

# **A Study of the Book of Revelation**

**By W.G. Finlay D.D.**

## **THE FEDERATION OF THE COVENANT PEOPLE**

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### ***INTRODUCTION***

The Book of 'the Revelation of Jesus Christ', after an incredibly chequered history for almost two hundred years, was through ecclesiastical sanction, finally admitted to what Jerome called 'the holy library' and which the church calls 'The Canon of Scripture'. It is patently obvious that ecclesiastics, both ancient and modern, have remained sceptical about the authenticity of the last Book of the Bible and have treated it, together with the Epistle to the Hebrews, James and II Peter, with a suspicion which borders on complete rejection. The bias against these Books — and indeed against the Old Testament narrative — is, whether men know it or not, an extension of the first attempt to form a Canon of Scripture in 140 A.D. The 'Canon of Marcion' contained one Gospel which was a mutilated revision of that by Luke and ten epistles by Paul — all of which was the sum total of the early writings considered 'profitable for doctrine'. The reason for this peculiar 'censorship' was that Marcion, who, notwithstanding his Roman name was a 'converted Jew', declared that all the Apostles, with

the exception of Paul, were corrupters of the Truth who should be expunged from ecclesiastical memory.

In essence, Marcion's contention has been projected into modern theology which relegates the writings of bona fide Apostles to the position of inferiority and utterly rejects any other portion of Holy Scripture which appears to be in conflict with what Paul has written. What has been forgotten in this modern day and age is that when the Apostles did write — their main objective was the oral preaching of 'the faith once delivered' — they never considered their literary efforts as 'the rule of truth' not- was it their intention of legislating for the future organisation of the Christian church. There is absolutely nothing to indicate that these Apostles regarded their writings — which were peculiarly local in context and content — as the sole vehicle which contained the sum total of God's Truth — no such claim is made by them nor would they be so presumptuous as to censor the Old Testament Scriptures which the Lord had declared to be 'the word of Truth' (John 17:17).

At a time when men wrote what *they* thought the Apostles were thinking when *they* wrote about the things of God, one finds an even distribution of emphasis which took in the fact of Calvary and what men interpreted as the effect of this on the world. Toward the end of the First Century, the writings of men began to take precedence over the historical event of Calvary and *religious philosophy* about the Christ of God was a developing trend which threatened to superimpose itself over the facts. The Book of the Revelation was written against this background — a background which refused to acknowledge that it was drifting into troubled waters. Marcion's rejection of the Revelation given to John, just forty-four years after it had been written, was typical of the resistance to the corrective urging of the Holy Spirit — a resistance which was to continue for a further one hundred years.

In the Third Century of the Christian dispensation, three separate and fully autonomous centres of Christianity emerged — that in Asia Minor which sanctioned its own Canon of Scripture and in which the Apocalypse, Hebrews, James and II Peter were omitted; that in Alexandria which omitted Hebrews, James and II Peter; and that in Carthage which taught only the Pauline epistles. Strangely enough, the Alexandrian church which upheld the authenticity of the Revelation was governed by Dionysius who, in ecclesiastical circles was considered one of the ablest bishops of the time and who followed Marcion's repudiation of John's authorship of the Apocalypse. However, notwithstanding this rejection by the Bishop of Alexandria, it was due to this church that the Book of the Revelation was finally sanctioned as an integral part of Holy Scripture at the third Council of Carthage in A.D. 397. This did not mean that the church now accepted the Revelation — far from it. Martin Luther (A.D. 1517) had his own ideas about the canonicity of the scriptures and while he placed the Gospel and First Epistle of John, the Epistles of Paul and the first of Peter as 'the kernel of Christianity', he treated the remainder of the Books with varying degrees of disrespect and at times, outright denial. Erasmus of Rotterdam, while leaving the Canon unaltered, denied Apostolic origin to II Peter, the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Apocalypse. The doubts expressed at the beginning of the Christian dispensation continue to this day and theology, instead of attempting to elucidate the Message of the Book, continues to occupy itself with the questions of authorship and Canonicity and apparently content to explain: "All that can be affirmed, however, is that Revelation certainly arose within a Jewish Christian setting, its author using apocalyptic symbolism and language familial in Jewish Christendom and perhaps incorporating fragments of apocalyptic literature current in his day."

Turning from this general background to the Book of the Revelation — which background may be seen as ecclesiastical opposition within a very feeble ecclesiastical sanction — one opens the Book itself to consider what it has to say in answer to the scepticism, rejection and other charges made against it. It is stated in the first verse of the first chapter: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which

must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John." John was thus the writer and the Lord, the Imparter. In the light of this evidence, the question of authorship (apart from the Lord Himself) revolves around which John for there were several of this name within the Christian community at that time. It is absolutely true — as many critics through the ages have noted — that John himself provides no addition to his name but this may be seen as the intrusion of a note of anonymity within an era which was marked by an emphasis on the writings of man to the detriment of the Message conveyed. However, John does unobtrusively identify himself by claiming to be a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ and one who had been an eye-witness to the momentous happenings in Judaea. He used phraseology which identifies him with the writer of the verses recorded in John 19:35 and I John 1:2. He was a prisoner on the isle of Patmos because of his testimony of the Living Christ and a fellow sufferer with those who were being persecuted by both the Roman and Jewish authorities.

Ussher's dating suggests that the Revelation was written in A.D. 96 and indicative of the challenge presented by the Book, even this date has become an arena of great controversy with theologians contending that it had its beginning no later than A.D. 60. The point at issue here is not an interminable argument as to when the Book was written but the fact that it was written by John during his imprisonment on the isle of Patmos. However, in order to corroborate Ussher's dating and merely as an intellectual exercise, it should be noted that Irenaeus (A.D. 180) who lived very much nearer the time than the theologians of today, stated: "It (i.e., the Revelation) was seen not a very long time ago, but almost certain in our own generation, at *the close of Domitian's reign.*" Eusebius, the 'father of church history' too confirms this in that he recorded that under the persecution of Domitian, the apostle John was banished to the isle of Patmos for his testimony concerning the Word of God. It is historical fact that the reference to Domitian makes the date of the writing of the Revelation certainly no earlier than A.D. 96.

As has been stated previously, by A.D. 96 the general state of Christianity had degenerated from its initial zeal and was governed by a primitive form of theology which revolved around what *man said* in contrast to what had actually transpired. John, it will be noted: ". . . was in the isle called Patmos, for the *word of God*, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:9) — a phraseology almost identical to that which Eusebius used in describing the Apostle. Why the emphasis on John's ministry concerning the Word of God? May it not be that even then the gulf separating theology and the Truth had become very noticeable?

Having been introduced to John and his particular circumstances in A.D. 96, nothing more is recorded of him and one is thus dependent on secular sources for further information. Eusebius records a history which many today will find hard to believe and yet when other scriptural facts are correlated with this, the story by Eusebius concerning John will be found as one which bore the marks of the Hand of God in its affairs. John, according to the historian, came directly under the attention of Domitian who had him arrested, tried and condemned to death. This policy would be a natural one under the circumstances for at a time when humanitarian considerations were simply non-existent, it is inconceivable that a trouble-maker such as John would have been summarily banished to an island and left there to rot. The usual procedure was to eliminate opposition and at the same time to afford the rebellious population the opportunity of witnessing the futility of their cause. John, according to Eusebius, was condemned to death — not in the customary manner of crucifixion or burning at the stake, but to be thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil. To many, the suggestion that John could have escaped this fate would be asking too much. If a man were to be thrown into burning oil, in the ordinary course of events, his life would be terminated immediately. However, it should be remembered that in the Old Testament there is a similar happening

recorded when Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego were condemned to death in the 'burning fiery furnace' which had been heated 'seven times more than it was wont to be heated' (Dan. 3:19-28). That trio escaped because of the Providence of God — could not the same be the experience of John? John, it will be recalled was, by this time, a very old man whose frail body would be over-taxed in the normal routines of the mission enterprise. It must be obvious that he lived under the Providential Care of the Lord — a Care which had been intimated by the Lord in His closing Message to Peter.

Having received the Commission to 'feed my sheep', Peter questioned the Lord concerning the 'apostle whom Jesus loved'(John 21:20). The Lord answered Peter: "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is it to thee? follow thou me" (John 21:22). This, of course, gave rise to the tradition that John would not die and this tradition among the brethren whom, one would have thought, would have been impervious to speculations and dedicated to fact. However, one may see in this statement by the Lord that it was within His Foreknowledge of the events which would arise subsequent to His Ascension, that He determined that John would tarry for the express purpose of recording the Revelation as a counter to the speculations and theories which men would superimpose over the Truth.

Leaving the testimony of historians, attention is focused on the Revelation itself. As has been stated, it is the purpose of the Book to reveal the things — events and situations — which would shortly develop — the acceptance of revelation would result in blessing. "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand" (Rev. 1:3). Here is a statement which cuts right across the theology of so many who aver that the Revelation is an undecipherable collection of symbols which should never be a part of Christian teaching. "Blessed is he that readeth ..." — this immediately establishes the Book, not as a massive work of unintelligible mysticism — this would defeat the very name of the Book — but as a source of blessing, 'blessing through knowledge'.

At the outset, it should be clearly understood that the Lord intended that His Revelation be in free circulation — 'Blessed is he that readeth ...' — which is perhaps why the 'mystery of iniquity' has been so active down the centuries in preventing the essential information in this Book from reaching those who would benefit most from it. It is quite common today — indeed as it was in the days of the 'church fathers' —to hear it contended that the metaphorical language mitigates against a clear understanding of the Book of the Revelation — 'a book too sublime and deep for human reasoning' as Dionysius declared. However, it should be noted that the Lord positively stated that He 'signified' the events which were -to come to pass —the word translated from the Greek *semaino* which literally means 'to show by signs and symbols'. To suggest that the Lord would use unrelated and unqualified signs and symbols 'too sublime and deep' for human understanding would be an exercise in futility for blessing could not result unless these signs or symbols were clarified by the Lord Himself. It will be found that these identical symbols are all used in the Old Testament and in such a manner as to make identification unmistakable.

In order to illustrate the point, an example may be taken from Revelation 4:6-8. "In the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts (Greek - *zoon*: literally, *living creatures*) full of eyes before and behind. And the first beast was like a *lion*, and the second beast like a *calf*, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a *flying eagle*." If one ignores the Old Testament — as so many do — private speculation (it cannot be called 'interpretation') tends to force the scene into a universal context by claiming that all creation is represented in the gathering around the 'throne'. This immediately falls down for if 'all creation' was representatively gathered, marine life which is usually symbolised by the fish (which incidently was the symbol of the early Christians) was missing.

On turning to the Old Testament, one finds the same four symbols used by Ezekiel the prophet (Ezek. 1:10) who equates the symbols in relationship to the Glory in almost the identical manner as is found in the Revelation. While this does not add much by way of identification, it will be noted that Ezekiel was drawing on symbolism which had been provided at an even earlier stage and established by God Himself.

In Exodus 25:8 it is written: "And let them (Israel) make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among *them*." This, of course, had to do with the construction of the Tabernacle — the 'dwelling place for the Lord' — which was to be surrounded by the Israel people in a God-ordered array (Num. 2). On the eastern side of the Tabernacle and under the leadership of the tribe of Judah, Issachar and Zebulun formed the first side of the square. *The ensign of the tribe of Judah was a lion*. On the west, headed by Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin formed the other side of the square. *Ephraim's ensign was the calf or the ox*. On the northern side with *Reuben's ensign of a man*, were the tribes of Simeon and Gad, while the southern flank was given to Dan with the tribes of Asher and Naphtali. *The ensign of Dan was a flying eagle*.

In the light of this, it will be seen that, far from having to speculate as to the meaning of the symbolism employed in the Revelation, one has but to reconsider the Old Testament which provides the key to understanding. Against this, one may be tempted to ask why the Lord resorted to this means of communication of the events which were shortly to come to pass? The answer is once again obvious. In His Foreknowledge, the Lord knew what men would do with the revealed scriptures - in A.D. 96 they had already placed all emphasis on *man* and this just half a century away from the tremendous events on Calvary. What would they do with the events which were even further back in time? With the passage of time in the Christian dispensation, the Old Testament was pushed into the background until men decided that it no longer formed an essential part of Scripture and consequently proceeded to issue copies of the New Testament alone. The Lord was thus forcing, if men were to understand His Revelation, a return to the old Scriptures for it is only there that the key to understanding may be found.

Returning to the first chapter of the Book of the Revelation, John records the situation which resulted in his commission to write the Work which today, and despite the scepticism of man, still forms the last Book of the Bible. The now aged Apostle was 'in the Spirit on the Lord's day' — a phraseology which is clarified in the last chapter of the Book, when he was startled by a real and living voice which was by no means the by-product of ecstatic spiritual elation occasioned by his solitude on the island. He heard a voice behind him saying: "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last . . . And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle" (Rev. 1:11-13). That this was the Lord Jesus Christ cannot be doubted for John continues: "And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore" (Rev. 1:17-18).

The full significance of what one may call John's re-introduction to the Risen, Triumphant Christ of God, may be seen in the phrase 'the Alpha and the Omega' and the setting in which 'one like unto the Son of man' appeared. The setting was, of course, associated with the Holy of Holies or the Tabernacle in Israel. The 'Alpha and Omega' or in Hebrew, the 'Aleph and Tau' had a very real significance in the days of the Levitical priesthood. The 'Aleph and Tau', the first and the last letters in the Hebrew alphabet, were inscribed on two stones which formed an integral part of the 'breastplate of the High Priest'. "Thou shalt put in the breastplate of judgment, the Urim and the Thummin: and they shall be upon Aaron's heart, when he goeth in unto the holy place" (Ex. 28:30). Further instances of mention insofar as

these stones are concerned, is found in Leviticus 8:8; Numbers 27:21; Deuteronomy 33:8; I Samuel 28:6; Ezra\* 2:63 and Nehemiah 7:65-

The priestly usage of these stones had to do with questions which arose in terms of God's Direct Revelation given to Israel primarily in the context of the Law. They were called the yea stone and the nay stone and when the priest stood before the altar with some question, the Glory shone on one or other of these stones signifying either yes or no — with no arbitration in terms of indeterminate answers. It was a case of either a positive or negative answer — the response being always in the context of what God *had said*. The significance of the Lord to John on the isle of Patmos as 'Alpha and Omega' confirms again that which has been stated earlier, namely, that men were superimposing *what they thought* over what God had declared and in consequence, the Alpha and Omega, by reason of that which followed, was saying a very definite NO to the trends which were developing.

Having thus seen the identity of the Author of that which was to follow, one is in a position to consider the *dispensation* in which the events which were about to be unveiled, would occur. Once again, if one disallows the Old Testament, the symbolism of the 'seven golden candlesticks' can mean anything or nothing at all. It is only as one considers the Book of Exodus where an accurate and detailed description of the seven candlesticks is given, that one can begin to approach the reason for the symbolism employed in the Revelation. In this, one may see the position of the candlesticks in the Tabernacle which was on the left side directly opposite the Table of Shewbread. The light of the candlesticks illuminated the Holy of Holies, the source of which was the oil which was continually supplied by the High Priest. The picture thus recorded by John threw the High Priest into focus and his attendance on the matters pertaining to the 'dwelling place of God'.

While this may not serve as an indication of the dispensation involved in the matters about to be revealed, the fact of John's description of the garments worn by 'the Son of man' will provide the missing clue. In Exodus 28:2-3 and on the consecration of the High Priest, it is stated: "Thou shalt make holy garments for Aaron thy brother for *honour and glory*. And thou shalt speak unto all that are wise-hearted whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they make Aaron's garment to consecrate him, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office." It should thus be noted that God specifically commanded that 'holy garments' made for 'honour and glory' be the symbol of the priest's office. In passing through the Old Testament, it will be noted that in Psalm 8:5, the 'son of man' is associated with 'honour and glory' while in the New, Peter records that he saw the 'Son of man' clothed with the garments of 'honour and glory' (II Peter 1:17). This was, of course, the experience which he shared with James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-5).

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the same phraseology is again used and without doubt in respect of the Lord Jesus Christ, the High Priest. "No man taketh this HONOUR unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, today have I begotten thee" (Heb. 5:4-5). The words 'honour and glory' are once again used as the garments of the High Priest — garments which were not earned, but given according to the calling of God. The whole picture is that of Christ Jesus, High Priest after the Order of Melchizedek consecrated in Eternity.

It is most significant that John did not see what Zechariah the prophet saw for this would have added confusion to the identification of the dispensation involved. The Old Testament prophet saw 'the priest on the throne' (Zech. 6:13) whereas John saw the Priest tending the candlesticks. The essential difference between the two is dispensational — the one during which the High Priest is the Mediator while the other that in which He becomes King. The dispensation thus involved in the vision which John saw was that period in which the High Priest remains, in the heavens 'until his enemies be made His footstool' (Heb. 1:13) - a

dispensation which today is known as 'the Christian Dispensation'.

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[[IMAGE]]

## CHAPTER 1

### THE IDENTITY OF THE CHURCHES IN ASIA

With the subject of Source and Dispensation fully seen in the symbolism of the 'Alpha and Omega' clothed in High Priestly Garments tending the seven golden candlesticks, one is equipped to pass on to a consideration of the first events which were annunciated by the Lord Jesus Christ. "What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven\_ churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira,. and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia and unto Laodicea" (Rev. 1:11).

At the very outset of the messages to the seven churches, one is able to see that discrimination, a very 'dirty word' in the modern context, is the order of the day. The time of the giving of the Revelation, as has been seen, was, according to Irenaeus, '. . . at the close of Domitian's reign.' Notwithstanding the many arguments which theologians present against Ussher's dating of A.D. 96, historians, much closer to the time and event, leave one in no doubt that the period around the turn of the first century is correct.

At this time, there were many 'churches' in existence. In Palestine, Greece, Asia, the British Isles, in Spain and regions of Gaul. Tertullian (A.D. 155—222), considered to be the church's first great genius after the Apostles, wrote: "The extremities of Spain, the various parts of Gaul, the regions of Britain which have never been penetrated by Roman armies have received the religion of Christ." Eusebius (A.D. 260—340) the great church historian, pinpoints the Apostles as having taken Christianity to Britain. "The apostles passed beyond the ocean to the isles called the Britannic isles." Gildas, the British historian (A.D. 425—512), establishes the fact that a Christian church was begun in Britain as early as A.D. 37, only four years after the Crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Christ, the True Sun afforded His light, the knowledge of His precepts, to our island in the last year, as we know, of Tiberius Caesar."

Thus, on historical evidence, one is able to see that at the time of the Revelation the message of Christianity had been spread far and wide and that Christian communities existed in regions other than Asia Minor. However, these other communities did not come within the compass of the seven messages which were specifically directed to the 'seven churches which are in *Asia*'. As there was obviously something very pertinent to the churches in this region, it behoves students of the Revelation to consider all relevant information which provides light on the subject.

In the first instance, it will be noted that men from Asia, indeed from the whole territory known today as Turkey, were present in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. This poses the question as to why, at this particular time, there should have been such unusual activity and so great an influx of people into Jerusalem. Another question also arises when one considers Peter's exhortation to those assembled in that he said: ". . . let all *the house of Israel* know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). Why limit the imparting of this news to *all the house of Israel* and why commit this task to an apparently mixed multitude when he later refused to consort with Cornelius on apparent racial grounds (Acts 10:1-28)?

At first glance the narrative appears to engender confusion in the mind of the student but if

one delves more deeply into the subject, one is able to see that, far from presenting contradiction and confusion, the original Greek wording of the text provides a glorious, God-honouring continuity of the Plan and Purpose of Almighty God. It will be seen that Peter's exhortation concerning *all Israel* in the context which presupposes Israel in existence outside of the bounds of Palestine was in conformity with what was accepted by the ruling hierarchy in Judaea at that time. It was a known fact that Israel was in dispersion (John 7:35) and, notwithstanding the Jew's claim to Israel's inheritance, it is of singular interest to note that James, some thirty years later and ten years prior to the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews, wrote ". . . to *the twelve tribes* which are scattered abroad . . ." (James 1:1). In the light of this, Peter's exhortation is seen to be in conformity with the then known facts, namely, that Israel was not in Judaea at that time but in regions far removed from Jerusalem.

Having thus established that Israel was the target of Peter's exhortation, one passes on to consider the people entrusted with this commitment. It will be recalled that at the commencement of the Ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, He directed His newly chosen disciples in the context of His publicly declared Mission, namely, to the 'lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Matt. 15:24). He sent them: ". . .not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:5-6). That the disciples were obedient to their mission is confirmed in Luke 22:35 and also confirmed is the fact that at that time no reaction to this was forthcoming from the Jews in Judaea which indicates that the disciples did not fulfil this mission among the Jews there.

Against this background together with the news of tremendous unrest in Judaea plus the story of the Crucifixion of One Who claimed to be Israel's Messiah and the impending 'Feast of Wave-Loaves' (Lev. 23:15), those of Israel in dispersion who were able, would have travelled to Jerusalem if for no other reason than to satisfy their curiosity. It should be recalled that the 'feast of wave-loaves' was one of the seven feasts which were exclusively Israelitish and would have no meaning or significance to people of another race. That others *were there* is not denied but their presence did not have, *for them*, the same significance as it did for those of the Israel nation.

There are, no doubt, those who would say that the above contention is pure speculation and if there were no other factors involved, this would be freely admitted. However, there is much more to the story. Peter's dissertation was limited to quotations from the Scripture — documents which meant little or nothing to those not of Israel — and yet the people were so moved that they said: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:36). The Greek wording is most illuminating. The word *brethren* here recorded is *adelphoi* and is used extensively in the New Testament to denote *blood relationship* as distinct from the fellowship of faith which is derived from the Greek word *philadelphos*. Those who were thus moved by Peter's exposition of the Scripture therefore *claimed blood relationship* with the disciples who were Israelites.

In the context of the exhortation 'let all the house of Israel know' and the bewildered response of 'what shall we do?', Peter provided the answer: "Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:28). This immediately thrusts to the fore the fact that these men were guilty of 'sin' — a condition which in the Israel context arose from the transgression of God's Law which was given to the nation at Sinai (I John 3:4). Further to this, the word 'repent' has a peculiar significance which is largely overlooked by many today. In the Biblical context, the word has a meaning far removed from that which is usually now implied. It meant to 'think again' in the primary sense with sorrow and contrition being secondary to it. If the student examined the overall situation as it obtained when this word was used, it would be seen that Israel, being the only nation in the world to

have known the Commandments of the Lord and the only nation which could transgress these plus being the only nation to have received the mechanics for reconciliation arising from violation of God's Laws, had much to think about. They had been committed to blessing 'all the nations of the earth', they had received 'the glory and covenants, the giving of the law, and the service of God and the promise'^ (Rom. 9:4) and they had thrown all this away when they rejected God's Directives for them. However, there was yet more for them to think about. Incorporated into the Scriptures were the writings of 'holy men of God who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost' (II Peter 1:21) 'and which showed very clearly that God was far from finished with them. These men recorded the promises of a Redeemer through Whom the sins of the nation would be blotted out (Isa. 44:22) and reconciliation wrought (Isa. 54:5). In the light of this, one is able to appreciate the call, first made by John and subsequently the Lord Jesus Christ and ultimately the Apostles for the people to 'think again'. They were enjoined to think again on the matter of national destiny.

What happened to these men after Pentecost? They obviously returned to their homes and formed the basis for the Christian communities in the towns where they resided. Peter., some twenty-five years later, knew full well the significance of Satan's attention on the people whom God had constituted as His witnesses and found it necessary to write to them reminding the people of their national identity and calling. "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, Elect according to the foreknowledge of God . . ." (I Peter 1:1). While the subject of 'the elect' has become one of much controversial speculation, Peter was under no delusions concerning it for having based the whole of his ministry on the only Scriptures which were in existence at that time, he would naturally use the phrase in the Old Testament context which was the Israel nation (Isa. 45:4). In support of this, it will be noted that these 'strangers' who were the elect of God are further unmistakably identified by Peter who wrote: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in times past were not a people, but are now the people, of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy" (I Peter 2:9-10).

The titles given by Peter are both racial and national and will be found to be those bestowed on Israel by God (Ex. 19:5-6). The peculiar status of 'not my people' and 'not having received mercy' is the projection by Peter of the events recorded by Hosea the prophet in respect of the condition of Israel arising from the national departure from the Directives of the Lord.

Attendant on the pronounced judgment (Hos. 1:6-9) one finds the promised reconciliation for the nation in the words: "Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God" (Hos. 1:10).

In the light of the obviously national character of events thus far considered, many find it difficult to reconcile this with the word 'church' as it appears in Paul's writings as well as in the Revelation. However, this 'difficulty.' need not arise if one is prepared to 'rightly divide the word of truth' and diligently 'search the scriptures'. In so doing, one finds that the English word 'church' owes its origin to the Greek word *Kuriakos* which literally means 'pertaining or belonging to the Lord'. This word was borrowed by the Gothic nations and became the German *Kirche*, the *Anglo-Saxon* *Cyryse*, the Dutch *Kerke*, the *Scottish Kirk* and eventually the *English Church*.

In searching the Scriptures, one finds that a variation of *Kuriakos* does exist in the Greek Text but is only found to have been used on two occasions and most certainly not in the context as visualised today. In the first instance of its usage, Paul uses the phrase when writing of 'the supper pertaining to the Lord' (ICor. 11:20) while John, recording the events

leading up to the giving of the Lord's Revelation, used the term when stating that he was 'in the Spirit on the Lord's day ...' (Rev. 1:10). In no other portion of Scripture does this word occur and this naturally leads one to enquire as to the actual word used which has found its translation into the English word 'church'.

The simple expediency of using any reliable Bible concordance will immediately reveal that the Greek word which has been translated into 'church' is *ecclesia* a word which prior to the beginning of the seventeenth century, was always translated congregation.. William Tyndale used the word *congregation* as did Coverdale in 1535 to be followed by Whittingham in 1557. Three years later, in 1560, the word congregation was dropped and *church* substituted although versions of the 'Great Bible' continued to use the original word for a further ten years.

An interesting fact is brought to light by comparing the Greek Septuagint (3rd century B.C.) with the Hebrew writings of the Old Testament for the Greek word *ecclesia* is found to be the equivalent of the Hebrew *qahal* which is used extensively in the context of the Israel nation. Two instances of this will suffice at this stage. On the occasion of Isaac's charge to his son Jacob, one finds the patriarch's blessing embracing the word *qahal* in an illuminating way. "And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a *multitude* (*qahal*) of people." In the Greek of the Septuagint, this word is *ecclesia*. The second instance is found in Genesis 35:11 where to Jacob the promise of a 'nation and company (*qahal*) of nations' is found. Here again the Greek word in the Septuagint is *ecclesia* which sets an unmistakable pattern within the *national context of Israel*.

In the light of this, one may see the contentions previously expressed, namely, that the Israel content in the events of (a) Pentecost and (b) the spreading of the Message of the Lord Jesus Christ, is fully justified. That satanic inroads were being made into the Israel community cannot be doubted for the writings of Peter, James and John were intended as corrective admonitions against the insidious penetrations by the serpent and his minions among God's witness nation Israel. That these went unheeded is obvious from the fact that in A.D. 96, the Lord Himself commanded John to write to the 'assemblies' of Israel in Asia Minor warning and exhorting them to 'think again' and to keep the faith committed to them.

#### *The Contents of the Message to the Seven Churches*

In considering the contents of the seven messages to the 'assemblies' in Israel in dispersion, one should bear in mind that, as in many other instances of prophetic fulfilment, there are two fulfilments. There is what may be termed the 'near fulfilment' which has to do with circumstances arising out of the then obtaining situation and the 'far fulfilment' which is a comprehensive completion of the prophecy at a time determined by the parallelism of the events. This principle is very definitely demonstrated by the seven messages to the 'churches' in Asia.

While there have been and still are those who limit Biblical Revelation to the age in which it was given, i.e., the Bible has ceased to have a literal relevancy today and has become the source of allegory from which to draw an infinite variety of spiritual truths, throughout its pages are God's assertions which contradict this view. For instance, in the Revelation, the Lord commands John to "Write the things *which thou hast seen*, and the things *which are*, and the things *which shall be hereafter*" (Rev. 1:19). The things which John had seen were, of course, the mighty events recorded in the Gospel under his name. The things which currently obtained were well within the compass of his own knowledge — his incarceration on the isle of Patmos was the direct result of these. However, of the things 'which shall be hereafter', these could have very little relevance to the man John for he was nearing the end of his life and only future generations could benefit from the knowledge about to be imparted.

The terminal date of the things which shall come 'hereafter' cannot be determined by either

theological or philosophical dogma but by the fulfilment of the events which form the basis of the Revelation. Here indeed are the quick-sands into which so many have blundered for, having examined the 'near fulfilment' of the messages to the seven churches, they conclude that nothing further is to be gleaned from this and consequently deprive themselves of the wealth of information provided by the Lord in the subject of prophecy.

The first superficial glance at the seven messages recorded in the second and third chapters of the Revelation will establish that there were seven literal assemblies within the cities mentioned all of which had situations which, while differing in content, had one feature in common. The common denominator was the mechanism of destruction which had as its main objective, the negation of Peter's call to the founding fathers of those assemblies to 'Let all the house of Israel know that God hath made that same Jesus both Lord and Christ' (Acts 2:36). One has but to read each of the Epistles to appreciate the satanic attention which was being paid to developing knowledge of Truth as it was being spread among God's servant nation Israel in dispersion.

However, as one diligently 'searches the scripture', one finds that there is more than an obvious clue to be found in the names of the cities in which the 'assemblies' had been formed. Each of the seven cities bore a name which carried a meaning that was determined by the context of the message and provides an appreciation of the 'far fulfilment' embodied in the seven messages. These names are revealed as seven stages of church history. *Ephesus*, the first of the messages, is associated with the situation of 'letting go' while Smyrna has as its highlight, 'anointing oil'. The remaining five are *Pergamos*, 'married to power'; *Thyatira*, 'ruled by woman'; Sardis, 'a precious stone'; *Philadelphia*, 'brotherly love' and *Laodicea*, 'power of the laity'.

It is more than superficially significant that after almost two thousand years one is able to look back and to find that church history, as such, has followed the course prescribed in the seven messages and that the current situation, highlighted as it is by the actions of the World Council of Churches, modernism, humanism, the permissive society and other apostasies are a graphic amplification of the last message to the church at Laodicea.

However, as this work is intended as a study of the Book of Revelation and not merely parts of it, the course to be followed will be that of historical progression and in the case of the seven messages, each will be considered in chronological order with its parallel secondary fulfilment.

### *EPHESUS*

The first message (Rev. 2:1-7) was directed to the assembly at Ephesus in which city the place the goddess Diana held was pre-eminent among the many gods worshipped (Acts 19:24-35). Those who returned from Jerusalem after the Pentecostal experience had much to overcome not the least of which was the paganism associated with the worship of Diana. However, they persisted in such a manner as to earn the commendation of the Lord Who said: "I know thy works and thy labour and thy patience and how thou canst not bear with them which are evil; and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles and are not and hast found them liars; And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured and hast not fainted ..."

'Several features emerge from this message, the first of which confirms the fact that a very deliberate attempt was being made, through doctrinal issues, to subvert the Truth. It will be noted that the Lord drew attention to the fact that men, *claiming to be apostles*, had tried to infiltrate the assembly and that they were exposed as imposters by the application of the yardstick for apostleship which the Lord had provided (John 15:27) and which Peter later confirmed (Acts 1:21-22). Here one is brought face to face with the kernel of the Revelation and which, as has been explained previously, provides the reason why the now Triumphant Risen Christ had to leave His August Position on the right hand of God (Heb. 1:13) to

provide a Divine counter to the spurious claims and doctrines of men. The Lord thus commended the assembly at Ephesus for exposing the 'Liars' and for holding fast to the faith. Thus, between the time of the establishment of the assembly at Ephesus and the Message to it from the Lord from Patmos in A.D. 96, one finds its sixty-three year history very chequered indeed. It will be

[[IMAGE]]

*Scattered ruins and rocks of ancient Ephesus. 19*

recalled that in A.D. 64 (Ussher's dating) Paul wrote his only letter to the seven mentioned 'churches' in Asia and at such a time as to coincide with Nero's abominable persecution of Christianity generally. Secular sources confirm that this date marked the breaching of the wall of apostolic faith and the tragic reality of the situation of 'letting go' as was charged by the Lord.

While many students have speculated over the actual mechanism which resulted in the indictment by the Lord, it is patently obvious that speculation as such need not enter into the picture for the Lord indicated the inducement which resulted in the fall of the assembly. It will be noted that He said: "But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate" (Rev. 2:6). From this it would appear that the 'deeds of the Nicolaitanes' was not unknown in this assembly, i.e., the 'works or effects' of the Nicolaitanes which, as will be noted later in the third Message of the Lord, has to do with the inclusion of proselytes within what was primarily an Israel community. Throughout the Old Testament history of Israel one finds that the proselytised alien has ever been the major cause for the nation's departure from the Directives of God (Isa. 1:7; Hos. 5:7; 7:9)- History repeated itself in the case of the assembly at Ephesus.

The message to this 'church' closes with the admonition of the Lord Who said: "... repent and do the first works: or else I will come unto thee quickly, and .will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent ..." That the 'church' at Ephesus did not repent and continued to depart from the apostolic faith is evidenced by the complete destruction of the city in 262 A.D. the dust of centuries covering the story of the church at Ephesus which 'let go' of its first love and courted other lovers.

*SMYRNA*

In the second message, i.e., to the assembly at Smyrna, one finds that this is summed up in four brief verses which highlight three facts. In the first and in contra-distinction to the message of the first assembly, there is no admonition to repent and no warning of the removal of the candlestick. In the second feature, it will be observed that mention is made of trial, persecution, tribulation and poverty lasting for a period specified as ten days. The third fact is an exhortation to endure all things and to overcome the tribulation.

The most striking of these three features is that proclaiming the *ten day* tribulation period (Rev. 2:10) for this had a very real meaning to those involved in this 'church' at that period. Secular history records ten very distinct tribulations through which Smyrna passed and their tabulation is a wonderful vindication of the accuracy of Holy Scripture. These phases were (1) Nero persecuted Smyrna in 67 A.D. (2) Domitian, in 85 A.D., added Smyrna to his general persecutions and while Nerva, who succeeded Domitian, did not persecute Smyrna, Trajan who succeeded him, recommenced the persecutions in 108 A.D. and this constitutes the third phase. (4) Adrian, who succeeded Trajan, was apathetic on the subject and during his reign, persecutions waxed and waned with unpredictable, regularity. However, the real fourth phase was commenced by Adrian's successor, Marcus Verus, who in 162 A.D. pressed the persecutions at Smyrna almost to breaking point.

Three rulers followed in quick succession, Commodus, Pertinax and Julianus, but their persecutions were mediocre compared with Severus who in 200 A.D. marked the fifth phase of persecutions. In the next 85 years, five distinct periods are marked by intense persecution and tribulation for Smyrna and were perpetrated by Maximus (235 A.D.); Decius (249 A.D.); Valerian (257A.D.); Aurelia (274A.D.); and Diocletian (285 A.D.).

In the above tabulation, attention has been drawn to Smyrna and not the other regions where assemblies had been constituted for it was the unique experience of the church at Smyrna that it underwent the ten distinct periods of persecution and tribulation. It is from this period that one is able to see the widening of the gulf between the 'near fulfilment and that projecting into the future for it was some 18 years later that *all Christianity* underwent a ten-year period of persecution.

In 303 A.D., Diocletian had responded to a request made by Lucinius, the emperor of the eastern Roman Empire, in which he craved tolerance for Christians. However, Galerius, the adopted son of Diocletian, inveigled his mother who was a bigoted pagan, to persuade Diocletian to recommence the Christian persecutions and in this he was successful. By the middle of the year 303 A.D. a full-scale assault was being made against all Christians no matter where they were and lasted exactly ten years, ending when Constantine succeeded to the throne in Rome. Constantine, together with Lucinius, issued a joint decree of tolerance toward Christians which brought the prescribed period of ten prophetic days to an end. In the midst of this message to the assembly, now referred to as the 'church' in the English translations, at Smyrna, there appears the parenthetical portion which deals with 'the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews and are not, but are of the synagogue of Satan' (Rev. 2:9)- As happens so frequently, many allow themselves to form an opinion of the Scripture based on their acceptance of an approximate English equivalent of the Hebrew or the Greek words and the phraseology here is no exception. In Strong's *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, as well as in other Greek Dictionaries of the New Testament, it will be noted that the word translated 'Jew' in this text, comes from the Greek *loudaios* which literally means 'pertaining to Judaea' and is a geographical or religious rather than a racial term.

This being so, one naturally asks the question as to the reason behind the reference to the blasphemy or, literally, vilification in the context of God, by spurious claimants in the land of Judaea? If this scripture is literally translated it will read: "I know the *blasphemia* — the evil speaking of the things of God — of those who claim Judaea as their own — and this without authority — but who are of the assembly of Satan." This, without doubt, is an extension of the scope of the Revelation in its warning against the dangerous trends which were developing — not only within the context of the written and spoken Message of Truth — but also in the context of Satan's counterfeit for true Israel.

The subject of the counterfeit may be seen in the Old Testament — God's Holy Word which in those days and by reason of ecclesiastical sanctions was ignored completely in favour of the writings and oral teaching of the church fathers. It will be noted that the prophet Eze-kiel who wrote at a time when nationally the Israel presence in Palestine was nil, drew attention to the fact that unnamed people laid claim to the territory formerly occupied by both Judah and Israel. "Son of man, those that inhabit those wastes of the land of Israel speak, saying: Abraham was one, and he inherited the land: but we are many; the land is given us for inheritance" (Eze. 33:24). Here, in unmistakable terms, are people of unspecified origins claiming the land as an inheritance — the claim being totally false as evidenced by the fact of it being mentioned at all. This was the groundwork for Satan's conspiracy who sowed an alien seed in the land of Judaea which would and did grow into proportions which dictated not only the political course of events, but also those in the religious sphere as well. The Lord Jesus Christ branded them as being of their 'father the devil' and condemned them for doing

his works (John 8:44). The reason for the reference to the 'synagogue of Satan', when taken in conjunction with the warnings against the doctrinal trends which were developing, may thus be seen as the corrective exhortation by the Lord to His people to get back to the Word of God.

The overall situation was thus fraught with dangerous possibilities and as one passes on to consider the remaining five messages, one is able to see that despite the intervention of the Lord by giving the incredible Revelation to John on the isle of Patmos, the satanic conspiracy continued unchecked and, tragically, unhindered by those teachers who professed to believe God.

### *PERGAMOS*

Pergamos — an assembly or church which became 'married to power' carried with its name an indictment which most one-worlders today find convenient to forget. Situated in the north-west regions of Asia Minor, Pergamos was considered a University city although the learning dispensed there was the very antithesis of enlightenment. The city wallowed in a depravity encouraged by paganism and idolatrous practices which were unrivalled by any other centre in Asia Minor. It was to this city that men returned from Jerusalem after Pentecost and endeavoured to fulfil Peter's commission to 'Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus . . . both Lord and Christ.' An assembly was established under the leadership of Antipas and this flourished for a while until the leaven of Pergamos began to permeate the congregation and the apostolic faith suffered a tremendous blow from which, from all evidences to hand today, it has never recovered.

The third message to the seven churches in Asia begins in the same vein as the two preceding messages. "I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth" (Rev. 2:13). This commendation was surely well earned particularly when one considers the social atmosphere which obtained in that city 'where Satan's seat is'. It required more than the average courage and conviction to go into a city where the very air was charged with the pollution of Satan's dominion and to begin a work which, in every respect, was diametrically opposed to the principles which held the people in its grip.

The specific reference to Antipas and his martyrdom in Pergamos provides a picture of the fate of those who sought to expand the knowledge of the accomplished Mission of the Lord Jesus Christ in which trial and tribulation was the constant companion of all involved in the congregation. Antipas vigorously opposed the evils which dominated the social life of the city and contended with the priests who dispensed the debauchery associated with the god Aesculapius whose temple was the fulcrum around which life revolved in the city. It should be noted that the Lord referred to Antipas as 'my faithful martyr' — a commendation which arose because of his opposition to the prevailing situation which, in many ways, is identical to that which today obtains within many cities of modern Israel — Anglo-Saxondom. Antipas was taken by the priests of licentiousness and burned to death in a brazen bull in the temple of Aesculapius during the reign of Domitian in circa A.D. 100.

The martyrdom of Antipas, occasioned by his opposition to the then prevailing evils, draws the subject of integration and miscegenation very much to the fore. Although one has no means of ascertaining the racial composition of the inhabitants of Pergamos, from the ensuing indictment of the Lord it becomes more than apparent that incompatible elements were present in the city and that these were being fused into a oneness which was detrimental. The Lord's charge against the Israel assembly in Pergamos highlights this feature. "I have a few things against thee, because thou hast them there that hold the doctrine of Balaam who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel." This charge is perfectly lucid and the only excuse — if excuse it could be called — for ignorance of its complications, is

the lack of knowledge of the Old Testament history.

Balaam is referred to on a number of occasions in the New Testament and unless his history is studied and accepted, much of the essential truth embodied in the New Testament references becomes obscure. Balaam was a prophet who sought to make capital out of his gift, marketing this and characterising false teachers of whom the word picture provided in the end of the age scene, indicates there would be a plentiful supply (II Peter 2:15). This situation is recorded as 'the way of Balaam' while in Jude 11, the 'error of Balaam' refutes utterly the contention held by so many that God, finding Himself in a situation created by Israel's disobedience to His Laws, had to reject the nation and begin again. It is reasoned by those who lack the conviction that God said what He meant and meant what He said, that notwithstanding His unconditional, Oath-bound promises, God discontinued His national Plan and began with an individual one. A Holy God — so they reason — must curse, by rejecting a people such as Israel had become, ignorant of the higher morality of vicarious atonement by which God could be just and a justifier of His people. This, is the 'error of Balaam' — an error into which so many fall today.

The third aspect of the subject of Balaam is that referred to by the Lord in His condemnation of those at Pergamos, namely, the 'doctrine of Balaam'. It should be noted that the Lord did not speak of the 'way of Balaam' nor the 'error of Balaam' but rather that in the church at Pergamos, there were those who held, i.e., kept the 'doctrine of Balaam'. The record of this doctrine (Num. 25) leaves one in no doubt as to the reason for the Lord's condemnation for it involved the violation of God's command to Israel to remain separate from all other people. Balaam, who was frustrated at every turn and unable to earn his fee as a hireling prophet, propounded his doctrine of physical integration with the children of Israel in which twenty-four thousand Israelites became involved in a situation which is described as a 'plague' (Num. 25:9). God's reaction to this was one of wrath and judgment and the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ was consistent in His condemnation of those in Pergamos is surely a warning to those who, in the modern context, hold the 'doctrine of Balaam'.

Another feature to be observed in addition to the Lord's condemnation concerning the trend in the church at Pergamos, is that, as in the case of the first message to the church at Ephesus, the 'Nicolaitanes' are again mentioned. Whereas the 'deeds' or the practices of the Nicolaitanes were recorded in the first message, the permeation of the 'doctrine' of these people within the church had become such as to warrant the warning of the Lord. It will be noted that the Lord averred that He 'hated' this subject — an attitude which should stimulate further enquiry and alignment with Him Whose Name Christianity bears.

The general voice of antiquity accuses the Nicolaitanes of legalising that which God prescribed as illegal, i.e., the eating of things offered to idols and of mixing in and encouraging idolatrous worship. The morality of these people was the very antithesis of that to be found in the Law of the Lord — a Law which, to them, was totally unacceptable because of its prohibitions and restrictions. It is significant to note that this group of people derived their name from Nicolaus whose name literally means 'conqueror of the people'. It will be noted that Pergamos had been induced to depart from the Directives of God and were using the instruction of the Nicolaitanes for the literal translation of the Greek text is: "So hast thou also in addition those that use (Greek: *krateo*) the instruction (Greek: *didache*) of the Nicolaitanes which thing I hate." The 'teaching or instruction' of the Nicolaitanes centred on the complete breakdown of any form of separation depending for its existence on integration in all forms. Nicolaus, after whom the group was named, will be found to have been elected as one of the first seven deacons of the church (Acts 6:5) and it was the accommodation of this proselyte from Antioch which resulted in the Law of the Lord being phased out and 'grace' taught in its place. The fact that the 'doctrine of the Nicolaitanes' was roundly condemned by the Lord is thus in keeping with His avowed statement that the Law of

the Lord was valid and should remain so till 'heaven and earth pass' (Matt. 5:17-18). It is small wonder that the Lord pointed an accusing finger at this assembly at Pergamos for Satan had indeed engulfed this church with his evil and anti-Christ machinations and very few indeed escaped these.

As has been mentioned previously, the seven messages to the churches in Asia carry both the immediate and local message as well as that which extends into the future, with that to the church at Smyrna extending to the time of the ten-year persecution of Christianity under Diocletian. It is not without significance that the next stage of church history as recorded by secular historians follows the pattern as revealed in the message to the church at Pergamos. The intense persecutions of Diocletian came to an end in A.D. 313 when Constantine succeeded to the throne in Rome and within twenty-four years, half the Roman population professed a conversion to Christianity as a religion. However, it is quite apparent that this was political expediency motivated by a desire to curry favour with the Emperor who was said to be converted to Christ. An outward show of Christianity began to appear but subsequent developments indicated a complete lack of inward conviction. A combination of pagan idolatry and Christian ceremonies soon indicated the meaning of the prophetic message to the church at Pergamos for this integration of paganism and Christianity and *vice versa* establishes an unholy marriage with the power of Satan himself.

History tears aside the facade of Roman conversion and reveals itself for what it was, namely, an expediency by which a pseudo-faith could contaminate and utterly pervert the truth. It cannot be denied that Romanism dominated the dissemination of Christianity and even though this was brought to an end in the Reformation, the superstitions with which Rome endowed the Christian faith continue, to a lesser or larger degree, today.

Julian, the nephew of Constantine, succeeded to the throne in Rome in A.D. 361 and, according to secular sources, was instructed in matters pertaining to Christianity by no less a person than Eusebius who enjoys the title of 'father of church history'. While receiving instruction from this illustrious person, Julian was under the persuasion of Maximus, a magician steeped in the lore of ancient paganism and it was not long before he renounced Christianity and returned to the worship of the ancient Roman gods. Julian did not forbid Christian ceremonies but made it very clear that his sponsorship of paganism was a directive for the Roman populace. Julian's death two years after his succession was attended by the most obscene oaths — a testimony to his reversion to the kingdom of Satan in Roman paganism.

Jovian next succeeded to the throne in Rome and the assimilation of Christianity within pagan Rome continued. The order of official Popes was inaugurated and the foundations of Roman Christianity were were laid. In the history thus far considered one may see the amazing clarity of the prophetic message to the church at Pergamos for the 'doctrine of Balaam', the God-condemned alliance of integration, became a tragic reality when Christianity was wedded to paganism in Rome. However, the 'doctrine of the Nicolaitanes', too, has its part for 'ecclesiastical hierarchy' based on pagan priestly prerogatives, began to emerge in the Roman version of Christianity. Priestly traditions began to be superimposed over the Truth and any non-acceptance of the priestly directives was held to be blasphemy against God Himself punishable by death. In A.D. 697, Pope Agathon issued an edict in which all reactionaries to the new order of Christianity were to be persecuted and those who, in spite of all political pressures, still held on to the apostolic faith, found themselves in a similar situation to that which obtained when Diocletian embarked on his ten-year persecution of Christians.

#### *THYATIRA*

Ecclesiastical dogmas emanating from fertile brains and propounded as God-given Truth is, in a manner, the personification of the 'doctrine of the Nicolaitanes' which, with the passage

of time, has characterised the mesalliance of Christianity with Romanism. This is forcibly driven home when one considers the period of A.D. 820 when Theodora, the wife of Theophilus, the eastern Roman Emperor, caused the revival of image worship which characterised that of paganism. It is not without significance that the fourth message to the churches in Asia brings this subject to the fore. The assembly or church at Thyatira — a region very close to Pergamos — would naturally be contaminated with the same problems as obtained in the larger University city. That the 'doctrine of Balaam' was practised in this region is clearly evident from the words of the twentieth verse of the second chapter.

"Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce my servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.

The ramifications of Jezebel and the havoc caused by this Phoenician woman in the northern kingdom of Israel is recorded in the First Book of Kings. In her history, one is able to see that in her rampage in Israel, she was supported by 450 prophets of Baal and 400 of Astarte the so-called 'Queen of heaven'. Opposition was brushed aside with the, 'prophets of the Lord' put to death on her orders (I Kings 16: 31-32; 18:19) and the whole of the northern kingdom introduced to idol worship with particular emphasis on Astarte.

In the message to the church at Thyatira there is no suggestion that the Lord supported the theory of the reincarnation of the woman Jezebel — far from it. He used the illustration of Jezebel to indicate the dangerous trend in the church in that they suffered the leaders to guide them into a spiritual fornication by the propagators of false pagan worship of Venus — the Roman queen of heaven. The compromise which characterised the church at Pergamos was also in evidence at Thyatira and the apostolic faith was being diluted by the integration with pagan ideals and customs. The church was warned against a continuation of this in the words: "Behold I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds" (Rev. 2:22).

There was no repentance and as one looks on the splendour of ancient Thyatira with its dyeing industry and generally vigorous economy, its current position in Asia Minor is indeed a grim warning to those who treat the admonitions of the Lord lightly.

Theodora, the wife of Theophilus the eastern Roman Emperor, as has been mentioned previously, acted in a typical Jezebel-like vein. Christianity, having been wedded to the power of pagan Rome, was induced by this woman to commit further spiritual fornication by elevating a woman to the position of 'Queen of heaven'. Statues were erected to the virgin Mary who was endowed with the title borne by Astarte of the Phoenicians and by Papal edict, homage and worship was to be accorded her. She became the central figure in the Papal religion and the fact that she bore the same title as Astarte is borne out by a painting in the Tate Gallery where the virgin Mary was given the infamous title of 'Queen of heaven'. That the Roman elevation of Mary to deity created an era identical with undiluted paganism cannot be doubted for across all history books is blazoned the words 'the dark ages' — a period when the 'queen of heaven' took pre-eminence over 'the Word made flesh' (John 1:14). The period of darkness in which Christianity was dominated by the act of the woman Theodora, covered the years 820 to 1553 when the authority of the 'queen of heaven\*' was broken in the Reformation of the Christian faith. Thyatira — ruled by a woman — is a message which, in keeping with all others, is proven wondrously accurate and true by the cold and unbiased facts of history.

Before leaving this fourth message there is one point which requires attention and which in the previous three is lacking. Each of the first three end with an exhortation to 'overcome\*' the evils, i.e., to remain uncontaminated by the machinations of Satan which were directed against the spread of the knowledge of the accomplished Mission of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, and for the first time in the seven messages, there appears the promise of the Second

Coming of the Lord. "But unto you, I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the *depths of Satan*, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have already hold fast *till I come ...*" Note how the Lord refers to the Jezebel act as the 'depths of Satan' — the delusion of substituting Mary for Christ. The subtlety of superstition injected within the Christian Message when both the Pergamos and Thyatira eras dominated would never truly be eradicated for in each of the three succeeding messages, one finds hope in the fact that the Lord has promised to come again. This Promise has been the hope of many and today takes on a very real meaning when Satan, knowing 'that he hath but a short time', is throwing every mechanism which he has used in the past and many new ones invented for this time, into the battle of the age.

As one looks back on the four messages considered thus far, it is more than a little evident that Satan has been determined to either contain or pollute the good news of the accomplished Mission of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 15:24). He has used perversion of the Truth and unadulterated paganism; he has used the 'doctrine of Balaam'; he has used the 'doctrine of the Nicolaitanes' and he has used the fornication of Jezebel to accomplish his ends but though he may claim success with the majority, there has always been the 'little flock', the 'seven thousand in Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal' who have, under God, carried the Truth inviolate. It stands today as the hope which is centred in the Promise of the Lord: "... hold fast till I come."

#### *SARDIS*

The name of Sardis, the city in which was established the fifth of the seven Israelite churches in Asia, was derived from the predisposition of the inhabitants towards amassing great fortunes in precious gems. While being an undoubted centre of the textile industry and a city where coins were minted under the opulent Croesus, its main claim to fame arose because of the exquisite jewellery which was fashioned by the craftsmen of Sardis and distributed throughout the then known world. The name of Sardis thus became synonymous with 'precious stone' — an expression which is most illuminating in the context of the prophetic message to be found in the messages to the seven churches in Asia.

The directive of the Lord concerning the church in Sardis as it obtained in A.D. 96 is summed up in six verses, the main features of which are: "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God . . . Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their, garments; and they shall walk with me in white; for they are worthy."

In this great city of precious gems which boasted a mighty temple to Cybele, historic records indicate a state of society which was saturated with the bacchanalian lusts which characterised this worship. The apostolic faith brought to this city from the pentecostal experience by those who were present in Jerusalem for the 'feast of wave-loaves', was initially vigorous and virile but, after half a century this had begun to crumble with the little community of believers striving to hold off the erosion of worldliness. At the time when John received the Revelation, the church at Sardis, while retaining the name Christian and performing Christian ceremonies, became spiritually dead merely having a 'form of godliness but denying the power thereof.

The warning of the Lord was: "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." There was nothing silent or secretive about the judgment which fell on Sardis and likewise there will be nothing silent or secretive about the Coming of the Lord at the end of the age. History records a sudden, swift, unexpected and noisy fulfilment of the judgment on Sardis for in one day, the whole city was destroyed in an earthquake which changed the whole topography of the countryside. From that day to this,

the region has been a wilderness of ruin.

The prophetic era indicated by the message to the church at Thyatira, as has been indicated, focused attention on the period in which Christianity was dominated by 'the rule of the woman', i.e., the era of the elevation of Mary to the position of deity and worshipped as Queen of Heaven. Following the events within church history from this Thyatira era, the most important event was the Reformation which has been likened to 'a shining light', a 'precious jewel', phrases which recall to mind the meaning of the name 'Sardis'.

The Reformation, however, saw tremendous happenings on the earth which went further than is normally accepted. One is familiar with the work of such men as John Wycliffe who, in the fourteenth century, endeavoured to present the Bible to the people in their own language that they might have the light of Scripture in such a manner as to rediscover the God of Revelation. Others, too, who strove in the same context and who gave their lives for this cause are even today remembered in the history of that period. In 1552 when Papal dominion was finally broken in Britain and the Bible became available to all, it was indeed an occasion for rejoicing. However, other events were taking place which were not acknowledged and passed unnoticed by the people of Christendom. Two prophecies were in the process of being fulfilled and Christianity had been so dazzled by the brilliance of the 'precious stone' of God's Word, that no comment was made of them. In the Book of Hosea which deals with the indictment against Israel and the effect of the nation's spiritual adultery, one finds the assurance of the Lord's release from the consequences of sin.

"Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight" (Hos. 6:1-2). As nothing of the nature is recorded within the literal three days nor in the prophetic period of days of 360 years duration, some other time scale was obviously intended to which Peter makes allusion in his second epistle (II Peter 3:8) and which indicates that *with the Lord* 'one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day.' This is obviously the time scale intended in Hosea.

If one calculates the period of two thousand years during which Israel was 'torn and smitten' as commencing when the kingdom of Israel was destroyed in the Holy Land under the Assyrian invasions, this would end in 1324 A.D. It will be noted that the prophecy indicates a process thereafter for 'after two days will he revive us; in the third day he will raise us up and we shall live in his sight.' The 'revival' began from that period for this was the era of the Reformers whose efforts culminated in the presentation of the shining jewel of the open Word of God.

Another prophecy was that of Ezekiel in which the national resurrection of Israel was assured. This event is pictured in the vision of the valley of dry bones (Ezek. 37) and of which the Lord said: "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel . . ." At the outset, one is given to understand that the resurrection here implied had nothing to do with the return of the remnant from the Babylonian captivity for as is made amply clear by Ezra, this return comprised 42 360 of the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin with a sprinkling of Levi.

In the resurrection of 'the whole house of Israel' one may see it as a process for ". . . behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them" (Ezek. 37:7^8). This is the precise picture of events as they are depicted in the 'Sardis' picture. They came alive but there was no breath in them — 'thou livest and thou art dead'.

Under the impetus of the 'Sardis' revelation, the People of the Book stood up but there was no understanding of the national events which comprise almost five-sixths of the Book.

Before leaving this message to the church at Sardis, it will be recalled that the Lord said: "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent." The

'holding fast' has a very definite meaning when one considers the attempts made by the Papal authorities to recover what had been lost to them through the Reformation. While there were many very definitely in favour of a return to Rome there were those who did not 'defile their garments' and legislation was introduced to make any contact with the See of Rome illegal in Britain. This legislation involved the Royal Family, the Parliamentarians and the Clergy and as one looks on these matters today, it has become the modern tragedy that those who have not 'defiled their garments' are very few indeed.

#### *PHILADELPHIA*

The sixth message, that is, that to the church at Philadelphia, is one of commendation and encouragement. "I know thy works: behold I have set before thee an open door and no man can shut it; for thou hast a little strength and hast kept my word and hast not denied my name ..." When considering the proximity of this church to those which came under the condemnation of the Lord, it is all the more remarkable that no word of remonstrance is found associated with it. It stood aloof from the contamination which eroded the foundations of the other churches and the community retained the zeal which marked its beginning. The city of Philadelphia was never destroyed although it changed its name and is today known as Allah-shehr —the 'city of God'.

The essential difference between the 'Sardis' and the 'Philadelphia' eras in prophecy is very clearly marked in that the former is characterised by a 'deadness' and the latter by the reverse. As has been shown above, the 'raising up' which highlights the Sardis era, was manifest in the Anglo-Celto-Saxon and kindred people and the Philadelphia period, too, has a particular meaning among these people. Having emerged from the ritualistic cloisters of the Roman religion arid while making every provision against a return to the dominion of the Pope, they failed to take note of the essential requirements of Scripture, namely, that the priesthood as such was abolished for "We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (Heb. 8:1) — "... even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 6:20).

Within the church, while the yoke of Rome had been overthrown, the authority of the priesthood had not been relinquished for the priestly prerogatives still covered the same fields as did those of Rome. Among other facets of priestly authority was the right of withholding or the granting of Communion to the laity, the exercise of which was rife in the Sardis era as it had been under the periods of Roman dominion. While this doctrine obtained, there could be no 'brotherly love' - the English equivalent of the Greek "Philadelphia".

However, as the Lord reveals that an era of 'brotherly love' would follow the period of the opening of the Word of God, history faithfully records this happening. During the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries, the exercise of priestly prerogatives verged on the fanatical until checked by what is today known as non-conformism initiated by John Wesley. In 1736, John Wesley was in America but his 'high church' attitude offended many people who were further incensed when he refused to give Communion to a certain Mrs. Williamson. This refusal led to his arrest on a charge of defamation and in a subsequent indictment he was charged with improper ecclesiastical usages. Wesley left America in 1737 without standing trial.

On May 24th, 1738, Wesley attended a Moravian meeting in London and to quote his own words: "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." This was the beginning of a new understanding — the commencement of a new era and its effect, within the context of the word 'Philadelphia', became felt by all. This became an era of not only consolidation but expansion for it was from this time that the promises of God made to Israel, began to take effect.

True modern Israel in Anglo-Saxondom became "a great and mighty nation" (Gen. 18:18)

spreading abroad "to the west, and to the east, and to the north and to the south" (Gen. 28:14). Here a 'nation and a company of nations' (Gen. 35:10) developed which appeared to have as a preoccupation the Word of God. The Bible, the 'precious stone', was printed in many languages so that people all over the world might know the Plan and the Purpose of the God of Israel in His people. It was indeed an unparalleled era which lasted for 110 years and only ended when the 'precious stone', by reason of its free distribution, became the focal point of destructive criticism.

#### LAODICEA

This immediately introduces the last of the seven messages to the churches in Asia which concerned the assembly at Laodicea. In whatever way one may look at this last message, one incontestable fact emerges in that at the conclusion of the revelation of events, the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ stands knocking at the door. If one reconsiders the message to the church at Thyatira, it will be noted that the Lord said: "... hold fast *till I come*" and in that to the church at Philadelphia, He said: "Behold, *I come quickly* ..." whereas in the last message, He said: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." The three phrases are indeed most significant in that the first two are indicative of the work of the Holy Spirit, the parousia or Presence of the Lord while the last is marked by the epiphaneia or His literal appearance. As one looks back on the many other scriptures which indicate the literal appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ, one is struck by the extreme necessity for His coming again. In the Olivet Discourse, the gravity of the situation is such that unless the Lord did come, 'no flesh would be saved' (Matt. 24:22). A further indication of the urgent necessity of His Return is found in the recurrence of the days and equal in magnitude to those which necessitated the judgment of the Flood (Matt. 24:37-39). In the light of this, the message to the church at Laodicea takes on an ominous meaning.

At the outset, one is struck by the contrast in this message when compared with that to the church at Philadelphia. In the latter message, there is nothing but commendation whereas in that to Laodicea, there is nothing but condemnation. This assembly became the centre of Christian activity in Asia, indeed the meeting place for whatever church councils were held, and, in this sense, enjoyed the title of the Cathedral city of Christianity in Asia. Occupying as it did a place of prominence in the Christian world, an air of self-satisfaction permeated through this assembly and it became more concerned with position and possessions than with the task of 'letting all the house of Israel know that God hath made that same Jesus . . . both Lord and Christ.'

This situation was described by the Lord Who said: "I know thy works . . . thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing", whereas, in reality, He said they were: ". . . wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." It will be noted that this assembly boasted its possessions and in terms of its initial function, it had become completely negative, neither hot nor cold, but 'luke-warm' and in which state, the Lord said: "I will spue thee out of my mouth."

The message does not end on this pathetic note, however, for the Lord made an appeal to this assembly: "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see." That this appeal fell on deaf ears is all too apparent and today, the spade of the archaeologist reveals the awesome judgment revealed in the words: "I will spue thee out of my mouth." The epitaph to the church at Laodicea is found in the work, *The Bible, the Scholar and the Spade*, from which the following extract is taken. "Today, absolutely deserted and uninhabited, Laodicea is a pathetic but powerful witness to the fate of a lukewarm church. It was rich and self-satisfied. But its gold perished, its riches vanished away. Once again history has written with unerring finger, its confirmation of the reality of the Divine judgments and the truth of the Divine

message." Thus, with heavy presentiments, the message to the local church is left and attention is focused on the prophetic implications.

From the current behaviour of the World Council of Churches and other denominational groups, it is more than apparent that this present time is indeed the Laodicean era of church history. "Thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing ..." has a very real meaning today particularly when one considers the financial grants given to terrorist groups when there are literally millions of Christians in desperate need. Money is thus squandered on the lawless element of humanity whose profession of faith is seen in the mutilated bodies of their victims. Another instance of the 'richness' of the church is the resolve of one denomination to *withdraw its capital investments* in South Africa to force a change of policy into one which is so roundly condemned by the Lord throughout the message to the churches in Asia.

There are, of course, many clergymen who realise the significance of these times and who do not hesitate to present the picture as it really is. A Doctor of Divinity in England has said: "Traditionalism, clericalism and ecclesiasticalism have been on the increase in the Church of England during the past three generations. They have driven multitudes out of the church ..." A South African D.D. has also said: "Christianity has become a pious allegory, a dim mythical philosophy, or a mere ethic; instead of the confident proclamation that in fact and in truth, Almighty God is descended into this world that He might raise man up to a newness of life."

The charge against the church in the Laodicean age is threefold. In the first instance it lacks the Lord's 'precious stone', the eternal treasure of the Word of Life. In the second instance it lacks the 'white raiment', the Lord's righteousness, which is simply the Lord's 'right ways'. Thirdly, it is blind.

It is no exaggeration to state that there has been a general tendency to drift away from God's Holy Word which, in essence, is regarded by many as allegory in poetic language designed to communicate some deep spiritual truth which lies deeply embedded within the human consciousness. Within this concept, the Bible is relatively unimportant and this accounts for a statement made to this writer by another clergyman who said: "In the interests of Truth, the church is prepared to discard the Bible." In this, the gentleman concerned was no doubt speaking of his own denomination for there are still those who hold that the Bible is indeed, the Word of God written.

God's 'right ways' are similarly subjected to a mass of interpretation. This, of course, involves the Law of the Lord which, so many proclaim, has been abolished in the Sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here indeed is blindness for those of this persuasion fail to see that it was the 'law that was added', namely, the ritual of sacrifice, which was fulfilled in the Sacrifice thus providing an ever-present Mediator before the Throne of Grace when sin, the violation of the Law, intrudes. In this context, the Lord Jesus Christ has become 'our righteousness', and here again one finds an incredible attitude of unbelief obtaining. This is found when it is decided that 'it really doesn't matter whether or not Jesus was born of the virgin'. The assault on His Person and Identity, the lowering of His Image to conformity with the degraded state of *degenerate* humanity — these and many other facets attest to the lack of belief in the 'righteousness' of the Lord.

The 'eyesalve' to correct blindness is seen in the situation as it obtains today. It is generally held that God has no plan in operation and that His Holy Spirit is working selectively among individuals who happen to ask for special favours. It cannot be seen that the great plan for world rehabilitation announced in the National Charters of the Old Testament are still in force and, notwithstanding the current world scene, are slowly but surely reaching the point of Divine intervention when the Kingdom of God, in all its Majesty, will be established in the earth. The national aspect of this is repudiated as are all those national matters which

constitute five-sixths of the Bible. Here indeed is blindness which contributes in no small measure to the calamity of the Laodicean age.

A further indication of this is to be seen in the fact that, wrenching the statement 'I stand at the door and knock' out of context and placing it within that of the human heart, denies a hope of the termination of the Laodicean apostasy in the literal and visible Return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Looking back over the past two thousand years, one is able to see that in the seven messages to the churches or assemblies of Israel in Asia is provided, not only a directive concerning the then established communities but also a prophetic preview of seven stages of church history commencing with its inception at Pentecost and culminating in the Return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Throughout these seven stages one is given to understand that while men may exercise the gift of free will and may align themselves with anti-God forces, the Lord God of Israel was aware of this and persistently worked His purpose as laid down in His Holy Word. Notwithstanding the many vicissitudes in church history, it is of singular importance to note that the Lord formed Israel the nation to be a blessing to all the nations of the earth and it is within this nucleus that His Plan has continued and will continue until finally consummated at the end of the age.

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[[IMAGE]]

*The arrangement around the Tabernacle in the wilderness.*

## CHAPTER 2

### *THE CRYSTALLIZING OF THE REVELATION*

*"After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter."*

As in all consideration of Holy Scripture, texts should never be removed from the context and this scripture is no exception although many have quoted it in isolation to support some theory or other. One should ever bear in mind that in the original languages, the Scriptures were not marked by chapters and verses and in many cases great disservice has been done to the context by breaking the continuity of the message with the insertion of a new chapter. This practice has given licence to 'private interpretation' which has no bearing on the overall subject.

In the first verse of the fourth chapter, the opening words are usually discarded as irrelevant with all concentration made, on the speculative assessment of the 'things which must be hereafter'. In the original Greek, the words which have been translated 'After this', are *metta tasta* which literally translated provides the essential link which denies any private interpretation or the removal of the text from the context. *Metta tasta* is literally 'after these things', i.e., after John had been acquainted with the messages to the Israel assemblies in Asia and their prophetic significance which ended on the tragic note of the Lord Jesus Christ standing outside the door of the Church at Laodicea knocking to come in. As a sequel to this certain happenings were imperative if God's Plan and Purpose were to have meaning in the earth.

"Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter." There can be no denying the urgency here — an urgency resulting from the chaos of the Laodicean era in which the 'riches' of the Word of God are lacking; the essential righteousness of Christ stripped away and blindness contributing to a false masquerade. Readers are invited to read this short chapter and to note that there are five separate features blended in the one picture of

Glory and which may be summed up as follows:

- (1) A *Throne* (not an altar) on which is seated Glory Personified.
- (2) Twenty four seats occupied by elders clothed in white raiment.
- (3) Thunder and lightning emanating from the Throne.
- (4) Four living creatures in attendance round the Throne.
- (5) The worship accorded the Occupant of the Throne.

At the very outset of the Revelation, the Lord indicated that this would be given through the use of 'signs and symbols' — a feature which should be borne in mind throughout any study of this Book. The fourth chapter is symbolic and is a reflection of the Kingdom of God in *the earth*. This contention meets with all the requirements of Holy Scripture in that, from the time of Satan's disruption of the perfection of Creation, the whole tenor of Scripture is toward the 'times of the restitution of all things' (Acts 3:21) which cannot, scripturally, be construed as anything less than the re-establishment of the earthly Kingdom of God. This is the very purpose of the resurrection of the dead (John 5:28-29) and the 'great city, the holy Jerusalem' (Rev. 21: 10) finding tangible expression in *the earth*.

If one were to indulge in the simple exercise of drawing a general picture of the scene depicted in the fourth chapter on a piece of paper, a staggering fact begins to emerge. One has a central point around which are placed *twenty-four* entities which, in turn, are boxed in by four others. This is a picture identical with that which greets the eye when one considers the displacement of Israel around the Tabernacle.

It is one of the most tragic consequences of the apostasy of this time that men and women should be encouraged to think *only* in terms of the New Testament as relevant to the Christian Faith while the Old Testament suffers a patronising toleration which is divorced, in the main, from Christian concepts. Here is an example of such irresponsible teaching. How, without the Old Testament, is one able to understand this vital picture of the things which must come as the imperative conclusion to the Laodicean apostasy? The picture is surely worthy of closer study.

One will note that .the first and indeed the most stupendous feature which greeted John's eyes, was the Throne of Glory. However, John was not unique in this for there is the record of others who had seen a similar picture. Moses and the leaders in Israel were given a vision similar to that of John. "Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness . . ." (Ex. 24:9-10). Thus, at the outset, one has the picture of the leaders in Israel receiving a vision of God Himself dwelling in His Glory.

It was clearly God's intention to manifest Himself in Israel for Moses received implicit instruction for the construction of the Tabernacle and was told the reason for this in words which deny ambiguity. "And let them make *me* a sanctuary that *I may dwell among them*" (Ex. 25:8). "I will meet with you to speak to you there . . . and *I will dwell among the children of Israel*" (Ex. 29:42-45). Thus, as one shares with John the vision of God in His Glory one also sees the earthly reflection of this in the Tabernacle in the wilderness. Needless to say, the Tabernacle, the symbolism and ritual associated with it, was the peculiar possession of Israel being positioned as it was in the very centre of the assembled nation. In passing on to the second of the features enumerated above, it will be recalled that this had to do with the twenty-four elders who were seated round the Throne. Association with the Old Testament Tabernacle is not lacking here either. In the first instance, the numeral twelve, in Scripture, signifies perfect government and organisation. There were twelve patriarchs — there were twelve tribes in the organisation of God's Kingdom at Sinai — there were twelve apostles dedicated to the spreading of the good news concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. In the new Jerusalem there are twelve gates containing the twelve names of the tribes of Israel

guarded by twelve angels (Rev. 21:12). In view of all this it is obvious that the numeral twelve is expressive of perfect earthly organisation and government. Twenty-four is exactly double this number and has the same significance in its highest form — heavenly. This is thus no contradiction of the contention relating to the displacement of Israel round the Tabernacle in the wilderness.

In terms of organisation and government, there is a most significant development when one comes to consider those entrusted with service associated with the Tabernacle. As is well known, this lot fell to the tribe of Levi which, because of its peculiar function, was not allotted territory in Palestine. In the Book of Chronicles is related the twenty-four courses of the Levitical priesthood (I Chron. 24:5-19) whose function was to preserve the Law of the Lord in all its integrity and purity and to see that its requirements were met. Theirs was the task of ensuring that the Constitution of the Kingdom was observed throughout the nation. That the Levitical priesthood was abrogated by the High Priest after the Order of Melchizedek (Heb. 8:1-5) does not alter the fact that the vision granted to John has a very direct reference to the organisation of Israel round the Tabernacle in the wilderness and which must have relevance in the things which must come hereafter.

The third of the five points raised previously concerns the 'thunders and lightnings' which emanated from the Throne and which requires very little elucidation. As the same feature attended the giving of the Law of the Lord to Israel at Sinai, one may understand this as indicating the power of God issuing forth to govern and direct the affairs in His Kingdom. This, of course, has a particular significance when one considers that behaviour today, particularly within the true modern development of Israel in Anglo-Saxondom, is characterised, not by the Directives of God, but the dictates of the human conscience. This is a recurrence of the situation which led to the institution of the Judges in Israel for then 'every man did that which was right in his own eyes' (Jud. 17:6). 'Thunders and lightnings' are indeed indicative of discipline which, when one considers a later chapter in the Revelation, is precisely what will happen when the Lord returns (Rev. 19:15).

The displacement of the four 'beasts' round the Throne is further evidence of the association of the picture with Israel in the wilderness. As has been intimated previously, many have held this representation to mean the four heads of God's Creation in the earth. However, as all the features discussed this far are seen to align themselves very definitely with Israel and the Tabernacle, this contention of world representation is out of place. There are further points which put it out of court for there are obvious omissions of certain species which does not support the contention of generalisation. There is no representation for the insect kingdom just as there is no allusion to the plant or vegetable kingdom. Reference, too, to the inhabitants of the sea is missing, all of which leaves one with the feeling that the theory lacks corroborating evidence. However, if one persists with the association of John's vision with that of Israel in the wilderness, all difficulties disappear.

In the second chapter of the Book of Numbers one finds that four tribes, each with two others, are placed in deliberate arrangement around the Tabernacle. The tribes and standards were positioned as follows: On the east and in the company of Issachar and Zebulun, Judah set up the tribal standard of the *Lion*. On the southern side, Reuben raised his standard of a *Man* with which both Simeon and Gad were joined. Ephraim with the standard of the *Bull* or *Ox*, together with Manasseh and Benjamin occupied the western side while Dan, with his standard of the *Eagle* covering Asher and Naphtali, completed the 'box' around the Tabernacle. Was it then pure coincidence that these were the 'beasts' or living creatures which were in attendance on the Throne and which worshipped the King day and night? Was it pure coincidence that this was the purpose for which Israel was created (Isa. 43:21)?

The fifth feature noted at the outset of this consideration of the 'things which must be hereafter' was the worship or service accorded to the Throne by these 'beasts'. This can only

refer to Israel for in terms of Holy Scripture, this nation was formed for this purpose and at no time did God ever relieve His servant nation of their responsibility. It foreshadows the completion of Israel's role and the significant feature is that the Church, as an organised body, is not seen in the vision which, in the light of the messages to the churches and the conditions obtaining at the Laodicean period, is understandable. This vision is one which is God-honouring in the extreme showing as it does the continuing faithfulness of God to His Word: "This people, have I formed for myself, *they shall shew forth my praise*" (Isa. 43:21). Having seen the vision and having considered its symbolism, it now remains to apply this to the sequence of events which must follow the apostasy of the Laodicean age.

The overall picture as presented to John was undoubtedly intended to bring to remembrance the scene of Israel's national organisation at Sinai when the nation functioned in satellite-like fashion around the Alpha and Omega Who manifested Himself in the Tabernacle. The pattern of this is, as related in Hebrews 8:5, based on the pattern of 'heavenly things' thus bringing to the fore the meaning of the Prayer which the Lord left as a guide line to supplication. ". . . Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." While the picture is indeed a heavenly one, this is an expression of God's desire in the earthly context which is adequately vindicated when one considers the implications of the symbolism of the Tabernacle as it centres on the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The first feature of the Tabernacle was the Brazen Altar — the Altar of Sacrifice which foreshadowed the Sacrifice of the Lamb of God in terms of the 'law of commandments contained in ordinances'. The second feature was the Laver which in its original usage was for priestly use in purification prior to entering the Holy place. Here, too, is a shadow of the metaphorical washing in the precious Blood of the Lamb. Within the Holy of Holies and at the entrance stood the Candlestick illuminating the Table of Shewbread. The Candlestick finds its meaning in the Person of the Lord Who indeed is the 'Light of the world'. The 'Shewbread' also points to the Lord for He is the life-saving and life-giving 'bread from heaven'. The altar of incense, another of the furnishings of the Holy of Holies is indicative of the Lord in His Priestly office after the Order of Melchizedek. The Ark of the Covenant which was the very centre of the whole organisation of Israel's Service and worship, too, foreshadows the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. It indeed sums up the whole subject. The tremendous symbolism of the Ark of the Covenant is simply the centring of the whole Mercy of God in Christ Jesus and the Mighty Calvary Act.

This very brief consideration of the symbolism of the Tabernacle as it centres on the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ is indeed complementary to the vision which John saw. Bearing in mind that the Second Advent of the Lord is depicted in the Scriptures as a very real and tangible event — indeed the mighty and visible deliverance promised by God (Acts 3:20) — the centring of the symbolism of the Tabernacle in Him clarifies what otherwise would be obscure promises.

It will be noted that prior to the end of the age, the Lord has promised a regathering of scattered Israel and the unification of the sons of Jacob. "They (reunited Israel) shall also walk in my judgments and observe my statutes and do them" (Ezek. 37:24). This, of course, is the setting which must precede the full realisation of Israel's function in the earth for it will be noted that the Lord God said: "If ye obey my voice indeed . . . then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be unto me a *kingdom of priests and an holy nation* . . ." (Ex. 19:5-6). The priests were intimately involved with the Tabernacle and that the Lord God intends to regather all Israel within the bonds of the requirements for the priestly office, i.e., bring them under His commands, is indeed a preparation for their priestly role.

When this has been accomplished, the Lord says: "My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God and they shall be my people" (Ezek. 37:27). The Tabernacle in the

Person of the returned Lord Jesus Christ will be with Israel and the promised Millennium will have begun. This is exactly the picture which was given to John on the isle of Patmos for, in symbolism, he saw the Millennium reign of the Lord, which reign is the era in human experience when the Will of God is done in the earth as it is in heaven.

The Old Testament prophets all directed their writings toward this great experience and while the 'traditions of men' may have switched off the perception of men to the reality of the Kingdom of God in the earth, God's Plan did not deviate nor was there any alteration to the original Plan. While men's attention was focused heavenwards and their ambitions centred on achieving citizenship within the realms of God, His plan has continued for the establishment of His Kingdom on the earth. It is toward this end that the Resurrection of the dead was directed and to this end, the Lord Jesus Christ directed attention when He said: "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear my voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:28-29).

Thus, then, the whole picture of the 'things which must come hereafter', i.e., the utter failure of the Laodicean era, is the establishment of the visible and very tangible Kingdom of God in the earth. This is the hope extended to an age which continues to rot under the administration of the doctrines of men.

[[IMAGE]]

### CHAPTER 3 *THE SECULAR TAPESTRY OF THE APOCALYPSE*

A fitting, indeed needful climax, to the events of the Laodicean age are recorded in the closing verses of the fourth chapter of Revelation. Bearing in mind those tragic events in which the Church was depicted as gravitating toward self-indulgence and self-sufficiency even going so far as to place the Lord Jesus Christ outside its doors, the assurance of acceptable worship is indeed a faith-building mechanism. As one looks at the picture of the elders and the four living creatures worshipping God, one is brought to the sad realisation that the situation as it currently obtains, will continue until the Lord Himself takes a hand by exercising His Sovereignty over His people Israel thus inaugurating the Millennial Reign of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The point to note about the fourth chapter is that while it has its context arising out of the seventh stage of Church history, the picture of Almighty God dominates in contra-distinction to the Laodicean era in which *man* and his assertions are the dominating feature. The change is brought about not, unfortunately, through the change of heart in the Church, but due to the direct intervention of Almighty God Who has never abrogated His prerogatives within the Israel people. The worship as seen in the fourth chapter embodies all the implications found in the Sovereign statement of the Lord when, in the context of having made the Israel people, He said: "This people have I formed for myself, they shall shew forth my praise" (Isa. 43:21). In brief then, the fourth chapter is nothing less than the promised Millennium in which God's true Israel people will function in accordance with His Will.

As the whole tenor of Scripture is directed toward the functioning of God's Kingdom on the earth — indeed the terminal in God's Purpose in the earth — the events revealed subsequent to this must be in a time context other than the Millennium. As one therefore turns to the fifth chapter, this is confirmed in such a manner as to be unmistakable in its association with the unfolding of secular *history* as it runs parallel with that of Church history.

While the scene described in the fifth chapter appears essentially the same, there are differences which, without doubt, are intended to convey a time factor upon which the revealed events would revolve. It will be noted that in the fourth chapter, attention is focused on the Throne, the elders and the four living creatures. The worship accorded the Occupant of the Throne crystallises the whole purpose of the vision. Having thus provided the assurance, of the Kingdom to be established, the Lord then provides the 'bridge' in time by drawing attention to other features which are not present in the vision of Glory.

In the first instance, the Occupant of the Throne has a book in His right Hand which becomes the subject of the voice of the angel who asks: "Who is worthy to open the book and to loose the seals thereof?" This 'Book' is obviously not the 'book of life' (Rev. 20:12) which is opened in judgment of the dead for this only takes place at the end of the Millennium and which, so far as the Scripture is concerned, carries no seal. This 'book' was no doubt the book which Daniel was told to seal (Dan. 12:4) — a book which contained things of a secular and national character.

It is inconceivable that John would have been ignorant of the sealed book and his weeping because none was found worthy to open the book might have been because of his disappointment that the time was not at hand for the unsealing of history. However, in his lament, John heard the voice of one of the elders saying: "Weep not; behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David hath prevailed to open the book and to loose the seals thereof." John then looked and saw another change for ". . . in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts and in the midst of the elders, stood a lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes which are the seven spirits of God sent forth into all the earth."

Here indeed is the positive direction toward the time factor for the symbolism is that pertaining to the Lord Jesus Christ officiating as High Priest after the Order of Melchizedek of which the Levitical Order was but a forerunner. This fact is soon established. In John 1:29, John the Baptist, "... seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Notwithstanding the many insidious teachings which are rife today concerning the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ in which it is intended to make Him an imposter and charlatan, this statement by John establishes the Truth that He was indeed the Lamb of God.

Further unchallengeable links in the chain of evidence are to be found in the Epistle to the Hebrews where it is recorded of the Lord Jesus Christ Who, ". . . endured the cross . . . is set down at the *right hand of the throne of God*" (Heb. 12:2). All this establishes the significance of the vision which greeted John's eyes for he saw, on the *right hand* of God, the Lamb Whose Sacrifice had removed sin, taking the Book from the *right hand* of God. The essential fact here evident is that the Lamb — the Lord Jesus Christ — was still seated in His August Position on the right hand of God officiating as Mediator and had not, as yet, taken 'the throne of his father David' (Luke Jj32) which would only be at the "times of the restitution of all things" (Acts 3:21). He was not as yet the 'priest on the throne' (Zech. 6:13) but rather the High Priest seated on the right hand of God making His intercession on behalf of sin.

That the Lamb had seven 'horns' and seven 'eyes' is yet another projection of the future.

'Horns', as is explained in the Book of Daniel, are symbols of kings or dynasties in which government is centred and with which the Lord Jesus Christ is equated in Isaiah 9:6-7. The seven 'eyes' are the seven attributes with which the Lord, as described by Isaiah the prophet (Isa. 11:1-9), shall reign in the earth. Thus, in summing up the vision, one may see the Lord, having fulfilled the 'law of commandments contained in ordinances' (a peculiar Israel law) and still carrying the identification of the Lamb of Sacrifice, projecting His future function as King in Israel in the 'horns' and 'eyes'.

The remainder of the fifth chapter is taken up with the acclamation of the worthiness of the Lamb, Weymouth's translation being most illuminating: "Thou art worthy to take the scroll

and to open its seals because thou wast killed and didst redeem to God, with thy Blood, out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And thou didst make them to our God, a Royalty and a priesthood and they shall reign on the earth." This glorious anthem of praise is sung because of the saving grace of God in Christ Jesus through Whom men may 'overcome' and 'live and reign with Him' during the thousand years of the Millennium.

After this anthem of praise, the Lamb opened one of the seals and as one stands in the twentieth century and looks back, the wonder and accuracy is branded into the consciousness as the mighty Grace of God extended toward those who, with the faith of Abraham, believe Him. "And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering to conquer."

In the first four seals it will be noted that horses are employed as symbolism. Without the Old Testament as a guide, these 'horses' could be made to mean anything whereas if one uses what God has given, the story of the 'horses' in the first four seals is found to have a very real meaning in history. Horses in their primary symbolism depict war or military might, a fact which is clearly demonstrated in Deuteronomy 32:13; Psalm 66:12; Isaiah 58:14 and Zechariah 9:10. To the symbolism of 'horses' is added that of 'colour' for the four horses are described as White, Red, Black and Pale. While Zechariah 6:2-7 provides a clue as to the meaning of the last three mentioned colours, White is left for the nineteenth chapter of the Revelation to indicate its meaning as Triumphant Glory.

As has been noted in the quotation of the first two verses of the sixth chapter, the White horse had a rider to whom was given a crown as an addition, to the bow that he carried and who went forth 'conquering to conquer'. This was a picture which John could follow with consummate ease. Imperial Rome, in A.D. 96, was readily identified with the White horse. As has been stated above, the White horse is indicative of triumph and victory and it is not without significance that the Roman Emperors and all-conquering generals, invariably rode white horses in their victory parades. That the rider in the seal had a bow in his hand is expressive of armed might, which is significantly demonstrated in Ezekiel 39 where it is described that the Lord will strike the bow out of the hands of Gog as he comes up against the 'unfenced villages' in the land of Israel.

The Crown which was given to the rider is seen in the then prevailing custom of placing laurel wreaths on the heads of the conquering Roman heroes. The first seal is therefore a depiction of Imperial Rome in its heyday for at this time, all the lands formerly possessed by the three preceding Empires of Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece were now under the control and dominion of Rome.

That Imperial Rome at that time (A.D. 96-180) fulfilled all the requirements of the first Seal cannot be denied and in order to summarize this situation, a quote from Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* would not be amiss. In point of fact, if one is to fully appreciate the first four Seals of Revelation six, this rather lengthy work by a self-confessed non-Christian is invaluable. In respect of Rome in its heyday and in conformity with the first Seal, Gibbon describes the situation as follows:

"If a man were called to fix in the history of the world during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus (A.D.96—180). The vast extent of the Roman Empire was governed by absolute power, under the guidance of virtue and wisdom. The armies were restrained by the firm but gentle hands of four successive emperors, whose characters and authority commanded involuntary respect."

It is not intended here to debate the philosophy of Edward Gibbon for whatever religious

persuasion may have motivated his conclusions, his portrayal of the facts as they obtained are confirmed by countless historians who did not share his religious opinions. These facts very definitely support the contention that in the Seals, one has a progressive unfolding of the dominating secular power as history develops from the time when John received the vision on the isle of Patmos in A.D.96.

However, while the White horse and its rider finds its interpretation in the triumphant era of Imperial Roman history, as with the messages to the Churches, there appears to be a parallel set of circumstances which, in point of fact, introduces what could be called the primary or secondary meanings attached to the Revelation. It would appear out of keeping with the tenor of Scripture if Israel, the people of the Book, were suddenly lost and had no part, in the Seals. This contention in no way invalidates what has been written concerning the Roman Empire at that stage but supports the suggestion of primary and secondary meanings to be found through the Lord's Revelation.

As has been noted above, in the Old Testament the horse symbolises military might and armed conflict. However, as one proceeds with a study of the horse as it appears in the Old Testament, one finds that it is used in the context of *Israel when in a state of national blindness*. In general, a horse is a domesticated animal docile, affectionate, faithful and true but at all times, requires to be kept in hand and mastered. In order to lead a horse, a bit is put into the mouth so as to make the task easier which is precisely how God represents His people Israel when they had no understanding. It will be noted that in Isaiah 63:13 the Lord led His people "... as an horse in the wilderness that they should not stumble." Many indeed are the references to Israel in this context and as one looks forward in time to the vision which John saw at a later stage, one may see the King of Israel coming from heaven on a 'white horse' (Rev. 19:11).

One may thus see that the 'White horse' is also indicative of Israel which, from the time of its Redemption on Calvary, *could* go forth 'conquering to conquer'. It should be noted that the Apostles were Israelites and that Peter instructed those Israelites present at Pentecost to "... let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus both Lord and Christ." Thus the first 'going forth' of the news of the 'White rider' — the Lord Jesus Christ — was within the context of Israel.

Israel, having been redeemed to God through the Calvary Act, was now in a position to fulfil her commission if she accepted her national redemption. She could go forth 'conquering to conquer'. When Peter told the assembly at Pentecost to inform Israel concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, he was fulfilling the Lord's commission to him to "Feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17) — the first step in the regathering of scattered Israel *so* that they could indeed be God's "... battle-axe and weapons of war" — the symbol of the 'bow' in the hand of the rider of the White horse. This surely reminds one of Joseph's bow which "... abode in strength and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob" (Gen. 49:24). The 'crown' which was given to the rider, i.e., the symbol of the victory, is surely the victory expressed by the Lord Jesus Christ when He said: "Fear not little flock (sheep — Israel); for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

Is it pure coincidence one wonders, that the White Horse figures so prominently in British history? In Thierry's *Norman Conquest*, in Miller's *History of the Anglo-Saxons*, in Chamber's *British Empire* and in Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*, the figure of the White Horse is portrayed as an integral part of British history with F.E. Hume, in the *Art Journal* stating: "The Saxon White horse is still preserved in the device of Kent, a white horse rampant on a red ground, and in the various white horses cut in the surface of the chalk downs in several parts of the south and west of England."

Reverting to the secondary or perhaps primary meaning of the Seal which depicted the White horse and its rider, one may see that this indicates a victory over Satan who had succeeded in

bringing Israel under the 'curse of the Law'. "Christ hath redeemed us (Israel) from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; for it is written (in Israel's law), Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal. 3: 13). Israel's redemption was thus a victory which would project itself down the corridors of time, suffering assault from time to time but never again creating the same desperate need for a re-enactment of Calvary. As depicted in the Message to the Church at Laodicea, this victory would enter an all-time low with the need for 'eyesalve that ye may see' but none can thwart God nor diminish what He has wrought through Jesus Christ His Son on Calvary.

The assurance is that He shall send forth His Son again this time to ride a 'white horse' and to establish His Kingdom in Israel which, He assures, will have no end (Luke 1:33) thus confirming the phrase that He shall go forth 'conquering to conquer'. This will culminate in the situation described by one of the seven angels who said: "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15).

Thus in summing up the first Seal with the White horse and its rider, one may see that it has a twofold meaning. In the first instance, it depicts the continuity of Israel through the Christian dispensation until the Coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ — the broadest sweep of history into what is today the future. In the second instance, it has its near fulfilment in the depiction of the Imperial Roman Empire in its heyday providing the guide-lines to the passage of time as it is manifest in developing secular history. As will be seen in the unsealing of the book, history flows from the Revelation in such clear and concise symbolism that none may doubt that the Lord is providing all the direction necessary for men to repent for surely the 'Day of the Lord' approaches.

#### *THE RED HORSE*

"And when he had opened the second seal . . . there went out another horse that was red; and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth and that they should kill one another and there was given unto him a great sword." No matter in which way one may look at the story of the Seals of the Revelation, it is an inescapable fact that, having been introduced to the White horse and his rider with its symbolism of triumph and dominion, the second horse, Red in colour, accompanied by words which indicate civil war, surely indicates a process of disintegration.

As one stands almost two thousand years in time away from the scene on the isle of Patmos and with the wealth of historical records readily to hand, it is comparatively easy to follow, not only the symbolism employed, but the actual course of history as it was foretold and as it was revealed.

The Imperial Roman Empire very definitely achieved a dominion and general state of existence summed up by historians as 'The Golden Age of Rome'. Having achieved extensive frontiers, the Empire entered into an eighty-year period during which Roman civilisation was guarded by disciplined valour, gentle but nevertheless the powerful influence of laws and the image of a free constitution. The Roman Senate possessed the sovereign authority although it fell to the Emperors to be the executive powers of government. During an eighty-year period, i.e., from A.D. 98 to 180, the status *quo* was maintained by the Emperors Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian and the Antonines all of whom looked upon the matter of civil administration as a sacred trust. Such was their diligence, that no breath of civil unrest is recorded and until the appearance of Commodus, no hint of internal strife was evident.

In the Second Seal, the phraseology used is such that one cannot mistake the implication of civil war for the rider was given power to 'take peace from the earth', i.e., disrupt the prevailing order, which would have as a consequence, internal strife in which the people would 'kill one another'. In the recorded history of Commodus, the son of Marcus, one is able to see the precise picture as revealed by the Red horse enacted on the stage of Roman history.

At the outset, it should be noted that Marcus, the father of Commodus, was a man of the most amiable character who, while maintaining the rigid discipline of the Stoics, had one failing in that in the unsuspecting goodness of his heart, he could not see wrong in anyone. His wife, Faustina, the daughter of Pius, was as subtle as Marcus was solid. From the historical record, it would appear that Marcus was the only man in the whole Roman Empire who seemed ignorant or insensible to the irregularities of his wife — a state of bliss which crystallized into folly when Marcus requested the Senate to declare her a goddess. This was agreed to and Faustina was represented in her temples with the attributes of Juno, Venus and Ceres.

The family background is given in order that one may appreciate how it was that a son of such a virtuous father could be capable of such vices which are historically associated with him. Marcus spared nothing in the education of his son and the subsequent events in the life of Commodus reveal that artificial education cannot displace the factors of heredity. As a youth, Commodus was weak and timid relying heavily on others for direction. Having been endowed by nature with a weak and wicked disposition, he became the pawn of his attendants who gradually corrupted his mind. His dependence on others became a drug and he refused to take any initiative on his own with others ever encouraging him to acts of cruelty until it became the ruling passion in his life. At the age of fifteen, Commodus was elevated to full participation of the Imperial power and history records a long list of distasteful escapades in which he was immersed in blood and luxury.

On succeeding to the throne (A.D. 180), he was embarrassed with the command of not only a prodigious army but a mighty Empire. He had no competitor for the throne, he inherited no internal problem — he had truly inherited the Golden Age of Rome. His boredom was soon evident in the negligence of the public administration and the general breakdown in Roman discipline. The army began to lose its efficacy with desertions taking place almost daily and such was the loss of discipline that instead of fleeing to some other country to be lost to recapture, the deserters formed themselves into bands which preyed on the highways and ultimately formed themselves into an army which plundered with impunity.

The storm was growing within the Empire and the general populace was beginning to feel the effects of Commodus on the throne which made for great insecurity within Rome itself. Discounting qualifications, Commodus raised a Phrygian slave to the exalted position of his right-hand man and henceforth his actions were directed by Cleander. Lacking the qualities of a Roman, Cleander encouraged Commodus to divest Rome of the mechanics of its greatness, the position of Consul, Patrician or Senator being offered for sale at a price. Such was Cleander's influence that Gibbon wrote of the general state of Roman society in these words: "In the lucrative provincial employments, the minister shared with the governor the spoils of the people. The execution of the laws was venal and arbitrary. A wealthy criminal might obtain, not only the reversal of the sentence by which he was justly condemned; but might likewise inflict whatever punishment he pleased on the accuser, the witnesses, and the judge." Such was the beginning of the decline of Rome which indeed took peace from the earth. To counter the smouldering, embers of revolt, Cleander urged Commodus to include among the Praetorian guards, people from the barbarians who could be relied on to execute their duties without any compunction dictated by loyalty to Rome. In the passage of time, Commodus abandoned the reins of Empire concentrating his powers on the unbounded licence of indulging his sensual appetite, being guided in the matters of state by those around him. History has preserved a long list of consular senators who were put to death on the least pretext and Commodus, a dispassionate shedder of the blood of the noblest families in Rome, ended his life as he had those of others. Marcia, the favourite concubine of the Emperor, poisoned Commodus but such was the hatred of the people, that one of the inmates of the household could not wait to see him die and so rushed to his couch and strangled him. Thus ended thirteen years of tyranny and Commodus, the son of Marcus, was ignominiously buried

in an unmarked grave.

Those involved in the death of Commodus — it is clearly evident that it was not a spontaneous action — had already chosen a new Emperor, one Pertinax, whose record of fidelity to the Roman Empire was unquestioned. He strove to reverse the damage done by Commodus but to no avail. The Empire was declining but worse still, the people of the Empire were reacting to a decade of degradation and violence knew no bounds. The phrase recorded in the second Seal "... that they should kill one another" became a very real experience in Rome during the years which followed the death of Commodus. The Praetorian guards, prominent during the reign of Commodus, created more civil strife by brutally murdering Pertinax and so plunging the Empire into chaos and giving a very real meaning to the phrase "... and there was given to him a great sword."

The dual fulfilment of the symbolism of the Red horse and rider will be discussed at a later stage when the symbolism of the horse departs from the revelation of the Seals. As has been intimated previously, while in the main one may see the development in Roman history in the symbolism of the horses, the Israel association with it is equally real. Thus the Red horse and its application to some portion of Israel history cannot be ruled out but in order to present clarity in continuity, it is intended to pursue the one aspect of prophetic fulfilment as it concerns the Roman world until the symbolism of the horses ceases.

#### *THE BLACK HORSE*

"And when he had opened the third seal ... I beheld and lo, a black horse; and he that sat upon him had a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice say, A measure of wheat for a penny and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and wine . . ."

The colour black is, of course, the opposite to the colour white and it is logical to conclude that the events depicted in the Black horse symbolism should be the antithesis of those of the White horse. The Red horse, as has been seen, indicated the internal strife and civil war occasioned by the despotic rule of an Emperor who abandoned the principle of discipline and dissipated the authority of civil administration. Notwithstanding sincere efforts to correct the effects of maladministration, the situation gradually worsened until, in the general economy of Rome, the spectre of depression was seen.

The voice which spoke in the context of the Black horse drew attention to the need for stability in the cost structure of essential commodities — a statement which must inevitably lead the student to consider the financial structure of the Roman Empire. Rome was the great city in which was centred all the opulence and luxury which was afforded by those far-off times. Through a thousand channels, merchandise of every type flowed into the city and it is from this that one is able to appreciate in some small measure, the type of financial structure which characterised the Roman way of life.

The rate of customs varied considerably according to the value of the commodity, some authorities claiming that it ranged from one-eighth to one-fortieth of the saleable value. However, it has been suggested that essential products were treated to a light duty whereas luxury items became very costly. Preference was given to articles produced or manufactured by the labour of Empire subjects while commodities imported from Arabia and India were almost taxed out of existence. The historian Pliny observed that Indian commodities sold in Rome fetched a price one hundred per cent higher than the original value and that among imports from Eastern suppliers from which much revenue was derived was cinnamon, myrrh, pepper, ginger, the whole range of aromatics, precious stones, leather, cottons, silks, ebony and ivory.

It was during the period of attempted reconstruction after the civil wars that the Roman population was hit by what could be called a capital gains tax although this was limited to all legacies and inheritances and subject to a five per cent taxation. This was imposed to pay for the 'mercenaries' who were hired to deal with the deteriorating situation within the Empire.

The Emperor Caracalla found himself in the invidious position of receiving further demands from his army and levied further taxes, increasing the tax burden of legacies and inheritances by a further five per cent. This was not the only additional burden imposed on Roman citizens for Caracalla finds special mention in the annals of Roman history for his complete subjugation of the Empire to his bills of taxation. He imposed a land-tax, a capitation, i.e., the levying of tax by the head upon each person, and extortionate duties on corn, wine, oil and meat. All in all, the history of the Roman Empire between the period 200 A.D. to 250 A.D. followed, in minute detail, the provisions of the third Seal with its Black horse and rider.

### *THE PALE HORSE*

"And when he had opened the fourth seal . . . and behold, a pale horse and his name that sat on him was death, and hell followed . . . and power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth; to kill with the sword and with hunger and with death and with the beasts of the earth." That the history of the Imperial Roman Empire followed the symbolism of the first three horses *so* exactly is sufficient encouragement to look at the next development which took place and, true to the depiction of the 'pale horse', one finds famine, decay and death. Edward Gibbon, whose *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* could have been a commentary on the first four Seals of Revelation had he been predisposed to accept the Christian faith, sums up the situation in the following words: "During that calamitous period (250 A.D.—300 A.D.— Ed.), every instant of time was marked, every province of the Roman world was afflicted by barbarous invaders and military tyrants, and the ruined empire seemed to approach the last and final moments of its dissolution. This gloomy period of history has been decorated with inundations, earthquakes, praetor natural darkness . . . But a long and general famine was a calamity of a more serious kind. It was the inevitable consequence of oppression which extirpated the produce of the present and the hope of future harvests. Famine is almost always followed by epidemical diseases, the effect of scanty and unwholesome food. Other causes contributed to the famous plague which raged without interruption in every province, every city and almost every family of the Roman Empire. During some time, five thousand persons daily died in Rome; and many towns that had escaped the barbarians, were entirely depopulated."

While this picture is adequate to establish the veracity of the contention that the 'pale horse' was indeed a graphic description of the disintegration and decay of Imperial Rome, further corroborations are found in a general survey of Rome during that period. During the early years, i.e., A.D. 250 to 300, the Goths began an invasion of the provinces of the Roman Empire and only retreated after extracting a promised annual payment of tribute. A second invasion by the Goths further devastated the eastern portion of the Empire to be followed after a few years by the third invasion. At this time there were general disorders in Sicily, open rebellion in Alexandria and revolt in most parts of the Empire. It was at this stage that the famine occasioned by an acute food shortage added pestilence to the list of misfortunes now crowding in on the decaying Empire.

Desperate efforts in Rome to halt the erosion of the Empire were undermined from within for the incredible happened. Individuals sought, through the most fantastic of gymnastics, to seize the throne. Oblivious to the fact that the throne itself was in jeopardy and that the Empire was crumbling around their ears, the intrigues, assassinations and blatant corruption practised by the pretenders makes for an incredible story of imbecility.

However, such was the extent of the Roman Empire that notwithstanding all this, it managed to survive although the old constitution presided over by Nerva, Trajan and Hadrian had come to mean absolutely nothing. Government now developed almost entirely upon the Emperor who, although maintaining the Senate, did so merely as a form. In the year 275A.D.,

Aurelian, who was by no means an Emperor of great stature, was forced to suppress a sedition at Rome — an ominous sign indicating the encroaching rot which had set in on the Empire. Subsequent to his death by assassination, three Emperors ruled in quick succession, the history of which may be likened to the throes of an animal prior to its death. There was a stability in government but the rot which had set in assured that Rome would never again be the Empire it was during the Golden Age symbolised by the White horse.

Diocletian was elected Emperor in 285 A.D. and the circumstances of this has a direct bearing on the change to be noted in the context of the Seals. Significantly, the Horse, the symbolism of military activity in rulership disappears from the story — a fact which finds an explanation in Diocletian's election to the throne in Rome. *Diocletian was a statesman not a warrior*. His predecessors, notwithstanding deviations into the sphere of debauchery, were all cast in the mould of national heroes whose claims to fame were always in the context of military exercise. Diocletian, however, born of a father and mother who had been slaves to a Roman senator, distinguished himself as a diplomat rather than a soldier. He was promoted to consulship and in his diplomacy in the context of the wars with Persia showed that he had qualities in diplomatic leadership which were sorely needed at a time when the Empire was disintegrating. He was thus elected to the now vacant throne in Rome and he immediately set about stemming the tide of decay. He divided the Empire into four sections placing his associates Maximian, Galerius and Constantius, in the position of Emperor in the other three and then proceeded to embark on reforms which, though valiant, could not avert the symbolism embodied in the 'pale' horse and Imperial Rome passed into oblivion, a saga written in history and prewritten in the first four Seals of the Revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

#### *A SIGNIFICANT DUAL FULFILMENT*

Before passing on, it should be noted that in the Fifth Seal there is no evidence of the symbolism of the 'horse' and prior to a consideration of this fact, it is necessary to return to a peculiarity which is missed by many when considering the second or Red horse.

"And there went forth another horse that was red, and power was given to him ..."

It will be noted that in connection with the second or Red horse, the Scripture positively states that there went forth *another horse* that was Red — it was not necessarily the same as the White horse but another one. While this point may, at first glance, appear irrelevant it is significant that in respect of the remaining horses the wording merely concentrates on the change in colour whereas in respect of the second, it very plainly refers to *another horse*.

This point, minor as it appears, should be sufficient to encourage a second look at the Red horse to discover if, on the stage of history, there is a dual fulfilment of the symbolism. As has been noted previously and in respect of the White horse, there is a very definite dual fulfilment in this — one in respect of Imperial Rome and the other in the context of Israel, God's servant nation. That appertaining to the Red horse, too, could have a similar implication.

Prior to considering *the events* related to the Red horse and its rider in the dual aspect of fulfilment of the symbolism, it would serve a useful purpose to investigate the many occasions on which the colour red is used in Scripture and the context in which this appears. The old notion that the name 'Adam' was the first Scriptural reference to the colour red because he was made of the 'dust of the earth' which was supposed to have been red in colour has, of course, no foundation at all. The name Adam merely means a description in which the colour of blood is diffused by the skin thus presenting a fresh and fleshy hue. It is not associated with the actual colour of red as this is commonly understood.

The first reference to red does not appear in the Bible until the birth of Esau and of which it is stated: "And the first came out red, all over like a hairy garment; and they called his name Esau" (Gen. 25:25). The actual name was not given because of the redness but rather because

of the rough and wild appearance of the child. It was at a much later stage that this name was changed to Edom meaning 'red'

[[IMAGE]]

and was occasioned by the event in which he bartered the birthright for 'red pottage' (Gen. 25:30). At first glance this, would be a rather meagre excuse for the changing of the name of Jacob's twin but when one considers the many traditions which surround the name of Esau which appear in both Arab and Jewish reference books one may appreciate that the account in Genesis 25 set the seal on Esau's association with the colour red. In the traditions, Esau showed an early predisposition toward blood-letting whether this was in the sphere of hunting animals or preying on passing caravans and in consequence he was referred to as 'the bloody man'. He is recorded as being a selfish man, determined to have his own way in everything even at the expense of running contrary to his father's wishes with passion governing his life to a very marked degree.

As one turns to the Scripture, one finds that, as a rule, red is equated with selfishness, covetousness, a passionate life and sin (Isa. 1:18). If credence may be given to the traditions which surround the life of Esau then one may see why his name was changed to Edom signifying red in all its meaning. However, there may be some who are tempted to claim that Esau could not be guilty of sin for this is very definitely defined as being a 'transgression of the law' (I John 3:4) and Esau and his descendants were not present when the Law was given at Sinai. This is correct — as far as it goes but it does not take into account the background story which starts with Abraham. Abraham, it will be recalled, revealed a particular predisposition toward obedience and this was the basis on which the Abrahamic covenant hinged. "Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, and *my laws*" (Gen. 26:5). It should be noted that these laws were not those conceived by human society at that time but those given by God at some time thus far undisclosed. That Abraham would pass these laws down to his progeny is assured, when one reads the soliloquy of the Lord recorded in Genesis 18:17-19: "... For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him." In the light of this, Esau, being descended through Abraham's son Isaac, would be well informed as to what constituted the laws of God and any violation of these would constitute 'sin' in the accepted meaning of the word.

A point of great interest emerges here in that while Esau was conversant with the Law, neither he nor his descendants were given the Ordinances whereby reconciliation could be wrought through the shedding of the blood of substitutionary sacrifice. This was 'the law that was added' and of which Esau knew nothing and therefore remained dead in his sins.

As Esau and his descendants began to develop into nationhood through the assimilation with the pre-Adamite Ilorite people. God's Israel people too, were developing into national proportions and it was at that stage that red in terms of blood introduced the fact of substitutionary offering and in which the blood of the slain lamb caused the angel of death to pass over. It is not intended here to enlarge on this subject — it is surely well known — but merely to emphasise that the colour red had, as one of its meanings, the fact of substitution.

As one passes on through the Old Testament record, one finds that the Esau characteristic which wrought the change of name to Edom, was passed on to his progeny for in the Babylonian onslaught on Jerusalem the Edomites were particularly vicious, to such an extent that the captives in Babylon made special mention of it. The prayer of those captives, while

being simplicity itself, provides food for thought in respect of the Edomite attack on Jerusalem. "Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof" (Psa. 137:7). Even with the demise of the kingdom of Judah, the Edomites were not at rest for as one considers the history of the remnant which was given the mandate to rebuild the city and the Temple one finds the re-emergence of Edomites who slowly but surely gained dominance over true Judah and eventually became the rulers of the land known as Judaea. After almost two millennia, Esau had fulfilled the role seen by Isaac who had indicated that by his sword, Esau would live and that eventually he would take the dominion which had been given to Jacob and would then break the restraining hand which had been a burden to him (Gen. 27:40-41).

While the true progeny of Jacob remained in control of Jerusalem the witness to God's Truth would be maintained but this was not the intention of Esau whom God hated (Mal. 1:3). By this time Esau had supplanted Jacob and was passing himself off as the people of God's Covenant. It is small wonder that the Lord denounced them in such terms as to be an unmistakable indictment against them for their spurious claims (John 8:37-47).

Here, then, one may see the symbolism of the Red horse coming to the fore for as has been seen, Edom means 'red' and red is also associated with the fact of substitution, a situation which Edom contrived to bring about when they displaced true Israel and presented themselves as the Covenant heirs. It would be labouring the point to re-emphasise the many occasions on which the Lord charged the Jews with nullifying the Word of God and so the subject is left with the brief comment that that which has been written above explains the cryptic remark of the Lord when He said: "I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews (Judaeans-), and are not, but are of the synagogue of Satan" (Rev. 2:9)-

Here indeed is a charge which vindicates the contention that the true heirs to the land of promise had been displaced by a counterfeit known as the 'synagogue of Satan' and which had been substituted for true Israel. In murdering the Messiah of Israel they cried: "His blood be on us, and on our children" (Matt. 27:25) in typical Edomite passion thus staining Esau's progeny with the colour red and marking them as the anti-Christ adversaries ever seeking to expand their dominion.

The events associated with the Red horse are mainly warlike in nature and true to that which has been written above, the Jews wielded the sword and the tongue and killed and were killed. The seditions which raged in Jerusalem just prior to its destruction in A.D. 70 were indeed a graphic fulfilment of the Red horse but subsequent history is even more illuminating. To most people, the slaughter which took place in Jerusalem in A.D. 70 put an end to the aspirations of the inhabitants of Judaea whereas history records just the reverse. A few years after the Revelation was given to John and during the reign of Trajan, *Dion. Cassius* relates: "The Jews about Cyrene slew of the Romans and Greeks 220000 men with great cruelty; and again in Egypt and Cyprus 240000 men." The Roman reaction to this was that Trajan sent Lucius and other generals against them also "Marcius Turbo with great forces by sea and by land, who in various battles slew many myriads of Jews." Other historians writing of that period noted that the Jews went beserk wherever they were and turned on all and sundry: ". . . the Jews with incredible commotion, made wild as it were, by rage, rose at once in different parts of the earth. Throughout all Libya they raged the fiercest wars against the inhabitants and the country was almost desolated" (*Anc. Hist. Univ.*, Reign of Trajan). While all this was taking place, Palestine appears to have remained in a state of submission to Rome as well it might after the awful slaughter of A.D. 70. A slow trickle of Jews began to re-enter Palestine but these had neither the inclination nor the means to bring about an open confrontation with the Roman authorities. It is not without significance that a 16th century historian wrote of Hadrian's treatment of these Jews that he treated them "... as imposters and mountebanks showing his dislike for them by building a temple to Jupiter on the spot where

Solomon's Temple formerly stood.' The use of the word 'mountebank' in this context is rather significant in that it means "an itinerant quack who from a platform appealed to his audience by means of stories and tricks."

In the year 132, the 'imposters' found a leader in the person of Bar-Cochab who claimed to be the Messiah and in the subsequent revolt, the full significance of the Red horse is made clear. The statistics are briefly summed up as being 50 strong fortresses demolished, 985 towns burned and 580000 men killed with uncounted multitudes perishing from famine and sickness and an equal number captured and sold as slaves (*Anc. Univ. Hist.*, Reign of Hadrian).

Thus, notwithstanding the accuracy of fulfilment of the second Seal in Roman history, that appertaining to Esau—Edom is a very graphic indication of the pattern of dual fulfilments in the Revelation. The association of Esau with the colour red and the history of his progeny in pursuit of displacing Jacob and substituting themselves in the role of the Covenant people; the fanaticism of frustration at the Roman disruption of their plans and the subsequent blood-baths — all these add weight to the contention that the Red horse symbolism incorporates the ramifications of he who is claimed to be the 'end of the world' while Jacob is said to be the 'beginning of it that followeth'.

One could, of course, project the Red horse into the present day for the red shadows of Communism originally initiated by the Jew Karl Marx, have fallen on almost every country in the world. This anti-God system has certainly taken peace from the world; has initiated civil wars and has fomented national and international strife resulting in wars in which the metaphorical 'swords' are the modern armaments of destruction. While the red flag continues to wave in the winds of Edomite ambition to gain complete dominion over the whole world, the Word and Purpose of God, unchanging and eternal, carries its assurance that Esau-Edom shall not achieve his goal. The *ersatz* state in Palestine, wrenched in typical Edomite vein from the hands of Ephraim-Israel in 1948, is hurtling to its rendezvous with destiny — a rendezvous elucidated by the Prophet Ezekiel in dramatic words: ". . . there, the Lord the Eternal declares, I speak in hot indignation of the riff-raff of the pagans and especially of Edom, of all Edom, for taking my land to be their own, exulting in malicious spite, to pray upon its pastures. Therefore, prophesy about the land of Israel and tell the mountains, hills, watercourses, and valleys that the Lord the Eternal declares: I speak in indignation and in fury, because you have had to bear the taunting of the nations. Therefore, says the Lord Eternal, I swear that the nations round you shall have to bear taunts when they are ruined. But you shall put out your branches O mountains of Israel, you shall bear fruit for Israel my people; for soon they will be coming back ..." (Ezek. 36:5-8, Moffat).

While many are quick to claim that the Israeli State fulfils the predicted return of Israel to the land, they forget that while the return of true Israel is foreseen, so, *too, is that of Edom*. The last Book of the Old Testament plainly reveals this in terms which are unmistakable in their application. "Whereas Edom saith, We are impoverished, but *we will return and build the desolate places*; thus saith the Lord of hosts. They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom the Lord hath indignation for ever" (Mal. 1:4).

Thus, while there is every justification for projecting the Red horse and its symbolism into the present day, one should remember that the second Seal is not an end in itself — it is followed by others and by reason of the continuation of the horse symbolism, one should seek historical continuity of events. "And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine" (Rev. 6:5-6). The lesson of the Old Testament Scriptures in terms of the meaning of the colour black is most significant. It is indicative of self-indulgence in sin and emblematic of luxury. The story of Ephraim when the birthright tribe had departed from the

Laws of God is summed up by blackness for in essence it is stated: "Ephraim is a cake not turned" (Hos. 7:8) and consequently turned black. The many statements recorded by the prophets from this point provide the guidelines to what is implied in the symbolism of the Black horse and his rider. "He is a merchant, *the balances of deceit* are in his hand" (Hos. 12:7); ". . . making the ephah small, and the shekel great and *falsifying the balances by deceit* ..." (Amos 8:5). "Shall I count them pure with the *wicked balances*, and with the *bag of deceitful weights*?" (Micah 6:11).

The whole theme associated with the colour black in the Old Testament has to do with exploitation of merchandise and, in keeping with this, the Black horse of the third Seal draws attention to the economics of everyday life. The voice from the midst of the four beasts called for a return to the principle of 'the labourer is worthy of his hire' which implies that economic exploitation was taking place. The 'measure' or *choenix* of corn according to Herodotus was as much as was needed by a normal healthy person and the 'penny' or denarius was as much money as a working man could earn in a single day. From the phraseology here employed it would appear that the merchants —'a trade characteristic of the Edomites — were indulging in under-paying their employees and even considering denying them, through exorbitant prices, the everyday needs of life. Notwithstanding the general migration of the Edomites away from Palestine thus making them displaced persons wherever they settled, this became characteristic of their dealings with the people with whom they came in contact. The Black horse symbolism thus shows this pattern in its dual fulfilment.

The fourth seal which ends the symbolism of the horse may be seen as a natural sequence to the exploitation of economics as seen in the Black horse. "And I looked, and behold a pale horse, and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given to them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with the sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth" (Rev. 6:8). If one is entirely honest it will be agreed that notwithstanding other aspects of life, economics and financial gain has been responsible for untold misery in the earth. The symbolism of the Pale horse could indicate the rise of international finance which gradually developed into a major factor which created wars, depressions, hunger and strife. That this is still very much prevalent today none will deny and that it will continue until the Coming of the Lord, is equally obvious.

That the horse symbolism ends with the 'pale horse' appears to support the contention of international finance for the grip of Death and Hell can and will only be broken when righteousness, i.e., God's right ways, are returned to the earth and men desist from manipulating the destinies of people for their own gain.

Thus in the dual fulfilment of the symbolism of the horses of different colours, one is able to follow the course of history as it is exposed by the light of the 'sure word of prophecy'.

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[[IMAGE]]

*Diocletian*

#### CHAPTER 4 *THE FIFTH SEAL AND CHANGE*

*"And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held"* (Rev. 6:9).

In the primary fulfilments of the first four seals, it has been noted that the horses depicted four distinct phases in the Imperial Roman Empire covering the periods from Domitian in

A.D. 96 to Diocletian in 300. The symbolism of the horse disappears in the fifth seal — an event which calls for attention and one finds this having its meaning in the person and reign of Diocletian. As has been noted previously, this Emperor differed from his predecessors in that as they were all depicted as national heroes based on their military prowess, Diocletian was a statesman indulging in diplomacy at a time when the Empire was disintegrating. This fifth seal, in terms of time, runs parallel with the events depicted in the message to the assembly at Smyrna and in which they were told: "... and ye shall have tribulation ten days; be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev. 2:10). As has been noted in the historical events of the fourth century, this was literally fulfilled in ten literal years in which Diocletian yielded to the pressure of his pagan wife and persecuted Christianity in an unprecedented manner. Those numbers who were killed in this have no epitaph other than the record now in the fifth seal and who are depicted as being 'under the altar' and crying: "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?"

As has been emphasised previously, the Book of the Revelation is written in symbolism and metaphor and the fifth seal is no exception to this. It will be recalled that Abel, whom Cain slew, provides a graphic illustration in such a context as to make the vision which John saw run uniformly with the whole body of revealed Scripture. In that event it will be noted that 'Abel's blood' cried out unto the Lord and not Abel who was literally dead and hidden beneath the earth. In similar vein, the fact that many had suffered death under the Roman persecutions was itself a plea to Almighty God to bring an end to the bloodshed and tribulation. Thus, in the same manner as Abel's blood metaphorically cried out in supplication, in like manner the blood of those who suffered martyrdom in Diocletian's mad ten-year spree, cried out to the Lord.

The answer to the supplication of events was soon forthcoming and is recorded in the next, i.e., the sixth seal. "And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind."

There are, of course, literal earthquakes recorded in the Bible and one is reminded of that which occurred at the time when Elijah was on Horeb (I Kings 19:11) and also when the Lord Jesus Christ died on Calvary (Matt. 27:51) and also on the morning of His Resurrection (Matt. 28:2). However, the word 'earthquake' is also used in many places, as indeed are all the words of the sixth seal, to denote political upheaval and revolution. For instance, in Jeremiah 4:23,24 and 28 is the history of the overthrow of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and the language used here to describe this is almost identical with that in Revelation. Other instances are: Isaiah 24:23; 34:4; Ezekiel 32:7-8; Hosea 10:7-8. Thus the words of the sixth seal in describing the darkening of the heavens to the accompaniment of the earthquake is, on the authority of the Old Testament, synonymous with political change and violent upheaval of the then prevailing system.

If this contention is to have any validity it should surely be borne out in history and particularly the history of events in Rome attendant on the passing of the ten-year period of the intense persecution of Diocletian. The era was begun in A.D. 303 and logically it should have ended in 313- In this year Constantine succeeded Diocletian and the persecutions were ended. This in itself became the starting point of the sixth seal for with his conversion to Christianity the whole Roman civilisation underwent such a change as to constitute a

metaphorical earthquake.

For three centuries the Roman Emperor had been the Pontifex Maximus -the head priest of heathen paganism, the 'sun' around which the Empire revolved. With the advent of Constantine, the pagan 'sun' was eclipsed, being replaced by the sign of the Cross which outshone and displaced the standards of paganism which embodied all the constellations. The edict of tolerance for Christians and his later edicts suppressing heathen sacrifices became the death-blow to paganism dealt by this new Emperor who calmly went about the business of dismantling the whole mechanism on which Imperial Rome had been built. Pagans were removed from office and replaced with those who professed the Christian faith until every responsible office in government was purged of those with pagan affiliations.

With the passing of Constantine, his legacy to Rome was the epitaph to Paganism as such, providing historians such as Edward Gibbon with an opportunity to describe it in words strangely reminiscent of the words recorded in the sixth seal. Gibbon wrote: "The ruin of paganism, in the age of Theodosius, is perhaps the only example of the total extirpation of any ancient and popular superstition and may therefore, deserve to be considered as a singular event in the history of the human mind. The ruin of the pagan religion is described by the Sophists as a dreadful and amazing prodigy, which covered the earth, with darkness and restored the ancient dominion of chaos and of night." This latter phraseology may have been copied from the words of the Revelation so accurately does it depict the overthrow of paganism and the metaphorical earthquake which overtook the old Roman world. The pagan 'heavens' indeed became as 'sackcloth' departing as 'a scroll that is rolled up'.

The words of the people, crying in desperation, are recorded from the pagan standpoint in which panic-stricken inhabitants of the pagan empire saw the whole system crumbling with the ejection of one pagan official after the other. Gibbon again provides a fitting epilogue to this pagan downfall. "So rapid was the fall of paganism that only 28 years after the death of Theodosius (A.D. 395) its faint and minute vestiges were no longer visible to the eye of the legislator."

As one passes from this account of the great political earthquake which overtook the ancient Roman Empire, the Revelation draws attention to the next development which took place and which today may be verified by history. "And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree." While the convulsions depicted in the earthquake and the darkening of the pagan dominion over Rome gave way to a period of tranquil calm, four entities were ever straining on the borders in the Goths, the Huns, the Vandals and the Saracens. History records that in 322 the Goths made a tremendous attempt to reduce the Roman Empire which was then in the grip of the new reforms instituted by Constantine. They were repulsed in this but continued to make sporadic raids — indeed an ever-present menace on the borders, well described by Gibbon in the words: "The threatening tempests of the barbarians which so soon subverted the foundations of Roman greatness, hung suspended on the frontiers." Following in historical continuity, is this not precisely the implication found in the holding back of the four winds recorded in the seventh chapter of Revelation?

The loosing of these 'winds' will be seen in the era of the Trumpets but for the present it suffices to note that a calm descended on the Roman world. The purpose for this is stated as being the 'sealing' of the 'servants of our God in their foreheads', the number of which was 144000 of 'all the tribes of the children of Israel'. This period is associated with the

'Pergamos' era of Church history in which, as has been seen, the Gospel of Christ was 'married to power'. The message to that Church in that era was one which indicated that it was an accusation of insincerity and expediency. For a fuller appreciation of this the relevant portions should be re-read particularly verses 14 and 15 of the second chapter.

There can be no doubt that expediency played an important part in the events in Rome during the reign of Constantine. All official posts were given to those professing the Christian faith and in order to obtain some of these 'plums' many professed a conversion which was an expedient facade. Churches — as buildings — sprang up by the hundred and so-called conversions totalled an incredible number with public repudiations of the abominations of paganism becoming commonplace. The whole situation was most enticing for the Israel people who had suffered so much persecution at the hands of the Roman Emperors and who now saw a glimmer of hope in a 'converted' Roman world. All in all, in this period of quiet, it was the searching of the Holy Spirit seeking out the truly converted as against those who merely professed a conversion for the sake of personal advancement.

It should be noted that those to be sealed at that time, were called 'the servants of our God' and this is an expression reserved for Israel (Ex. 32:13; Lev. 25:55; Deut. 32:36,43; Isa.-65:15; Dan. 3:26). The whole subject of the 144000 is simply the sealing of true Israel at that time against the insidious and certainly spurious form of religion which had now been taken on by those who were never commissioned by the Lord to be His witnesses. It is, of course, held by some that this number has to do with the 144000 individuals witnessing to God in the present generation. However, in the Biblical and chronological context, this sealing took place during the period when the four angels held back the four winds which blew on the Roman earth. Merely making such a statement is not proof in itself but when it is confirmed by historical events, it takes on an authority which is infinitely greater than doctrine.

During the life of Theodosius who succeeded Constantine, a strange and inexplicable peace settled on the Roman world — a peace which lasted 'about the space of half an hour'. In order to show chronological continuity it is necessary to pass to the 8th chapter and the loosing of the winds held by the four angels. "And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was a silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. I saw seven angels and to them were given seven trumpets. And another came and stood at the altar having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense . . . with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God. And the angel took the censer and filled it with fire of the altar and cast it upon the earth: and there were voices and thunderings and lightnings and an earthquake."

#### *THE TRUMPET*

Unlike the opening of the previous seals, the 7th seal is not followed by a vision foreshadowing some great historical epoch or crisis. It is merely a prelude to a new series of visions under the symbolism of trumpets. The 'trumpet' is symbolic of judgment and judgment was about to fall on those who had not received the mark of God in their forehead, i.e., had not been sealed. Thus one has firstly the holding back of the winds and the space of time to be followed by judgment which is certainly evident in the history of events as they transpired during the reign of Theodosius. During this pause, John saw the vision of the censer-angel which explains why judgment was about to fall — a pause which immediately recalls the Pergamos period and the illegal marriage of Christianity to Roman paganism. The symbolism of the prelude to the seventh seal is unmistakable in that it directs one back to

the Old Testament when, under the Old Covenant and in the context of Tabernacle worship, the high priest stood at the altar of sacrifice and there received gifts of incense from the children of Israel as part of their worship. The incense was not received by God unless it had been burned upon the altar and it was the function of the high priest to offer this on the golden altar before the Holy of Holies. In John's vision, he saw this ordinance as it manifests itself in the Roman form of Christianity but he saw, too, the heavenly rejection of a ritual which had no validity and a practice which was as spurious as was the pretence of conversion.

The Bible makes it amply clear that priests as such are invalid and that since Calvary, there is only one Mediator between man and God and that is Christ Jesus the Lord. The seeking of mediation by so-called saints, martyrs or priests is thus a rejection of Biblical fact and, as such, is utterly rejected from on High. The elevation of martyrs to saints, the endowing of relics with supernatural power and the creation of shrines where formerly dwelt martyred Christians, were and are all forms of pseudo-Christianity and are totally rejected by God. It is interesting to note an historical comment on the situation as it affected Roman worship, written by Mosheim in his *Ecclesiastical History* and in which he observes: "Divine worship was now rising from one degree of pomp to another and degenerating more and more into a gaudy spectacle, only proper to attract the stupid admiration of a gazing populace."

Thus, as historical evidence mounts, one is able to see the unfolding of the Revelation which the Lord gave to John on the isle of Patmos — a revelation of history in its uninterrupted flow exposing the depths of Satan's ramification in presenting a form of godliness with associations which have their roots in abominable paganism. The 'Pergamos' story exposes this apostasy, the sixth seal re-emphasises it and the seventh carries the history on from that time.

As has been stated, the trumpet is symbolic of judgment and one may quite easily appreciate judgment on the perversion of Truth and the assumption of the Office of which the Lord Jesus Christ alone is the High Priest. It will be noted that Divine judgment fell in 'threes' and it is not without significance that three entities — Goth, Arab and Turk — each in turn invaded and scourged a 'third' part of the Empire thus covering the whole of it. From secular history one is able to see that the /and, the sea, and the rivers of Rome all had their share of the invasions by the three entities mentioned above and it serves a very useful purpose to follow these as they form part of the judgments embodied in the Trumpets of Revelation 8. In Revelation 8:7, it will be noted that a 'third part of trees was burnt up' and in Gibbon's account of the Gothic invasion of Rome is a graphic description of the first Trumpet. The devastations and the massacres occasioned by the Gothic usage of fire in their onslaught is a grim reminder of the first Trumpet of judgment. On no less than three distinct occasions did Aiaric the Bold, the Gothic leader, besiege Rome itself until finally, in 410 he succeeded in sacking the city. The sweep of the Goths was like a fire devouring the land which was ravished in much the same manner as the modern scorched earth practises.

The second Trumpet of judgment then follows and, it will be noted, is applicable to the seas. The Vandals, a branch of the Goths, were prominent in this and began their rampage in Gaul and Spain and crossing to Africa, took Carthage in 439. Genseric, their leader, then embarked on a 30-year period of devastation of the Roman fleets in the Mediterranean and this destroyed the might of Rome at sea. Thus was fulfilled the second Trumpet of judgment, the third being directed against the 'rivers and the fountains of waters'. It will be noted that this judgment is meteoric in duration and finds the fullest explanation in the Hunnish invasion

under Attila whose name was 'the scourge of God'. The sub-Alpine provinces in north Italy are the 'rivers and fountains of waters' which were the scenes of the rapid thrusts of the Huns. In the fourth Trumpet (Rev. 8:12) one finds again the metaphorical language used in the sixth seal in which the heavenly bodies are darkened indicating the overthrow of the then existing form of government. In the fourth Trumpet one may see the overthrow of the ruling powers in the tottering Roman Empire. The first three Trumpets foreshadowed the rapid declension of the Empire — her territories ravaged, her maritime possessions destroyed and all that remained to her were empty titles of her former sovereignty. Under the fourth Trumpet this, too, disappears.

The political overthrow of the Western Roman Empire was accomplished by Odoacer, the king of the Heruli who deposed Romulus Augustus, the last of the Western Roman Emperors in 476 A.D. From this date, the insignia of Roman authority was transferred to Constantinople whence an attempt at resuscitation was made by Justinian the Byzantine king in his invasion of Italy and his overthrow of the Ostrogoths. However, Imperial Rome was nearing the end of its road and nothing could prevent its utter demise as prescribed in the judgment of the Trumpets. Papal Rome, on the other hand, was growing and beginning to exercise considerable influence which was to be felt by the world in a later stage of history. This, too, was seen by John many centuries before it transpired and he was enabled to write of it and to expose it as part of the system which was both anti-God and anti-Christ.

[[IMAGE]]

a conqueror's coin, *this eighth-century silver dirham was minted by the first Umayyad caliph of Spain. The inscriptions read, in part, "There is no god but Allah" and state that the piece —roughly equivalent to a shilling in size and value—was struck in al-Andalus, as the Arabs called their Spanish domain.*

**THE DEATH THROES OF IMPERIAL ROME** *The First "Woe" - the Saracens*

*"And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads" (Rev. 9:3-4).*

The first four 'trumpets' of the eighth chapter of the Revelation provide a graphic picture of the dying Roman Empire, the seat of which was removed from Rome to Constantinople. However, while Roman officialdom was transferred eastwards, a religio-political entity which began to rival that at Constantinople developed in Rome and was founded on a corruption of Biblical Christianity. At this time, i.e., the commencement of the seventh century, the Christianity in Rome was such that if Diocletian had been resurrected, he would have found that there had been no appreciable difference in the religious conviction of the people. Prayers were offered to so-called 'saints'; there was the public use of images; veneration of relics belonging to pious men was rife; the priests were urging conformity to their religious dictates — the alternative being Purgatory; the vow of celibacy was being enforced and the universal use of the Latin tongue in Divine service was, according to the priesthood, the only procedure acceptable to God. It was on this situation that the fifth

'trumpet' of judgment sounded and the first 'woe' fell.

From the general context of the first 'woe' it would appear that Roman officialdom in Constantinople was not the main recipient of this for the assault of the 'locusts' was directed against those who had 'not the seal of God in their foreheads'. From this, it is both logical and historical to infer that the 'woe' was within the context of a religious war.

*The 'locusts' identified by history*

In the Old Testament Scriptures the term 'locust' or 'grasshopper' is used to denote numerous armies or hosts of men (Jer. 46:23; Nah. 3:15-17; Deut. 28:38-42; Psa. 75:46, etc.). Locusts are thus symbolic of destruction although in the Revelation context this entity was commanded not to destroy but to 'torment' for 'five months' (Rev. 8:5). While in the sixth trumpet the avenging host is depicted as the 'river Euphrates' (verse 14), the fifth trumpet merely describes it as 'locusts' and one is thus thrown back on secular history in order to ascertain the identity of the symbolism used.

In 612, Mohammed proclaimed his mission to wield the Sword of Islam against the infidels and Saracens by the score rallied to his call and countless horsemen from the deserts of Arabia (the home of the scorpion and the locust) began a prolonged attack on Christendom. They overran the whole of the Roman Empire exercising dominion as far westward as Spain and North Africa — a dominion which lasted until the decisive battle of Tours in A.D. 732 when Charles Martel the Frank challenged the Saracens. This battle marked the beginning of the end of the Saracen exploit which culminated in 762 A.D.

This campaign of the Saracens lasted exactly one hundred and fifty years and one is confirmed in the belief that they may be identified with the 'locusts' by this particular period. It will be noted that the Scripture provides the period of 'five months' for their 'tormenting' (verse 5) and as a Biblical month was thirty days, five times that period would be one hundred and fifty days. Prophetically, a 'day is a year' (Ezek. 4:6) and one would be very sceptical indeed if one could find no correlation between the one hundred and fifty year expedition of the Saracens and that period mentioned in the first 'woe'.

Should one claim, however, that the Saracen invasion of the West was very convenient and that it need not necessarily provide the clue to the identity of the locusts, other aspects of these Saracens add weight to the contention. Locusts and scorpions are, of course, indigenous to Arabia but as one reads the further description of these invaders, the more the evidence mounts in support of the identity. "And the shapes of the locusts were like horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns of gold, and their faces were as the faces of men. And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions. And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle" (verses 7-9).

"Crowns like gold". Pliny once wrote that the Arabs wore their hair long and uncut as a sign of their manhood and in the most characteristic of Arab poems — *Antar* — yellow turbans were considered by the people as individual 'crowns'. It was a common conviction among the Arabs that God had bestowed four peculiar things on them: that their yellow turbans should be instead of diadems; their tents instead of walls and houses; their swords instead of entrenchments and their poems instead of written law. From this may be seen that the 'crowns of gold' and 'hair as the hair of women' were the peculiar characteristic of the Arabs who, wielding the Sword of Islam, behaved as was prescribed of the 'locusts'.

"Breastplates of iron". In the traditional Arabic poem *Antar* one finds the following description of the Arabian warrior: "A warrior immersed in steel armour ... 15 000 men armed with cuirasses and well accoutred for war . . . They are clothed in armour and brilliant cuirasses . . . Out of the dust appear horsemen clad in iron." In the Koran it is stated that among God's gifts "God hath given you coats of mail to defend you in your wars."

The wealth of evidence is endless supporting the contention that the first 'woe' in Revelation 9 is identifiable with the Saracen invasion and it would serve no useful purpose to labour the point here. It will suffice to recapitulate the highlights as they support the thesis. The first 'woe' was likened to 'locusts' whose function was to 'torment' — not kill — those of the Roman earth. Mohammed proclaimed his mission in 612 and by 713 the Saracenic hordes had conquered Spain. The Battle of Tours in 732 was the first real opposition met by these people and this, together with problems in Syria, became the turning point in the incident. In 755 there appeared a division in the ranks of Islam with the Western Caliph challenging the authority of the Eastern. The history of 761 records the withdrawal from Spain and in 762 the Eastern Caliph moved the Mohammedan centre from Syria to Baghdad. This was exactly one hundred and fifty years after Mohammed had proclaimed his mission.

"One woe is past; and behold, there come two woes more hereafter." The contrast between the end of the first 'woe' and the end of the second is very marked in terms of time for, while the third follows 'quickly', no mention is made of the time lapse between the first and second 'woes'. From this one may gather that a period of respite intervenes — a fact which is borne out by secular history. Two centuries elapsed before the Turks — the sixth trumpet — burst forth from the Euphrates and destroyed the last remnant of the Imperial Roman Empire.

#### *The Sixth Trumpet*

"And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice . . . Saying to the sixth angel . . . Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates. And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men. And the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand... By these were the third part of men killed, by fire and by smoke and by brimstone which issued forth out of their mouths ..." Arising out of the description of events pertaining to the sixth trumpet, one finds that there are five major points which

[[IMAGE]]

*Saracens and Crusaders meet - a painting by Stanley Wood.*

are highlighted and may be summed up as (1) the locality of origin of the force employed; (2) the numbers involved; (3) the function of this; (4) its duration and (5) the impact of this in Europe.

It will be noted that the Scripture directs attention to the 'great river Euphrates' from which one may reasonably expect the main actors in this drama to emerge from this region. In 1062 A.D. history records that hordes of Mongol Turks under the persuasion of the Islamic faith, poured across the Euphrates river on a very wide front. The objective of this invasion was obscure for in the north it appeared to be aimed at Constantinople while in the south it crystallized into a battle for the Holy Land. This, of course, was the era of the Crusades in

which the 'Turkish' hordes were contained for almost two centuries., However, it was only after the downfall of the Crusader kingdom in 1291 A.D. that this 'Turkish' force struck at the tottering remnant of the Imperial Roman Empire.

While the general statistics of the numbers involved in this present the picture of 'two hundred thousand thousand', the literal translation of the Greek Scripture places this number as 'Two myriads of myriads' — phrases which not only give positive identity to those from the Euphrates, but also present the numbers in proportions which are more realistic.

According to Gibbon, the Turks were in the habit of reckoning their forces in 'myriads' or *tomans* which consisted of a force of 10000 men. In his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Gibbon focuses attention on Togrul who unified four sections, all of the house of Seljuk, and passed 'the Euphrates at the head of his cavalry the number of which was two hundred thousand.' While historians may differ as to the mathematics all agree that the numbers of horsemen involved in the Turkish invasion was infinitely greater than any of the contemporary armies of Europe at the close of the eleventh century.

As has been, stated above, these armies commenced warring in the Holy Land in 1062 and, while being contained by the Crusaders for almost two centuries, broke through and commenced to destroy the component parts of the Eastern Roman Empire. In 1389 Bulgaria fell to them; in 1430 Salonika was taken; Serbia was next in 1483 and Greece in 1446. By 1452 the whole of the Eastern Roman Empire was in the hands of the Turks and on the 29th May, 1453, Constantinople, the eastern capital of the Roman Empire fell as a result of the sixth Trumpet.

It is significant that the duration of this judgment was prescribed as being for 'an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year' — a period of three hundred and ninety-one literal years.

Calculating this period from the emergence of the Turks from the Euphrates river in 1062, this sixth Trumpet should have accomplished its mission in 1453 — the precise date of the fall of Constantinople. There is, however, another amazing aspect to the fulfilment of the Scripture in respect of the downfall of Constantinople which should satisfy even the most ardent critic and it is found in weapons used by the forces of the sixth Trumpet. "By these three was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued forth out of their mouths" (verse 18).

#### *Gunpowder used by the Turks*

For over a thousand years Constantinople had been proof against attack from all quarters — Goths, Huns, Avars, Persians, Bulgarians and even the Ottoman Turks who on previous occasions had laid siege to the city. Gibbon, always the unconscious commentator on the historical aspect of the Revelation, presents the picture of Turkish artillery prepared at the foundry at Adrianople. He describes how "the volleys of lances and arrows were accompanied with the smoke, the sound and the fire of the musketry and cannon" and to which he added that "the fortifications which had stood for ages against hostile violence were dismantled on all sides by the Ottoman canon, many breaches opened, and near the gate of St. Romanus, four towers levelled to the ground." One may thus see the remarkable accuracy of prophecy not only in its chronology but also in its preview given in respect of the mechanism by which the events resulted.

There is another aspect of the fall of Constantinople which should be noted prior to passing on and which is relevant to a large number of Greek manuscripts of the New Testament which were housed in the city. When it became evident that the city was the focal point of the Turkish attack, many Greek scholars left, taking with them these manuscripts into Europe

where they later came into the hands of Desiderius Erasmus who was thus enabled to produce the first complete Greek New Testament in 1516. This, as is well known, were the embers which were to add fire to the Reformation in which the Bible became an open Book and which is the general theme of the 10th chapter of the Revelation.

Thus, in summarising the sixth Trumpet, one notes that the Turks, bearing, all the marks of identity with this, accomplished the task of 'killing' the last of the former Imperial Roman Empire although leaving Papal Rome to be dealt with at the appropriate time. One would have thought that with the incredible events which saw the downfall of Constantinople in the manner prescribed in the Scripture, Rome would have taken a new look at the Scriptures which they guarded so jealously. However, the Scripture reveals that they would not repent and would indeed pursue their 'works' as beforetime (verses 20 and 21).

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[[IMAGE]]

## **JOHN WICKLIFFE 1324 - 1384**

### *CHAPTER 5 THE 'LITTLE BOOK' OF REVELATION*

After having provided a picture of the sixth Trumpet in an unmistakable light, the Revelation does not mention the end of the Turks at that stage. They were far from a spent force when they took Constantinople and history of the subsequent centuries reveals that they continued to harass the Eastern world but certainly not in the same manner as when they accomplished the task of 'killing' the last vestige of Roman rule. In 1699 and under the Treaty of Carlowitz their activity was limited although Turkish power continued to exist until 1924 when the Caliphate was dissolved and Turkey became a Republic. However, it should be remembered that they performed a service to Israel although inadvertently. They forced the Greek manuscripts of the Scripture into the Western European world in preparation for the time when the Lord said that He would 'raise up' His people and they would live in His sight (Hos. 6:1-2).

"And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire: And he had in his hand a a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth" (Rev. 10:1-2). At the commencement of this chapter, which is considered as 'parenthetical' by many Bible scholars, one notes that there is no striking revelation of events as had characterised the previous chapters. It is an exhortation — a message concerning activity in respect of the 'Little book' which, in the light of the preceding chapter brings the era of the Reformation into focus.

As has been seen, the sixth. Trumpet was active for 391 years and covered the period 1062 to 1453. During this period and in the 'isles of the west', John Wycliffe was moved to break some of the stranglehold of the Roman Church on the Scriptures. For nigh on a thousand years Christianity had been Latinised and in this, the Word of God was a closed Book to those unfamiliar with the Latin tongue. They depended entirely on the interpretation of the priests for their religious instruction and as must be evident, whatever the priest taught was held to be God-spoken. Who, for instance, could contradict Pope Nicolas when he declared:

"I am all in all; above all; so that God Himself and I, the Vicar of God have both one consistency, and am able to do almost all that God can do. It is said of me that I have a heavenly arbitrament, and therefore am able to change the nature of things and of nothing, to make things be ... Wherefore, if those things which I do be said not to be done of man, but of God, *what can you make me but God?*"

Who could deny this claim and what evidence could *be* produced to expose this blasphemy as that spawned from hell itself? The Word of God was a closed Book and such was the inherent reverence for God in the hearts of true Israel now in the isles and western coastlands of Europe, that they continued to be deluded by the pretensions of Roman Christianity. Under this, they remained slaves to the dictates of Rome but the Lord God had promised 'a raising up' and this is nowhere better illustrated than in the 10th chapter of the Revelation which shows the 'little Book' open.

#### *THE 'SEVEN THUNDERS'*

"And the angel cried with a loud voice as when a lion roared, and when he cried, seven thunders uttered their voices ... I was about to write and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered and write them not ..." It was certainly strange that John was commanded not to write the 'seven thunders' and one is tempted to ask the reason for this but even before the question is asked, the answer comes back from history — a history of the time when the Book of Life became an open Book in which the falsity of traditional Christianity was exposed. The 'thunders' of the Papal 'bulls' which pronounced dire judgment upon the heresy of Protestantism reverberated around the then known world attempting, through fear of eternal punishment, to draw the 'lost sheep' back into the wolves' fold. The seven-fold character of the Papacy is clearly set out in Revelation 17 where it is depicted as the Babylonian Harlot sitting on the seven-hilled city of Rome.

It is small wonder that John was commanded not to write the things spoken by the 'seven thunders' for, while he was commanded to 'write for *these* words are true and faithful' (Rev. 21:5) no place should be made for the erroneous mouthings of Rome's pretensions to Divine prerogatives. The Open Book of Truth certainly exalted the true Israel people of the West for the French historian D'Aubigne wrote: "Just as the Papacy degraded the Spanish peninsula, so has the Gospel exalted the British Isles." This came about when, in obedience to the message of the 10th chapter, the people began to feel the urgency of the times when, in the words of the angel of the Lord, 'there should be time no longer' (verse 6).

With the 'eating of the little book' (verse 9) there were very few indeed who could not and did not quote the Scriptures and fewer still who did not believe its message. They saw for themselves the signs of the times — the sixth Trumpet in the invasion of Constantinople — the opening of the Book — the fact of time no longer with the sounding of the seventh Trumpet. It is small wonder that their thoughts were fixed on the Promise of the Return of the Lord Jesus Christ which became an integral part of the teaching of Protestant Christianity in the Isles.. Time was indeed running out but the end was not yet for the 'beast' (Rev. 13) had not been subdued neither had the plan of Satan come to an end. These still lay in the future — a future which the subsequent chapters of the Revelation reveal.

#### *THE RESISTANCE OF ROME*

"And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God and the altar, and them that worship therein. But the court that is without the temple leave out, and measure it not: for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the

holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months" (Rev. 11: 1-2).

As one passes to what may be termed the halfway mark in the Revelation, it is of singular interest to note the specific command of the angel of the Lord as it was given against the background of almost fifteen centuries of Christian history. While today segregation and discrimination are considered as 'unChristian' — indeed much of the Lord's action in the Old Testament is similarly branded — it is an undeniable fact that the angel of the Lord commanded a discrimination against the Gentiles in the outer court. It will be noted that a measuring 'reed' or 'rod' was provided for this task and if the same yardstick was provided today, one wonders what the sum total of the exercise would be.

As ever in the task of ascertaining the meaning of phrases and symbols employed in the Revelation, one must 'search the scriptures' and the subject of the 'reed like unto a rod' in this context, as in most other instances, throws one right back into the Israel theme of the Old Testament. It will be noted that the Lord God promised His people: ". . . I will cause you to pass under *the rod* and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant . . ." (Ezek. 20:37) thus indicating that the 'rod' and the 'covenant' fall into the category of 'cause and effect' — the 'rod' having its natural effect in the promised covenant. In a nutshell, the 'rod' is the Word of God which is inextricably bound up with the subject of His covenant and in which one may see that the Lord assures that He will bring Israel under the influence of His Word thus enabling Him to fulfil His Covenant promises. It was because of God's assurance that this would transpire that Micah recorded the prayer: "Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine inheritance" (Micah 7:14).

The word 'reed' is seen by many scholars as indicating the discipline of the Holy Scriptures for, it is asserted, the Hebrew word from which this has been translated in the Old Testament is *kaneh* from which the English canon as applied to the Bible, derives its origin. This being so, the overall meaning of the opening phraseology in the eleventh chapter indicates a contrasting of Biblical doctrine with that commonly held and taught at that time. In point of fact it goes somewhat deeper in that it gives the lie to the many modern assertions which contend that 'it doesn't matter what one believes — as long as one believes'. The yardstick, the Word of God, allows for no such flexibility in faith and is uncompromising in its demands and dictates. Rome fell into the error of believing that God would accept counterfeit substitutes just as many today would project a 'form of godliness' heavenwards in the arrogant assumption that this would be acceptable in His Sight. However, the Lord has said that His Word would not return unto Him void but that it would prosper in the thing whereunto He sent it thus invalidating any interpretation of Scripture which is not in accord with the overall whole.