of the earth (Gen. 12:2-3), a particular people to Himself, and His personal treasure from among all people to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exo. 19:5-6). Chosen Israel was a bride to Jehovah, the object of His eternal love (Isa. 54:5; 62:5; Jer. 2:2; 3:14; 31:3, 32; Ezek. 16:8; Hosea 2:16). She was also His fig tree for sweetness and satisfaction (Jer. 24:5; Hosea 9:10); His flourishing olive tree, beautiful in fruit and form, to produce oil for His offerings (Jer. 11:16a; Hosea 14:6; Rom. 11:17, 24); His vine to produce wine to cheer God in the drink offering (Psa. 80:8, 14; Jer. 2:21; Mark 12:1; Lev. 23:13); and the firstfruits of God's increase, as holiness to Him (Jer. 2:3). Hosea 11:1 says, "When Israel was a child, I loved him, / And out of Egypt I called My Son." This verse is fulfilled in Matthew 2:13-15, in which Joseph took the child Jesus and His mother into Egypt to flee the persecution of Herod. Thus, in prophecy, Israel was joined to Christ the Son and identified with Him.

Eventually, however, Israel as God's chosen people turned away from Him and became a failure to Him. God's particular people became common, the same as the surrounding nations (2 Kings 17:15, 33-34). They broke

their marriage contract with the Lord and became adulterous and unchaste (Hosea 2:2, 5; Ezek. 16:20, 26), setting up high places for the worship of idols and foreign gods (1 Kings 11:7-8; 12:28-31; 14:23; 2 Kings 17:11-12). In its corruption and pollution Israel became rotten figs and a heap of splinters (Jer. 24:2; Joel 1:7), broken olive branches (Jer. 11:16), and desolate, degenerate shoots on a foreign vine (Joel 1:7; Jer. 2:21). As a result, the meal offering and drink offering were cut off from the house of God, causing Israel to lose its blessing and denying God His food and drink (Joel 1:9, 13). Because of this, Jehovah contended with Israel (Jer. 2:9) and chastened her with many judgments.

The “rod” with which He chastened Israel was the Nations, which in Joel are referred to as four kinds of locusts, or one kind of locust in four stages (1:4). Beginning approximately two hundred years before the coming of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon (Joel prophesied around 800 B.C.), God sent the prophets to warn Israel, to advise the people, and to call them to return to God. However, Israel did not listen to the prophets. This forced God to send the four kinds of locusts to chastise His people. As the cutting locust, Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar took the people into captivity, carried away the vessels of the temple, and destroyed Jerusalem (2 Chron. 36:17-20). As the swarming locust, the Medo-Persian Empire was fierce and cruel; under a decree by Ahasuerus, all the Jews in the empire were almost annihilated (Esth. 3:13). As the licking locust, the Grecian Empire caused much devastation in the Holy Land, especially in the times of the king of the north and the king of the south, whose warfare caused destruction in the beautiful land (Dan. 11:15-16). The despicable Antiochus Epiphanes, of the Seleucid line of Hellenistic rulers, is a full type of Antichrist. His heart was set against the holy covenant, and he profaned the sanctuary, removed the daily sacrifice, and set up the abomination that desolates in the temple (vv. 21, 28, 31).

Finally, as the consuming locust, the Roman Empire usurped the land of Israel and brought it fully under the control of its dark and unjust government (Luke 2:1; 3:1; Matt. 2:1, 16; 27:2, 21-26; Acts 4:27; 12:1-2). Daniel 7:12 says concerning the beasts, the human empires, that “an extension of life was given to them for a season and a time.” This indicates that the life and culture of the empires have been extended and still remain. In particular, human government today is an extension of the Roman Empire, which subsumes the foregoing empires. Throughout the past two millennia, Israel has suffered the consuming

of the human, Gentile government, and at the end of this age, it will endure its greatest trials under Antichrist, the last Caesar of the Roman Empire.² Throughout the time of its consuming, Israel has had no kings, no priests, no prophets, and no temple as the God-ordained center for the worship of God. This has been the governmental judgment on unbelieving and apostate Israel in God’s divine administration.

Although God employed the nations as the rod of His anger (Isa. 10:5) to chastise apostate Israel, the nations acted excessively and overstepped the limit set by God, becoming haughty, like an ax that glorified itself above Him who chopped with it and a rod wielding Him who lifted it up (vv. 12-15). Because of this, God came in to punish the nations that devastated Israel. This is prophesied in Zechariah 1:18-21, which speaks of four horns and four craftsmen. In these verses the four horns signify the four human empires, corresponding to the four sections of the great human image in Daniel 2:31-33, that damaged and destroyed the chosen people of God. Concerning the four craftsmen, Zechariah 1:21 says,

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“These have come to terrify them [the horns], to cast down the horns of the nations who have lifted up the horn against the land of Judah to scatter it.” The four craftsmen are the skills used by God to destroy these four kingdoms with their kings (Lee, *Zechariah* 11-12). Each of the first three kingdoms—Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece—

was taken over in a skillful way by the kingdom that followed it (Dan. 5:25-28, 30-31; 8:3-7). The fourth Craftsman will be Christ as the stone cut out without hands (2:34), who will crush the restored Roman Empire and thereby crush the great human image as the totality of human government at His coming back. The final destruction of the nations will transpire in the day of the Lord.

The Manifestation of Christ and the Restoration of All Things

The ultimate goal of all the chastisements upon Israel and punishment of the nations is the manifestation of Christ, who is the centrality and universality of God’s economy. While the judgments upon Israel and the destruction of its devastators transpired in human history, God did something silently and mysteriously in the divine history. First, Christ was conceived of the Holy Spirit within the womb of a human virgin and was born of this virgin to be the God-man, the One who is the complete God and a perfect man. After passing through human living, He went to the cross to die a vicarious, all-inclusive death

that accomplished redemption, terminated the old creation, and solved all problems. Following this, He resurrected, and in His resurrection He was begotten to be the firstborn Son of God (Acts 13:33; Rom. 1:4; 8:29), to become the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45), and to regenerate millions of believers to be the sons of God and members of His Body, the church (1 Pet. 1:3; Eph. 1:22-23). Following this, He poured Himself out upon the believers as the consummated Spirit to produce the church and begin the age of mystery for the enlarged, expanded, and corporate manifestation of Christ in the church (Acts 2:1-4; Eph. 3:4; 1 Tim. 3:16). In the coming day of the Lord, Christ will return to defeat Antichrist and his armies and set up the kingdom of one thousand years, which will consummate in the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth. In this age the church is the manifestation of Christ; in the millennium the New Jerusalem in its preliminary stage will be the fuller manifestation of Christ; and in eternity the consummated New Jerusalem will be the fullest manifestation of Christ. This will be the ultimate step of God's history.

For close to twenty-seven centuries, God has permitted His elect Israel to suffer under the cutting, swarming, licking, and consuming locusts. However, this suffering was the factor that produced the incarnation of Christ, because it was through the suffering history of Israel that a couple, Mary and Joseph, was brought together so that God could be born in man, of man, and out of man to become no longer only God but a God-man. Moreover, even though the governments of the nations have been and are still being used by God to consume Israel, God has used them to afford all the necessary facilities in the environment for the carrying out of His purpose. God used the Roman Empire, the aggregate of the four empires, to keep the region around the Mediterranean Sea—the center of human habitation—in a peaceful order. The Romans built highways, established shipping routes, and spread a common language, Greek, throughout all its realm. In this way it afforded everything necessary for the incarnated God to live, work, and move on earth, providing the means for Christ to be crucified and the infrastructure for the communication of the gospel of His resurrection. It was also on this infrastructure that Jews from every nation under heaven were able to come to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost, when the consummated Spirit was poured out (Acts 2:5). Thus, the suffering of Israel and the consuming of human government have worked together for the manifestation of Christ in progressing stages. This is the universal history according to God's economy—the intrinsic kernel of the divine history within the outward shell of human history.

The manifestation of Christ will bring in the restoration of all things in the coming age (Matt. 19:28; Acts 3:21).

Because of two rebellions—the rebellion of Satan and the angels who followed him and the rebellion of man—the universe became utterly defiled and polluted. Thus, the God-created universe needs a restoration. Christ's goings forth, His manifestation, began in eternity and continued with His incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension, and outpouring, and it will continue further until the fallen universe has been fully restored. The restoration of all things will begin in the coming age after the Lord's second coming. At that time, Christ will judge in righteousness and faithfulness, creation will be brought into a peaceful order, the remnant of Israel will be recovered, the nations will seek after Christ, and the earth will be filled with the knowledge of Jehovah (Isa. 11:1-12). Christ will reign among Israel on the holy mountain of Zion within Jerusalem and be a shelter and a stronghold to them, and the New Testament overcomers as Christ's co-kings will rule with Him over the nations (Joel 3:16-17; Matt. 19:28; Rev. 2:26-27). Finally, in the consummation of the restoration, there will be the new heaven and new earth with the New Jerusalem as its center. This is the intrinsic history of the universe. Only an eschatology that considers the above four items—God's chastisement of His elect people, His punishment of the nations, the manifestation of Christ in progressing ages, and the restoration—can be considered proper, clear, and inclusive.

The Day of Jehovah for the Judgment of Israel

The judgments upon Israel will continue throughout the course of this age and will consummate in the day of Jehovah at the end of the age. At this time Israel will be purified, and the remnant of the people will be saved. Specifically, the day of Jehovah's judgment for His governmental dealing with Israel will transpire during the great tribulation, the final three and a half years of the present age. This final day will be a day of destruction for unbelieving and unrepenting Israel. Joel 1:15 says, "Alas for the day! / For the day of Jehovah has drawn near, / And as the destruction from the Almighty it will come." It will also be a day of darkness and gloominess. Verses 1 and 2 of chapter 2 say,

Blow a trumpet in Zion; / Sound an alarm in My holy mountain; / Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, / For the day of Jehovah comes; / For it draws near: / A day of darkness and gloominess, / A day of clouds and deep darkness, / Like the dawn spread over the mountains— / A people great and mighty. / There has not been any like them / Since eternity, / And there will not be any more after them, / Even until the years of the generation of the generations.

The day of Jehovah is a great and terrible day. Verse 11 says, "Jehovah utters His voice / Before His army, / For His camp is very great, / For He who executes His word

is mighty. / For the day of Jehovah is great / And very terrible, / And who can endure it?" It is a time of unprecedented distress for Jacob (Jer. 30:7; Dan. 12:1), a time of tribulation such as has not occurred from the beginning of the world nor shall by any means ever occur (Matt. 24:21; Mark 13:19), a day of darkness and not light (Amos 5:18, 20), the day of the overflowing wrath of Jehovah (Zeph. 1:18), and the day of Jehovah's anger (2:2-3).

The Day of Jehovah for the Salvation and Restoration of Israel

However, the day of Jehovah will also be the day of the salvation of the repenting remnant of Israel. Jeremiah 30:7 says, "Alas! For that day is great, / And there is none like it; / And it is a time of distress for Jacob, / But he will be saved out of it." Daniel 12:1 confirms this by saying, "There will be a time of distress, such as never occurred since there came to be a nation until that time; and at that time your people, every one found written in the book, will be delivered." The Lord is willing to save Israel by pouring out His Spirit upon them. Joel 2:28-29 says,

Afterward I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh, / And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy; / Your old men shall dream dreams; / Your young men shall see visions. Indeed even upon the male and female slaves / In those days I will pour out My Spirit.

This prophecy concerning the pouring out of God's Spirit for Israel's salvation was fulfilled as a foretaste by the pouring out of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4, 16-21), and it will be fulfilled as a full taste by the pouring out of the Spirit a second time, before the great tribulation, for the salvation and regeneration of many of the returned Israelites (Lee, *Joel* 18-19; Recovery Version, Joel 2:28, note 1). The Spirit poured out on the day of Pentecost was the Spirit of God compounded with Christ's humanity, His death with its effectiveness, and His resurrection with its power (Exo. 30:23-25). This processed, compounded Spirit who has been poured out is the consummation of the Triune God and the realization of Christ for the manifestation of Christ.

In spite of such an outpouring of the Spirit, many of the returned Jews will not believe but will continue to be stubborn. In the final days of this age, Israel will be as sinful as Sodom and as worldly as Egypt until the return of Christ, the Messiah (Rev. 11:8; Isa. 1:9; Jer. 23:14; Ezek. 23:8, 19). However, during the great tribulation, the Jews will be persecuted by Antichrist and the nations of his

kingdom, resulting in the slaughter of two-thirds of them (Zech. 13:8). The third that remains will be brought through fire to be refined as silver is refined and tried as gold is tried (v. 9), yet half of them will be captured by the nations who will be gathered against Jerusalem (14:2). Eventually, Jerusalem will be surrounded by the Gentile armies under Antichrist, whose intention will be to destroy Israel entirely. At that time the consummated Spirit will again be poured out, and the remnant of the children Israel will be saved. Zechariah 12:10 says,

I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and of supplications; and they will look upon Me, whom they have pierced; and they will wail over Him with wailing as for an only son and cry bitterly over Him with bitter crying as for a firstborn son.

The pouring out of the Spirit for the salvation of the returned Israelites before the tribulation is signified by the early rain (Joel 2:23), and the pouring out of the Spirit of grace and supplications at the end of the tribulation is signified by the late rain (Hosea 6:3). Rain in the Scriptures signifies the Spirit of God sent by Him from the heavens to water His people (cf. Gen. 2:5; Deut. 11:14). The outpourings of the Spirit referred to in Joel 2:28-29 and in Zechariah 12:10 are the fulfillment of the early rain and the late rain, respectively. Thus, the three outpourings of the

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Spirit—on the day of Pentecost, just before the great tribulation, and at the Lord's second coming—work for the salvation of Israel.

As a result of the outpouring of the Spirit as the late rain, the remnant of Israel will be saved into the enjoyment of the riches of the Triune God in the millennium. All the nations will come to Israel to entreat the favor of Jehovah, and the children of Israel will be priests to them; from Zion will go forth instruction, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem (Zech. 8:20-23; Isa. 2:2-3; 60:3-5). At that time Israel, who was torn, will be healed, and Jehovah who had stricken them will bind them up; He will enliven them after two days, and on the third day He will raise them up to live in His presence (Hosea 6:1-2). The Lord will be like dew to Israel, who will bud like the lily and send forth his roots like the trees of Lebanon (14:5-8). Living waters will go forth from Jerusalem, and Jehovah will be King over all the earth (Zech. 14:8-9). A fountain will go forth from the house of Jehovah to water all the land (Joel 3:18; cf. Rev. 22:1) The threshing floors will be full of grain, and the wine vats will overflow with

new wine and fresh oil to produce the offerings with which to feed God and cheer Him in the land of Immanuel (Joel 2:24; Isa. 8:8). Moreover, the Lord will restore to Israel the years the cutting, swarming, licking, and consuming locusts have eaten (Joel 2:25). Eventually, in the New Jerusalem, Israel will participate in all the blessings God has ordained in eternity and for eternity. All the foregoing will be the household salvation to Israel (Rom. 11:26-27) to fulfill its destiny in the day of the Lord and into eternity.

The Day of Jehovah for the Judgment and Destruction of the Nations

The coming day of Jehovah will be a day also for the judgment and destruction of the nations, who from the time of Babel have rejected God, usurped Him, and opposed Him, and at least from the time of Assyria and Babylon have dealt with Israel in an excessive way, beyond the limits set by God, and acted without regard for justice. This will be the day for the Lord to deal with the proud and lofty nations (Isa. 2:12), a day of destruction from the Almighty (13:6), a day that is cruel and with overflowing wrath and burning anger to destroy sinners from off the land (v. 9), a day of clouds and a time of doom for the nations (Ezek. 30:3), a day of recompense for the nations (Obad. 15), and the great and terrible day of Jehovah, that burns like a furnace, in which all the proud ones and all the ones who act wickedly will be stubble that is set ablaze (Mal. 4:1, 5).

The punishment of the nations in the day of the Lord will comprise the various calamities, plagues, and woes of the great tribulation, as recorded in Revelation 6 through 19. It will begin with the shaking of the earth and heaven as the sixth seal, which will be a warning to those who dwell on earth and the initiation of the coming great tribulation (6:12-17). Following this, the first four trumpets of the seventh seal bring further, more severe judgments on the earth, the sea, the rivers, and the sun, moon, and stars (8:7-12). Today those who oppose God and those who practice evil against Him still enjoy God's creation, but through the judgment of the first four trumpets, the third part of the earth, the sea, the rivers, and the hosts of heaven will be damaged and become no longer good for man's living. After this, the fifth through seventh trumpets come, the three woes that inflict judgment and damage not merely on the earth but directly on men (v. 13). As the first of these most severe woes, Satan opens the abyss, the dwelling place of the demons, and releases demon-possessed locusts to torment men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads (Luke 8:30-31; Rev. 9:1-10). At the same time Antichrist, the king of the locusts, is released from the abyss to collaborate with Satan to torment people, persecute the saints, and blaspheme God (v. 11; 11:7; 13:5-7).

At the sounding of the sixth trumpet, the second woe, the four angels bound in the Euphrates are released to kill the third part of men by means of the two hundred million horsemen (9:13-19). The third woe is the negative contents of the seventh seal, which are the seven bowls, the seven last plagues in which the fury of God's wrath is finished (15:1; 16:1). These bowls comprise an evil and malignant sore on the worshippers of Antichrist (v. 2), the sea becoming blood (v. 3), the rivers and the springs of waters becoming blood (v. 4), the sun burning men with fire (v. 8), darkness on the kingdom of Antichrist (v. 10), the drying up of the Euphrates to prepare the way of the kings from the rising of the sun (v. 12), and the greatest earthquake with great hail (vv. 18, 21).

The final manifestation of the unbelieving and rebellious nations will be the revived Roman Empire under Antichrist, the beast, the last Caesar, which will be established in the seventieth week prophesied in Daniel 9:24-27. Ten kings in Antichrist's kingdom will receive authority with the beast and will be one with him in opposing God and persecuting His people—the Jews and the believers. These ten kings are the ten horns of the beast and the ten toes of the great image seen by Nebuchadnezzar in his dream (Rev. 17:12, 17; Dan. 2:42). Between the sixth and seventh bowls, near the end of the great tribulation, Satan, Antichrist, and the false prophet will send forth unclean spirits to stir up the kings of the whole inhabited earth to gather their forces, including the two hundred million horsemen, to the war of the great day of God the Almighty (Rev. 16:13-14). In that war Satan's intention will be to destroy Israel and fight directly against Christ and His army, the overcoming believers (Zech. 14:2; Rev. 17:14; 19:19). In His sovereignty, however, it will be God Himself who gathers the nations like sheaves for the threshing floor (Zeph. 3:8; Micah 4:11-13). He will bring them to the valley of Jehoshaphat, which means "Jehovah judges," which is also called Armageddon, the place of slaughter (Joel 3:2; Rev. 16:16; Judg. 5:19; 2 Kings 23:29; Zech. 12:11).³ Joel 3:14 says, "Multitudes, multitudes, / In the valley of decision; / For the day of Jehovah has drawn near / In the valley of decision." *Decision* in Hebrew (*haruts*) means "strict decision" and is akin to the verb *cut* (Brown 358). At that time the Lord will make a determined, incisive decision to exercise His government in judgment to destroy Antichrist, the false prophet, and the rebellious nations. This will be the treading of the great winepress of the fury of God (Rev. 14:17-20; 19:11-21; Joel 3:13; Isa. 63:1-6).

Following this, the victorious Christ will sit on the throne of His glory to judge the unbelievers left alive from all the nations (Matt. 25:31-46). The "sheep," those who treated the suffering believers well while they were under the persecution of Antichrist, will be transferred into the millennium to be the people living under the kingly ruling

of Christ and the overcoming believers and under the priestly ministry of the saved Jews (Rev. 2:26-27; 12:5; Zech. 8:20-23). However, the “goats,” those who persecuted and mistreated the believers, will be sent into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. This will be Christ’s judgment of the living before the millennium (Acts 10:42; 2 Tim. 4:1). After the millennium, Christ will sit on the great white throne to judge the resurrected sinners whose names are not written in the book of life (Rev. 20:11-12, 15). This will be the final judgment of Christ upon the sinful and unbelieving nations. Through all these means, the nations will be punished, Israel will be restored, and Christ will be manifested in full.

The Day of the Lord for the Believers

As we have seen, the Bible speaks of God’s chastisement of His elect people, God’s punishment of the nations, the manifestation of Christ, and the restoration of all things. While the chastisement of Israel and the punishment of the nations were transpiring in human history, the manifestation of Christ began with His incarnation and continued with His human living, death, resurrection, and ascension. Then on the day of Pentecost the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ—the pneumatic Christ, the processed and consummated Triune God as the Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17)—poured Himself out on the believers. At this time, the individual Christ became the corporate Christ for His enlarged and expanded manifestation. This enlarged Christ is the church, the great mystery of godliness, God manifested in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:15-16). Thus, the church is a major part of the divine history, the intrinsic history of the divine mystery within the outward, human history. Eventually, the church will usher in the final appearing of Christ to bring in the restoration in the millennium, the thousand-year kingdom, which is the prelude to the new heaven and new earth with the New Jerusalem in eternity.

From the point of view of the church, the end of this age will consummate in the building up of the Body of Christ, the preparation of the bride of Christ, and the formation of the army that will return with the Lord to defeat Antichrist and his armies at Armageddon. At the Lord’s return, prior to the great tribulation, He will rapture His overcomers, who have been constituted as the high peak and reality of the Body, bride, and army. These are portrayed as the man-child in Revelation 12, the stronger part of the bright woman, who is caught up to God and to His throne (vv. 1-2, 5). These are also the firstfruits in chapter

14, the first to ripen in God’s harvest, who stand with the Lamb on the heavenly Mount Zion (vv. 1-5). They are also the ones “taken” in Matthew 24:40-41. However, the majority of the believers at the end of the age will not have matured adequately and will be left on the earth during the three and a half years of the tribulation. These are signified by the general harvest in Revelation 14:14-16.

The sequence of events in chapter 14 is very significant, being a brief, chronological overview of the entire period of the tribulation. Following the rapture of the firstfruits, an angel announces the eternal gospel to those dwelling on the earth (vv. 6-7), religious Babylon falls (v. 8), and another angel warns against the worship of Antichrist (vv. 9-11). All these transpire near the beginning of the three and a half years. Then verse 12 says, “Here is the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.” These saints are God’s people who remain in the great tribulation, composed of both Jews and believers. Clearly, those who keep the commandments of God are His Old Testament people, the Jews, and those who keep the faith of Jesus and

bear His testimony can be none other than genuine New Testament believers (12:17). Both of these peoples will need endurance to suffer Antichrist’s persecution. After the word concerning endurance, 14:13 proclaims the blessing of the martyrs in the tribulation. Then, following all these events, the believers who still remain on the earth

are raptured as the harvest of the earth. Verses 14 and 15 say,

I saw, and behold, there was a white cloud, and on the cloud One like the Son of Man sitting, having a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, Send forth Your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come because the harvest of the earth is ripe.

The harvest of the earth is God’s people on earth, the believers in Christ, the “sons of the kingdom” (Matt. 13:37-38; Mark 4:26-29; 1 Cor. 3:9). After the first-ripe ones are reaped as firstfruits, the majority of the believers will ripen with the help of the sufferings in the great tribulation. Then they will be reaped, raptured, at the end of the three and a half years. *Ripe* (ἐξηράνθη) in Revelation 14:15 is “dried”—“perfectly ripe, so that the stalk is dry” (Alford 691). To be ripe is to be “dried” of all earthly water. Govett notes, “The disciples of Christ when ripe, are dry, and dead to earth” (*Kingdom* 63). The suffering of

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the great tribulation, like the parching sun, will dry up the earthly waters from the believers who are left on the earth during that time, enabling them to ripen. This harvest is distinct from the second reaping that follows it, which is the gathering of the grapes, the evildoers, who are cast into the winepress of the fury of God (vv. 17-20). Alford asks concerning the two reapings,

Why do we read of the casting into the winepress of God's wrath in the second case, and of no corresponding feature in the other? Again, why is the agency so different—the Son of man on the white cloud with the golden crown in the one case, the mere angel in the other?...The two gatherings seem quite distinct. (691)

Just before the worshippers of Antichrist are gathered for destruction, the remaining believers, as the final portion of God's crop, are harvested by a rapture at the end of the tribulation.

The Suffering and Martyred Believers in the Great Tribulation

In Revelation 8:3 Christ as another Angel offers the prayers of the saints upon the golden altar which is before the throne in the heavens. This takes place after the opening of the seventh seal, which begins the major part of the great tribulation. This indicates that even at this time there still will be saints praying on the earth. In Revelation 15 another sign is seen that reveals the presence of believers in the tribulation. Verses 2 and 3 say,

I saw as it were a glassy sea mingled with fire and those who come away victorious from the beast and from his image and from the number of his name standing on the glassy sea, having harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses, the slave of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and wonderful are Your works, Lord God the Almighty! Righteous and true are Your ways, O King of the nations!

These are the late overcomers, who pass through the great tribulation, overcome Antichrist and his worship, and are martyred. That they stand on the glassy sea mingled with fire indicates that they are resurrected to be above any further judgment of God. On the negative side, they sing the song of Moses (Exo. 15:1-8), praising God for His victory over and triumphant judgment of His enemies. On the positive side, they also sing the song of the Lamb, indicating Christ's redemption experienced by God's people in the presence of their enemy.

These martyrs are included among "My brothers," of whom the Lord spoke in Matthew 25:31-46. When the Son of Man comes in His glory, He will sit on the throne of His glory to judge all the nations, those who are left

alive at the end of the great tribulation. At that time He will separate the sheep from the goats based on their treatment of Him, that is, of His brothers, during that great time of suffering. Verses 37 to 40 say,

Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, Lord, when have we seen You hungry and have fed You, or thirsty and have given You a drink? And when have we seen You a stranger and have taken You in, or naked and have clothed You? And when have we seen You sick or in prison and have come to You? And the King will answer and say to them, Truly I say to you, Inasmuch as you have done it to one of these, the least of My brothers, you have done it to Me.

During the tribulation, the Lord's brothers, His believers (12:49-50; Heb. 2:12), will suffer under hunger, thirst, homelessness, nakedness, sickness, and imprisonment. Whoever helps the suffering brothers during this time will be rewarded with the inheritance of the kingdom, where they will be the nations under the shining of the New Jerusalem in the millennium. All the foregoing indicates that genuine believers in Christ in the New Testament age will also partake of the cleansing, purifying, and perfecting judgments of God in the day of the Lord.

The Vision of Religious Babylon, the Great Harlot

In Revelation 17:3 John was carried away in spirit to see the vision of the destruction of Babylon the Great. The fall of Babylon is mentioned in 14:8 and again in 16:19, and chapters 17 and 18 are devoted to it. Babylon is a great sign in Revelation, signifying the systems that will characterize godless human culture, religion, commerce, and government at the end of this age. Therefore, the destruction of Babylon the Great is a significant part of the righteous judgments in the coming day of the Lord.

Babylon as a sign is of two aspects. The first aspect, seen mainly in chapter 17, is the consummation of false and degraded religion. John P. Lange points out the contrast between the universal bright woman in 12:1-5 and the harlot in chapter 17 (306). The former signifies the totality of God's children on the earth throughout the ages, of which the greatest part is the church in the age of the rising of the sun from on high, the enlargement of the manifestation of Christ in the New Testament age (Luke 1:78; Mal. 4:2; Eph. 5:14, 8). The latter woman, however, is an evil, mystical entity, "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF THE HARLOTS AND THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH" (Rev. 17:5). That this woman sits upon the seven mountains, which are the seven heads of the beast and seven kings (vv. 9-10), identifies her with Rome, which is built upon seven hills and from which seven Caesars of particular note, being most evil and blasphemous, have ruled and will rule.⁴

The harlot signifies religious, not pagan and political Rome. Concerning the vision in chapter 17 as a whole, Henry Alford says, “The prophecy regards Rome pagan and papal, but, from the figure of an harlot and the very nature of the predictions themselves, more the latter [papal] than the former [pagan]” (713). *Mystery* is a designation that best suits religion, not politics. This evil, religious entity is prefigured by Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal (“with Baal,” a companion of Baal), who zealously urged Ahab to serve idols (1 Kings 16:31; 21:25-26). That Jezebel denotes a propagator of heathen religion even in the church is proved by her presence in the church in Thyatira, where as a self-appointed prophetess she led the church astray to commit fornication and to eat idol sacrifices, teaching the deep and mysterious doctrines of Satan (Rev. 2:20, 24). While the Roman Empire sought to destroy the church outwardly, the philosophy of the satanic mysteries was used by God’s enemy to corrupt the church inwardly. Another indicator that the harlot of chapter 17 is not political Rome is found in verse 2, which says that the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her. Alford asks,

If this be pagan Rome, who and what are these kings, and what is indicated by her having been the object of their lustful desires? In the days of Imperial Rome, there were no independent kings of the earth except in Parthia and Persia. Rome in her pagan state...was not one who intrigued with the kings of the earth, but ἡ ἔχουσα βασιλείαν ἐπὶ τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς [“has a kingdom over the kings of the earth”—v. 18]: she reigned over them with undisputed and crushing sway. (705)

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Lange says simply, “Pagan Rome did not allure the kings of the earth by blandishments; she destroyed them” (312). Alford says further,

The figure here used, of a harlot who has committed fornication with secular kings and peoples, is frequent in the prophets, and has one principal meaning and application, viz. to God’s church and people that had forsaken Him and attached herself to others. In eighteen places out of twenty-one where the figure occurs, such is its import [Isa. 1:21; Jer. 2:20; 3:1, 6, 8; Ezek. 16:15-16, 28, 31, 35, 41; 23:5, 19, 44; Hosea 2:5; 3:3; 4:15; Micah 1:7]. (704)

Lange concludes, “That the Woman here depicted is significant of the fallen Church there can be no doubt” (306). In Revelation 17:6 John testifies, “I marveled with great marvel when I saw her.” Lange explains that even the bloodthirstiness of pagan Rome, for which it was well

known and long notorious, could not have caused such marvel in the apostle: “But that such a Woman could finally be the product of the historical development of the Church of faith, then existent, must appear even to the Seer, with his knowledge of the world, a thing unheard of” (314). Both Lange and Alford see the woman in chapter 17 as the degeneration of the woman seen in the vision of chapter 12. The latter says,

I should rather regard St. John’s astonishment as a compound feeling, occasioned partly by the enormity of the sight revealed to him, partly also by the identity of the symbolism [of the harlot] with that which had been the vehicle of a former and altogether different vision [in chapter 12]. (708)

This evil consummation of apostate religion—“the fallen Church”—is clearly associated with Rome. Lange says, “Nothing but Christian Rome can constitute the symbolical and historical apex of this whole body of the fallen Church” (307). Alford asserts, “I do not hesitate therefore,...to maintain that interpretation which regards papal and not pagan Rome as pointed out by the harlot of this vision” (705). John N. Darby concurs:

The general character is the great active idolatress that has gained influence over the mass of the nations; next, that the kings of the earth have lived in guilty intimacy with her, seeking her favours, while those

that dwell on the earth have lost their senses through her pernicious and inebriating influence. This is the general idea first given, a character plain enough to mark the Roman or Papal system. (549)

The religious aspect of Babylon, therefore, is embodied in the apostate Roman Catholic Church.⁵ That she is a harlot denotes that God has never acknowledged a relationship with the false, outward appearance of Christianity that grew out of the degradation of the church in the first centuries after the apostles and was fully systematized at the time of Gregory the Great at the end of the sixth century. What the apostate church commits is not adultery, the sin of an unfaithful spouse, but fornication, the sin of a harlot. George H. Lang notes,

It is important that this Woman is not styled an adulteress...The force of this is, that this Woman, this system of religion, is not regarded as having ever been ‘joined unto the Lord’ [1 Cor. 6:17] and as having become unfaithful to Him. (278)

The harlot's fornication consists of her having sinful relationships with the kings of the earth for gain, which is fully attested to by the history of the Roman Church.

The evil woman sits upon a scarlet beast, denoting the Roman Empire and Antichrist in particular, who is one with Satan in his appearance (Rev. 17:3; 12:3). She is gilded for outward display with gold, precious stone, and pearls—the materials with which the New Jerusalem is built. However, the content of the golden cup in her hand is abominations and the unclean things of her fornication. As such, she is typified by Jezebel, who was related to fornication and idol sacrifices (2:20) and to the woman in Matthew 13:33 who mingled leaven with the meal of the meal offering (Lev. 2:1, 4). History records that the Roman Church has taken in many pagan practices, heretical doctrines, and evil matters and mixed them with the teachings concerning Christ, leavening the whole content of Christianity.⁶

The Destruction of Religious Babylon

Revelation 17:16 says, “The ten horns which you saw and the beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked and will eat her flesh and burn her utterly with fire.” Antichrist and the ten kings will persecute the apostate Roman Church, rob her of her riches, expose her, and annihilate her altogether. Daniel 11:36 and 37 say of the coming Antichrist,

He will exalt himself and magnify himself above every god, and against the God of gods he will speak extraordinary things...He will not regard the gods of his fathers or the desire of women, nor will he regard any other god; for he will magnify himself above all.

Second Thessalonians 2:4 says similarly, “Who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or an object of worship, so that he sits in the temple of God, setting himself forth, saying that he is God.” As a man who regards no god, Antichrist will persecute not only the true saints but also the false appearance of the church, which has been a heavy burden and a great grievance to kings, especially in Europe, since medieval times. Daniel 9:27 says,

He will make a firm covenant with the many for one week; and in the middle of the week he will cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease and will replace the sacrifice and the oblation with abominations of the desolator, even until the complete destruction that has been determined is poured out upon the desolator.

The one week is the seventieth week prophesied by Daniel, which will transpire at the end of this age (v. 24). Hence, the middle of the week will be the beginning of the great tribulation of three and a half years (12:7; Rev.

11:2-3; 12:6). In Revelation 14 the hundred forty-four thousands living overcomers are raptured (vv. 1-5). Following this, an angel announces the eternal gospel to those dwelling on the earth (vv. 6-7). Then a second angel declares the fall of Babylon (v. 8). Finally, a third angel proclaims a warning against the worship of Antichrist in the tribulation (vv. 9-13). This sequence clearly indicates that Babylon the Great in its religious aspect will fall prior to the major part of the tribulation, when the ten kings give their kingdom to the beast, and his image is worshipped (17:16-17). George H. Pember notes,

The Woman, or Harlot Church, must be thrust out of the way before the Antichrist can be revealed. Useful as it has hitherto been to the Powers of Darkness, corrupt Ecclesiasticism must be swept off the face of the earth as soon as it is found to be obstructive to Satan's ultimate plan. (*Antichrist* 72)

Joseph Seiss concludes, “Every form of existing worship then upon earth, be it Romanism, Mohammedanism, degenerate Protestantism, or any other species of false worship, it will come under the ban of this great infernal confederation” (138). Although the destruction of religious Babylon seems to be the purpose of the ten kings under Antichrist, the embodiment of Satan, Revelation 17:17 reveals, “God has put it into their hearts to perform His mind.” At the end of this age, God will answer the prayer of the martyrs, saints, and witnesses of Jesus (v. 6; 6:9-10) and will put the destruction of Babylon into the hearts of Antichrist and the ten kings. This will be the expression of the mind of the Lord in the execution of His governmental judgment against apostate Christendom at the beginning of the great tribulation.

The Destruction of Material Babylon, the Great City

The predominant imagery of Babylon in chapter 17 is that of a harlot, signifying mystical and religious Babylon—apostate Christianity embodied and consummated in the Roman Church (vv. 1, 5, 15-16). In chapter 18, however, the harlot is no longer mentioned. Rather, the emphasis there is on Babylon as a city, denoting a material and commercial system that continues to exist until the end of the tribulation (vv. 10, 16, 18-19, 21). After Antichrist destroys religious Babylon and begins to persecute God's genuine people on the earth, the material and commercial system, denoted by and embodied in future Rome, will flourish in Antichrist's kingdom.

There are several marked differences between the visions in Revelation 17 and 18 (Lang 298-299). First, the vision of the great harlot in chapter 17 is announced by one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls, but the vision in chapter 18 is proclaimed by another Angel, Christ, who has superior authority and glory. This indicates that

the visions in the two chapters are distinct. Second, the judgment of the harlot in chapter 17 transpires at the beginning of the great tribulation, as we saw above, but the judgment of the Babylon of chapter 18 transpires at the pouring out of the seventh bowl, after the worship of the beast, after the establishing of his throne, and immediately after the war at Armageddon (16:2, 10, 16-19). One Babylon is destroyed by the beast near the time of his enthronement, and another is judged after his defeat. The third difference is that in 17:16 the ten kings hate and desolate the harlot, but in 18:9 the same kings weep and lament over the burning of the city. Lastly, when the kings have killed the harlot, they enrich themselves from her (17:16), but when the city is overthrown, like a stone cast into the sea, there are no more riches to be seized (18:19, 21).⁷

Verse 3 of chapter 18 says, “The merchants of the earth have become rich by the power of her luxury.” Chapter 17 speaks of kings and nations, but in chapter 18 a new class of persons is named: “The *merchants* of the earth, a transition-form between the kings and the nations, in which the money-agents can become money-princes, and the princes agents of the Woman” (Lange 325). Writing near the middle of the nineteenth century, Benjamin W. Newton observed the global economic system that was already bringing the nations of the world into an unholy unity, knitting them into an evil, international harmony for the mutual pursuit of wealth:

Commercial enterprise...the increasing control of governments by capitalists, manufacturers, and merchants; the gradual yielding of the aristocracy of birth and station to the aristocracy of wealth...If facts prove to us that these are the principles that are beginning to spread a moral unity throughout the Roman earth, we could scarcely avoid concluding upon this ground alone, that this is the system represented...as dominant over the prophetic earth at the time of the end...And what features can be more clearly marked as attaching to the Babylonish period than commercial greatness, the supremacy of wealth, and the mixing of iron and miry clay in the government of the kingdoms? (*Apocalypse* 364-365)

He adds, “The commencement of the reign of commerce is already recognised, and men welcome it” (378).⁸ In this insidious paradigm of world domination—in which “Capital’ is power; and men of wealth are becoming the chief guardians of society and the firmest pillars of the throne” (366)—it is not swords but cargo that builds

empires to ransack the peoples of the earth for material gain. In Revelation 18:12-13 this cargo is detailed in seven categories (Lee, *Revelation* 613). Gold, silver, precious stone, and pearls are ornaments; fine linen, purple, silk, and scarlet denote clothing; and thyine wood, ivory, most precious wood, brass, iron, and marble point to furniture and decorations. Cinnamon, amomum, incense, ointment, and frankincense are spices; wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle, and sheep are for food; and horses and chariots are for transportation. Finally, slaves and souls of men (σωμάτων, καὶ ψυχὰς ἀνθρώπων) refer to employment. *Souls of men* refers to men who sell themselves for employment. The characteristic of commercial Babylon is that those who are captured by it sell their souls and lives to their occupation, neglecting God and their eternal destiny. In Babylon, “everything is open for purchase and for sale, from gold to the souls of men” (Nee 443). All of the above prove again that Babylon the Great in chapter 18 is the material Babylon that exists today and will continue to thrive even after the destruction of religious Babylon.

In assuring common prosperity to all peoples under its sway, commerce, like Babel of old, has introduced a new form of sovereignty independent of God and a new idolatry in rebellion to Him.

In assuring common prosperity to all peoples under its sway, commerce, like Babel of old, has introduced a new form of sovereignty independent of God and a new idolatry in rebellion to Him. Seiss writes that the culmination of the Babylonian system at the end of this age will bring in

a worship concentrated upon the ephah and the talent; a worship which makes temples

of banks, and warehouses, and exchanges, and pleasure-parks; a worship not of the sun, or moon, or stars, or emperors, or popes, but of pounds, and francs, and piastres, and dollars;...the worship of Mammon perfected,...taking to the soul’s embrace and into the place of God the meaner object which the divine word stigmatizes as “*filthy lucre.*” (152-153)

The ultimate downfall of this rebellious, idolatrous kingdom will transpire when God brings judgment upon it in the day of the Lord (v. 20).

The Destruction of Worldly Commerce, Whose King Is Satan

It is the Roman religion that has made all nations drunk with its religious, mystical, and devilish wine, but it is the city of Rome—embodying the principle of worldly commerce—that will have enriched the merchants of the earth by the power of her luxury. The beginning of world commerce can be seen in Ezekiel 26 through 28 as embodied in Tyre, the splendid “merchant of the peoples” (27:3).

Verses 12 to 24 tell us that Tyre conducted business with Tarshish, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, Syria, Judah, Israel, Damascus, Arabia, Sheba, and many coastlands, trading in every manner of metals, precious stones, fabrics, clothing, food, wine, spices, animals, and even human beings. Following this detailed description of the commerce of Tyre, chapter 28 prophesies against the prince of Tyre, who typifies Satan and was one with him (vv. 12-14). To the prince of Tyre, Jehovah says,

By your wisdom and by your understanding you have made your wealth and accumulated gold and silver in your treasuries. By your great wisdom and by your trading you have increased your wealth, but your heart has become lifted up because of your wealth. (vv. 4-5)

Then to Lucifer, addressed as the king of Tyre, He says, “You were perfect in your ways from the day that you were created, until unrighteousness was found in you. By the abundance of your trading they filled your midst with violence, and you sinned” (vv. 15-16). These chapters also declare the determined judgment of Satan, the originator of the commercial system that began in Tyre:

So I cast you out as profane from the mountain of God, and I destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire...I cast you to the ground...I sent forth fire from your midst; it consumed you, and I reduced you to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all those who look at you. All who know you among the peoples are astonished at you. You have become a source of terror, and you will be no more forever. (vv. 16-19)

The destruction of Tyre itself corresponds closely to the destruction of material Babylon in Revelation. The fall of Babylon, as of Tyre of old, will reverberate through the kingdoms and economies of the earth, which have intertwined and confederated into a system of international commerce. On the day of its fall, the ships of Tyre will be wrecked, and its dealers in merchandise and its wares will sink into the heart of the seas, causing the lands to shake, men to weep in bitterness of soul, and kings to shudder excessively (27:26-36). Likewise, when Babylon will be utterly burned, kings and merchants will weep, mourn, and lament: “Woe, woe, the great city, by which all those who have ships on the sea became rich from her wealth, for in one hour she has become desolate” (Rev. 18:19). This reveals the hatred that God bears toward the evil, commercial system of the world, which He will judge by His governmental dealings. It is also a sober warning to the people of God to separate themselves from this system before the judgments of the day of the Lord (v. 4).

Wickedness in the Ephah Vessel

Revelation 12 and 13 reveal that Satan will be cast down

to the earth and will incarnate himself in the beast, Antichrist (12:9; 13:1). While helping to set up the political kingdom of Antichrist, the false prophet will require its citizens to bear the mark of the beast on their right hand or forehead, without which they will not be able to buy or sell, that is, to engage in any business (vv. 16-17). Thus, Antichrist will possess and control the world’s economy to the highest degree. Therefore, of the three great, worldly, and sinful systems at the end of the age—the political kingdom of Antichrist, the satanic kingdom of religion, and the commercial kingdom of Antichrist—it is commerce in particular that will draw down the most severe, destructive judgment of God (Kangas 146). The system of commerce, which will reach its consummation and peak of development in Babylon, is prefigured by the ephah vessel in Zechariah 5. Verses 5 to 8 say,

Then the angel who spoke with me went forth and said to me, Lift up now your eyes and see what this is that goes forth. And I said, What is it? And he said, This is the ephah vessel that goes forth; and he said, This is their appearance in all the land; (then a lead cover was lifted up) and this is a woman sitting within the ephah vessel. Then he said, This is Wickedness. And he threw her down into the midst of the ephah vessel and threw the lead weight over its opening.

An ephah vessel is a measuring container able to hold one ephah, a dry measure used for purchasing and selling in business (Lev. 19:36; Isa. 5:10; Ezek. 45:10). The vision of the ephah vessel signifies the wickedness of commerce on the earth, in particular, the “pure commerce” of entrepreneurial speculation, financial aggrandizement through trading, and the shrewd buying and selling that uses money to make money for the sake of money itself (Amos 8:4-6). Watchman Nee points out that the occupations approved by God in the Bible include receiving the increase of nature through agriculture, applying time and skill to add value to raw material, and laboring with skill for wages (437-438). Abel, for example, was a keeper of sheep, Peter a fisherman, and Paul a tentmaker, when necessary, for the support of his co-workers. These occupations increase abundance of value by offering goods or services for fair exchange, and they neither aggrandize nor make poorer those who transact with them. Pure commerce, on the other hand, involves the trading of money to enrich one person at the cost of another. Moreover, as money supercedes goods as the item of exchange, commerce may actually decrease the riches and practical well-being of the world, bringing economies close to collapse while shrewd traders enrich themselves, as we observe in the world even today. As we have seen, this system of commerce began in Tyre under the instigation of Satan, and it will end with material Babylon in Revelation 18.

Apparently, commerce has a proper appearance, but in

actuality, it is evil and full of wickedness manifested in covetousness, deceit, and the love of money. In the sight of God the wickedness contained in commerce is a form of idolatry and fornication. Robert Govett suggests that personified Wickedness (*rish'ah*, fem.) is the female counterpart of Antichrist, just as the bride is the counterpart of Christ: "She is the city supported by Antichrist, as the New Jerusalem is the city in which the glory of the Lamb will abide" (*Babylon* 9).⁹ Newton notes,

There is to be a period, therefore, during which Commerce is to rule the earth; a period when an Ephah might fitly be emblazoned on the banner of each Kingdom of the Roman World as the device best suited to indicate where the secret of its influence lay. (*Prospects* 107)

The entire system of pure commerce has its source in Satan. The Bible reveals Satan to be a businessman, a merchant, having his thought according to his commercial principle. In Job 1, Satan told God,

Does Job fear God without cause? Have You not set a hedge around him and his household and all that he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his possessions are spread throughout the land. But stretch forth Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face. (vv. 9-11)

For a man, even a genuine, born-again believer, to serve mammon indicates that Satan has a strong grasp on his being. To serve the Lord requires us to love Him and cleave to Him, giving our heart and entire being to Him.

By speaking in this way, Satan exposed his commercial mind, supposing that Job feared and served God only for wages. What an evil, insidious concept this is! Such a thought, born in the heart of Satan, was injected into man at the time of his fall, henceforth causing the satanic, commercial mind to operate in the souls of men (cf. Matt. 26:6-10, 14-16). Even in the decline of the church, men corrupted in mind and deprived of the truth suppose godliness to be a gain-making trade for material profit (1 Tim. 6:5). Such ones, who intend to be rich, fall into temptation, a snare, and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge them into destruction and ruin; because of the love of money they are led away from the faith and have pierced themselves through with many pains (vv. 9-10).

Luke 16:13 says, "No household servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." For a man, even a genuine, born-again believer (a household servant of God), to serve mammon indicates that Satan has a strong grasp on his being. To serve the Lord requires us to love Him and

cleave to Him, giving our heart and entire being to Him. In this way we are released from being occupied and usurped by mammon, and we overcome its enticement and deceit in order that we may serve the Lord wholly and fully. Zechariah 5:9-11 concludes the vision of the ephah vessel:

Then I lifted up my eyes and I looked, and there were two women going forth, and the wind was in their wings; and they had wings like the wings of a stork. And they lifted up the ephah vessel between the earth and the heavens. And I said to the angel who spoke with me, Where are they taking the ephah vessel? And He said to me, To build a house for her in the land of Shinar; and when it is prepared, she will be set there in her own place.

Within the ephah vessel is the idolatrous, fornicating woman named Wickedness. The one woman becoming two women signifies the rapid spread of wicked commerce and its double effect once it becomes free of restriction. Eventually, God's sovereignty will cause the wickedness in business, which originated in Babylon, to go back to Babylon. When Revelation 18 is fulfilled, there will be a house for the ephah vessel in the city of Antichrist, material Babylon, and the woman Wickedness will find her "own place" there. "The ungodliness carried away out of the sphere of the people of God will have its permanent settlement in the sphere of the imperial power that is hostile to God" (Keil 285). Then, as wicked commerce doubled in Zechariah 5, its judgments will also be doubled:

Her sins have accumulated up to heaven, and God has remembered her unrighteousnesses. Pay her back even as she has paid, and double to her double according to her works; in the cup which she has mixed, mix to her double. (Rev. 18:5-6)

This indicates the most severe judgment from God, which will be brought against material Babylon in the day of the Lord.

"Come out of Her, My People"

Revelation 18:4 says, "Come out of her, My people, that you do not participate in her sins and that you do not receive her plagues." *My people* indicates the genuine people of God, the believers of the New Testament age, because in this age God acknowledges only them as His own. Lang notes,

The command means that we refuse utterly the slightest association with the philosophy, worship, politics, principles, practice, and spirit that are Babylonian in character. These are found in measure in all national life, and in every humanly organized system of religion. (310)

The believers are commanded in the most solemn way to come out of the Babylonian system in both of its aspects. First, genuine believers are commanded to come out of the system of organized, apostate Christianity—both the Roman Catholic Church and her daughters—the different sects and groups in Christianity that hold to some extent the teachings, practices, and traditions of the Roman Church (17:5). Hebrews 13:13 says, “Let us therefore go forth unto Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach.” To go outside the camp is to follow the suffering, rejected Jesus to come out of the predominant system of religion in the present evil age (v. 12; Gal. 1:4). Lange summarizes the call in Revelation 18:4 in this way: “The Church finally goes forth from the Church, in order that it may continue to be the Church” (320); that is, the believers who answer the Lord’s call come out of the systematized, apostate church to be the Body of Christ in genuineness, reality, and practicality. In order to live, function, and be built up as the Body, the Lord’s people are called to come out of all religious systems and practice a church life that is pure and has no evil transmitted from the apostate church.

Second, the believers are commanded to be released from the power of mammon and the wickedness of pure commerce. When Judas sought to betray the Lord, he asked the chief priests, “What are you willing to give me?” (Matt. 26:15). Even the greatest and most evil act of treachery was carried out as a commercial transaction through a Satan-filled mentality, to whom “buy at the cheapest and sell at the dearest” is the rule of a man’s life. All the Lord’s believers must be utterly delivered from the wickedness of the system of commerce invented by Satan. The most severe judgment from God will be brought against Babylon because it will be the consummation of aggrandizement by trade and the epitome of sin. Concerning this all-consuming system, Newton warns,

We have not, therefore, to watch so much against Antichrist himself, as against that system which precedes Antichrist, which he adopts, and by which he rises into his glory...Another system is being prepared, which is not religious, and *it* is the system to be really feared. (*Apocalypse* 388-390)

To be saved from a concept and a living that take material wealth as their center is to escape the corruption which is in the world by lust (2 Pet. 1:4). Commerce is the field in which, more than any other, the corruption which is in the world by lust relentlessly pursues even the

most high-principled of Christians and can easily overtake them to their undoing (Kangas 152). It is possible even for true believers to live a life of making money for the sake of money, accumulating it in excess, and living in luxury without the vision and practice of caring for the needs of God, the church, the brothers and sisters, and the “Levites,” those who follow the Lord to drop their jobs and serve Him with their full time for the advance of the Lord’s move (Mal. 3:10; Acts 11:29; Rom. 15:26; Num. 18:21; Phil. 4:16-17). When Nehemiah observed the degraded situation among God’s recovered people, he said, “I also found out that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them and thus the Levites and the singers, who performed the service, had gone back, each to his own fields” (Neh. 13:10). What a shame this was! For the “Levites” to return to their fields is an indication that God’s people have not yet been delivered from the power of mammon. To properly give to the Lord for His move is to store up treasures in heaven, not on the earth, manifesting a heart that is for the heavenly purpose and goal of God (Matt. 6:19-21). May many of the Lord’s people be found in such a condition at His coming back!

The believers must also be saved from covetousness to give to the Lord as He prospers them (1 Cor. 16:2), being delivered from the blindness of not realizing that their prosperity is given by God so that it may issue in a surplus to be offered to Him. All of fallen mankind is under the domination of mammon and material possessions, but the Lord’s people must receive grace to overcome these things and release them from Satan’s domination so that they may be offered to the Lord for the fulfillment of His purpose. To this end, they must receive the supply of resurrection life to live a life of trusting in God, not in material possessions, a life not for today but for the future, not for this age but for the coming age, a life that overthrows the usurpation of temporal and uncertain riches (1 Tim. 6:17-19; Recovery Version, 1 Cor. 16:1, note 1). Giving money and material things in resurrection is a strong indication that we are under God’s administration in resurrection and are overcoming the possession of material riches. As the Lord’s people today, we must all have a change in our concept of value and cultivate a divine sense of value, treasuring the Lord above all things as the One of supreme worth (Job 22:23-28; Matt. 6:32-33; 26:6-11). This is to bring out the precious from the worthless (Jer. 15:19), esteeming above all the Triune God, the all-inclusive Christ, the compound Spirit, the eternal life, the divine nature, the divine economy, the Body of Christ, the churches, the gospel, the Lord’s coming, and our glorification to stand before Him as firstfruits unto Him (Rev. 14:1-5).

“That You Do Not Receive Her Plagues”

The Lord’s people are called to come out of Babylon so

that they would not participate in her sins and receive her plagues (Rev. 18:4). There is the real and foreseeable possibility that at the Lord's coming many Christians will be found in, or under the corrupting influence of, Babylon the Great. This is to participate in the sins of Babylon. Lang observes,

Many real children of God persist in adherence to church systems which, in outward splendour and symbolic ritual, are plainly Babylonian. Yet other believers share in governmental and worldly enterprises plainly to do with the kingdoms of this world and not with that kingdom of God which is presently to destroy and supersede these all.

In the light of all this how serious to-day appears teaching at all calculated to break the call of God, and of His warnings, by assuring His people that most certainly they will all have been removed from the earth before the perils of the last years of this age set in. God does not tacitly encourage His people to remain in the foul vessel of Babylonianism by offering a miraculous deliverance just before she is to founder in the gale of His wrath. He urges them to abandon the ship at once, lest the tempest burst in which Babylon and all therein shall perish. (309-310)

To not participate in the sins of religious and material Babylon is the requirement for not receiving her plagues in the coming day of the Lord. Concerning the material, commercial principle of Babylon, Jesus told His disciples, "Watch and guard yourself from all covetousness, for no one's life is in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15). To enjoy the abundance of possessions is to save one's soul-life, behind which Satan is hidden, and preserve the soul's enjoyment in this age (Matt. 16:23-25). Jesus said,

What shall a man be profited if he gains the whole world, but forfeits his soul-life? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul-life? For the Son of Man is to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will repay each man according to his doings. (vv. 26-27)

At the end of this age, all believers will stand before the judgment seat of Christ to answer to Him concerning their manner of life (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10). Those who have withstood the strong current of this age, who are rich toward God, have a way of life without the love of money, and are emancipated from the love of riches (Luke 12:21; Heb. 13:5), so that God's move in His economy can proceed without hindrance, will receive a reward from Him in that day. However, those who fall under the influence

of the Satan-conceived system of trading in mammon for the accumulation of wealth, and thus save their soul-life in the realm of commerce, will lose their soul-life for a thousand years in the coming kingdom age.

In the day of the Lord, which commences with the great tribulation at the end of this age, the judgments of God's universal government will be manifest. It is an error to think that God's judgment refers only to eternal perdition. In the Bible there are varied judgments, and the results of these different judgments are not the same. Some judgments result in a disciplinary dealing, some in a dispensational punishment, and some in eternal perdition. Those who receive the mark of the beast, worship his image, and persecute the Lord's people during the tribulation will be destroyed at His coming in power (Rev. 19:20-21; Matt. 25:41), and all those who are disobedient to the gospel and remain in unbelief will suffer eternal perdition in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15). However, genuine believers, who are eternally saved, but who are unwatchful and unready and who remain in the principle and practice of Babylon, will also suffer loss at the Lord's coming and fall under the punishment of divine governmental discipline.

In the Bible there are varied judgments, and the results of these different judgments are not the same. Some judgments result in a disciplinary dealing, some in a dispensational punishment, and some in eternal perdition.

The Lord calls, "Come out of her, My people, that you do not participate in her sins and that you do not receive her plagues" (18:4). This word makes it clear that at the coming of the Lord Jesus, genuine children of God, "My people,"

may be found participating in the sins of Babylon the Great, and it is equally clear that they will, to some extent, share in and receive her plagues, which will come to pass in the great tribulation. This is a warning to God's people, the New Testament believers, in the light of the government of God and the day of the Lord.

by John Campbell

Notes

¹Please see *Affirmation & Critique*, XIII.2, Oct. 2008: 70-84.

²We have spoken much previously concerning the four human empires. Please see *Affirmation & Critique*, XIII.1, April 2008, especially pages 83-89.

³In Zechariah 12:11 the Septuagint renders *Megiddon* as ἐκκοπτόμενου, thus the "valley of cutting off," or the "valley of slaughter." For four thousand years the region around Megiddo in Israel has suffered almost constant warfare; at least thirty-four bloody conflicts have been fought there. Looking over the

Jezreel Valley, Napoleon is supposed to have said, “All the armies of the world could maneuver their forces on this vast plain... There is no place in the whole world more suited for war than this” (Cline 1, 142).

⁴Rome has long been known as the City of Seven Hills—the Aventine, Caelian, Capitoline, Esquiline, Palatine, Quirinal, and Viminal Hills—all of which stood within the ancient city wall. Varro, a historian in the first century B.C., tells us that for this reason Rome was once called Septimontium, meaning “seven mountains.” Septimontium was also the name of an annual festival held in Rome, in which sacrifices were offered on the seven hills (Platner 471-472).

The first five kings figured in Revelation 17:10 are Julius Caesar, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero, who “have fallen,” that is died unnaturally (Judg. 3:25; 2 Sam. 1:10, 25, 27). By John’s time, these five had either been murdered or committed suicide. The sixth, Domitian, who was also murdered, was living when this book was written; thus, John said that he “is.” “The other,” the seventh, is Antichrist, who had “not yet come.”

⁵George H. Lang regards Babylon the Great as the broader system of false, idolatrous worship that originated in Babel and was propagated through the centuries until it reached Rome. Nevertheless, he concurs that the Roman Church “reveals the form and features of the Harlot more than does any other system of to-day” (280). The Roman Church, he says, is simply the “christian’ phase” of this universal, evil system (286).

⁶Robert Anderson notes, “Both Christianity and Buddhism in their decadence bear a family resemblance to the religions of classic Paganism, and to the old-world cults of Babylon and Egypt” (44). Many of the pagan and heretical things that have leavened the truth of the faith are catalogued by Alexander Hislop in *The Two Babylons*. These include the Babylonian origin of the worship of a Madonna and her child (20, 74), festival days (91), the baptism of infants, the mass, prayers for the dead, relic worship, the rosary, the lighting of candles, and many other ceremonies performed in the Roman Church (129ff.). George H. Pember traces the history of the Babylonian religion from the mystical societies in ancient Babel, through Pergamum, to Rome, where it invaded first the Empire and then the church (*Antichrist* 77-82). He also recounts the following, one of many gross examples of the pollution of paganism that changed the nature of the church into Babylon the Great:

In less than a century after the death of Belshazzar a new or rather a reformed faith was spreading in India, the Buddhist religion, which is but a slightly changed Babylonianism, and bears the strongest resemblance to Romanism... Buddha himself is actually a saint in the Roman Catholic Calendar, under the name of St. Josaphat. For the story of Josaphat and Barlaam, which first appears in the works of John of Damascus, a theologian of the early part of the eight century, and became extremely popular in the Middle Ages, has now been certainly identified with that of Buddha. (*Prophecies* 136-137)

⁷The Babylon in Revelation 14:8 corresponds with the one in chapter 17, while the details concerning the Babylon in 16:19 are given in chapter 18. In the brief transition between Revelation 17 and 18, both the religious and material aspects of Babylon appear and are blended together (17:18—18:5). In 18:3, for example, *drunk of the wine of the fury of her fornication* is a reference to religious Babylon (17:2), but *the merchants of the earth have become rich by the power of her luxury* refers to material, commercial Babylon (v. 3). E. R. Craven notes, “As in ch. xvii., where the main figure was the *Harlot*, a portion of the symbolization was drawn from the *City*,—so [in chapter 18], where the main figure is [material] *Babylon*, a portion of the symbolization is taken from the *Woman*” (Lange 326).

⁸Joseph Seiss observes that commerce is the system that more and more overshadows and reigns supreme over world governments and gathers nations under its rule. He writes,

The time must come when it will settle itself down somewhere on its own independent base, and where Judaism and Heathenism, Romanism and Protestantism, Mohammedanism and Buddhism, and every distinction of nationality,—English, German, French, Italian, Greek, Turk, Hindoo, Arab, Chinese, Japanee, or what not,—shall be sunk in one great universal fellowship and kingdom of *commerce*. (149-150)

⁹*Wickedness* (Zech. 5:8) in the Septuagint is ἀνομία (*lawlessness*), corresponding to ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀνομίας (*the man of lawlessness*) in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. Thus, the woman Wickedness may be regarded as the female counterpart of Antichrist, the man of lawlessness and the son of perdition. Their destinies under the judgment of God are bound together.

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Footnotes from the Recovery Version of the Bible

"The vision of **Isaiah** the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, the kings of Judah: Hear, O heavens, and hearken, O earth, / For Jehovah has spoken: / I have brought up **children**, and I have raised them; / And yet they have rebelled against Me" (Isa. 1:1-2).

Isaiah: Meaning *the salvation of Jah*. The book of Isaiah, in its content concerning God's eternal economy in Christ, is the leading book among all the books of the prophets. This book is the vision that Isaiah saw (v. 1), the word that Isaiah saw (2:1), and the burden that Isaiah saw (13:1; 15:1). The vision, word, and burden in Isaiah are concerned with God's eternal economy in Christ, which is thoroughly covered in this book.

The book of Isaiah unveils that God's dealing in love with His beloved Israel and His righteous judgment upon the nations bring in Christ, the Savior (43:3; 49:26), who is God (9:6) incarnated to be a man (7:14), possessing both the divine nature and the human nature (4:2), living on this earth (53:2-3; 42:1-4), crucified (53:7-10a, 12), resurrected (53:10b-11), ascended (52:13), and coming (40:10; 64:1) to meet the need of God's chosen people and the nations (9:1-7; 49:6) in God's all-inclusive salvation (12:2-3), that the restoration of all things, of the created yet fallen universe (2:2-5; 11:6-9; 35:1-10; 30:26), may be brought in, which will consummate in the new heaven and new earth for eternity (65:17). Hence, the content of Isaiah covers God's entire economy of the New Testament, from the incarnation (Matt. 1:18-25) to the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21—22), with the Old Testament background of God's dealing with Israel and His judgment upon the nations. According to Isaiah's prophecy, the Christ who was processed for the divine purposes is the centrality and universality of the great wheel of the move of the Divine Trinity (Ezek. 1:15) for the accomplishing of His economy in the divine dispensing of Himself into His elect.

children: In the book of Isaiah, God's love toward Israel is exercised in a threefold way: as a Father (1:2-3; 63:16; 64:8), as a nursing Mother (66:13), and as a Husband (54:5). Since God deals with His beloved Israel in a loving way, His dealing with them, in general, is a matter not of judgment but of chastisement. God's dealing with the Gentiles, the nations, however, is a matter of judgment based on God's righteousness, on His justice.

God deals with people according to what He is. God is holy and righteous; He is the Holy One and the righteous One (v. 4; 24:16a). As the Holy One, He chastises His people that they may be holy (Heb. 12:10), and as the Righteous One, He judges the nations because they are not just and righteous.