

# Revelation

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# The Accumulation of Israel's Enemies 8

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Your understanding of chapters 8 – 13 of Revelation depends somewhat upon your awareness that at the midway point of the tribulation many events occur simultaneously or at least follow each other in rapid succession – sometimes with a cause-and-effect pattern. These chapters do not put the events in chronological order, but the sequence seems to be as follows: (1) The erection of an idol in the temple at Jerusalem (8:11; 11:2; 13:2); (2) the escape of many Jews to a wilderness retreat (12:6, 14); (3) the ejection of Satan and his angels from the "heavenlies" (12:8-10); (4) the eruption of demons from the abyss (9:1-11); (5) the entrance of the northern armies to Palestine (8:1-13; 9:3-21); (6) the elimination of the Russian armies (12:16); (7) the expansion of the kingdom of the two beasts (13:1-18); (8) Israel's endurance of persecution from beasts (11:7, 13:7, 15). Moreover, these chapters have special application to the coming crisis in the Mideast.

## **The Flight of Israel (Revelation 12:1-7)**

As soon as the Jews learn that an idol has been erected in the restored Temple, many of them will heed the warning of Christ in Matthew 24:16-26 and flee to a place where they will be safe from the northern desolator (Russia). Revelation 12 describes this flight. The woman in verse 1 represents Israel. It makes no sense at all to identify the woman with Eve, the Virgin Mary, or the church. The church is the bride of Christ, not the woman in this chapter. John sees Israel in the governmental role which God destines for her to fulfill in the millennial kingdom. The man child in verses 2, 4, 5 is Christ, for He alone will rule the nations with a rod of iron. Israel produced Christ "after the flesh." Israel was the matrix from which he came into the human race.

The dragon is Satan (verses 3, 7, 9). Satan, the old serpent, heard the pronouncement of Genesis 3:15, and from that moment he entered into a conflict with "the seed of woman" (Christ). When Christ was born of Mary, the devil sensed the significance of this event and discerned in it an end of his ignominious career. Hence he moved King Herod to slaughter the innocents, hoping thereby to kill Christ (verse 4c). All of the devil's engines of destruction failed to eliminate his arch enemy. Even death did not defeat Him, for God raised Him from the dead and caught Him up to heaven in the ascension (verse 5).

The supernatural child which is Israel brought into the world had the authority to sit upon David's throne as Israel's sovereign ruler, but the representatives of the nation rejected His kingly credentials and instigated His crucifixion. That official repudiation of their Messiah has brought and will yet bring Israel indescribable anguish (verse 2). The "child" will remain in Heaven until Israel acknowledges its ill-treatment of Him and calls for Him to come to deliver them from destruction.

When God removes the church from the earth at the rapture, he will resume his special dealings with Israel again. In order to bring the nation to the end of itself, he will permit external enemies (the northern king and the western king) to persecute her. He will also permit an internal enemy (the Jewish king) to persecute her. Caught in awful maelstrom of affliction, Israel will cast themselves on Christ for deliverance. These sufferings of Israel during the tribulation are her travail and her birth pangs.

The instrumental cause of Israel's immediate sufferings right after the middle of the tribulation is the invasion of Russia from the north. Many Jews will escape this horrible Holocaust possibly by chartering planes and flying out of Israel to the remote access is of Jordan and probably other adjacent lands. The northern aggressor will not ravage these districts. Jews will be secure here for the remainder of the tribulation period (verse 6).

As the King of the North is the instrumental cause of the suffering, the devil and his angels are the procuring cause of the agony (verses 7-13). At the middle of the tribulation Michael will cast Satan out of the airways and confine the devil's activities to earth. Satan will determine to exhaust his fury on Israel because Israel has produced the man child who will ultimately execute the devil's death warrant. In looking for a likely tool to use in destroying Israel, the devil will lay hold of the armies of the North and inspired them to attack Israel (verses 13, 15). Of course, in all of this activity, God himself is the efficient cause of Israel's suffering. God will use the wrath of the devil, and the devil will use the anti-Semitism of Russia to bring it all about.

Israel would be annihilated by this formidable invasion if it were not for God's early warning system. The erection of the idol in the temple is the signal for Jews to leave the land; the invasion will occur almost immediately afterward. God will cause a supernatural darkness to enable Jews to escape under its protective cover. God will enable the Russian armies from venturing into those areas where Jews will be hiding. Finally God will super naturally intervene and liquidate the Russian army by causing the earth to swallow them up just as they were about to capture the city of Jerusalem. This unexpected turn of events will bring many to Christ.

### **The Foes of Israel (Revelation 13:1-18)**

Satan will not cease his endeavors to destroy Israel when the armies of the North lie still in death. Indeed, he will raise up another enemy of Israel in the person of the European dictator and still another in the person of the Jewish antichrist. Satan will resolve to destroy those Jews who have not fled to safety (12:17). This time he will use as his instrument the expanding empire of nations that encompasses Western Europe in the Middle East.

The devil stands upon the sand of the sea (verse 1). The result is the appearance of a beast arises out of the sea. The beast is both an empire an emperor. Some of the descriptions here apply to the empire, others to the emperor, and a few two both. The ten horns signify that when the Roman Empire makes its appearance again in history, it will consist of a ten-nation unification – a political and military community, a United States of Europe.

The ten-nation confederacy will likely not gain much progress until God removes Russia from the scene; but with Russia out of the picture, the Roman Empire will expand until it incorporates into its domains all of the territories once occupied by Greece (the leopard), Persia (the bear), and Babylon (the lion). This empire will probably exist as a ten-nation unity at the beginning of the tribulation, but not until the middle of tribulation will Satan take possession of this political entity and use it in his last desperate struggle to oppose the coming kingdom of Christ and to destroy those people who are destined to become the ruling citizenry of that kingdom.

The devil will seize this empire by enabling an obscure politician, who he energizes, to put down all opposition from three of the ten ruling kings. The man will accomplish this feat in the middle of the tribulation, and the kings will thereupon grant him the powers of an absolute dictator. The whole world will stand in awe of these proceedings (verse 3). Then the devil will motivate the dictator to assume divine titles and prerogatives (verse 4). At this point no

contestants trouble the dictator; later, it seems, the kings of the East will attack him and defeat him (verse 10; compare with 16:12; 19:20, 21).

While the dictator has absolute powers – 42 months only – he will distinguish himself by his blasphemous oratory (verses 5,6). His wicked word will precede his atrocious deeds. He will initiate a program calculated to exterminate the tribulation saints (verse 7). No part of the planet will go unaffected by the dictator's policies. He will commit the crowning infamy by introducing emperor worship (verse 8). Only God's elect people will refuse to pay him the divine honors he demands. Living by the sword, however, he will die by the sword (verse 10).

The first beast is a gentile, resides in Western Europe, and controls political and military affairs. Daniel 7 refers to him as the "little horn." Daniel 9:26 calls him "the [Roman] prince." The second beast, a Jew, resides in Palestine, and controls commercial and religious affairs. Daniel 11:36 calls him "the king." The European dictator and the Jewish deceiver are allies – an alliance that Israel got mixed up in at the beginning of the tribulation before the dictator took possession of the ten-nation empire. The second beast, as the official representative of the Jews, concluded a treaty of defense with the ten-nation empire in order to secure Israel against an attack from the king of the north (Russia). Now, in the middle of the tribulation, the European dictator comes to absolute power in the West, and he informs the second beast that if he wants continued protection, the second beast will have to promote the worship of the first beast.

The second beast subsequently puts a statue of the first beast in the restored Jewish temple – and he does so willingly, not by compulsion (verse 12). Second beast is not a slave of the first beast. The second beast exercises absolute power in the Middle East, while the first beast exercises sovereign authority in Europe. Both beasts demand and receive worship. Both beasts are diabolical. But the second beast seems to be the more energetic and active of the two. He is certainly more dramatic, for with the supernatural powers he gets from the devil, he will convince wide-eyed Jews he is their long-awaited Messianic King and therefore has the right to assume also priestly and prophetic functions.

The chief characteristic of the second beast is his ability to perform miracles and deceive people (verses 13, 14). The first beast is never so described. The second beast is the religious actor of the future; it is the second beast who sits in the Temple at Jerusalem, receiving worship and working "with all powers and signs and lying wonders" (II Thessalonians 2:4-10). It is the second beast who is eminently the deceiver, the liar, the false prophet, and the fountain of error. The Apostle John associates the word "antichrist" with false prophets, the spirit of error, liars, and deceivers. Every description applies to the second beast, not the first, and for this reason the title "antichrist" rightly belongs on the second beast, not the first. It is the second beast that poses as Christ, not the first. It is the second beast who gives an identifying mark, not the first.

The second beast – the Jewish antichrist – has the power to boycott goods and control all trade in the empire which he jointly rules with the first beast (verses 16, 17). Babylon will once again become the world center of commerce, and in all probability the second beast will be responsible for smooth operation of restored Babylon on the Euphrates River.

# Encouragements for Suffering Saints 9

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Proverbs 29:1 aptly applies to the situation that comes before us in Revelation 14 – 15: "He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy." Proverbs 6:15 is also to the point: "Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly, suddenly shall he be broken without remedy. When the warning cries of men and angels go unheeded, nothing remains but untempered judgment.

## Dividing Jews (Revelation 14:1-20)

Thousands of Jews – both saved and unsaved – will die during the entire tribulation. Saved Jews will die as martyrs; unsaved Jews will be caught in the various invasions that will sweep the land of Palestine. At the very end of the tribulation just before Christ returns to earth, two classes of Jews will be alive: the godly Jews who have defied the beast and godless Jews who have allied themselves with the beast and have survived the general judgments. When Christ comes he will deal personally with any unsaved survivors by destroying them. He will gather out the tares (the wicked) and leave the wheat (the righteous). One shall be taken (the wicked), and the other left (the righteous).

None of these events actually occur in revelation 14 – 15; they are only announced. John anticipates the millennial reign of Christ from Jerusalem (verse 1). He sees the 144,000 Jews of Revelation 7 still safe and in the company of the reigning King. John mentions these items at this point in revelation in order to encourage the tribulation saints who are still suffering at the hands of their enemies. Their victory is ultimately assured, and so they have reason to hold steady in their opposition to the beast and the Antichrist.

The war-weary saints on earth are the objects of the sympathy of the Jews martyrs who are singing a new song in heaven (verse 3). Heaven and earth are very near. The great cloud of martyred witnesses in Heaven are a challenge to the Jewish survivors on earth. The example of the Jews who sacrificed their lives for Christ will spur their comrades on to heroic deeds. The song which the martyrs sing in Heaven somehow pertains to the endurance of the 144,000 who are delivered from the present evil world. Perhaps they are singing praises to God, who kept his promise to preserve the 144,000 through the tribulation period.

The 144,000 are "virgins" in the sense that they have maintained purity of doctrine and life despite inducements to apostatize (verse 4). The threats of the beast and the false prophet could not influence them to abandon Christ. They had given Him their undivided allegiance and refused to stray from His leading. God had purchased them as a special act of sovereign grace. They belonged exclusively to Him and therefore acknowledged the ownership of no other. Like the first fruits and the harvest which follows, the 144,000 will be the earnest of a large group of saved Jews who will participate in the millennial kingdom.

The 144,000 stand in sharp contrast to the prevailing principles of the tribulation era. Falsehood and deceit will everywhere abound but the 144,000 pay strictest attention to the truth (verse 5). Other Jews on all hands will identify themselves with the man of sin and adultery, but the 144,000 regulate their lives according to God's Word. At the time when the majority of Jews are guilty of the worst form of apostasy the 144,000 are blameless in God's sight.

Verses 6 – 20 give the order of events that lead up to the fulfillment which verses 1 – 3 anticipate. The everlasting gospel becomes the subject of a worldwide proclamation. It is the good news that the persecuted remnant of Jews is waiting to hear (verses 6, 7). It is the announcement of God's vengeance upon Israel's enemies. It presses the claims of the Creator upon the creature. The message is perfectly consistent with the old-age principle that judgment will overtake sinners eventually. But therefore the cup of God's wrath overflows, He calls upon sinners universally to fear, glorify, and worship him. This is their last opportunity to repent of their sins and own God's sovereignty over all things.

Those who are depending upon commercial Babylon to sustain and safeguard them are due for a bitter disappointment. God warns them of their false confidence by announcing that Babylon will collapse; it will be in no position to help anyone. Regardless of how widespread its influence becomes during the tribulation and how many people are caught in the orbit of its activities, Babylon is destined for oblivion (verse 8). It will corrupt the nations no more.

With the fall of Babylon occurs the destruction of the empire of the beast, for the same armies which God will use to destroy Babylon will also destroy the empire of the beast. In the everlasting gospel God warns sinners that they cannot identify with the beast or false prophet and get away with it (verse 9). When the empire of the beast topples, the followers of the beast will be overtaken in the judgement. Their lot is punishment in eternal Hell (verses 10, 11). They have associated with the beast and his wicked projects, and they have associated with him in his everlasting torment.

The hope, based on divine promises that the prosecutors will soon find themselves in the hands of an angry God enables the Jewish tribulation Saints to be patient a little longer and to endure a little more (verse 12). Regardless of what the beast demands, they obey commandments of God and remain faithful to Christ. Some will pay the supreme sacrifice for their faith (verse 13), but their death is especially precious to the Lord for whom they suffer martyrdom. Their labors are more abundant and their words more accomplished under the most trying circumstances; therefore, a special blessing is their portion. Other saints will suffer affliction before their martyrdom, but none will suffer so severely as those who oppose the Roman prince and his minister of religion.

Yet another thing greets John's eye. He sees the Son of man coming with a sharp sickle to reap the harvest of the earth (verses 14 – 16). This refers to a harvest of judgment. With the sickle Christ will cut down the apostate Jews and sever them from the godly Jews. The work is not a single act. This weeding-out process will go on all during the second half of the tribulation. Christ will use providential agencies for accomplishing this judgment. The trumpet judgments will provide for the invasion of Russia, and duration that invasion many of apostate Jews will be killed. The harvest here refers to these general calamities which will bring death to thousands of godless Jews.

The judgment of verses 7 – 20 appears to be the very last stage in God's process of separating saved Jews from unsaved Jews. The general judgments under the trumpets will not succeed in destroying all rebel Jews. Some will survive and be alive after the destruction of the empire of the beast. Christ will, it seems, come personally to slay the wicked who still remain after the tribulation judgments are finished. He will send his angels to remove from earth all those wicked survivors. Only saved Jews will then remain on earth to populate the millennial kingdom.

Jews and Palestine are chiefly in the view in both the harvest judgment (verses 14 – 16) and the vineyard judgment (verses 17 – 20). Figuratively, apostate Israel is in the vine that yields only sour grapes (Isaiah 5:1-7). Nothing can remedy this situation except for God to tread the

vine under foot. The final stage of this judgment upon Israel will occur in the valley of Jehoshaphat outside the city of Jerusalem. But the whole of the land of Israel will be drenched in blood – from Dan to Beersheba (verse 20).

## **Dispensing Judgment (Revelation 15:1-8)**

Before describing the nature, source, scope, and duration of the final judgments, John takes account of a group of people who get the victory over the beast while the beast is in the height of his power (verses 2 – 4). Most interpreters believe that this is a martyred company who are in Heaven. If the sea of glass here is the same as that in revelation 4, then they are probably right. If, however, the sea of glass here is not the same as that in revelation 4, then perhaps the victorious company represents those Jews who survived their tribulation despite the fact they have defied the beast.

The fact that the company of victors sing the song of Moses may indicate they are the survivors of the tribulation and not martyrs. Moses and the Israelites did not win over Pharaoh by dying and going to Heaven. The song of Moses celebrated the overthrow of the armies of Pharaoh and the physical escape of Israel from his clutches. The Jews stood on the shore of the Red Sea and exalted in God's greatness and power. Many of the tribulation saints will have the same experience. Pursued by the Gentile dictator, they will pass through the ordeal of fire and flood and emerge triumphant. God will destroy the enemy by acts of power, and the rescued Israelites will compose songs appropriate to the occasion.

God will demonstrate afresh that He is the King of nations. In His sovereignty He raises them up to serve His purposes and He strips them of their power by His mere pleasure. The ruination of the empire of the beast will inspire the Gentiles to fear the Lord God almighty (verse 4), just as the destruction of Pharaoh's troops caused the surrounding nations to feel a fear and dread of God's great power.

One last detail now remains before the events of 14:1 – 15:5 can actually come to pass: the appointment of seven angels who will pour out the vials of God's wrath and destroy the kingdom of the beasts (verses 5 – 8). Although these angels are invested with the authority to ravage earth, they do not act until commanded to do so (16:1). At last all is ready for final disasters to descend upon Israel's foes.

# End of Godless Politics and Religion 10

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The world stage is already set for European unification and ecumenical union. Statesman everywhere are talking more and more about the consolidation of Europe eventually eclipsing the United States in economic growth. Changes in the Roman Catholic Church are a preparation for the return of apostate Protestantism to the papal fold. The Vatican is taking an increasingly active role in influencing governments for peace. The world Council of Churches is putting more and more pressure on politics.

The climax of all these political and religious maneuvers will occur in the tribulation when the ten-nation confederation and the one-world church will become super-powers. The godless state and the corrupt religion will continue only a brief time before God destroys both by blasts of His unmitigated wrath.

## **The Seven Bowls (Revelation 16: 1-21)**

Many of the voices which the apostle John heard are unidentifiable. Sometimes they represent angelic voices; at other times they represent the voice of God. They are always symbolic of an intelligent Providence. Nothing happens by chance or without divine permission. God controls all events.

One such voice now directs seven angels to empty their saucers upon the earth which has entered the final stage of its revolt against God (verse 1). They pour out without measure divine wrath. The seal judgments are a sprinkle of judgement. The trumpet judgments are a shower of judgment. The bowl or vial judgments are a storm of judgment unleashed in all its fury.

During Jesus' residence on earth his followers received miraculous cures for their diseases. The followers of the beast, however, are destined to receive miraculous diseases for their unholy association with the beast. The first bowl judgment brings an offensive and painful pestilence upon their worshippers of the beast parentheses (verse 2). Whatever the affliction, it will be an appropriate exhibition of their inward corruption.

The beast will depend upon seaways in order to maintain its vast political and commercial empire. Rebuilt Babylon will become the financial center of the reorganized Roman Empire and will ply its "trade by sea" (Revelation 18:17). The second bowl judgment will turn the oceans into stinking, rotting cesspools in which nothing can survive (verse 3). Imagine ships trying to plow through millions of Dead Sea creatures floating on the surface of the water!

Our present ecological crisis is nothing compared to what the divine judgments will produce in the final days of the tribulation period. The third bowl judgment will make all fresh water in the Kingdom of the beast unfit to drink (verse 4). The pollution of the rivers and streams will reach maximum proportions. Death will overtake those who drink from them. The turning of the



freshwater to blood is not too severe a penalty for people who never seem to get enough of the blood of the Saints (versus 5, 6). They shed blood and now they must sup blood. In his justice God suits the punishment to the crime.

Whether something goes haywire with the sun itself or with the atmosphere that filters out the sun's rays we cannot be sure. At any rate, the effect of the fourth bowl judgment will be the same as if the temperature of the sun suddenly increases (verse 9). From the fourth day of creation God has caused his sun to shine on the just and the unjust for their mutual benefit. Under the fourth bowl judgment the drastic increase of heat in the congested cities of the Roman Empire or resulted in thousands of people dying from sunstroke, suffocation, and third degree burns. Sunshine will become sunscorch. The boils will be made worse by blisters. But neither death nor discomfort is sufficient to bring sinners to repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ (verse 11).

Donald Grey Barnhouse conjectures that God will first cause the sun to flare up to an intense magnitude and subsequently dim until thick darkness covers the earth. Similar astronomical phenomena have been observed in the stars outside our solar system. Solar disturbances will cause electrical failures, leaving the kingdom of the beast in darkness. This is result of the fifth bowl judgment (verse 10). Beast worshippers will nurse their boils and blisters in perpetual night and curse God as the source of their miseries (verse 11).

The great sleeping giant of the east will now be fully awake. The rulers of the Orient will take advantage of the disasters which the beast is suffering all across his empire and launch a full-scale invasion upon Babylon – a literal city on the eastern frontier of the beast's empire. God will aid the Far Easterners by drying up the Euphrates River. This is the result of the sixth bowl judgment (verse 12). The dry riverbed of the Euphrates will provide a natural highway for the mobilization of China's millions. Oriental troops were marched northward and swooped down upon Palestine from the north. Communist China's dream of world conquest will seem to be imminent.

It may be that at this time Satan forsakes the Roman prince and his colleague in Jerusalem in favor of bigger game in the Eastern kings (verse 13). However that may be, demon spirits worked the sorts of miracles that convinced the Oriental kings it is time to invade Palestine and thus assumed global control (verse 14). Perhaps God will use these demon intelligences to dry up the Euphrates. That in itself would be enough to lure the kings of the East into the Holy Land. But eventually other miracles will contribute to the enterprise. The massive military movements need not alarm saved Gentiles. They are looking to Christ for deliverance, and in a view of His imminent public appearing they maintain a good testimony of life and lip (verse 15).

The beast with his armies will confront the kings of the East with their armies in the valley of Esdraelon for the focal point near the Hill of Megiddo (verse 16). This event has often been called the Battle of Armageddon. In a way this is true, but actually the Greek word translated "battle" in verse 14 should be rendered "war" or "campaign." What takes place in Megiddo is only one phase – the last phase – of a long campaign in which military troops ravage the whole of the Middle East.

The seventh bowl judgment brings God's purposes of wrath to a conclusion (verse 17). We cannot be certain how the contents of the bowl will affect the air. Conceivably this marks the end of the beast air force. Or, perhaps his or somebody else's space satellites containing warheads suddenly descend. Whatever it means, the greatest earthquake in recorded history will follow (verse 18). It will devastate all the cities in the territory of the beasts, including Babylon (verse 19). The wreckage will involve even the islands and mountains (verse 20). Out of the air will fall hailstones weighing as much as 100 pounds each (verse 21). Under such celestial bombardments the terrestrial convulsions the empire of the beast will sink into oblivion.

## **The Sacrilegious Babylon (Revelation 7:1-18)**

Having described the destruction of the political empire of the beast, John now concentrates on the destruction of the religious system of the tribulation period. It is helpful to keep in mind, however, that apostate Christendom meets its doom long before the empire collapses. Chronologically, the contents of chapter 17 belonged to the early part of the second half of the tribulation.

Counterfeit religion deserves the epithet "the great whore" because it has forsaken fidelity to God and illicitly embraced a succession of lovers (verse 1). It has entered into alliances with the state and worked to seduce politicians (verse 2). The ten kings of the Roman Empire will find themselves under the control of the ecumenical harlot in the first half of the tribulation. Indeed, the woman dominates the empire and uses the state to enforce church decrees (verse 3).

Although the false Church of the future masquerades behind the costume of respectability, its real character is idolatrous, adulterous, and licentious (verse 4). Mystery Babylon – the apostate church – is vicious and murderous as well (verses 5, 6). One of its main objectives is to put true believers to death. Ecumenism's hatred for believers betrays its real attitude towards Christ. If the apostates love Him, they would also love those who honored and served Him.

We are not left in doubt about the meaning of the beast, the woman, the heads, the horns, and the waters. The seventh angel interprets all. The beast is none other than the final future form of the Roman Empire which is for a short time supports the ecumenical church of the tribulation period (verse 7). The government of the Roman Empire has already passed through several phases in its long history. Kings, consuls, dictators, decimvirs, tribunes, and emperors all successively ruled ancient Rome at the time of its historic existence ("the beast that was" – verse 8).

In A.D. 476 the Empire ceased to exist as a political entity ("and is not"). For centuries the principles of Rome have persisted, but the power has undergone an eclipse while various states of Europe remained fragmented and isolated. But the Empire will return to the historical scene once more in the tribulation period ("and yet is"). The seven heads represent seven successive stages in the development of the Roman Empire (verse 9). The seven kings belong to the seven successive stages of Roman government (verse 10). Five of them had passed off the scene in John's day. A sixth – an emperor – ruled the Roman Empire in John's day. The reorganized

Roman Empire, as ruled by the ten kings in the tribulation, will constitute the seventh stage. When the Roman prince moves in to assume absolute power in the middle of the tribulation, the eighth stage will be complete (versus 11-13).

None of the political alignments will help the Roman prince in the long run. When he directs his personal venom towards the Lord Jesus Christ, his end will come suddenly and finally (verse 14). Christ will descend from heaven were they raptured and resurrected church saints and slaughter the combined armies of the beast and the armies of the Orient.

Having anticipated the outcome of the beast career, the angel resumes his description of the beast's activity (versus 16-18). When the Roman prince takes over the whole territory ruled by the ten kings, he will show his contempt for apostate Christendom by stripping religious authorities of their wealth and power (verse 16). God will use the utter disgust of the Roman prince to put an end to the ecumenical church (verse 17).

Much of the same thing will occur in the future that happened in the sixteenth century. Henry the VIII used cardinal Thomas Wolsey's genius to make England a great international power. Later Henry accused Woosley of high treason and had him executed. Then Henry proclaimed himself to be the head of the English church, confiscated the property of the Roman Church, stripped bishops of their power, and also put many Protestant theologians to death. In it all Henry resembles the Roman prince that will dominate politics and religion in the tribulation era.

# The Fall of Commercial Babylon (Revelation 18:1-24)

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Regardless of how attractive cities may be to us, God takes a dim view of the city, for it represents his center in which man cluster in order to consolidate their strength against God. It is a place where men think they can hide from God amid congestion where they can forget God in the bustle. The city is man's attempt to achieve by cultural emphasis what only God can accomplish by redemptive processes. It is a substitute paradise and a point of unity outside fellowship with God.

Cain along with his descendants, in flagrant disobedience to God, settled in a city – a walled enclosure – in which he felt more secure than in trusting God's promise to protect him from his enemies. The Noachian flood wiped out civilization on a global scale. Soon after the deluge, however, survivors once more defiled God's command to disperse and concentrated their energies on building a commercial empire by means of slave labor (Genesis 10: 8 – 10). Later the human race migrated to Babel in the land of Shinar where they engaged in a common labor, employed a common language, inhabited a common location (Genesis 11: 1 - 9 ). They, too, defiled the living God.

What had its commencement in genesis will have its conclusion in revelation. Civilization arose in the Mesopotamia valley, and it seems that it will move back to that vicinity where it will sink into oblivion once and for all. Babylon of the future, although probably a literal city to be rebuilt on the Euphrates river, also stands for all godless civilization, culture, politics, society, and government – national and municipal. God intends to bring a dramatic and final end to everything that man develops for the purpose of glorifying and deifying himself.

## Reason for the Fall of Babylon (Revelation 18: 1- 8)

The opening words of chapter 18, "and after these things", indicates that this section deals with a different set of circumstances from those in chapter 17. Chapter 17 depicts religious Babylon; chapter 18 discusses commercial Babylon. The first fact we learn from the heavenly messenger is that Babylon has at last come to an abrupt end (versus 1, 2). Men have deserted the city and abandon it to demons. The white places are haunted by the impure spirits which wants obsessed if not possessed the residents of the city. The whole area has become a kind of Hell on earth; it is a prison House of vultures. All of these descriptions suggest utter debasement of the once prosperous and magnificent city.

What did Babylon do to deserve such a fate? She corrupted the nations and polluted the kings of the earth (verse 3). Their association with her enabled them to grow fabulously rich, but in the process her "suitors" imbibed her spirit of materialism, commercialism, and imperialism. She commended the God of mammon to her companions, and they worshipped at the shrine. Babylon

seduced them to regard luxury and lasciviousness as the chief aim of life. They were drunk with pretensions and extravagance. In all likelihood, during the last half of the tribulation the cities of the restored Roman Empire and perhaps even the cities of the Far East will depend upon trade with Babylon to enhance their economy. These cities will reflect Babylon's insatiable thirst for monopolies. Babylon will yet become the home of the world bank.

During the 70 years of exile Israelites settled down in Babylon, raise families, engaged in business, and obeyed the laws of the land. When the 70 years expired and Cyrus gave Jews an opportunity to return to Jerusalem, it is not surprising that most of the Jews preferred to remain in Babylon where life was comfortable rather than face the rigorous life of Palestine. In the future many believers will live in Babylon and other cities of the empire of the beast. Their natural impulse will be to remain where they are, but a special summons from God will cause them to evacuate the city lest they be overtaken in the destruction (verse 4). God will not devastate this citadel of commerce until His own people are at a safe distance. God demands complete break of relations with sinful Babylon.

Babylon of the future will consist of a gigantic building program, and endeavor to consolidate all business, and a blasphemous defiance of God. But through her arrogance reaches to the moon, God will bring her down to earth (verse 5). Babylon will eventually get what's coming to her (verse 6). She will get more than a taste of the wine of wrath which she has been supplying to the nation; She will drink the full draw. In all probability God will use the advancing armies of the Orient to destroy Babylon of the future, just as he used Cyrus, a king from the East, to destroy Babylon of the past.

The torment and sorrow of Babylon will be proportionate to her self-glorification. Her debasement will correspond in agree to her elevation. Her poverty will measure up to her poverty. As is the case with all sinners, Babylon will imagine that no change can reverse her position of authority and affluence (verse 7). The thought never occurs to her that she will suddenly be abandoned by her lovers. She rests in a false security, fancying that her lifestyle will be persistent indefinitely. Suddenly God will cut her down (verse 8). The element of surprise will greatly aggravate her misery. "To think I have come to this when I didn't dream such a thing could ever happen!"

## **Reaction to the Fall of Babylon (Revelation 18: 9 - 24 )**

Babylon's sudden demise will affect every city in the reorganized Roman Empire and perhaps far beyond those boundaries. It is possible that whatever brings instant catastrophe to Babylon will also reduce other cities of the Middle East to rubble – for instance Tyre, Haifa, Alexandria, and Istanbul. For all we know, the disaster will include also New York, London, Toronto, Paris, Athens, Peking, Tokyo, and San Francisco; for all of these cities in the thousands more belonged to Babylonish commercialism.

The reduction of Babylon to ashes will be felt throughout the length and breadth of the civilized world. Presidents, princess, prime ministers, kings, and dictators alike will grieve over the loss of the main source of their profits (verse 9). Satellites will eventually carry televised reports of the devastation of Babylon, for they shall see the smoke of her burning. Fear of contamination will keep government officials at bay (verse 10). It is not impossible that a hydrogen bomb was destroyed the city. In that case, radiation would make the whole territory inaccessible. It will be too late to send Babylon emergency relief; the kings of the earth can only declare it a disaster area and post notices to keep out.

Merchants and monarchs will mingle their tears (verse 11). Not a soul will remain alive in Babylon to purchase the variety of wares which the manufacturers offer. Granite and gems, cloth and crockery, food and furniture, sheep and slaves – these luxuries or necessities are of no more use to the residents of Babylon now (verses 12-14 ). In the early judgments of the tribulation the rich did not feel the effects (6:6b). The oil and the wine were exempt from damage. In the judgment of Babylon, however, the affluent are the special objects of God's wrath. Everything they lusted for now slipped through their grasp like sand (verse 14). All dissolves in one infernal judgment, and the businessmen of the earth are instantly deprived of their lucrative market. Their lamentations bespeak of the sorrow they feel for themselves at losing Babylon's trade (verse 16). What especially dumbfounds them is that such a calamity could occur so suddenly and unexpectedly (verse 17a).

The monarchs and merchants are not alone in their anguish. Mariners are also stricken to grief (verse 17b). Ship owners, captains, sailors, passengers, dockmen – all who contribute to the maritime industry – bewail the loss of Babylon from their vantage point at sea or down the river Euphrates. They exhibit their frenzy of despair by beating their breasts and throwing dirt in the air (verse 19). They acknowledge that they have never heard of any destruction so thorough, on so large a scale, or so quick.

The one company that rejoices over the fall of Babylon is the family of Saints in heaven (verse 20). In destroying Babylon, God will avenge those whom the Babylonish world power persecuted and murdered. They had suffered violently at Babylon's hand, now God recompenses Babylon by delivering it into the hands of the violent. It is an abiding principle of God's government that those who live by the sword will die by the sword. The action of Babylon against believers of the tribulation period will be the last instance in which the kingdom of God suffers violence at the hands of wicked men (Matthew 11:12). After Babylon's fall the kingdom will come to earth, and all opposition will terminate.

With a giant stone tide to her neck Babylon will plummet to the briny deep where her body will be never recovered. The city that provided musical and chorographical entertainment for myriads of tourists will be dead silent (verse 22). Not a single artist will remain in the city. Domestic and social life will cease (verse 23). The drug culture will at last disappear from the scene. The blood of men and women and boys and girls who became the sacrificial victim of Babylon's fanatical hatred will testify against Babylon's crimes in the day of judgment (verse 24). That blood will cry out until God visits the world system in vengeance and punishes the blood-guilty culprit.

Although many Bible teachers argue that Babylon is only a symbol of God-defying world government and that the prophecies of a destruction of literal Babylon were fully fulfilled in the time of Cyrus and shortly thereafter, it is difficult, if not impossible, to find in history a destruction of Babylon that fully fits the destruction Isaiah 13 predicts. Isaiah distinctly puts the time of the disaster in the day of the Lord (verse 9) – the tribulation. The meteorological phenomena of verse ten did not accompany the historical destruction of Babylon. Furthermore the past destruction of Babylon did not resemble the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, as verse nineteen requires.

But the future destruction of Babylon, as described in revelation 18: 21 - 24, certainly corresponds to what occurred to the wicked cities of the plain. Isaiah's prophecy requires that no inhabitant ever again dwell in Babylon after its destruction. But after its destruction in the past, people lived in Babylon at least until the nineteenth century A.D. After the future destruction of Babylon in the tribulation period, of course, the area will never again support a populace. The final and full fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies about the fallen Babylon awaits the tribulation period when the city of Babylon will be rebuilt on the Euphrates River and later destroyed.

# A Summary of Final Events

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The view which teaches that Christ will return to earth, banish evil, and begin a new social order is not only an optimistic view but a biblical view of history. Premillennialists believe that the preaching of the gospel will never gradually conquer the world. They know from scripture and experience that apostasy will increase, that wicked men will "wax worse and worse," and that morality will decline even though great advances will come in science and technology.

Premillennialists believe that Christ is the Lord of history and that he will triumph over the forces of evil in history. They hold that the coming of a 1000-year reign of Christ is only logical goal of history. The millennial reign of Christ is the crowning dispensation of God's purposes for man and earth. At that time Christ will be vindicated in history.

## **Premillennial Events (Revelation 19:1 - 20:6)**

The Hallelujah Chorus celebrates the destruction of the whole Babylonish system and the dawning of the millennial age (versus 1-6). Four times in this passage the word "alleluia" occurs. This song celebrates the deliverance of the tribulation saints from their enemies (verse 1). The scene is Heaven. The singers include tribulation martyrs, the church saints, and the four living creatures (verse 4). God is the sole object of their worship. The heavenly company praise Him for what He is and for what He has done. He is altogether true and righteous; He has destroyed Babylon and thus avenged the tribulation martyrs (verse 2). What he has done to Babylon is evidence of his perfect justice. The continual smoke of Babylon will be an ever-present reminder to the millennial populace of the consequences of defying a holy God (verse 3).

The harlot church of the beast and the chaste virgin-bride of Christ cannot coexist in earth's golden age, so the great horror must be removed from the scene before the wife of the lamb can come forth in her coronation robes. The forthcoming marriage festival is cause for thanksgiving (verse 7). The bridegroom with His bride will come from the private marriage ceremony in Heaven to the public marriage celebration on earth. Saved Jewish tribulation survivors will act as ladies in waiting to the bride at the reception. Saved Gentile tribulation survivors will act as servants at this occasion. All unsaved Jews and Gentiles will be barred entrance to the wedding feast; in fact, Christ will cast them into hades before the celebration begins.

The bride is all glorious within. She is without spot or wrinkle or any such thing (verse 8). Both her standing in righteousness and her state are "granted" – that is, a gift of grace. By grace God clothes every believer in the righteousness of Christ positionally and instantly; by grace God produces Christlikeness in every believer practically and progressively. That divine work will not cease until God presents us to Christ at the wedding ceremony in Heaven.

Those who receive invitations to the marriage feast are a group quite distinguishable from the bride wife (verse 9). The bride does not need an invitation to her own reception. All of the Saints



of all the ages belong to the family of God, but the members of this family are not related to Christ in precisely the same way. The relationship between Christ and his church is unique for intimacy. The church alone is the bride and body. Israel was related to God as the wife of Jehovah. That wife entered into adulterous relations with other lovers and thus repudiated her marriage status. Eventually God will cleanse Israel and restore her to His good graces. The church, however, must never be identified with Israel. The church is not an adulterous wife who will be reinstated in favor; the church is a chaste virgin, unsullied and unsoiled.

Contrary to our modern custom to give special attention to the bride, the Word of God focuses the interest of all upon the bridegroom. He will be the chief attraction at the wedding ritual and the reception which follows. Christ Himself is the very heart of prophecy. Prophetic Scripture unfolds the loveliness of Christ (verse 10). He is worthy of all the honors. True prophecy always bears witness to His sovereignty, His sinlessness, His Saviorhood, and His substitutionary sacrifice for our sins.

In vision John sees the gates of heaven thrown open so that the celestial armies can exit (verse 11). The Commander-in-Chief appears astride a white charger – emblematic of His conquering power. He will wage a legal and justifiable war against the enemies of His government. In His truthfulness and faithfulness Christ will prove Himself a drastic contrast to the antichrist.

The second advent of Jesus Christ will settle earth's destiny for 1,000 years. He will reveal Himself as a universal warrior, governor, and judge. His enemies cannot escape His all surging eye (verse 12). Every form of human government will come under His authoritative sway. At the same time Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that He is the Lord of history as well as sub Ruler of eternity. In the exercise of his governmental powers, Christ will bring to public attention qualities of His person hitherto hidden in his own inscrutable being. Every opposing force will fill the fury of His wrath (verse 13). The same word which brought worlds into being and sustains them in their orbital flight will slay the wicked. In all that he does Christ is the communicator of the nature and purposes of the Father.

Christ is the Captain of the Lord's host. Angelic squadrons will accompany Him in His dissent from outer space (verse 14). The angels that had no permission to rescue Christ from the cross will now arrive en masse to deliver earth from the clutches of Satan and to purge sinners out of it. In the process Enoch's ancient prophecy will be fulfilled as reported by Jude, verses 14, 15.

The word which proceeds from the mouth of Christ suggests immediate and incisive judgment. The rod of iron conveys the thought of inflexible and invincible rule. The winepress is an emblem of Christ extreme wrath. These figures all contradict modern notions about the "man upstairs" who indulgently overlooks the frailties of man. Our God will display not only His wrath but the fierceness of His wrath. Not a single rival will remain to contest his supremacy (verse 16). He alone will have the title of universal dominion.

Birds of prey will have a banquet the like of which surpasses anything else in the world of nature (verse 17). In advance of the slaughter of the armies of the earth, vultures will gather in

preparation to pick clean the rotting corpses (verse 18). In death, generals are no more fortunate than privates. All men alike will be bread for the buzzards.