

THE HOUR OF DARKNESS

an Exposition of Revelation

Prof. Johan S. Malan

**“Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be
counted worthy to escape all these things that will
come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man”
(Luke 21:36)**

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Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version, unless otherwise indicated. Quotations from the King James Version are designated **KJV**, from the Amplified Bible **AB**, from the Living Bible **LB**, and from the New International Version **NIV**.

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INTRODUCTION

Never in the past has the book of Revelation been as relevant to the times as now, for we are on the threshold of the rapture and the glorification of the true Church as the bride of Christ. In the wake of this dramatic event a treacherous New World Order of political, religious and economic unity will be instituted under the leadership of the Antichrist. He will rule as a false Prince of Peace for 3½ years. The sudden collapse of his humanistic peace programme will usher in the dark days of the *great* tribulation when the whole world will be subjected to an unprecedented military dictatorship lasting another 3½ years. This international reign of terror will culminate in the battle of Armageddon.

Very aptly, Paul exhorted Christians not to despise the prophetic word (1 Thes. 5:20). It should merit priority in our thinking, our conversations and in the ordering of our lives, since it lends an extremely important future perspective of what is in store for all of us. Preachers should strongly emphasise this message, as ignorance of biblical prophecies leads to secularism and a poor insight into the true significance of world events.

The tendency in the Churches to resort to humanism and excessive involvement with secular issues, while being content with a mere form of godliness, can be attributed to a lack of prophetic understanding of end-time events. This is particularly evident in the astonishing ignorance about the dangers constituted by the inter-faith movement with its objective to unite all the world's religions.

Many of the theologians who do not expect a millennial kingdom after the second coming of Christ have substituted this future dispensation for a *Kingdom-now* theology. They blatantly exalt themselves rather than Christ and institute high positions of authority through prophets and apostles with supernatural powers. These powers are practised in close association with extra-biblical, and hence unverifiable, revelations of God's will. In so doing, they produce strange signs and wonders while striving to unite all believers. They clearly do not prepare the way for Christ with their transformations and false revival, but for the appearance of the Antichrist and the universal false prophet who will astound and deceive the world with their display of supernatural powers (Rev. 13:11-13).

By means of this review of Revelation it is proposed to bring into sharper focus the prophetic perspectives that God has provided to us in His Word. Since biblical prophecy is in most Churches either hushed up or spiritualised, and thus deprived of its original meaning

(*replacement theology*), the information to be presented here could indeed be a revelation, or even a huge disillusionment, to some. Whatever your reaction, the objective of the author is to acquaint you with the vital events related to the end-time. Without knowledge on this subject, people are not able to adequately comprehend the rapidly changing world in which we live. Ignorance of the signs of the times also results in a lack of vigilance in the midnight hour immediately prior to the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom:

I solemnly declare to you that when these things happen, the end of this age has come... Watch out! Don't let My sudden coming catch you unawares; don't let Me find you living in careless ease, carousing and drinking, and occupied with the problems of this life, like all the rest of the world. Keep a constant watch (Lk. 21:32-36 LB).

Christ also reprimanded the people of the first century for their inability to discern the signs of His first coming (Lk. 12:54-56). They were able weather-prophets, and when the clouds from the Mediterranean Sea rolled inland, they could tell that the rain was imminent. When the hot winds from the desert swept over the countryside, they could predict dry and warm conditions. Why then did they lack the ability to observe the signs of the times? These signs are just as obvious as those of nature, if one would just care to read the Bible and use the prophetic word as a frame of reference to interpret and anticipate world events.

However, criticism can also be levelled against our generation on similar grounds as to Israel's spiritual leaders in the first century. Most Christians are *hypocrites* – people who, because of their lack of discernment, have only a form of godliness. They either ignore or deny the basic truths in the Word of God, and reject reprimands about their stubbornness.

Vigilance is an indispensable disposition in the life of a born again Christian. We should constantly be on guard against the possibility of attacks and deception by the enemy of our souls. Furthermore, we should endeavour to be found occupied with the works of the Lord when He comes. The promise of His second coming, as well as the signs pointing to this event, serve to encourage and motivate us to persevere with a life dedicated to glorify our Saviour. We should realise that we do not have unlimited opportunities to do the work assigned to us by the Lord Jesus, and that we will have to give account of our stewardship when He comes. What preparations have *you* made by way of a programme of spiritual commitments so that you can have confidence to face Christ before His judgement seat – not only as a saved person, but also to be found a faithful

servant?

So then each of us shall give account of himself to God (Rom. 14:12).

For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10 NIV).

The prophetic word also addresses sinners not to delay in their quest to find a refuge in the Saviour, Jesus Christ. In the prophecies, much attention is given to eternal life and eternal punishment in order that people should give due consideration to this very important matter. The spiritual interests of your soul should take precedence over the material interests of your earthly life. Eternity waits at the end of the road, and the choice about your final destination must be made now!

The prophecies of Revelation are also intended as a guide for those who will be left behind during the rapture, and have to face the turbulent times of the tribulation period. In the first place, they should hurry to be reconciled with the Lord. Furthermore, they will have to bear the immense responsibility to withstand the deception of the Antichrist and to unmask him as a counterfeit Christ. They will have to be prepared to pay the highest price for their faith. Their greatest concern should be their spiritual lives, and not physical and economic survival in a Christ-less New World Order. Knowledge of the prophetic word will be indispensable during the tribulation period.

A biblical strategy for spiritual survival during the tribulation period has been included at the end of the book. It is our sincere prayer that those of you who, by the time of the rapture, have not yet responded to the friendly invitation of the Lord Jesus to come to Him to have your sins forgiven and your burdens lifted, will have the courage of your conviction to do so in the dark days of testing and antichristian deception that lie ahead.

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Chapter 1

THE GLORIFIED CHRIST

An intelligible message

The very first verse of Revelation confirms the fact that the content of this book does not constitute an enigmatic allegory of future events, but a revelation of the book. The origin of its prophetic message is clearly stated: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants – things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified *it* by His angel to His servant John” (Rev. 1:1). These things will certainly **take place** and are not be symbolically interpreted.

By writing it down, John ensured that this important message would find its way to the entire Church of Christ. In verse 2 he states that what he has described is an accurate record of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. He is therefore merely a messenger of that which God Himself wishes to address to the Church through Jesus Christ.

In verse 3, a special blessing is promised to everyone who reads this prophecy and keeps these things faithfully in his heart: “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.”

Peter also plainly states the importance of the prophetic word:

So we have seen and proved that what the prophets said came true. You will do well to pay close attention to everything they have written, for, like lights shining into dark corners, their words help us to understand many things that otherwise would be dark and difficult. But when you consider the wonderful truth of the prophets' words, then the light will dawn in your souls and Christ the Morning Star will shine in your hearts. For no prophecy recorded in Scripture was ever thought up by the prophet himself. It was the Holy Spirit within these godly men who gave them true messages from God (2 Pet. 1:19-21 LB).

The prophetic lamp has shone through the ages and lightened up the pathway of devoted pilgrims in a dark world. Abraham sojourned in tents in a strange land. Because he had a vision of a city whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:10), he lived by faith as someone whose citizenship is in heaven – in the new Jerusalem.

Christ and His Church

The message of Revelation comes from the Triune God. It includes letters addressed to the seven Churches in Asia Minor. Since seven is the biblical number of fullness, and is often repeated in the book of Revelation, this message is addressed to the entire Church of Christ through the ages.

The excellence of the Lord Jesus as Head of the Church is extolled in a sentient and lofty way. He is the One who loved us and washed us from our sins with His own blood. He is the Alpha and the Omega. *Alpha* means He is the beginning of the creation of God and of the plan of salvation for man. As *Omega* He is the end of the dispensation of the Church and the One through whom we shall obtain entrance into eternal glory.

John beholds Jesus as He is during the present dispensation of the Church – moving among the golden lampstands, being intimately aware of everything that happens. The various congregations are depicted by the lampstands, as they are the containers into which the oil of the Holy Spirit is poured. When the members of the churches are filled with the Holy Spirit, they will be shining lights in a dark world.

Jesus is portrayed in His glorious appearance. He is clothed with a garment right down to His feet, and girded with a golden girdle, thereby emphasising His priestly and royal dignity. His hair, white like wool, symbolises His wisdom, while His eyes that are as a flame of fire, witness to His incisive judgement and omniscience. Nothing is hidden from His sight. His feet like fine brass as if they burned in a furnace, depict His absolute holiness and purity. Because of our sins He went through the fire of God's judgements; through Gethsemane, Calvary and the grave, without hesitation or apprehension. Consider the great sacrifice that He made to walk this path. He left the glory of heaven to be rejected on this earth – despised, mocked, beaten and executed with criminals:

His face *and* His whole appearance were marred more than any man's, and His form beyond that of the sons of men (Is. 52:14 AB). He is despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief: and we hid, as it were, *our* faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows: yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He *was* wounded for our transgressions, *He was* bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him; and by His stripes we are healed (Is. 53:3-5).

Paul not only refers to the humiliating death of Christ for our sins,

but also to the indescribable glory that befell Him in heaven after His crucifixion, resurrection and ascension:

Christ Jesus...., being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:6-11 KJV).

It is the glorified Christ whom John sees in the midst of the lampstands. He, when He was on trial, offered no plea in His defence, He opened not His mouth (Is. 53:7), but now He speaks with a great voice as the sound of many waters. No one can dispute it, argue against it or challenge its authority. His words are like a sharp sword out of His mouth – it causes division, justifies and judges. His countenance is like the sun that dispels all the darkness, and His special witnesses are as bright shining stars in His right hand. They must cause the light of the Sun of Righteousness to shine upon a world shrouded in darkness. His feet are like brass as if they burned in a furnace. Likewise, His disciples must aspire to a holy walk in life and be purified through suffering.

Jesus Christ is the One around whom the entire book centres. From the beginning people reacted differently to Him. Shortly after His birth, Simeon said to Mary: “Behold, this *Child* is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against” (Lk. 2:34). During the past 2 000 years Jesus has indeed been the rising into a new life for millions of people. The fall of many others was caused because they rejected Him and loved the darkness more than the light.

According to these two characteristics, the book of Revelation depicts Jesus Christ as Redeemer and as Judge. In the first place He is revealed as Redeemer and Head of the Church, as He walks in the midst of the lampstands. He speaks words of comfort to His faithful servants, reprimands the stubborn ones and calls to repentance the unsaved Church members who only have a form of godliness. The glorification of the Church and the everlasting kingship of Jesus are closely connected to His work of redemption.

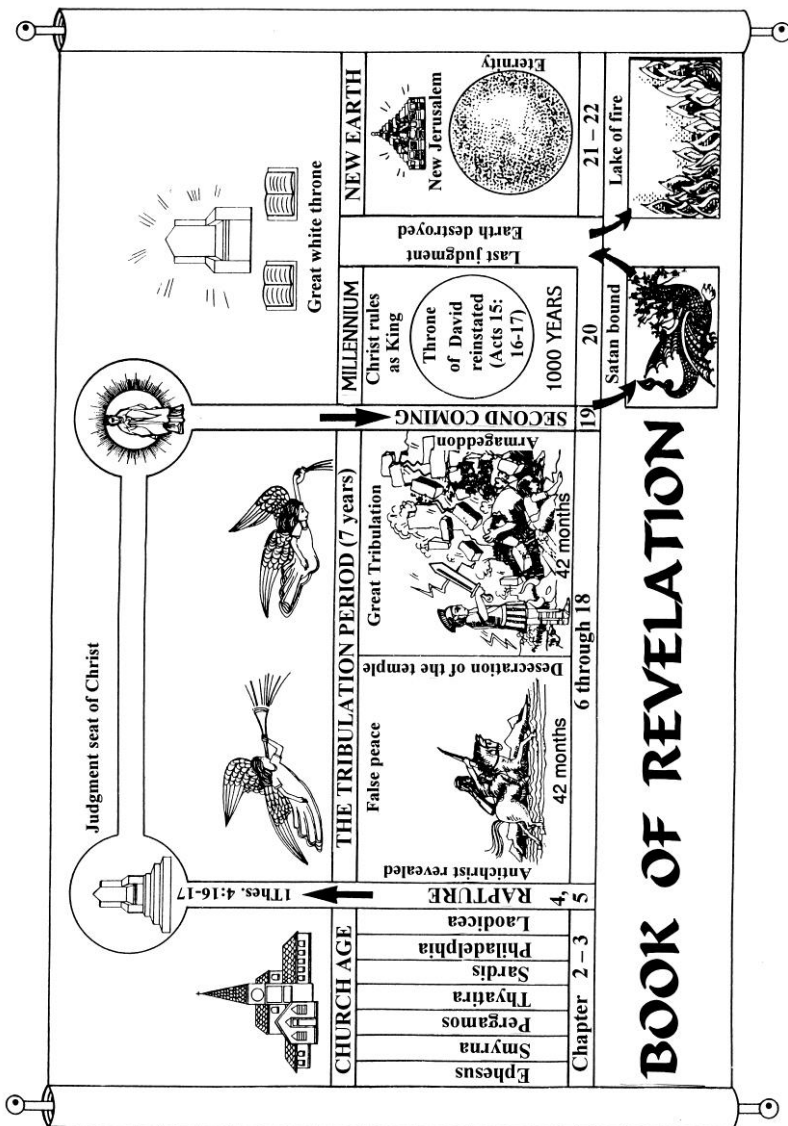


Figure 1. The chronology of Revelation

In the second place, He is revealed as the Judge who exercises judgement over all those who have rejected Him. Until the last moment He offers them the opportunity to accept Him as Redeemer. Finally, when the fullness of time is reached, He passes judgement over all the followers of the Antichrist and the false prophet with the sword that issues from His mouth.

In righteousness, in glorification as well as in judgement, the determining factor is the relationship that every person has with Christ: **for** Him or **against** Him. This is what prompts John to state in Revelation 19:10 that “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy”. He is either the Saviour of your soul, or He will be the Judge of your soul. In the great tribulation a Christ-rejecting world will be brought to trial and get a last opportunity to repent and accept Jesus as Saviour.

Sequence of prophetic events

The glorified Jesus addresses John directly, but the apostle is so overwhelmed with fear and humility that he falls like a dead man at the feet of Jesus. Shortly before the destructive end-time judgements are announced, the Lord lays a reassuring hand upon His servant and says: **“Fear not”**. He has overcome the last enemy, death, and therefore he who truly belongs to Him, has no cause for fear; he “...shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (Jn. 5:24 KJV).

In Revelation 1:19 John is commissioned to write the things he has seen, the things that are and the things that shall be hereafter. The manner in which Jesus has formulated this commission is an important key to an understanding of the book of Revelation, since three series of events are distinguished.

- First, John must record **the things he has seen**, that is, the glorified Jesus midst the seven lampstands.
- Next, he must report **the things that are**. The year 95 AD when John received the visions on Patmos, was within the dispensation of the Church. At present we still find ourselves in the same dispensation. John lived in the early years of it while we find ourselves very close to the end of the Church age.
- The main part of the message of Revelation deals with **the things that shall be hereafter**, and includes everything that will happen after the consummation of the Church age.

Viewed from this angle, it is evident that the book of Revelation has been written in a chronological order with regard to the clearly defined categories of events, that is:

- the glorified Christ, in Chapter 1;
- a review of the dispensation of the Church on earth, in Chapters 2 and 3;
- the heavenly vision, featuring also the glorified Church, in Chapters 4 and 5;
- the seven years of tribulation, in Chapters 6 to 19:10;
- the second coming of Jesus, in Chapter 19:11-21;
- the thousand year kingdom of peace, in Chapter 20:1-6;
- the final judgement, in Chapter 20:7-15; and
- the new heaven and the new earth, in Chapters 21 to 22.

Although the chronological order in the description of the major prophetic periods that follow one another is strictly adhered to, the events connected with the tribulation period (Chapters 6 to 19) are discussed subject by subject, not necessarily chronological. The events of Revelation 6 occur during the entire week (seven year period). The white horse (the bogus prince of peace) is revealed at the onset of the tribulation, while the red horse (war), the black horse (famine) and the pale horse (death) appear in the second half of the week.

The martyrs of the fifth seal are gathered throughout the tribulation, while the tremendous cosmic signs and disturbances described under the sixth seal, occur at the end of the great tribulation. The Messianic Jews of Revelation 7:1-8 are saved at the beginning of the tribulation period, while the Christian martyrs of Revelation 7:9-17 are gathered throughout the seven years. Events in the middle of the tribulation are recorded in Revelation 12 and 13.

Mystical Babylon of Revelation 17 (the false world Church) appears on the scene during the first half of the year-week. She is abandoned and killed after 3½ years, while the destruction of commercial Babylon (the city described in Revelation 18) occurs after another 3½ years at the end of the great tribulation.

People who explain and interpret the Bible in a literal, dispensational way, are called **millennialists**. The term is derived from the Latin word for **a thousand** and therefore refers to people who believe in a literal thousand year kingdom of peace on earth that will commence after the return of Christ. Because they expect the coming of Christ **before** the millennium, they are also called **pre-millennialists**.

The millennialists honour the literal meaning of the Scriptures, except where the context shows very clearly that a certain part should be interpreted symbolically. An example is the description of

a dragon with seven heads, which, according to the Bible, refers to the Devil. When the Bible speaks of Israel, Jerusalem, the great tribulation, the Antichrist, the battle of Armageddon, the binding (or total restriction) of the Devil following the return of Christ, no reason exists for these concepts to be interpreted allegorically by ascribing other meanings to it at will. The golden rule is: **When the plain sense of the word makes common sense, then seek no other sense.**

Unfortunately, there are many people who alter the primary sense of biblical statements through spiritualisation. In terms of this approach they reject the literal kingdom of peace after the second coming of Christ. They are called **amillennialists**, who assert that the thousand years of peace is a spiritual kingdom that exists on earth during the present dispensation of the Church. Consequently, the period is not a thousand years and the Devil is not bound completely – he is attached to a lengthy chain and is able, to a significant degree, to move around and do the damage he plans. There are also people who believe that the Church will, through its own efforts, improve the world and eventually usher in the millennium. According to them, Christ will return only after the present millennium. They are called **postmillennialists**.

Furthermore, the amillennialists do not believe in the physical and spiritual restoration of the people of Israel according to Old Testament prophecies. In terms of replacement theology, they regard the Church as the new Israel. They also discard the rapture, and by means of spiritualisation dispose of various literal statements in the Bible. As far as they are concerned, the prophetic message of Revelation is irrelevant to modern man because of its alleged historical fulfilment many centuries ago. The chronology of events is also denied because the thousand year reign of peace described in Revelation 20, is allegorically viewed as an integral part of the present dispensation of the Church.

Such an approach harms the credibility of the prophetic word, and causes people to disregard the spiritual preparation needed for the coming of Christ. They tend to ignore the signs of the times as they unfold before us. The inevitable result is that Christians resort to a materialistic way of life that gradually develops into a humanistic and worldly assessment of reality. Within this secular perspective, human relationships, brotherly love and all kinds of social, moral, ethical and political issues dominate their thinking while the man-God-relationship is confined to the background. Under these circumstances a heavenly vision and the expectation of the soon coming Bridegroom, quickly fade into oblivion.

Millennialism, on the other hand, places a strong focus on the basic truths of the Scriptures. It tends to develop a clear concept of God's divine plan for future events. Christians who hold this view, are disposed to interpret current affairs in the world in the light of the prophetic word and, therefore, have the spiritual ability to see a biblical pattern in contemporary events. They avoid the typical amillennial pitfall of complacency that arises from the self-imposed inference that the Devil is bound and that we can sit back and enjoy the benefits of the kingdom. Instead, they view themselves as strangers in a world that "lies in wickedness" (1 Jn. 5:19 KJV). With-in this orientation, an intensified struggle between the powers of light and darkness is expected.

Premillennialists are aware of the solemn hour in which we live, and are convinced that the dispensation of the Church is speeding towards its end. Under these circumstances they make the best use of their time to warn others to prepare their lives to meet the Lord. Greater evangelistic zeal is displayed in this manner, as the time to give effect to the Great Command is soon to expire. Furthermore, the prophetic word urges people to continuously conduct their lives according to biblical standards of holiness, in preparation for the return of Jesus. They also long for the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom, who will take them to their heavenly mansions which He has prepared for them.

Should you not be a millennialist, please do not lose interest in this book. We do not discuss man-made theological doctrines, but the basic truths that are recorded for you and me in the book of Revelation. As the name indicates, Revelation unveils the future so that we may know what to expect.

The occasional somewhat strange symbolism can be attributed to the fact that John had only the archaic terminology of the first century to narrate his visions, and consequently experienced problems in describing the modern technology and nuclear wars that were revealed to him.

I invite you to join me on a journey of discovery into this vast treasure-house of knowledge about the end-time. We will discover unsearchable riches of the love and saving grace of Christ, but also urgent warnings of the terrible judgements awaiting those who have not turned to the living God and His Son, Jesus Christ, to be saved.

Chapter 2

THE DISPENSATION OF THE CHURCH

Seven letters of encouragement and admonition were sent by Christ to the Church of the New Testament. At a time when more than a hundred congregations had been established, He selected seven that reflected the typical characteristics representative of the entire Church in the current dispensation. No hidden reason, therefore, exists why most of the congregations did not receive letters from Christ. Each Church, as well as every individual Christian, can identify with one or more of these congregation types and take the message therein to heart.

Revelation 2 and 3 furnish a vertical as well as a horizontal perspective of the Christian Church. Should a vertical 'cutting' be made of the Christian Church at any stage, it would reveal seven different layers. Such were the characteristics of the early Church when these letters were written, and the same seven categories remain the distinguishing marks of the end-time Church as well.

Besides this perspective, a horizontal division can be made of the Church in successive periods. Although these Church types were all in existence throughout the entire dispensation, the general characteristics of the Christian Church have, with the passing of time, followed the course of these seven types. In terms of this view, there are seven distinctive periods in Church history. We currently find ourselves in the period of Laodicea, the last of the seven Churches. While certain denominations still display characteristics of the first six types, the end-time Church can predominantly be described as Laodicean.

As will be evident from the discussion that follows, there is a great difference between **the Church of Christ** and **the Christian Church**. The former includes those who sincerely belong to Christ because they have been washed in His blood of their sins. The latter includes all those who belong to Christian Churches – also the nominal Christians who are not yet saved. In the spiritually degraded situation that is rife in all the large Churches, most of the members are nominal Christians who have a mere form of godliness. It is with them in mind that the Lord sends messages of repentance to five of the seven Churches.

1. Ephesus – The backslidden Church

In the year 95 when John received these messages, there were clear indications of backsliding in the Christian Church. The fervent congregations about which we read in the book of Acts, had waned and their zeal had reverted to a form of godliness in which Christ was no longer the central figure. Most Church activities were still practised, but the love of the Lord Jesus was no longer the basic motivation. Christ cannot tolerate this spiritual formalism, even though the members were extremely active. He lays His finger on the very gist of the problem when He says:

Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works; or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place – unless you repent (Rev. 2:4-5).

The Lord calls the Church to repent from the situation into which it has fallen. Humanly-motivated works done for the Church by its members are not acceptable to God. A buoyant Church is one in which the members serve God under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The congregation is called to return to its **first works**. Should they not do so, says Jesus, He will withdraw His Holy Spirit from them. Then there will be no light to their lamps, and total spiritual darkness will descend upon the Church. As an organisation controlled by human beings they could continue to survive, but they would no longer be a mouthpiece for Christ. He will transfer His lampstand to another Church that is prepared to serve Him in Spirit and in Truth.

What is the true nature of your Christian experience? Do you serve the Lord under moral or social pressure and by your own effort, or does the Holy Spirit urge you to proclaim the excellence of your Redeemer? Let your light therefore so shine that all may see it and in this way be drawn closer to Him.

A positive aspect of the members of this Church is that, in spite of their spiritual relapse, they didn't open the door to the sects. They strongly denounced the Nicolaitans, who were hateful in the eyes of the Lord. The Nicolaitans aspired to power and prestige in society, but they were very carnal and known for their loose moral practices. They endeavoured to establish an order of priests in line with the Old Testament division of the people into priests with special privileges, and lay people without any religious standing. Instead of mere shepherds, an exalted order of holy men ruled the Church. This principle is reflected in the name **Nicolaitans**, which is derived from **niko** (to subject) and **laos** (the laity or people).

This sharp division is foreign to the New Testament practice since it would restrict the spiritual growth of the believers. Ordinary members of the congregation would be inhibited and discouraged in their calling as witnesses of Christ. Under such circumstances the Church cannot effectively evangelise the world.

The condition in Ephesus is characteristic of the early Christian Church until around the year 100. It applies as much to their initial love for their Lord as to their subsequent spiritual deterioration.

2. Smyrna – the persecuted Church

Smyrna means **bitterness**, and is indicative of the ruthless persecution and intense suffering of the Church under the Roman yoke. There was hardly any conceivable method of humiliation, persecution and martyrdom that was not used against the Christians. Public scorn, derision and heavy fines, discharge from employment, and expropriation of property numbered among the lighter forms of persecution. More generally, imprisonment in musty dungeons under situations where hunger, disease and torture prevailed, as well as execution on charges of heresy, was the order of the day for thousands of Christians. At times the prisoners were let loose in the large arenas to be torn by lions and other beasts of prey. No value was placed upon their lives, and during the public executions callous spectators even derived amusement from these tragic and macabre scenes in the arenas.

The Lord cherishes an intense sympathy for these martyrs because He, too, walked the path of suffering and drank the bitter cup of persecution to the last drop. To this Church He introduces Himself as the One who was dead but is now alive. He urges them to take a firm stand in the midst of suffering, because they will be rewarded with the incorruptible resurrection life if they remain faithful. In Revelation 2:10, He says to the martyred Church:

Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the Devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

The ten days probably refer to the persecution of Christians during the rule of ten successive Roman emperors – from Nero in 64 AD, until Diocletian in the year 305. With the commencement of the Smyrna period the persecution had already started, and it would take its course for the next two centuries. The last two years under Diocletian were the bloodiest. This tyrant, like most of his predecessors, deified himself. He even took a step further and expected

people to fall on their knees at the sight of him, to kiss the seam of his garment and exclaim: **Dominus et Deus!** (My Lord and my God!). In the year 305 he proclaimed an edict by which Christians should all be divested of their possessions and civil rights, and in terms of which all Christian Churches were to be closed. The accompanying persecution is considered the bloodiest of all Christian persecutions. After the abdication of Diocletian in 305, the campaign to eradicate Christianity continued until the year 312.

3. Pergamos – the compromising Church

An important turn of events occurred in 312 AD when Emperor Constantine made an end to the persecution of Christians, by recognising and accepting the Christian faith. It is believed that while on one of his wars of conquest he saw a cross in the sky, as well as the following words: **In hoc signo vinces** (In this sign you will find victory). After this experience he obtained significant military success, and because of it he adopted the Christian faith. Through the Edict of Milan in 313 he granted equal rights to Christianity on the same level as all other religions. However, his personal involvement with Christianity raises serious doubts because he did not condemn the heathen religions, and was baptised only shortly before his death.

At any rate, the change in the religious sphere was enormous. Suddenly the persecuted Church had to fling open its doors to high-ranking officers and prominent citizens, including the emperor. All of them were prompted to become 'Christians'. The requirements of the Gospel were scaled down to make the message more popular and acceptable with the new audiences. Large sums of money were voted to the clergy by the emperor, and with the generous financial aid they erected imposing church buildings.

At the Council of Nicea in 325 AD, a body of bishops obtained control over the Church. This development opened the way for the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, harking back to the Church at Ephesus, to be introduced. The initiative for ordinary members to operate independently was gradually suppressed, and in due course everyone had to conduct himself according to the directions and rules laid down by the bishops and priests. In this way the Church encroached upon the authority of the Word of God and on the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers.

The compromise that the Church made with the secular world has inevitably given rise to disloyalty and infidelity among members. The emergence of this situation is also reflected in the name **Pergamos**, which means **marriage**. During the reign of Constantine the

Church and state contracted a marriage, but in the eyes of God an attachment of this nature amounts to spiritual adultery:

Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that the friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God (Jas. 4:4).

The Lord refers to this compromise as “the doctrine of Balaam who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality” (Rev. 2:14). According to Numbers 22 to 24, Balaam was hired by Balak, king of the Moabites, to pronounce a curse upon Israel. However, Balaam refused to do so and persuaded Balak not to resort to curses and military confrontation, but to tempt Israel by means of compromise to partake in the feasts of Baal.

This strategy brought success, and we read in Numbers 25 that Israel accepted an invitation to attend a feast for Baal in Moab. Passion prevailed and soon this new friendship induced the Israeli men to commit sexual immorality with the daughters of Moab, and to pay homage to their idols. This provoked the Lord’s anger against Israel and He caused a plague to come over them in which 24 000 people died. Balak exulted over this tragedy since he had succeeded in bringing the wrath of God upon Israel. Afterwards Moses expressed his resentment against Israel’s discarding of principles through their permissiveness. In Numbers 31 he said:

Have you kept all the women alive? Look, these *women* caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD (Num. 31:15-16).

In modern times, the same change in strategy by the enemies of God has also wreaked havoc among believers. By substituting the strategy of **confrontation and persecution** with that of **compromise**, large sectors of the Christian Church have been lured into various practices of fornication with the non-Christian religions, and with the world. Severe persecution couldn’t destroy the Christian Church in Communist countries. However, in the Western world Christian Churches had, with a few exceptions, apostatised and became so materialistic and worldly-minded that they have largely forfeited the favour of the Lord. Instead of spiritual blessings, they are bringing the wrath of God upon themselves because of their fornication and compromise with an evil world.

The warning to the Church of Pergamos not to resort to friendship with worldly concerns, should be viewed in a very serious light.

Their city was so wicked that the Lord referred to it as the place where Satan had his throne (Rev. 2:13). The city housed a library with 200 000 books, which contained many volumes with a strong impact of Greek philosophy. Polytheism was promoted, as well as Plato's metaphysics, that lead to a belief in various kinds of supernatural powers. The city also had several temples, among others the temple of Asclepius, a heathen god of healing symbolised by a snake. There were also images of the deified emperor in the city, and people were to bow in reverence before it.

In ancient times during the fall of Babylon, the Chaldean priest-king and his followers took refuge in Pergamos. Because Babylon was an important centre for pagan religions, one of the thrones of Satan was, because of this event, transferred from Babylon to Pergamos. The unbiblical tradition of the affording of political status and domination to religious leaders, thus became established in the city. Prompted by the Babylonian institution of an order of priests headed by a priest-king, a priestly hierarchy of men who also aspired to secular leadership, was introduced to the Christian Church.

Besides this, the Babylonian tradition of homage to the sun-god and the queen of heaven with her darling son, exercised their influence upon Christian circles. It eventually led to the veneration of the Madonna and her Child and the deification of Mary, mother of Jesus. The Church was thus assailed and misled from a variety of fronts. Those who would not compromise or associate with these heathen traditions, were persecuted and became martyrs for their faith. Like Antipas, they paid the highest price for refusing to compromise with unbiblical beliefs. In this letter, the Lord Jesus Christ commends people like Antipas as *faithful witnesses* (Rev. 2:13). **Antipas** means **against everything**. In the godless city of Pergamos, Antipas had little choice but to denounce just about everything.

4. Thyatira – the apostate Church

According to Alexander Hislop (*The Two Babylons*) the headquarters of the Babylonian priestly order moved from Pergamos to Rome – and with it the throne of Satan with its pagan religious system. In the year 606, Boniface III was crowned as Universal Bishop. This occasion introduced a long period of Roman Catholic domination. During the dark Middle Ages the Church was ruled by a power-hungry hierarchy of priests, bishops, archbishops, cardinals and popes. The authority of the Church was elevated above that of the Bible, and the rule of infallibility was applied to the pope's **ex cathedra** pronouncements. The position of Christ as Mediator was phased out as a result of this reform, and eventually people were

forced to confess their sins to the priests.

As a result of the Babylonian influences conveyed to the Roman Catholic Church through a number of avenues, serious theological divergence and compromise with pagan customs occurred. Among these is the worship of Mary, which is merely a Christian replica of the Babylonian queen of heaven, Semiramis. Mary was deified in the year 381, based on the assertion that she had ascended to heaven. This view is still maintained by the Catholic Church, and the present pope declared the period from 17 July 1987 to 15 August 1988 as a special year for the veneration of the Madonna. She is called **the sinless Mother of God** as well as **the heavenly Mother of the Church**.

In the letter to Thyatira the Lord compares this type of infidelity with another woman, Jezebel, who seduced the people of Israel to the service of Baal, and to adultery. In the introduction to this letter, Jesus reminds the Church that He is the Son of God. To them He is merely the son of Joseph and Mary, but at the same time they wrongly assign divinity to Mary.

To the faithful believers who would become victims of the power-hungry and tyrannical Roman Catholic Church during the **holy wars**, the Lord had a special word of encouragement in the letter to Thyatira:

But to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, and who have not known the depths of Satan, as they call *them*; I will put on you no other burden. But hold fast what you have till I come. And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations – *He shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the potter's vessels shall be broken to pieces* – as I also have received from My Father. And I will give him the morning star (Rev. 2:24-28).

A multitude of martyrs have found encouragement in these promises through the ages. If they remained faithful and did not deny their faith in Christ, they will reign with Him in His millennial kingdom. In this government no disorderliness, corruption and double standards will prevail as justice and righteousness will be observed at all times. The morning star is the promise of the Lord Jesus about a new day that will dawn upon the present, evil world in which people love darkness more than the light (Jn. 3:19).

The Thyatira period continued throughout the Middle Ages up to the Protestant Reformation.

5. Sardis – the dead Church

It is apparently a paradox to refer to the Church of the Reformation as a dead Church in the prophetic application of this letter. Yet, the Lord says: “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead” (Rev. 3:1). During this period only a sector of the Church was theologically reformed, as Roman-Catholic errors were exposed and the concept of grace was reinstated. However, despite these necessary changes, real godliness still lacked in the Church at large. The reform movement did not reach out to all the levels of Church activities since dynamic, growing churches that could evangelise heathenism in the areas around them, had not been established. The Lord reproaches them for their indifference about this serious matter: “Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die; for I have not found your works perfect before God” (Rev. 3:2).

Christ introduces Himself to this Church as *the One who has the seven Spirits of God*. This attribute of the Lord has a direct bearing on their problem, as they did not display the zeal for evangelism that may be expected from a Spirit-filled church. They made a good start, but they still needed the experience of full surrender to the Holy Spirit to get the power and motivation to fulfil the mission of the New Testament Church.

History confirms that during the 200 years of its existence, the Church of the Reformation did less evangelistic work than was undertaken within a mere 20 years in the succeeding Philadelphia period. This lack can be attributed to theological formalism without the required devotion and commitment to the One who has sent His Spirit to endue the Church with power from on high.

There were, however, also the exceptions. Many of the reformers faced tremendous personal threats, and they were prepared to defend the stand they had taken by stating their convictions in public. To them the assurance is given: “You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy” (Rev. 3:4).

6. Philadelphia – The evangelising Church

Philadelphia means **brotherly love**, and this was indeed the force behind the revival meetings and global missionary endeavours that were undertaken between 1750 and 1900. Filled with the Holy Spirit, men of faith became pioneers in carrying the light of the Gospel to the unknown regions of Asia, Africa, South America and the islands of the sea. Badly equipped and often in danger of their lives owing to hostile heathen, tropical diseases and wild animals, these mis-

sionaries accepted the difficult challenge facing them. Indigenous languages were learned with the greatest devotion. Translations of the Bible were made, schools were started and medical services rendered with the very meagre means acquired from congregations and missionary friends in their countries of origin.

In the face of all these problems the work progressed because the Lord was in it. This is what the Lord has to say to His faithful ambassadors: "See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name" (Rev. 3:8).

Among the heroes of faith who, in their time, set the world on fire with the message of Christ were names like George Whitefield, John Wesley, Charles Finney, D.L. Moody, Hudson Taylor, William Carey, Andrew Murray and many others.

The Lord encourages His servants who labour under difficult circumstances to endure and not to become weary along the way: "Behold, I come quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown" (Rev. 3:11; also refer to Heb. 11:24-26).

It is worthy to note that only the evangelising Church of Philadelphia and the martyrs' Church of Smyrna did not get any reproof from the Lord because of apostasy in their congregations. The true calling of the Church of Christ is fulfilled in faithfulness and self-denial under the most difficult conditions that may prevail on earth.

7. Laodicea – the materialistic Church

The smug and lukewarm Church of Laodicea is typical of the Church in the twentieth century, and as such it reflects the last period of Church history. As in the previous periods, some elements of all seven Churches can be recognised, but the dominant type is that of Laodicea. An alarming situation prevails in most of the modern Churches. Satisfied with their outward form of godliness, they continue on a course of formal worship while being unaware of their spiritual poverty. In spite of their prosperity and well-organised activities, Christ is not worshipped with a sincere heart. The Lord dissociates Himself from such a man-made religion that aims only at outward appearance. He gives His reason for this attitude:

So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth. Because you say, I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing – and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked (Rev. 3: 16-17; see also 1 Tim. 6:7-12).

They confess the Name of the Lord with their lips, but in their

hearts they are full of themselves and glory in their own excellence. That is humanism in its most extreme form. Laodicea is the only one of the seven congregations that does not receive a single word of commendation from the Lord Jesus as He is unable to praise them for any aspect of their religious lives. They are as loathsome to Him as lukewarm water in one's mouth. The ancient Laodiceans understood this symbolism because the water for their city came through a pipeline of a few kilometres from Hierapolis. By the time the water reached Laodicea it had become so much heated that it was repulsive to drink before it had cooled down. The Lord wants His disciples to be burning with zeal in His service. If they are not 'hot', they should rather be 'cold' towards Him, like Paul on the road to Damascus, and therefore candidates for salvation.

The wealth that features so prominently in Laodicean churches amounts to more than mere material possessions. It also refers to the intellectual achievements of modern man, and his aptitude for psychological solutions to his problems. Enchanted with his self-righteousness, he is reluctant to acknowledge his dependence upon God, and he is also too proud and unwilling to bow before Him.

Laodicea means **human rights** and clearly reflects the humanistic nature of this Church. As an institution, the Church is now controlled by man and is utilised as an instrument for the creation of a more humanistic (man-centred) society. The result is that the whole institution reflects a mere form of religion. Man becomes his own god, and he preaches a man-made prosperity gospel based on the accumulation of secular wealth and humanistic achievements.

Laodicea portrays the image of rational man without faith. He argues everything with his mind. Consequently, his religion is limited to an intellectual knowledge of the Bible. The real experience of faith, involving the acceptance of God's promise of a rebirth, is foreign to him. With his allegorical and relativistic interpretation of the Bible, he can bypass these basic spiritual demands and teach his followers to do the same. This approach leads to the establishment of a nominal Christianity and churches that evaluate themselves solely according to human standards. In terms of their academic parameters they regard themselves as exceptionally good.

Self-deception of this nature has very serious consequences. People with self-imposed righteousness without a spiritual rebirth, do not belong to the Lord. Some of them who suspect that there may be some shortcoming, either rationalise about their faith or take their refuge to some church ritual such as baptism or Holy Communion. Such acts are also misleading since these rites have been instituted to strengthen or confirm the already existing faith of a be-

liever. It does not generate faith and cannot, in itself, establish a relationship with God. A true commitment to a life of faith is done in a sincere prayer and received as a gift from God.

We read in Revelation 3:20 that, although the Lord Jesus dis-sociates Himself from the hollow Laodicean worship, He is much concerned about these deceived people and earnestly calls them to repentance. It is for this reason that He stands at the door of the twentieth century Church and knocks, that those people inside may realise their spiritual hunger and accept His invitation to a life-giving feast: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."

Except for some churches and congregations that can certainly not be classified as Laodicean, it is a fact that most of the leading churches are compromising with the world. They are engaged in concerted efforts to seek solutions for the deepening political, economic and social problems of our time. The theological decline and 'new' spiritual values that accompany the humanistic reforms manifest in various false religious movements, or cults, and will continue unabated until the Lord appears to take His faithful ones away.

Because of its self-centred attitude and heavy involvement with human affairs, the Church of the end-time is spiritually deceived and prophetically without a vision. The rapture of the true believers will therefore come as a tremendous shock to theologians, ministers and Church members alike. It will be a supernatural event that will defy rational explanation and force people to make an honest re-appraisal of fundamental biblical facts. Blessed are those who turn to the Bible for answers, and are reconciled with the Saviour. The others will continue on the path of deception and become members of the false world Church of the Antichrist.

Did you give heed to these personal letters from the Lord Jesus to His Church on earth? If so, your own spiritual weaknesses will have been identified and the correct solutions offered. In the light of these facts you will know if you are on the right way. If so, you need not have any fear for the future.

If you are unsaved or spiritually in a lukewarm state and have not yet taken the Lord's admonitions and calls to repentance seriously, you are heading for disaster. Whether you realise it or not, condemnation and eternal darkness are awaiting you. The dispensation of the Church is drawing to a close and soon we will all have to give account of our faith, or lack of faith. "Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near" (Is. 55:6).

Chapter 3

CAUGHT UP!

The trumpet shall sound

The next scene described in Revelation is in heaven, around the throne of God. The introductory phrase **After this** appears often in Revelation and is a definite indication that the information is presented in a chronological order. When John in Revelation 4:1 says: “After these things....” (in Greek **meta tauta**) it is to convey that what he is about to describe, follows on the previous scenario of the Church on earth. From chapter 4 onwards we are, therefore, dealing with future events since we are at present still within the dispensation of the Church.

To obtain a glimpse of the glorious destination of the Church, John was called to heaven in his vision. He had heard a voice like the sound of a trumpet, that said: “Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this” (Rev. 4:1). Soon the faithful are to hear a voice similar to this when Christ shall come to take them away:

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be **caught up** together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord (1 Thes. 4:16-17; emphasis added).

In a study of biblical prophecy it is important that the doctrine of the rapture should be clearly understood. The key-word in 1 Thesalonians 4:17 is **caught up** (Greek: **harpazo**). In his internationally acclaimed *Studies in the Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (p. 68-69) K.S. Wuest explains this word as follows:

HARPAZO. This is a Greek word which has various meanings. It is not translated by one uniform English word. The meanings are as follows: *To seize, to carry off by force, to claim for one's self eagerly, to snatch out or away.* It was used proverbially in the sense of *to rescue from the danger of destruction.* It was used also of divine power transferring a person marvellously and swiftly from one place to another. The word is used in Mt. 11:12, 13:19; John 6:15, 10:12, 28-29; Acts 8:39, 23:10; 2 Cor. 12:2, 4; 1 Thes. 4:17, Jude v. 23; and Rev.

12:15. The procedure in Greek exegesis when a word has a number of meanings, is to use only those meanings which are in accord with the context... Study these places where the word occurs... Pay special attention to 1 Thes. 4:17, and see how much new truth you obtain regarding the Rapture of the Church.

The following are a few examples of ways in which the word *harpazo* has been translated in the Bible:

- ☐ Snatch away (Mt. 13:19)
- ☐ Take by force (Jn. 6:15)
- ☐ Take by force from among (Acts 23:10)
- ☐ Caught away (Acts 8:39)
- ☐ Caught up (2 Cor. 12:2; 1 Thes. 4:17; Rev. 12:5)

The word **caught up** or **caught away** occurs in the verses quoted below, and leaves no doubt about its meaning:

Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord **caught** Philip **away**, so that the eunuch saw him no more (Acts 8:39).

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was **caught up** to the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:2 NIV).

And the Lord Himself will descend from heaven... And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive... shall be **caught up** together with them... to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thes. 4:16-17).

And she bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was **caught up** to God and to His throne (Rev. 12:5 KJV).

Escape from the wrath of God

A very clear promise that the rapture will occur before the tribulation period, is found in Luke 21. This promise is given after a short review of the dark days of the great tribulation:

Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to **escape** all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man (Lk. 21:36).

According to W.F. Arndt & F.W. Gingrich (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian Literature*, p. 246) the word **escape** (Greek: **ekfeugo**), as used in Luke 21:36, means **to escape tribulations**. The chronological nature of Revela-

tion clearly indicate the glorification of the Church *before* the first seal of the tribulation period is broken.

From the viewpoint of circumstances on earth, the rapture will constitute an **escape** for Christians from the tribulations that are to follow. The period immediately preceding the rapture will be a particularly dark time of spiritual deception during which the evangelical Christians will be despised and ridiculed. They will be branded as prophets of doom when they warn people against the impending judgements that will occur during the reign of the Antichrist. They will also be regarded as rebels because of their refusal to co-operate with the ecumenical unification of all faiths under the banner of a United Religions Organisation. If they remain faithful and true to the end, the Lord will take them away just before the revelation of the Antichrist and the beginning of the tribulation period. This promise was given to the Church in Thessalonika:

And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendour of his coming (2 Thes. 2:6-8 NIV).

Those who subscribe to the false, humanistic peace plans of the New Age Movement which is paving the way for a unified New World Order under the reign of the Antichrist, will *not* escape the great tribulation:

For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labour pains upon a pregnant woman. **And they shall not escape** (1 Thes. 5:3; emphasis added).

From the above verses it is evident that there will be a group of people who will escape the tribulation, while the others who didn't turn to God will suddenly and unexpectedly be overcome by it.

All these promises are in full agreement with the basic assurance given in John 5:24 that those who believe in the Lord Jesus do not come into judgement, but have passed from death into life.

Although the rapture is a unique occurrence, there are examples in the Bible of times when God poured out His wrath, but provided an escape route for the true believers as they were not the objects of His wrath. In the time of Noah, God announced His judgements over a wicked and perverted generation: "And God said to Noah, The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with

violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark..." (Gen. 6:13-14).

Shortly before the commencement of the judgements the eight believers escaped the disaster area by entering the ark. God Himself closed the door behind them before He judged the wicked people (Gen. 6:16-23).

In the time of Lot the believers were also rescued. The night before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah they were ordered to evacuate the city and flee to the mountains. The angels emphasised that they could do nothing as long as Lot and his family were still among the wicked. Fire and brimstone rained down from the heavens shortly after their departure. The cities with all their inhabitants were destroyed (Gen. 19:13-25).

The Bible says that there is a clear correlation between these historic events and God's end-time dealing with believers *and* unbelievers:

And as it was in the days of Noah, so will it also be in the days of the Son of Man: They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed *them* all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed (Lk. 17:26-30. Also read Genesis 6 and 19).

The following comparison can be made between the ancient and end-time situations:

- { In the time of Noah and Lot anarchy prevailed as people in these lawless and promiscuous societies did just what they wanted. Force was the most common means to resolve conflicts. So will it be again...
- { In the time of Noah and Lot widespread spiritual and moral decline occurred. People became so corrupt that they were 'wicked in every intent of their thoughts'. So will it be again...
- { In the time of Noah and Lot people were excessively materialistic and adopted permissive life-styles that led to all sorts of licentiousness, including sodomy (derived from *Sodom*). So will it be again...
- { In the time of Noah and Lot people scoffed at the men of God and took no heed of the prophetic warnings of forthcoming judgements. They regarded it as far-fetched speculation and continued with their

reckless lives. So will it be again...

- ƒ In the time of Noah and Lot God gave the degenerate sinners enough time to repent from their evil ways. They refused to repent and thereby sealed their own fate. They had only themselves to blame for their downfall and affliction. So will it be again...
- ƒ In the time of Noah and Lot God offered a way of escape to the believers at the critical moment before He turned in wrath to the wicked. The order of events was: First the prophetic warnings about the impending judgements, then the safeguarding of the believers who took heed of the appeal to repent, and ultimately the outpouring of wrath upon the wicked. So will it be again...
- ƒ In the time of Noah and Lot there was no security for nominal believers whose hearts were still devoted to the things of this world. Lot's wife was a type of those believers who only have an outward form of godliness, but are still spiritually dead. This false pretence cost her her life at the last moment. So will it be again...
- ƒ In the time of Noah and Lot an awful disaster struck the wicked people soon after the evacuation of the believers. Death and destruction occurred as never before in history. So will it be again...
- ƒ In the time of Noah and Lot the wicked didn't realise how many privileges and blessings they enjoyed because of the presence of a few believers in their midst. God was prepared to pardon an entire city if there were only ten believers. When these people, who shone like lights in a wicked and perverted generation, were taken out of the way, complete spiritual darkness befell the godless and provoked the anger of God. So will it be again...
- ƒ In the time of Noah people scoffed at the builders of the ark: "and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. This is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man" (Mt. 24:39 NIV).

Deception

Immediately after the rapture, panic-stricken people will desperately attempt to explain the mystery of the sudden disappearance of millions of people from planet earth. The enigma will even be more confusing when it becomes evident that large numbers of nominal (so-called) Christians, including eminent pastors and theologians, are among those who have been left behind.

The intensity and persuasive power of the spiritual deception that will be unleashed during this troubled time, will be unequalled in the

entire history of mankind. A prince of peace with world-reforming abilities will appear on the scene. He will capture the imagination of the distressed masses and soon gain their full support.

The heavenly vision

John was in heaven, in the Spirit, the moment when he heard the voice like a trumpet:

Immediately I was in the Spirit: and behold, a throne set in heaven, and *One* sat on the throne. And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and *there was* a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald. Around the throne *were* twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads (Rev. 4:2-4).

The glory that John beheld was unspeakable. The closest he could get to a description of the Lord's excellence and brightness was to liken it to the most effulgent precious stones. His appearance was like a jasper and a sardius stone. The description of jasper in Revelation 21:11 as a crystal clear stone, agrees more with that of a diamond. The spotless sanctity of God is expressed in this way. Sardius has a deep red shade and symbolises the precious blood of the Lamb. The green rainbow around the throne indicates eternal life that we have in the Lord Jesus. The never-ending circle points at eternity, while green is the colour of life.

The 24 elders with crowns on their heads, represent the glorified Church of Christ. They identify themselves beyond any doubt when they fall down before the Lamb in worship: "You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9). They are the blood-bought Christians from all the nations, and will receive glorified bodies through the resurrection of the righteous. All the members of the body of Christ will gather around the throne to participate in the Lord's judgement over the world during the tribulation period (1 Cor. 6:2).

The symbol employed here to portray the true Church of Christ, is perfectly clear. **Elder** is a New Testament office and indicates a person who has been saved by Jesus Christ *and* who has committed himself to serve the Lord. The number 24 has special significance. In 1 Chronicles 24, king David appointed 24 families to the priestly ministry in the temple. Every group would serve in the sanctuary for two weeks each year according to a fixed schedule. In 1 Peter 2:9 every believer in the New Testament is called to a "royal priest-

hood.... that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light". To be an elder implies obedience to the Lord's call to discipleship.

Have you accepted your Christian calling, whether in a full-time or part-time capacity, as well as the spiritual equipment to fulfil it? The 24 elders all have golden crowns upon their heads, and this is proof of their Christian ministry that has been crowned by Jesus (Rev. 22:12). To appear before Him empty-handed is tantamount to hiding your talent in the ground and then to stand shamefaced on the day when Christ comes again (1 Cor. 3:15; 2 Cor 5:10; Gal. 6:9; 1 Jn. 2:28; Rev. 22:12). Eldership is akin to discipleship, as in both cases faith and works go together. These must, however, not be the works of the flesh that find their origin in human skill and insight, but those things accomplished in response to and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Care must be taken not to confuse works with salvation: "For by grace you have been saved through faith... not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). However, after salvation we are called to a life of dedication and works of faith: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). It is for these works that the elders will receive crowns. The Bible mentions the following five crowns that believers can aspire to: *The crown of rejoicing* for soul-winners (1 Thes. 2:19, Phil. 4:1), *the crown of life* for Christian martyrs (Jas. 1:12, Rev. 2:10), *the crown of glory* for faithful shepherds (1 Pet. 5:4), *the incorruptible crown* for a holy, dedicated life (1 Cor. 9:25), and *the crown of righteousness* for those who love His appearing (2 Tim. 4:8).

The year of release

After having saved the true Church from the hour of tribulation, the Lord will pour out divine wrath upon a wicked world with a view to punishing those who rejected Him and to ultimately liberate the world from domination by the evil forces of darkness. Revelation 5:1-5 is a prelude to a dramatic process of redemption that will occur during the seven years of the coming tribulation. It is discussed in terms of Israel's traditional law of redemption, of which an example is recorded in the book of Ruth. A comparison between the circumstances in which Ruth found herself, and those prevailing in the end-time, will throw a great deal of light on the scene in Revelation 5:

Naomi, her husband and their two sons moved away from Bethlehem during a great drought and famine, to stay in Moab as strangers. In a similar manner, humanity as a whole found itself in a spirit-

ual drought after the Fall, by which the rights to our property were forfeited. Even to this day we are still strangers and sojourners in an evil world in which we have to wrestle against the powers and rulers of the darkness of this age (Eph. 6:10-13).

During their exile, three of Naomi's family members died and another one decided to remain behind. Eventually, only two of them found grace in the eyes of God and were restored to their property. By way of comparison we can say that most people die during their wanderings as sinners, but that those who put their trust in the Lord to be saved, are spiritually revived and restored.

Back in Bethlehem, Naomi and her daughter-in-law faced an enormous problem. The accumulated burden of debt incurred during the years on the family property was more than they could afford to pay. They had to find a rich relative who could, in his capacity as kinsman, redeem the land and restore it to its destitute owners. This kinsman would also have to take Ruth as his wife to perpetuate the family. Such a redeemer was found in the person of Boaz. He exercised the law of redemption and paid all the debt. He took Ruth, the Moabitess, as his wife since she had accompanied her mother-in-law to the land where the God of Israel ruled. Ruth and Naomi were overjoyed and greatly thankful for what Boaz had done. If he had not come to their rescue, their property would have fallen into the hands of strangers and caused their family name to be obliterated.

Jesus Christ is the One who stepped in and redeemed us. He took the burden of our debt upon Himself and paid the full price for it. Because of this act of love, we have become co-heirs with Him and will reign with Him over our restored inheritance. In addition He took us who, like Ruth, were born into a heathen world, as His bride because we have taken refuge with Him for shelter. What a tremendous joy for us to have found a kinsman who took pity on us, paid our debt and made us sons and daughters of the heavenly Father to enjoy everlasting life in His presence!

The joy of the elders knew no bounds when they realised that their Saviour, Jesus Christ, their Kinsman and Redeemer, had not only paid the price for their sins, but would free the entire world from the power of the Evil One. In this way they will soon, on the strength of Genesis 1:28, repossess their heritage on this earth and rule with Jesus as kings over it. Then the situation caused by the Fall, as the result of which "the whole world lies *under the sway of the wicked one*" (1 Jn. 5:19) will no longer exist.

It was the custom in Israel to record inheritance, or bonds on a property, on a scroll. On each occasion when certain entries were made, that part of the scroll was sealed. The will of our right of in-

heritance and ownership of the whole earth has been sealed with seven seals. Only Christ is worthy to break the seals and open the book. Not only is He the legal owner of the world, but He also paid all the accumulated debt that was incurred by Satan's deception of humanity and the estranging of their God-given appointment.

When the seals are opened one after the other, the most violent judgements of all times will be poured out upon the earth. Many of the prophets in the Old Testament referred to these terrible judgements:

For see, the day of the Lord is coming, the terrible day of His wrath and fierce anger. The land shall be destroyed, and all the sinners with it. The heavens will be black above them. No light will shine from stars or sun or moon. And I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sin; I will crush the arrogance of the proud man and the haughtiness of the rich. Few will live when I have finished up my work (Is. 13:9-11 LB).

The great day of the LORD is near... That day *is* a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet and alarm against the fortified cities and against the high towers. I will bring distress upon men, and they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like refuse. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD's wrath (Zeph. 2:14-18).

The evil works of man will be destroyed and the power of Satan's kingdom will systematically be disintegrated until all its strongholds have fallen. When the Lion of Judah appears victoriously on the battle-field at the end of the great tribulation, the Antichrist and the false prophet will be captured and cast alive into the lake of fire. At the same time, the Devil will be bound in the bottomless pit for a thousand years.

With all these awesome future events in mind, the elders wait in suspense for the first seal to be opened....

Chapter 4

THE ANTICHRIST

The events described in Revelation 6 to 19 all occur within a period of seven years. This *year-week* is known as the tribulation, and is clearly divided into two periods of 3½ years each. The first half will be characterised by intensive diplomatic and peace initiatives by the Antichrist, who will strive to exalt himself to the position of undisputed world leader. When his efforts to establish world peace fail, he will resort to an unprecedented reign of terror during the last 3½ years, and introduce the bloodiest dictatorship the world has ever seen. The hundreds of millions of victims that this reign of terror will claim, will render it the biggest human tragedy of all time.

The last part of the tribulation is called **the great tribulation**. This term is sometimes used to refer to the entire seven year reign of the Antichrist, but with the clear understanding that the first half will mainly consist of spiritual deception and torment, while the second half will be particularly awesome in the sense of the physical destruction of man and his natural environment.

The four horsemen

According to Revelation 6:1-8, the Antichrist will be revealed in a highly deceptive way as an *angel of light* in an effort to first mislead people, and later to extend his merciless dictatorship over them. In the first stage of his rule he will appear to the world as a global peacemaker who brings hope to a conflict-ridden and poverty-stricken world (**the white horse**). In a show of clever diplomacy he will deceive the people into accepting a world government as well as a universal religion in order to accomplish international unity.

When his peace initiatives and reform policy collapse after 3½ years, the Antichrist will turn to violence in order to maintain his power. He will then become a military dictator (**the red horse**). The next logical action will be stringent economical control and the rationing of food during the severe wars and famine in the world (**the black horse**). After these calamities, the only activity left for the Antichrist is his ride as the angel of death to reap as many souls as possible to join him in perdition (**the pale horse**).

In His prophetic discourse, Jesus Christ described a similar sequence of events that will occur during the coming tribulation period (Mt. 24:4-9):



Figure 2. THE WHITE HORSE
The Antichrist as prince of peace, head of a world government and universal Messiah.



Figure 3. THE RED HORSE
The Antichrist as military dictator, blasphemer and self-declared god of this world.



Figure 4. THE BLACK HORSE
The Antichrist as economic oppressor who rations food and issues numbers to control all economic transactions.

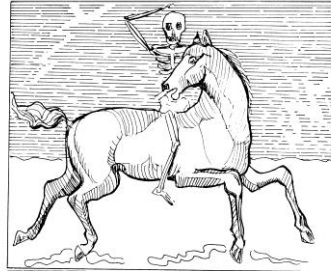


Figure 5. THE PALE HORSE
The Antichrist as murderer of men, destroyer of God's creation, and death angel.

- "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many" (**the white horse**);
- "And you will hear of wars and rumours of wars:.... For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (**the red horse**);
- "And there will be famines (and) pestilences" (**the black horse**);
- "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you" (**the pale horse**).

This strategy has often been followed in the world, especially when Marxist dictatorships were introduced. Initially, people are misled under false pretences and a utopian prospect under a dynamic

leader who is depicted as a messiah or prince of peace. Churches are politicised and become entangled in political ideologies that propagate political liberation and a humanistic brotherhood among all men (**the white horse**).

In the wake of this deception, the masses are mobilised for revolutionary action under the pretext that the existing structures must first be removed by force before the dispensation of genuine freedom and progress can dawn (**the red horse**). When a country becomes involved in war, its infrastructure is seriously damaged, the economy for the most part collapses, and large-scale unemployment and famine set in. The result is that food is likely to be rationed and become prohibitively expensive (**the black horse**). For many people their last sight in the revolution is the grim rider of **the pale horse** - death.

On a limited scale, the world has already been subjected to the revolutionary pattern of Revelation 6. According to 1 John 2:18, many minor antichrists have appeared on the scene: "...it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come". The Antichrist, therefore, has many forerunners. Their combined actions will culminate in the unprecedented great tribulation of the end-time. Viewed in this context, revolutions, wars and famines are an integral part of human history. Phenomena like these constantly remind us that we are not living in the thousand years of peace, but in a dispensation of struggle against evil powers. How intensive and destructive these wars, catastrophes and famines may have been, none has yet occurred that can compare with the sorrows of the coming great tribulation. Jesus said:

For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened (Mt. 24:21-22 KJV).

When the apocalyptic horses of Revelation 6 are unleashed, cataclysmic events will follow in their wake. They will usher in the final revelation of the mystery of iniquity:

The white horse

And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals... And I looked, and behold, a white horse. And he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering, and to conquer (Rev. 6:1-2).

At the very beginning of the tribulation period, the Lord Jesus

opens the first seal in heaven and a prince of peace on a white horse suddenly appears on earth. He only has a bow in his hand, and purposely hides the arrows since his march is under the banner of peace and reconciliation. He was not able to make his entry earlier, as the presence of the true Church of Christ resisted his appearance and his planned usurpation of power. Now that the Lord has taken them away, the hour of darkness has struck, introducing the Antichrist's brief period to hold sway before the appearance of the Lord to condemn him to the lake of fire.

The identity of the rider on the white horse has for many years remained a controversial subject. However, from the context it is evident that he can be nobody else than the Antichrist. It is wrong to assert that the rider of the white horse in Revelation 6 is Christ, merely because He is represented as a rider on a white horse in Revelation 19. There simply isn't proof for this assertion. Symbols often don't have fixed applications, and must therefore be interpreted in the context in which they are used. So it is that a lion in one instance symbolises Christ as the Lion from the tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:5), while in another instance the Devil is said to be a roaring lion seeking whom he can destroy (1 Pet. 5:8).

In the vision of Revelation 6, Jesus is seated upon the throne and He opens the book that has been sealed with seven seals. In it, the judgements of God upon a sinful world are described. Its purpose is to expose the sinister works of Satan after which he and his henchmen will be judged and their influence over the earth and its inhabitants will be broken. When the first four seals are opened, four horses follow one another as they are commissioned to mislead and kill people. It is clearly shown in Revelation 6 how intensely terrible and utterly destructive their actions will be:

And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth (Rev. 6:8).

However, the entry of the Antichrist upon the world scene as the rider of the white horse will be in terms of an ideology of reconciliation, unity and global brotherhood. In a New World Order, mega-structures will be established for the religious, political and economic unification of all people under his personal leadership.

Unity of this nature can only be achieved if identity and fundamentalism are abandoned. In order for a universal Church and a global government to be realised, the parties concerned must put all differences aside in the interest of reconciliation. Compromise will be an important requirement, as exclusiveness and the right to self-

determination will have to make way for the cause of greater unity. Revelation 17:13 says that the political allies of the Antichrist will have one mind, and they will voluntarily give their power and authority to the beast. In this way he will gain universal power and consolidate the divided nations of the world into a coherent group of *planetary citizens*. These reforms will include the removal or scaling down of boundaries to effect a process of compulsory denationalisation. The utter confusion and evil effects of this modern tower of Babel will soon be evident.

A similar unification process will occur in religious circles. According to the New Age Movement, the future world leader will add titles of all the world religions to his name. Collectively, he will be the Maitreya Buddha for the Buddhists, Krishna for the Hindus, the Imam Mahdi for the Muslims, the Christ for the Christians and the Messiah for the Jews. All these religions will be allowed to function for 3½ years on condition that they do not question their coexistence as partners in a universal religion.

Jesus earnestly warned the people of the last generation against this type of deceit that will, in more than one way, be practised under His name: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many" (Mt. 24:4-5).

Because the Antichrist's utopian policy of universal unity will be in conflict with the nature of biblical diversity (Acts 17:26), and also threatens the uniqueness of the Christian religion (Jn. 14:6), opposition against it will soon arise. This reaction will open the way for further apocalyptic manifestations in order for the satanic deception of this time to develop to its full, ferocious unfolding.

The utopian prospects pictured by the Antichrist in his peace initiatives will suddenly disappear like mist before the morning sun.

The red horse

And another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that *people* should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword (Rev. 6:4).

Leaders who become unstable and no longer enjoy popular support, often turn to autocratic rule and military force to secure their positions. The Antichrist will be no exception. When he discards his mask of pretended justice in the midst of the tribulation, he will gird his sword and make his appearance as the rider on the war-horse. With an iron fist he will rule the world as the most cruel and violent dictator of all times.

His religious status will at this time be promoted from world Mes-

siah to that of God (2 Thes. 2:4), and maintained through forced worship (Rev. 13:15). His utterances will be characterised by the grossest blasphemy (Rev. 13:5-6). The Antichrist will, however, be openly rejected by Israel when he desecrates the Most Holy of the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, by having an idol of himself placed inside (Mt. 24:15). He will then launch a military campaign against them and, much like Adolph Hitler, endeavour to eradicate the Jewish nation:

And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily *sacrifices*, and place *there* the abomination of desolation (Dan. 11:31).

As a military leader the Antichrist will attain phenomenal success, and his supporters will acclaim their admiration: “Who *is* like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?” (Rev. 13:4). He will gain victories on all the continents until his rule extends over every tribe, tongue and nation (Rev. 13:7).

The black horse

And I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand (Rev. 6:5).

The inevitable result of wars and the mobilisation of economically active manpower is the rapid depletion of a country's finances, the destruction of infrastructure, serious losses in production, and famine. In an effort to counteract these problems, the Antichrist will institute stringent economic measures. By means of internationally linked computer networks he will exercise control over the world economy. Individual freedom on how to manage financial resources will be completely eliminated and replaced by a global system of electronic funds transfer. Within the future cashless economy, no person will be able to buy or sell without the consent of the Antichrist and his world government.

Because of food scarcity caused by wars, pollution, natural disasters and the over-exploitation of resources, strict rationing and control will in any event be unavoidable. The Antichrist will take advantage of this situation to further enforce his authority. Only those who acknowledge his political and religious leadership by accepting his mark and the number of his name, will be granted certain privileges. This will include the right to buy and sell, as well as eligibility for employment (Rev. 13:16-18).

The pale horse

And I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat

on it was Death, and Hades followed with him (Rev. 6:8).

Since the Antichrist comes from the Devil he will, like his father, be a murderer. He will delight himself in the death of millions of people and continue to wreak havoc in God's creation. The death of a quarter of the earth's population that he and his accomplices will cause according to Revelation 6:8, amounts to more than 1,5 billion lives. This is approximately 29 times more than the 52 million lives claimed by World War II – indeed manslaughter on a scale never seen before.

Identity of the Antichrist

In Revelation 13:1-2 and 17:9-12, more details about the identity and character of this evil world leader are furnished. He is described as a beast with seven heads and ten horns. The seven heads are, according to Revelation 17:9-10, seven kingdoms from which he originates. In Genesis, Isaiah and Daniel mention is made of these kingdoms. They are:

1. The ancient Babylonian Empire established by Nimrod.
2. The Assyrian Empire that took the ten tribes of Israel captive in the 8th century BC.
3. The neo-Babylonian Empire that conquered the kingdom of Judah in the 6th Century BC and took many of its subjects captive to Babylon.
4. The Medo-Persian Empire.
5. The Greek Empire.
6. The Roman Empire.
7. The end-time empire of the beast.

In Revelation 17:10, John says that during his time five of these empires had already fallen; one was existing and the seventh one was still to come. In the year 95 AD, when the book of Revelation was written, five of the empires were past – that is from the ancient Babylonian to the Greek Empire. The Roman Empire ruled at the time, while the end-time empire of the beast was still future. This last empire is symbolised by the head with the ten horns.

A common characteristic of the first six empires is that all of them were hostile towards the kingdom of God on earth. Their occult practices, pantheism, immorality, the deification of their leaders, humanism, and rebellion against God, will culminate in the seventh empire of the Antichrist and descend to even greater depths of spiritual darkness and deception. The unanimity among them has its roots in mystery Babylon, the immoral mother of all the false

religions. She exerted a tremendous influence upon the previous world empires, and was responsible for their wicked disposition. "The woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth" (Rev. 17:18). The same evil alliance between a world government and a false world religion will be characteristic of the empire of the beast.

The Antichrist is so closely identified with the previous world empires that he is depicted with the body of a leopard, the paws of a bear, the mouth of a lion and ten horns on his head (Rev. 13:2). These symbols agree with those in Daniel 7 where the Babylonian Empire is represented as a lion, the Medo-Persian Empire as a bear, the Greek Empire as a leopard and the Roman Empire as a ferocious beast with ten horns on its head:

- The Antichrist will follow the tradition of the Babylonians who deified their kings. He will declare himself above all that is god and even challenge the authority of the God of heaven. He will cause an image of himself to be erected in the temple and force all the citizens of his global empire to worship the image. Those who refuse to do so will be cast into the fiery oven of persecution. He will also make relentless attacks on the Jewish state and try to annihilate all its citizens.
- As in the Medo-Persian Empire, he will trample upon all the nations, make an end to their independence and incorporate them into his own empire. He will establish a merciless government and rule over his kingdom with the irrevocable and unchangeable laws of the Medes and the Persians. He will also order the eradication of the Jewish people.
- The Greek Empire was depicted by Daniel as a leopard with four wings. It operated highly mobile armies characterised by skilful military manoeuvres that enabled them to carry out their attacks with speed and efficiency. The Antichrist will revive these tactics in his well-disciplined armies. He will be able to deploy striking forces practically overnight in any part of the world. An anti-Jewish policy also ruled supreme in the Syrian province of this empire. The Greek dictator, Antiochus Epiphanes, was a fanatical hater of the Jews and as such also a type of the Antichrist.
- The fourth beast with its ten horns and teeth of iron had a terrible appearance. This is symbolic of the harshness, unapproachability and unrelenting attitudes by which the Roman Empire made its authority and sovereignty felt. During the invasion of Palestine and the siege of Jerusalem, hundreds of thousands of

Jews were gruesomely murdered, crucified upon trees and sold as slaves, while many of the survivors were taken as captives of war to other parts of the empire. An even more devastating war of annihilation will be waged by the Antichrist during the great tribulation.

The ten horns of the animal indicate a political alliance that the Antichrist will establish. In the beginning of the tribulation period, ten Mediterranean countries will join forces under the leadership of the Antichrist:

And the ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet; but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. These are one of mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast (Rev. 17:12-13).

Daniel says: "I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn *were* eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things" (Dan. 7:8 KJV). The Antichrist will consolidate three of the kingdoms under his personal authority, after which only eight will remain.

Another title of the Antichrist is **the king of the North** (Dan. 11:36-45). In Old Testament times, the king of Assyria was called the king of the North. Assyria was a large territory directly to the north and north-east of Israel. It included modern Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and parts of neighbouring countries. That the Antichrist is also called *the Assyrian* in Isaiah 10:20-27 and Micah 5:5-7, confirms the expectation that he will be an Assyrian Jew. Developments in Syria and Iraq, including the rebuilding of Babylon in Iraq, can in the near future create a scenario for the appearance of such a leader. He must, however, be of Jewish descent to be accepted by Israel as Messiah.

An essential part of the Antichrist's identity is his association with false religions and his inclination towards self-deification. He will weld politics and religion into a tight synthesis and present himself to the world as the redeemer of humanity. Most people will in the midst of all the confusion hail him as a messiah with supernatural powers, and corroborate his claim that he is the saviour of the world. When he achieves diplomatic successes and performs astounding signs and wonders, the "whole earth (will go) after the beast in amazement and admiration" (Rev. 13:3 AB). They will strongly refute any suggestion that he may be a false messiah.

Character of the Antichrist

The key aspects of the Antichrist's character are mentioned by Paul:

Let no one deceive you in any way, for that day will not come except the apostasy comes first – that is, unless the [predicted] great falling away of those who have professed to be Christians has come – and the man of lawlessness (sin) is revealed, who is the son of doom, who opposes and exalts himself so proudly *and* insolently against *and* over all that is called God or that is worshipped, [even to his actually] taking his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming that he himself is God... For the mystery of lawlessness – that hidden principle of rebellion against constituted authority – is already at work in the world, [but it is] restrained only until he who restrains is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one (the Antichrist) will be revealed (2 Thes. 2:3-4, 7-8 AB).

The great falling away of the end-time can also be termed a rebellion against God and His kingdom on earth:

There will be a time of great rebellion against God, and then the man of rebellion will come – the son of hell (2 Thes. 2:3 LB).

The outstanding characteristic of the Antichrist is indeed that he will be a man of rebellion. He will be an uncontrolled, wild and permissive man who will utterly reject all laws, including the laws of God. Christians will be among the victims of his rebellion:

He will defy the Most High God, and wear down the saints with persecution, and try to change all laws, morals, and customs. God's people will be helpless in His hands for 3½ years (Dan. 7:25 LB; see also Rev. 13:6-7).

Double standards, bribery and corruption will be the order of the day in his wicked regime. Special favours will be done for his collaborators:

He will honour those who submit to him, appointing them to positions of authority and dividing the land to them as their reward (Dan. 11:39 LB).

There will be no limits to the conceit and evil intentions of this dictator's perverted character. He is even called *the son of death and destruction* (or *the son of perdition* - 2 Thes. 2:3). His close companion, the false prophet, will be one of his foremost butchers who will also use occult powers to achieve his purpose:

And he was permitted to impart the breath of life into the beast's image so that the statue of the beast could actually talk, and to cause

to be put to death those who would not bow down *and* worship the image of the beast (Rev. 13:15 AB).

According to 2 Thes. 2:7-8, the secret power of lawlessness is already operating in the world, although it is to a certain extent restrained by the presence of the Christians who are the light of a dark world and the salt of a corrupt earth. However, in the end-time just prior to the rapture and the beginning of the tribulation period, a large number of nominal Christians (those who are not truly born again) will openly join forces with the kingdom of darkness:

Now the Spirit expressly says that in the latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons (1 Tim. 4:1).

Disobedience, immorality, rebellion, and utter selfishness are manifestations of the spirit of lawlessness, and will pave the way for the revelation of the Lawless One:

You may as well know this too, Timothy, that in the last days it is going to be very difficult to be a Christian. For people will love only themselves and their money; they will be proud and boastful, sneering at God, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful to them, and thoroughly bad. They will be hard-headed and never give in to others; they will be constant liars and trouble-makers and will think nothing of immorality. They will be rough and cruel, and sneer at those who try to be good. They will betray their friends; they will be hotheaded, puffed up with pride, and prefer good times to worshipping God. They will go to Church, yes, (having a form of godliness) but they won't really believe anything they hear. Don't be taken in by people like that (2 Tim. 3:1-5 LB).

We are now living in these days, and witness this tremendous falling away around us. So-called Christians are compromising and collaborating with the spirit of lawlessness by teaming up with the non-Christian religions, sharing power with the forces of anarchy, condoning the murderous acts of criminals, abandoning the Christian foundation of the state and the educational system, promoting anarchy by allowing people to break the laws of the country at will, and opening the doors of society to gambling, prostitution, pornography and all sorts of evil practices, while the traditional observing of Sunday as the day of the Lord is rapidly disappearing.

Soon the big rebel, the man of sin, the breaker of laws and moral codes, the destroyer of human lives, the blasphemer and self-declared God, will make his appearance. Are you *resisting* his appearance, or are you *paving the way* for his coming? We would like

to urge Christians not to become weary in this time of trouble and unrighteousness, but to keep on resisting the evil. About this time, as well as the coming tribulation, Jesus said:

And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved (Mt. 24:12-13).

The Living Bible says:

Sin will be rampant everywhere and will cool the love of many (Mt. 24:12 LB).

Unprecedented extremes of the spirit of sin and lawlessness will occur during the great tribulation.

Power bases of the Antichrist

The Antichrist's change of image and strategy in the middle of the tribulation will be so dramatic and terrifying that he will endeavour to force all people into Satanism. After he has received a deadly wound and come to life again, the Devil will no longer manifest through him as prince of peace and an angel of light. He will now reveal his true nature as a power-hungry dictator who gives full expression of his propensity for blasphemy, sadism and brutal murder. He will establish a dictatorship that will be power-based on politics, religion and the control of economic resources. On each of these spheres, totalitarian control will be exercised with the main objective to reduce all people to absolute slavery. They won't be granted political rights, religious liberties or economic freedom outside the unitary structures of the New World Order.

In the **political** sphere he will be the sole ruler of the world during the last 3½ years, and base his power on military strength. No alliance will be able to match him because he will have "power over all kindred, and tongues, and nations" (Rev. 13:7 KJV).

On the **religious** level, he will elevate himself from the position of messiah to that of God. According to 2 Thes. 2:4 he will set himself up above all religions and sit in the temple of God, showing himself as God. At this stage all forms of religion will be declared redundant and illegal, while places of worship will be abandoned and set on fire (Rev. 17:16). The Jewish temple service will be interrupted and forbidden (Dan. 9:27). The only alternative for people will be to worship the Antichrist and his image. Refusal to do so, will be punishable with death (Rev. 13:15). During this time, world-wide Satanism and the forced adoration of the beast will be practised under the guidance of the false prophet. The satanic triumvirate – the dragon, the beast and the false prophet – will act in unison.

Besides the political and religious macrostructures, a cashless

world **economy** will be instituted by the Antichrist (Rev. 13:16-18). With the use of numbers and codes, he will control a computerised system of funds transfer from a central part of the world. No person will be able to operate economically without being linked to it. To link up with the system, will have the far-reaching implication of acknowledging the Antichrist as ruler and god of this world.

A cashless world economy

It is important to consider the present level of technological development in terms of the possibility to institute a cashless monetary system for the world. Without complete control over economic resources, the Antichrist will hardly be able to enforce his totalitarian rule that will be aimed at the objective to effectively control the lives of people. Economic intimidation will indeed be one of his strongest weapons to ensure the loyalty of all people.

Frequent indications are given in the media that electronic control over buying and selling is an attainable goal within the near future. In the *Sunday Star* of 17 May 1992, the benefits of the implantation of a computer chip under a person's skin were highlighted as follows:

POWER UNDER YOUR SKIN

New concept implants chip in your body for easy access to a world of benefits

CHIPS THAT GET UNDER YOUR SKIN

"And he causes all.... to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads" (Revelation 13:16).

In this modern day and age, the quoted text has led cynical observers to explore the reality of Orwellian total control. They base their view on the increasing weight of numbers with which we have to live: ID, PIN, security, registration and new technologies that almost exclusively work on numbers.

Considering our acceptance of this fact, the thought arises that having just one number would be nice. But stamped on the forehead in ink? No. A much better idea would be to implant into all of us a tiny, individualised, computer chip, suggests Johan Bornman.

Why carry cards when an implant can do the trick?

Since so many domestic pets and livestock already have implanted electronic ID's oscillating inside them, it seems as if humans may be losing out on the digital bandwagon's benefits.

What technology is available? The radio frequency (RF) capsule that identifies animals is one option. These minute coils, encased in glass, are injected under the animal's skin – or perhaps in your car's upholstery – and emit a unique frequency (number) when scanned by a special device.

These ID numbers have been stored on a computer, which records the information you require. In the case of lost domestic animals the chip does all the talking and reveals the owner's name, address and telephone number. For recovered stolen cars a similar tale unfolds as the police scan the upholstery for an ID.

*But a far better technology is that of the so-called **smart card**. These credit card sized plastic cards house a pin-head-sized chip with a powerful interactive memory.*

Not only do they have excellent security verification features such as checking against fingerprint patterns, PIN's and voice prints, but they can store useful amounts of data in separate files. It can store details of financial transactions, one's medical and dental history, and details of residence and next of kin. Most people would agree that this could be useful. With a bit of imagination, we could replace a whole wallet of cards for cash, replace the ID book, keep a permanent medical file and be positively identified at all times.

What's more, scientists have now developed a smart-card that can be read by machines without first swiping it through a magnetic-stripe reader. Rather, it is pushed into the device or slipped into a set of electronic contact points.

If one took away the card's rectangular plastic surface-area which is merely a standard-sized carrier, the remaining tiny chip would be ideal for implanting under the human skin. Mind you, scientists would have to think hard about an implant area...

Imagine the usefulness of such a prosthesis. No more ATM and credit cards or ID books. At the supermarket check-out you would simply put your finger (or whatever area is chosen) on the reader and have your account updated...

Total ID is a far cry from a crude number on the forehead.... After all, we are dependent on our various numbers right now, so why not store them somewhere better and safer than in some secret places and on plastic cards?

The author of the above article makes the mistake to ridicule the biblical account of total control through the allocation of numbers. He also erroneously refers to the biblical description of a number stamped **on** the right hand or forehead in ink. In fact, his exposition

of modern technology which enables the implantation of microchips under the skin, really confirms the following biblical statement made almost 2 000 years ago:

And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark **in** their right hand, or **in** their foreheads: and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name (Rev. 13:16-17 KJV; emphasis added).

Unfortunately, most of the Bible translations refer to a number **on** the right hand or forehead. The Living Bible even says that people will be tattooed with a certain mark. However, the Greek word **epi**, which normally means **on**, is rendered **in** when used in combination with the genitive form of the noun. The King James Version is therefore grammatically correct in referring to a number **in** the right hand or forehead.

It should be mentioned here that modern technology, including electronic systems of funds transfer, is neutral – no moral value is attached to it. However, when this technology becomes available to the Antichrist, he will greatly abuse it to achieve his ends. He will force people to sign an oath of allegiance to him before being awarded a number. This will involve recognising him as Messiah and eventually as God.

A practice that has always been unbiblical and therefore unacceptable to Christians, is any form of marking of the body through tattooing, or the implantation of a micro chip for that matter. In Leviticus 19:28 the Lord says: “You shall not.... print or tattoo any marks upon you” (AB). Such a practice would be an inadmissible defiling of your body that is a temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16-17). The reason for this prohibition is to deter people from having occult symbols and satanic marks put on their bodies.

Satan has a well-planned scheme to force people to enter into a contract with him in exchange for the right to buy and sell. He knows that in this materialistic world which is largely controlled by Mammon, the god of money, almost every person has a price and can therefore be ‘bought’, bribed or intimidated. However, it is an incredibly expensive deal that he will offer to people. Never even consider exchanging the long-term interests of your immortal soul for short-term economic benefits by accepting the Devil’s mark!



Figure 6. The man of sin who will pervert humanity with his evil doctrine.

Philosophy of the Antichrist

The underlying philosophic principle upon which the Antichrist will base his global system of religious, political and economic governance is **monism – everything is one**. According to Revelation 13, a divided and bellicose human race will indeed be united under the common leadership of the Antichrist:

And **all the world** marvelled and followed the beast... and **all who dwell on the earth** will worship him (Rev. 13:3, 8; emphasis added).

The Antichrist will create a unified world by eradicating boundaries and building bridges of agreement and common consent between the various groups. The end result will be a united class of denationalised planetary citizens. Political expression will be given to the coming New World Order by establishing a world government that will also control the world economy from an international centre. The Ecumenical Movement will lay the foundation for an alliance of world religions that will operate in close association with the world government.

The globalising of mankind will be the result of a world-wide consciousness revolution. In order to obtain the condition of a changed

consciousness, psycho-techniques such as transcendental meditation will be widely practised – also in schools. In the ensuing mystic experience people will discover what is commonly referred to as the **deeper self**, the **higher self** or the **god within**.

When this state of consciousness is achieved, the meditator is linked to a mystical source of cosmic energy which enables him to develop psychic abilities such as telepathy, extrasensory perception, astral travel, self-healing, etc. During the meditational trance of a deep cosmic consciousness the person will experience feelings of tranquillity and perceive the entire cosmos as an integrated, undisturbed whole. His mental horizons accordingly become widened and from that moment onwards he sees everything as one. The natural world becomes mystical and divine. Plants, animals and humans are conceptualised as interacting parts of the same evolutionary process, and all have the same attribute of divinity that flows through them and unite them.

The higher the level of evolutionary development, the higher (or deeper) will the degree of consciousness become. A person who has been fully introduced to the hidden cosmic powers, will be a miracle-working person who knows all the secrets of the cosmos. He will be a master of wisdom who may ultimately develop to the level of **the Christ**.

It is believed that such a person with superior knowledge, who is able to manipulate tremendous cosmic powers, will soon appear on earth to lead the human race into the Utopia of the New World Order (also referred to as the Age of Aquarius). This man will be the Antichrist who is described as **the beast** in Revelation.

Since the Antichrist is heading the spiritual hierarchy in the consciousness revolution, we must clearly realise the fact that New Age mysticism which is at present widely promoted as a neutral psycho-technique, or the unlocking of man's hidden potential, is entirely occultic and demonic in nature. It aims at preparing the whole world to worship the Antichrist and the Devil:

So they worshipped the dragon (Lucifer) who gave authority to the beast (the New Age counterfeit Christ); and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like the beast? (Rev. 13:4).

The warning is clear: Don't experiment with cosmic powers and beings because they belong to the domain of Satan. They are our adversaries in spiritual warfare: "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*" (Eph. 6:12).

Pray to the Lord for the ability of discernment between His kingdom and the kingdom of the Devil. Satan and his evil spirits want to deprive you of your ability to discern and categorise things by instilling in you the idea that **everything is one**. On the other hand, through His Holy Spirit, God wants to give you enlightened eyes of the mind so that you can clearly distinguish two different categories of things in the universe, that is the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness, heaven and hell, the narrow way and the broad way, good and bad, the truth and the lie, the only true religion and all the false religions.

The different perceptions and ways of thinking emanating from these opposite ideologies may be distinguished from one another as indicated in the list below. The philosophy of the Antichrist can be better understood if it is compared with the Christian world-view, as the Antichrist offers a deceiving alternative world-view to his followers.

Christian world-view	Antichristian world-view
An antithetic way of analytical thinking in which discernment is needed to be able to categorise things and to think in opposites.	A synthetic way of thinking which ignores differences and integrates all things into a larger whole. This philosophy is called holism.
Continued divergence to a point of eternal separation between light and darkness. Reconciliation and unity between these two poles will never be possible.	Sustained convergence until all things in the cosmos become integrated and unified. Differences and conflicting interests are ascribed to ignorance.
The cosmic domain of demons is prohibited. No experimentation with occult powers and extrasensory perception is allowed.	The developing of a cosmic consciousness by transcending the boundary to the supernatural, mystical world is recommended.
Monotheism. The Triune God is a transcendent God whose abode is in heavenly places. He must be perceived and worshipped independent from His creation. God works within man through His Holy Spirit, but remains a distinct Being who should be reverently approached in prayer.	Pantheism. God is mystical and impersonal. There is an element of divinity in the entire creation, which means that everything is god. Since all people are inherently divine, they must deepen the level of their consciousness and discover the god within themselves.

Christian world-view	Antichristian world-view
Man is a unique creation of God. He is distinct from the natural world and was commanded by God to subdue it and rule over all the living creatures. He is responsible to improve and protect his environment.	Man is part of the natural creation. He emerged from a unilinear line of biological evolution and thus descended from apes. He must be at one with nature, not unduly disturb it and maintain a mystical bond with it.
Man only has one life cycle in a human body. It is appointed for him to die once, after which the judgement follows and eternity dawns.	Man has various life cycles in which he evolves to higher forms of life. By way of reincarnation he often returns to a new life cycle on earth.
Humanity must realise that it is divided into two groups, i.e. the saved ones who are destined for heaven and the unsaved ones who are destined for hell. Those who are in spiritual darkness are invited to come over to the kingdom of God by being spiritually born again.	The unity of the human family must also be reflected in the religious sphere. All faiths must accept the fact that they worship the same God. One religion must therefore not be regarded as better than any of the other. Structures must be created to promote this unity.
Because there are religiously speaking two opposing kingdoms, each of them promised a messiah to redeem the world – the true Christ and the Antichrist. A choice must be made between them.	Because the different religions emerged from the same source of cosmic wisdom, they all wait for the same cosmic Christ who will finally unite them. In anticipation of this great event they must all take hands.
Man is morally corrupt and spiritually dead because of the Fall. If he is not born again, he will end up in the lake of fire.	Man is inherently good and only acts badly as a result of adverse external influences. There is no Devil or hell in the universe.
Through prayer the remission of your sins can be obtained from Jesus Christ, and the love and peace of God will flow into your heart by the work of the Holy Spirit. There is no substitute for prayer. Christian meditation is a counterfeit form of worship derived from TM.	Through a process of quiet meditation and the opening of the receptive faculties of your right-brain you can develop a deeper state of consciousness. You will then become one with the Christ within you and experience a mystical peace and tranquility.

Christian world-view	Antichristian world-view
When Christians join together in corporate prayer, the Holy Spirit works in a powerful way to convict people of sin and to save their souls.	When large numbers of people meditate at the same time, cosmic energy will be released to promote peace and to save mankind.
Reconciliation between man and God occurs at the Cross and is based upon the atoning death of Jesus. Reconciliation between people is based upon the honouring of other's rights, negotiated settlements and the respecting of boundaries.	Reconciliation between people, ideologies and faiths is effected by compromise, the eradication of boundaries, and unity. Groups must relinquish their exclusivity and become open and accommodating in order to promote convergence.
Jesus Christ is the living Son of God who will soon come back from heaven to take His bride from this corrupt world to her heavenly abode in the new Jerusalem. After another seven years He will come back in power and majesty with His glorified Church to judge the nations and to reign in His kingdom on earth.	The Antichrist is the son of perdition who will arise from the ranks of fallen man. The members of the false religions will be his bride who will reign with him from Babylon. After seven years his kingdom will suddenly be terminated and he and his followers destroyed at the coming of the King of kings.

Destination of the Antichrist

Regarding the final destination of this arch-deceiver and tyrant, the Antichrist, the Bible is very clear. Paul says that "the Lord will consume [him] with the breath of His mouth and destroy [him] with the brightness of His coming" (2 Thes. 2:8).

John also mentions this encounter as one of the most important events of the day of Christ's return:

Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone (Rev. 19:20).

The same fate awaits all those who have collaborated with the Antichrist and worshipped him as their Messiah and God. There will be many of them, because the false prophet and his co-workers in the alliance of world religions will have deceived many people into worshipping the Antichrist:

If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive *his* mark in his forehead, or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation, and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name (Rev. 14:9-11 KJV).

No one can dismiss this warning lightly and think that he or she can, in the interest of political acceptability and economic survival during the great tribulation, provisionally accept the number of the Antichrist and hope to cancel it at a later stage. People who bear this mark and number on their right hand or forehead, barter their souls to the Devil by acknowledging the Antichrist as head and god of this world. You may be sure that he will not allow you to escape from his grip. There is but one command in respect of the Antichrist: **Resist and reject him, even at the cost of your life!**

THE REVIVAL OF BABYLON

The reconstruction of a pagan centre

A development that is directly related to the tribulation period is the rebuilding of the once renowned metropolis, Babylon, on the banks of the Euphrates River. As the birthplace of the Ancient World's pagan religion, this city must again emerge as the seat of a false universal religion. Babylon is in Iraqi territory, and since 1978 in a process of reconstruction. The first phase of the rebuilt city was inaugurated amid great festivity between September 22 and October 22, 1987. This festival has become an annual event, and is reported in the media as an international cultural festival.

Included in the first phase of the reconstruction of the old city is the southern palace of King Nebuchadnezzar. This part of the palace includes the famous throne-room where the writing appeared on the wall during the last night of King Belshazzar's reign. Among the other reconstructed buildings is the gateway to the temple of Ishtar. Hotels and tourist facilities have also been erected on the outskirts of the city.

To correctly comprehend current events in Babylon, cognisance must be taken of the city's origin and the relentless anti-God tradition it has followed in ancient times. According to Genesis 10:8-10, Nimrod established a kingdom for himself in Babylon. Apart from the fact that it was a political kingdom, it also became a powerful pagan religious centre from where idolatry and other false religious practises spread across the world.

As protagonist of the self-sufficiency of the human race, Nimrod took a firm stand against God. Not only did he offer himself as a king to the people, but also as a god. As a builder of fortified cities in the land of Shinar (one of the earliest names for Babylonia), he was honoured as the **God of Forces**. He was addressed as the **Liberator** and **Crown Bearer**, and regarded as the personification of the **Sun-god** – the one who gives light and life. After him all Babylonian and Assyrian kings deified themselves. This tradition was imitated by the rulers of other world empires, especially in the Roman Empire. This is a pagan tradition that will be revived during the great tribulation when the Antichrist will declare himself to be God and demand the worship of all people. He will exalt himself above every god and claim to be the supreme God of the universe (Dan. 11:36).

Form of Worship

Since its earliest existence, Babylon was the centre and symbol of an anti-God world power. This tradition is also reflected in the name **Babylon**, which means **Gateway to the gods**. (After God confounded their language, the name **Babylon** was also associated with **confusion** and **disorder**). The gateway to the gods consisted of a temple tower (*ziggurat*) in which the priests ascended to make contact with the gods. The top could be reached by means of a helical stairway that surrounded the tower. Up there the priests meditated to become one with the cosmic world. Observations with a view to horoscopy were also made from that look-out post.

The great tower of Babylon was part of the building complex known as the temple of Marduk. It comprised eight sections built one upon the other. At the pinnacle was a smaller temple with luxurious couches and a golden table. Marduk was the Babylonian city god. As paramount god in the Babylonian pantheon, he was accorded the title **King of heaven and earth**. The word **Lord** is **Bel** in Chaldee, and it is for this reason that Marduk is also called **Bel**, or **Baal** in other languages (Jer. 50:2, Is. 46:1). Hence the name the **tower of Baal** or **Bel**.

The title of **Baal** with the general meaning of **Lord, Protector god** or **Possessor** was applied to various gods and further qualified by another name, e.g. **Baal-Peor** (the god of the mountain Peor), etc. Marduk was thus the Baal of Babylon. Close to him was the most important goddess, **Ishtar** (also called Astaroth, Ashtoreth or Astarte in other Middle East languages). In the plural form the term refers merely to the **goddesses** of the pagan nations. In this sense mention is often made in the Bible of the Baals and Ashtoreths of the heathens (see Judges 2:13 and 10:6).

Ishtar (Astaroth) occupied an extremely important position in the Babylonian and Assyrian religions. Temples and open-air places for worship were built for her in all the cities and towns. She is also known as the **queen of heaven** (Jer. 7:18, 44:19) and is the daughter of the moon-god, Sin. Her symbols are the crescent moon, the morning star (or battle star) and the evening star (the star of passionate love). As the mother goddess she expressed sadness and sympathy for her earthly children in their suffering, particularly when they were ill or struck by natural disasters. Healing rituals were carried out in her name.

She was also the goddess of fertility and love. Unbridled lust was such a strong characteristic on her part that her temples and places of worship became centres for immoral acts. In the service of Ishtar,

women belied their chastity and became temple prostitutes. But to them it was a form of *devotion* to honour Ishtar and as a result they did not forfeit their esteem in society. Ishtar was also the Assyrian's goddess of war. She was so fearsome that the other armies trembled when the war-minded Assyrians sang her praises.

In the rebuilt part of Babylon the gate of Ishtar has been restored and people can move through it to the king's throne-room. Should Ishtar's cult be revived in Babylon, a period of growing idolatry, immorality and wars of conquest awaits that part of the world.

According to Babylonian mythology, Ishtar murdered her lover, Tammuz – the god of spring. Because of this act she developed a sense of guilt and descended to the underworld where she found him and restored him to life. He is therefore the symbol of death and resurrection. A cross-shaped token representative of the **T** of Tammuz was customary in the pagan world as a symbol and decoration on garments and buildings. In mythological accounts, Tammuz is sometimes depicted as the son of Semiramis who is the personification of the queen of heaven. The religious concept of the Madonna and Child in Roman Catholicism is clearly a perpetuation of this Babylonian tradition. The real motive behind the deification of Mary in 381 AD was to bring a 'Christian' queen of heaven and her child into being.

Another god of significance in the Assyro-Babylonian pantheon was Shamash, the sun-god. He despised darkness and evil, and was accredited as the giver of good laws. He was the head of the Babylonian diviners. The cult of sun-worship spread to many cultures and is still rampant in our day. The symbol of the sun-god is familiar in the Mormon Church, and in the Roman Catholic Church the pope is often likened to the sun. In the New Age Movement, the sun with its rays of light is also a very common symbol.

The fall of Babylon

Prophecies that deal with the fall of Babylon are so clearly defined and absolute that no period in the entire history of Babylon and Assyria can be found in which they have been exhaustively fulfilled. Consider the following statements:

And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans' pride, will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It will never be inhabited, nor will it be settled from generation to generation; nor will the Arabian pitch tents there, nor will the shepherds make their sheepfolds there (Is. 13:19-20).

Jeremiah refers to the destruction of Babylon in these words:

They shall not take from you a stone for a corner, nor a stone for a foundation, but you shall be desolate forever, says the LORD (Jer. 51:26).

Dr. J. A. Seiss stated as far back as 1865 in his *Letters on the Apocalypse* that the city of Babylon will have to be rebuilt, in order that the Lord can finally destroy it like Sodom and Gomorrah, never to be inhabited again. This is clearly an end-time event that will, according to Isaiah 13:6, occur on **the day of the Lord**, probably coinciding with the battle of Armageddon at the end of the great tribulation. In 1918, Clarence Larkin indicated in his famous book *Dispensational Truth* that Babylon was never completely destroyed or uninhabited. Jeremiah's prophecy that after the final destruction no stones from the ruins of Babylon will be used, must yet be fulfilled. Various towns and cities have in fact been built with bricks recovered from the ruins of Babylon. Before the present rebuilding of Babylon started in 1978, thousands of bricks were removed by Iraqis for construction purposes. Since the official building programme started, several impressive structures have risen on the foundations of ancient Babylon. These developments underscore the biblical view that the great fall of the city is yet to occur.

Two Babylons

In Revelation 17 and 18 respectively, John mentions two Babylons that will rise to prominence shortly before the advent of Christ. The one is mystical Babylon, referring to an evil ideology, or false system of religious worship, and the other one a commercial city with all kinds of worldly fun and immoral practices in it. Both these chapters in Revelation are based upon the supposition that there will be a reconstructed Babylon as an end-time manifestation of the ancient Babylonian Empire, and also as a fitting centre of operations for the Babylonian world religion.

The one Babylon is called: "Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth" (Rev. 17:5). Because the city of Babylon is the place of origin of the pagan religions, the apostate end-time alliance of religions with its unbiblical unification of all faiths, is aptly described as **mystery Babylon**. It is opposed to biblical Christianity and is already in the process of establishing an ecumenical body, or parent organisation, described as **the mother of harlots** in Revelation 17:5. What appeared to be impossible a few decades ago, that is multi-religious ecumenism, has suddenly become common practice.



Figure 7. Rising of a modern tower of Babel.

Present initiatives by interfaith movements such as the United Religions Initiative enhance the possibility of establishing a unified league of world religions. The reviving of the Parliament for the World's Religions in Chicago in 1993, a century after its inaugural meeting, provides another religious superstructure from which a universal religious leader, the false prophet, may emerge.

The traditional **religious freedom** in the West, in which only Christianity was officially recognised has, during the past decade or so, been superseded by a dispensation of **religious equality**. This means that all religions are regarded as of equal significance and standing, thereby denying the uniqueness of Christianity (Jn. 14:6). The universalistic premise that the same God is worshipped by the followers of all the religions, is currently paving the way for even closer ties between the various religions. The ultimate objective of this movement is **religious unity**.

The emerging alliance of world religions will constitute a revival of the Babylonian religion, which was characterised by the following institutions and practices:

- J The deification of a world leader, as was the case with Nimrod of old. He will rule in close association with religious leaders.
- J The establishment of a priestly hierarchy of holy men, among whom some will attain the level of *masters of wisdom*.
- J Worship of the sun-god.
- J The adoration of the Queen of Heaven and her Son (the Madonna and Child).
- J The adoration of several 'Baals' within a pantheon of gods (idolatry and Satanism).
- J Meditation and other mystical techniques of holistic healing, and the development of a cosmic consciousness.
- J Magic, divination and astrology, accompanied by the extensive use of occult symbols and emblems.

As part of the Babylonian reforms, a feminine principle is also introduced to the concept of God. Various New Age writers make mention of the **Planetary Mother** as a spiritual presence sensed at the birth of every child. Besides a physical body, the child is also said to have an astral body that makes him part of a cosmic community under the caring control of a heavenly deity, or Planetary Mother. Mention is also made of her as **Our Lady**.

This feminine principle of divinity existed in different religions under the titles of Isis, Venus, Ishtar and the virgin Mary. Isis is the Egyptian queen of nature, Venus is the goddess of love in the Roman mythology, Ishtar is the former mighty Babylonian queen of heaven whose sanctuary is in the process of being reconstructed in its ancient abode, and the deified Mary is the Christian replica of this communal mother of humanity.

The syncretistic religion of the great tribulation is symbolised by a woman who rides on the back of a beast (Rev. 17:3). This points to

a marriage that will be concluded between religion and politics. The bride of the Antichrist will be the alliance of false religions. Her name is **Mystery Babylon, the mother of harlots.**

According to Revelation 17:9-10 and 18, this apostate woman had reigned over past world empires through the strong influence that the pagan religious system had over leaders and governments. Her influence is not to be underestimated, as her capacity to deceive humanity is enormous. She will persuade her millions of followers during the tribulation to associate with the Antichrist as global messiah, and to accept his number. According to Zechariah 5:5-11, her headquarters will be moved to Shinar, that is Babylon. Halfway through the tribulation, her position as a religious body will become redundant. The Antichrist will declare himself as God and demand that he alone be worshipped. The apostate alliance of religions will then be abandoned and destroyed:

And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire (Rev. 17:16).

The Antichrist will order the execution of his 'wife' after an association of 3½ years. That will be the end of mystical Babylon who ruled over the kings of the earth. Only those members of the false religions who abandon their religious affiliation, worship the beast as God and accept his number, will escape the annihilation of the mother of harlots. But they will also be eternally condemned after another 3½ years when Christ will come to destroy the Antichrist and his followers who will attempt to fight against the true Christ in the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 19:19-21).

An International Centre

In its capacity as economic, political and entertainment centre the rebuilt Babylon will, according to Revelation 18, play an important part in the great tribulation. It can be expected that international organisations will rush to be accommodated in Babylon, and that large building projects will be undertaken and completed in a relatively short time. Very soon the city will assume a cosmopolitan character as the point of convergence for a variety of cultures and civilisations from all over the world. Here the nations were separated when their languages were confused. An attempt will soon be made to reunite them at the same place from where they dispersed 4 500 years ago.

In the days of ancient Babylon, the first united nations conference on record was held on the plains of Shinar:

Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top *is* in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth (Gen. 11:4).

In modern times, a similar appeal may be as follows:

Let us co-operate and build ourselves a city between the East and the West as a symbol of global unity and internationalism. Let us create a united league of world religions and develop our spiritual potential to ascend to greater divinity. Let us establish one monetary system, one government and a classless social order. Only then will we be united into a peaceful and harmonious society of planetary citizens that does not become separated into conflicting and self-centred national groups.

The ideology of the modern tower of Babylon is rapidly gaining ground in the world. Its final implementation will occur very rapidly. Zechariah says that the woman called **wickedness** will be transported to Babylon by two women who have the wind in their wings. A house will be built for her in the land of Shinar, which is Babylonia (Zech. 5:9-11).

Wherever the neo-Babylonian organisation for the united religions of the world may initially be based, an urgent decision will soon be taken about her new headquarters. Destination: **Babylon!**

Satanic gaiety and corruption

At the close of the great tribulation, the evils in the reconstructed city of Babylon will have no limits. Revelation 18 tells us that the sins of Babylon, like that of Sodom and Gomorrah, will reach unto heaven (Rev. 18:5). It will be a place of licentiousness and immoral parties (Rev. 18:7, 9). Music will be an important aspect of the satanic gaiety of Babylon (Rev. 18:22).

The inauguration of the first part of the rebuilt city in September/October 1987, was celebrated with an international music festival. It is obvious that modern rock music, which leads to enslavement to alcohol and drugs, sexual abuse, rebellion, Eastern cults, magic and Satan worship, will find a home in the new Babylon. No wonder the Bible says that these and other decadent forms of art will be destroyed along with Babylon. The noisy instruments of these musicians will become silent and the voices of the singers will no longer be heard (Rev. 18:22).

The destruction of Babylon

The final fall of Babylon will occur at the end of the great tribulation (Rev. 14:8, 16:17-19, 18:2, 10, 21). From the quoted Scriptures it is evident that there will not be a gradual decay and decline of the city

over a long period of time. The destruction of Babylon will occur in **one hour**. As with Sodom and Gomorrah, it will be consumed by fire (Rev. 18:8-10, 18; Is. 13:19, Jer. 50:40). At the same time a great earthquake with continuous thunder and lightning will occur, then the city will subside into a lake of fire, never to be restored or inhabited again (Rev. 16:17-19; 18:21). The smoke of her burning will form dark clouds across the plains of Shinar and be clearly visible from the ships in the Persian Gulf (Rev. 18:17-18). The merchants and the seamen will weep and mourn over the destruction of this city with its riches, pomp and glory.

Where Babylon once was, will be a desolate crater in which the remains of some of its buildings will still be visible. A frightening atmosphere will prevail midst the scene of destruction, and the silence will be ominous. During the millennium, no one will want to stay or overnight in its vicinity (Is. 13:19-20). This scene depicts the downfall and destiny of a kingdom and a society that revolted against God and scorned His mercy.

Evacuate Babylon!

God calls on His people to leave Babylon:

Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues (Rev. 18:4).

This command is not only meant for the people of God who may find themselves in the city of Babylon during the great tribulation, but also for those who are members of Babylonian-type churches and religions. Don't be influenced and led astray by churches that are participants in the building of a modern tower of Babel. Their compromise and spiritual blindness may have a severely detrimental effect on you. Through a subtle process of brainwashing they may succeed in deceiving and misleading you in this critical hour just prior to the coming of Jesus, the Head of the true Church. Many people are the victims of false prophets!

The city of Babylon, its political and economic structures, its immoral life-styles *and* the religious system of mystery Babylon, are all well-planned traps by Satan, the great adversary of the people of God. Regard these unitary structures, evil practices and deceptive ideologies as out of bounds if you want to remain faithful to the only true God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Babylon's fate is sealed and her days are numbered! Stay clear of her!

Put Babylon and all it represents far behind you – it is unclean to you (Is. 52:11 LB).

Chapter 6

ISRAEL DURING THE TRIBULATION

Jerusalem restored

Many people make the mistake of failing to observe Israel in the apocalyptic events of Revelation. Because of this ignorance, much of the biblical perspective on the great tribulation is lost, as well as one of the most important prophetic signs of the end of the Church's dispensation, namely the restoration of the people of Israel and their capital city, Jerusalem.

In connection with the return of Christ, Revelation 1:7 states that "every eye will see Him, and they *also* who pierced Him." This verse has the express implication that Israel must be back in their land so that they can make a decision in respect of the crucified Messiah who was rejected by their forebears during His first coming.

The status of Jerusalem is the most important single sign that the Lord Jesus gave us regarding the end of the present dispensation and the start of the tribulation period. After He outlined the physical destruction of the city of Jerusalem in Luke 19:41-44 and 21:5-6, He mentioned the world-wide dispersion of the Jews as well as the fact that Jerusalem would, during that time, be trodden down by the non-Jewish nations:

For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. **And Jerusalem will be trampled by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled** (Lk. 21:23-24; emphasis added).

Paul refers to the time of Israel's dispersion as a period of spiritual hardening, and to the concurring times of the Gentiles as the period of world evangelism: "...hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Rom. 11:25-26).

The word **until** in Luke 21:24 does not only point to the time when Jerusalem will no longer be trodden down, but also to the end of the dispensation of the Church when the times of the nations will be fulfilled. It is expedient for us to take note of developments in and

around Jerusalem in order that we may correctly interpret the signs of the times (Lk. 12:54-56).

Israel's independence in 1948 was granted with only the new part of Jerusalem under Jewish control. This was an important indication that the prophesied time of the end was imminent. A very significant situation developed in June 1967 when the part of Jerusalem known as the Old City (Zion and the Temple Mount, that is "biblical Jerusalem") as well as East Jerusalem, were conquered from Jordan in the Six-day War. By then, the physical restoration of Jerusalem was complete and would be followed by its political restoration as capital city. Keep in mind that the last time Jerusalem was an independent Jewish capital, was before the Babylonian captivity in the sixth century BC. During the time of Christ, the flag of the Roman Empire was flown in the city.

In August 1980, the Israeli prime minister, Menachem Begin, declared Jerusalem to be the eternal and indivisible capital of Israel, and moved his office from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem. During the two years that followed, his entire cabinet was relocated to Jerusalem as office space became available. The political restoration of the city was then complete.

The spiritual restoration of Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple must yet occur. Religiously speaking, the city is still being trampled by the heathen as is evidenced by the three Muslim Mosques on the Temple Mount. A major religious development in Israel will be a revival early in the tribulation period, from which 144 000 Messianic Jews will emerge. The other religious development of great significance to the Jews will be the rebuilding of the temple. References to the reconstructed temple which will be desecrated during the middle of the tribulation, can be found in Daniel 9:27 and 11:31; Matthew 24:15; 2 Thessalonians 2:4 and Revelation 11:1-2. The prophecy of John in Revelation 11 was recorded in the year 95, more than two decades after the destruction of the previous temple in 70 AD, and can therefore only refer to a future, rebuilt temple.

The spiritual rebirth of the whole nation – the remnant of Israel at the end of the great tribulation – will occur when the Messiah appears on the Mount of Olives during His second coming:

And on that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east (Zech. 14:4).

Many people are looking forward to this great event. The former mayor of Jerusalem, Teddy Kollek, said that his task was the most difficult of any mayor in the world, namely to prepare the city for the coming of the Messiah.



Figure 8. The spiritual revival of Israel.

A week of trial and tribulation

Modern Israel has reinstated its biblical chronology in terms of which years are counted in multiples of seven and called year-weeks. Every six years are followed by a Sabbatical year to complete the cycle, and after seven year-weeks (49 years) a jubilee year is celebrated as the feast of the 50th year (Lev. 25:1-10). Since the tribulation will cover a period of seven years, as indicated in Daniel 9:27, much interest is focused upon Israel's year-week cycle.

The final year-week before the coming of the Messiah on the Mount of Olives, will be a time of testing and spiritual awakening for Israel. This nation is still spiritually blinded and faces a tough time of purification during the seven years of tribulation (Jer. 30:7; Dan. 9: 27; Ezek. 22:19-21; Zech. 13:8-9). After this purification a remnant of Israel will enter the rest of the Messianic kingdom and enjoy all the promises of blessing and perfection. Although the national conversion of Israel will only take place at the end of the seven years – also called the 70th week of Daniel – a great revival will occur at the beginning of the seven years.

The Jewish tradition of year-weeks enables us to understand why the coming tribulation will be a period of exactly seven prophetic years. In a prophetic time-scale, every month is 30 days in length.

Daniel 9:27 refers to this coming year-week of the false messiah's reign, and his desecration of the temple in the middle of the week. This final year-week is therefore divided into two halves of 3½ years (42 months or 1 260 days) each. It is only against this background that we can understand the following statements in Revelation:

- Two special witnesses will minister for 1 260 days in the tribulation period (Rev. 11:3).
- The rebuilt temple in Jerusalem will be desecrated for 42 months (Rev. 11:2).
- The woman (the people of Israel) will flee to the desert where she will be sustained by God for 1 260 days (Rev. 12:6).
- The Antichrist will have absolute authority in the world as a military dictator for 42 months (Rev. 13:5).

The sealed 144 000

A very important event at the beginning of the tribulation period is a spiritual revival among the Jewish people. Revelation 7:4 clearly states that there will be 144 000 servants of God from Israel who will be sealed on their foreheads: "And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred *and* forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel *were* sealed."

There is nothing vague about this statement and it is completely unjustified to attribute the revival of Revelation 7:1-8 to the Church, or to any other group. It applies emphatically to Israel. By that time the Lord will have removed the true believers from the planet earth. He will then spiritually revive 144 000 Jews from among the restored people of Israel to be His special witnesses. Revelation 7 ties up with an extensive series of prophecies in the Bible in which the guarantee is given that the Lord will not only restore Israel physically to their land, but that they will in the latter days also experience a spiritual revival:

Therefore say to the house of Israel... I will take you from among the nations... Then will I sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean.... I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgements, and do *them*. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God (Ezek. 36:22-28).

Today there are many thousands of Jews who have been exposed to the New Testament facts about the messiahship of Jesus,

but most of them are deferring a final decision because of uncertainty, or because of the threat of persecution. A decision will only be taken after the rapture has occurred and all the Messianic Jews (those who have previously accepted Jesus as their Messiah) have been taken away with the Church of Christ. A thorough reappraisal of the facts relating to the Messiah will then have to be made by those left behind.

Because of these dramatic events a large group of Jews all over the world will, in deep repentance under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, accept Yeshua Ha Mashiach (Jesus the Messiah) as their Saviour. From this revival, according to Revelation 7:3, the Lord will have 144 000 of his servants sealed early in the tribulation and appoint them to a special evangelistic ministry. As happened with Daniel's three friends they will, as chosen witnesses, be kept safely in the fire of tribulation during this particularly trying time.

The great deceiver strikes

While the scene is set for Israel's spiritual recovery, the Devil will not let the opportunity go by to produce a false messiah. Immediately after the rapture, great fear and anxiety will prevail in Israel. The situation will be aggravated by an allied Russo-Arab attack which will enfold them from every side (Ezek. 38 and 39). In a most dramatic and unexpected way, God will intervene and save Israel supernaturally by destroying their enemies.

At the same time a dynamic, miracle-working man of Jewish descent will suddenly appear on the scene. Credit for the victory will wrongly be given to this extraordinary man who seemingly came to their rescue at a very critical moment. He will present himself as Israel's redeemer and promised Messiah. After brief consultations, the national leaders will accept him as such. The Lord Jesus referred to this tragic decision when He said:

I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive Me; If another comes in his own name, him you will receive (Jn. 5:43).

This deceiver, who will imitate the true Messiah and attempt to take His place, is the rider on the white horse – the Antichrist. He won't delay efforts to consolidate his position, and will give his consent to Israel to rebuild the temple. He will discredit the spiritual revival from which the 144 000 witnesses will have come forth, as a perfidious movement outside the will of God. In opposition to the Messianic revival he will channel all religious initiatives into an orthodox course, that will include the rebuilding of the temple and the reinstitution of sacrificial services.

For obvious reasons, there will be a tremendous polarisation between the Messianic Jews on one hand, and the orthodox Jews under the guidance of the false messiah on the other hand. The latter group will be in the majority and pledge unanimous support to their long-awaited messiah. Even when he moves out to the other nations and religions and presents himself as their messiah, and thereby draws Israel into an alliance with other religions, the majority will still be blind to his deceit and support him unconditionally.

The two witnesses

During this period of mass seduction the Lord will send two exceptional witnesses to proclaim to Israel that they should turn to the true God (Rev. 11:3-12). Indications in the Bible are that these two could be Moses and Elijah who appeared with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mt. 17:1-3). They may, however, be two modern prophets who will act in the spirit and power of Moses and Elijah. In the last two verses of the Old Testament, the following is said about the end-time ministry of Elijah:

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse (Mal. 4:5-6).

From prince of peace to tyrant

Halfway through the tribulation period, the covenant between the false messiah and Israel will be broken when he declares himself as God in the temple:

...there will be a time of great rebellion against God, and then the man of rebellion will come – the son of hell. He will defy every god there is, and tear down every other object of adoration and worship. He will go in and sit as God in the temple of God, claiming that he himself is God (2 Thes. 2:4 LB).

With the assistance of the false prophet he will set up an image of himself in the Holy of Holies and force everyone to worship him. He will abandon all other forms of worship, including the sacrificial services in the temple. Of this wicked ruler, Daniel says:

This king will make a seven-year treaty with the people, but after half that time, he will break his pledge and stop the Jews from all their sacrifices and their offerings; then, as a climax to all his terrible deeds, the Enemy shall utterly defile the sanctuary of God. But in God's time and plan, His judgement will be poured out upon this Evil One (Dan. 9:27 LB).

Daniel therefore confirms that the Antichrist will abandon all other forms of worship, including the sacrifices in the temple, after the first 3½ years of his reign.

A disillusioned Israel will refuse any continued allegiance to the counterfeit **Messiah** who will suddenly declare himself to be **God**. In so doing they will become the objects of his wrath. Now the false messiah will be the self-declared god of this world and assume the role of the rider on the red horse. He will go on the war-path and endeavour to eradicate Israel and all other dissident groups. He will kill the two witnesses who so adamantly warned the people against him (Rev. 11:7). He will also order the execution of all other people who believe in Christ. In no uncertain way, Jesus warned the Jewish people against this unprecedented persecution by the Antichrist:

Therefore when you see the *abomination of desolation*, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes... And pray that your flight may not be in the winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, never ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved (Mt. 24:15-22).

In those days of tribulation many Jews will perish. Zechariah says:

And it shall come to pass in all the land, says the LORD, *that* two-thirds in it shall be cut off *and* die; but *one*-third shall be left in it (Zech. 13:8).

The remaining third will be purified in the crucible of tribulation until the time when Jesus returns, then they will be reconciled with Him (Zech. 13:9).

The flight to the desert

Revelation 12 describes the flight of the Israelites to the desert. It will take place shortly after the desecration of the temple and the rescission of the covenant between Israel and the false messiah, halfway through the tribulation.

In the scenario of Revelation 12 it is evident that the conflict between Israel and the Antichrist will not be an isolated phenomenon, but part of the age-old struggle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. The background of events that will culminate in this confrontation, are mentioned by John:

And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered. And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and *to* his throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred *and* threescore days (Rev. 12:1-6 KJV).

Here Israel is likened to a married woman – not a betrothed virgin like the Church of Christ (compare Jer. 31:1-5; Is. 54:4-8 and Hos. 2:15 for Israel, and Mt. 25:1-13 and 2 Cor. 11:2 for the Church). The woman is also identified by the twelve stars upon her head that indicate the twelve tribes of Israel, as well as the sun and the moon that point to Jacob and Rachel as ancestor and ancestress of Israel. This symbolism is clear from Joseph's dream:

Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said: Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me. So he told *it* to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him: What *is* this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you? (Gen. 37:9-10. See Jer. 31:11 and 15 where Jacob and Rachel are personified as Israel).

The pregnancy of the woman suggests the period of Christ's birth. The dragon that draws a third of the angels with him from heaven and stands ready to destroy the child, is no other than the Devil himself. On this occasion the abettor was Herod. He demanded that the infants be murdered in an effort to take the life of Jesus. But the Lord Jesus came and fulfilled His task and He was taken back to heaven. The period when He will rule the nations with a rod of iron will commence after His second coming. According to Revelation 2:26-27, His faithful disciples will reign with Him.

Until Jesus comes again, the Devil is directing his efforts of opposing the kingdom of God against the true Church and Israel. As the spiritual restoration of Israel progresses, Satan will focus much

more attention on them – first to deceive them and later to annihilate them – in order that God's plan with His covenant people may be foiled. It is during this period that Israel is given the command to flee to a place in the wilderness, probably Petra, to survive the great tribulation. There the Lord will protect a remnant for 1 260 days – that is 3½ years.

Christian martyrs

The Antichrist will likewise persecute the Christians of the tribulation period. They will reject him and, in contravention of his explicit orders, only worship the God of Israel through the Messiah, Jesus Christ. In this respect the Christians are close relatives of the woman, Israel (Rev. 12:17). In Romans 11:15-20, Paul says that Christians from the non-Jewish nations have been grafted into the Olive Tree (Israel) and are accordingly closely associated with them. This intimate bond is the source of our love for Israel. The sincere desire and prayer of our heart is that they, too, will recognise Jesus as their Lord and Saviour and enter into the new covenant with Him (Heb. 8:8-13).

True Christians (those who are saved shortly after the rapture) will from the onset recognise the Antichrist as a false leader. They will reject him, as well as the false universal Church. For them there will be, in the brief kingdom of the beast, only one course and that is persecution, martyrdom and death. About these martyrs, John says:

When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying: How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth? (Rev. 6:9-10).

These martyrs include all those who will be converted during the tribulation period. Under the ministry of the 144 000 Jewish evangelists there will be many such converts. They will be committed to opposing the Antichrist as a counterfeit Christ and revealing the deception of his multi-faith approach.

Should you live during that time, you must keep in mind that your salvation cannot be effected merely by opposition to the Antichrist and the refusal of his mark, but only by conversion to the Lord Jesus Christ. You must confess your sins, accept Him as your Redeemer and be cleansed by His blood. Only then will you be spiritually equipped to resist the Antichrist, even at the cost of your life. You must indeed be prepared to accept the inevitability of a martyr's death, for Christians will not survive the great tribulation.

Spiritual victory and martyrdom will go hand in hand:

And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; and they did not love their lives to the death (Rev. 12:11).

In heaven they will learn that all their fellow-brothers in Jesus will also have to suffer and die as martyrs:

And a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both *the number of* their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they *were*, was completed (Rev. 6:11).

When all the martyrs have been gathered in heaven, they will receive resurrection bodies and greatly rejoice in the Lord. They will no longer remember all the grief and sorrow of persecution, hunger, martyrdom and the execution they suffered because of their faith. Of this vast gathering, John writes:

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes.... These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.... the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes (Rev. 7:9, 14, 17).

Meeting on the Mount of Olives

The sudden appearance of Christ on the world scene at His second coming is described in Revelation 19, and will take place on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. On that day the remnant of Israel will accept Him as Messiah and be saved:

And His feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which *is* before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof towards the east and towards the west, *and there shall be* a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove towards the north, and half of it towards the south. And ye shall flee *to* the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah: and the LORD my God shall come, *and* all the saints with thee (Zech. 14:4-5 KJV).

The Lord Jesus will come, and with Him the holy ones who were

caught up and united with Him seven years earlier. Now He comes to be reconciled with the remnant of Israel who, during the time of the great war of Armageddon, will take refuge in the rock-shelters in the Mount of Olives. Their meeting with Jesus will be for their salvation because, "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness" (Zech. 13:1 KJV).

On the day of the Messiah's crucifixion, the fountain was opened *potentially* for all Israel and the whole world. At the second coming of the Messiah, the fountain will be opened *experientially* for the Jewish nation. The spiritual cleansing of the nation is associated with Israel's spiritual regeneration and the conclusion of the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-37; Ezek. 36:25-32; Rom. 11:26-27). "The house of David" (political leaders) and "the inhabitants of Jerusalem" include all the people of the land who need the spiritual cleansing that only the Messiah, Jesus, can graciously bestow on them.

The surviving Jews will refer to the nail-marks in His hands, and ask: "What are these wounds in your hands? Then He will answer: *Those with which I was wounded in the house of My friends*" (Zech. 13:6). It will be highly moving moments when the remnant of Israel will have great remorse because of their sins, and also because their forefathers rejected the Messiah during His first coming:

And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; and they will look on Me whom they have pierced; they will mourn for Him as one mourns for *his* only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning at Hadat Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo (Zech. 12:10-11).

The great mourning of the last days, described by Zechariah, refers to the repentance of the Jewish people and their deep contrition in view of their past unbelief. Under conviction of the sin of rejecting the Messiah they shall look on Him whom they have pierced, and shall mourn, and find cleansing in the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. "And so all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:26). Blessed are those who mourn thus (Mt. 5:4) for they shall be comforted through the pardoning mercy of our God freely remitting all their sins, and imparting peace to their souls.

Jesus will be united with the purified, fugitive and sorrowing remnant of His people and comfort them with the words: "This *is* My people; and each one will say: The LORD *is* my God" (Zech. 13:9).

Chapter 7

WARS, PLAGUES AND NATURAL DISASTERS

And you will hear of wars and rumours of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all *these things* must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places (Mt. 24:6-7).

The great tribulation will be a period of devastating wars, pestilences and natural disasters. As a result of it the world and its inhabitants will greatly suffer, and the works of man will be destroyed. A high death-toll, decomposing bodies that remain unburied, and the collapse of medical services will result in pestilence and severe pollution. Unendurable situations will arise, particularly in densely populated areas. Natural resources that have already been rendered useless because of exposure to radioactive pollution, will undergo further damage through earthquakes, droughts and heat-waves. Terrifying earthquakes will occur in which whole cities will be turned into rubble-heaps.

Behind this scene of destruction is the Devil – the great homicidal maniac and destroyer of God's creation. In the brief hour of the kingdom of darkness, he and his followers will be let loose upon the earth to fully manifest their inherent evil desires. In so doing, the measure of their unrighteousness will be filled to the brim and they will face their final doom. The great tragedy is that the fires of hell that are prepared for the Devil and his angels, will also be the final destination of millions of deceived people.

Satan's big wars of annihilation will be waged in the second half of the tribulation, during the period called **the great tribulation**. At the beginning of this 3½ year period he will be barred from further access to the throne of God where he previously made accusations against Christians, day and night (Rev. 12:10). He will be filled with great wrath after being cast out of the heavenlies. In the remaining short time at his disposal, he will use all his power to cause as much destruction upon the earth as possible:

...the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.... Woe for the inhabitants of the

earth and the sea! For the Devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time (Rev. 12:10, 12).

On this occasion the Antichrist will exchange the white horse for the red one, and embark on a course of extermination to turn the whole world into chaos and disorder. When the 42 months of Revelation 13:5-7 come to an end, his gruesome trail of destruction will stretch across the entire earth. Amid this scene of desperation the macabre profile of the death-angel will arise as he gathers his rich harvest of human souls for hell. Like the Devil, the Antichrist will be a murderer who will delight in the death of people.

Wars

In descriptions of the great tribulation, mention is often made of bloody wars that will be waged. Revelation 6:8 states that the battles of the Antichrist, as well as the famines and pestilence that will follow in its wake, will claim a death-toll of a quarter of the world's population. According to present population figures it amounts to 1,5 billion people. The magnitude of such a slaughter is incomparable in the history of mankind. The biggest death-toll ever claimed by a war is the 52 million people who died in World War II.

A Russian invasion of Israel was predicted by Ezekiel some 2 600 years ago. Details are given of how Russia will be allied with Iran, Lybia, Ethiopia, Turkey, and other countries. The driving force behind this war will be the forces of Communism and Islam. These ideologies are fanatically anti-Jewish and anti-Christian. In Ezekiel 38 and 39, a description is given of how the power of this king from the far corners of the North will be broken on the mountains of Israel. Considering that America is an ally of Israel, the predicted Russo-Arab invasion of Israel can potentially develop into a full-scale world war. Indications are that this war will occur at the beginning of the seven years of tribulation and cause the intense conflict needed for the sudden appearance of the Antichrist as a self-declared prince of peace. He will pretend to have 'saved' the world from a destructive nuclear war.

Revelation 9:13-19 gives a description of how the kings of the East – that is China and its allies – will mobilise their forces for the wars of the great tribulation. An army of 200 million Asians will cross the Euphrates River into the Middle East and the Western world, and become responsible for a great slaughter. According to Revelation 9:15, they will kill one third of the world's population. That is about two billion people. Their invasion will continue till the end of the great tribulation at the battle of Armageddon. In Revelation 16:12, where the final events before the battle of Armageddon are discus-

sed, mention is made of this ominous march towards the Middle East:

Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl upon the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared.

Several indications that nuclear weapons will be used in the wars of the great tribulation, appear in Revelation. John did not have the vocabulary to describe the sophisticated 20th century weapons and missiles, but he does convey the idea of nuclear bombs that are dropped, or missiles with nuclear warheads, when he describes various scenes of immense destruction:

The first angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown on the earth; and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up. Then the second angel sounded: And *something* like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood; and a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed (Rev. 8:7-9).

Directly after these catastrophes, he refers to the poisoning of a third of the earth's water sources. He warns that many people who will drink of it, will die. This situation will possibly be caused by radioactive dust that will settle in the water. According to Revelation 8:12 the sun, moon and stars will be partially darkened, thus suggesting serious air pollution.

Scientists have calculated that if a world war should break out in which nuclear weapons are used, it could result in the immediate death of about one billion people. Another billion will be doomed to a slow death. Heat waves will spread over the earth and set flammable material alight. The ignition of stored poisonous gases will fill the atmosphere with deadly carbon monoxide and cyanide gas.

The aftermath of a nuclear war will be equally ghastly. After the initial heat waves, the surface of the earth will cool down dramatically. Temperatures will fall with as much as 55 degrees, and cover the earth under a blanket of ice and snow. This phenomenon is described as a nuclear winter. It will destroy all vegetation, while water reservoirs will be frozen and polluted with radioactive dust. The northern hemisphere will be covered with smoke as most of the explosions will occur there. The sun will be darkened for about a month. Dense clouds will drift to the southern hemisphere, causing the whole earth to experience twilight for about a year.

Revelation 6:12 refers to such a situation when "...the sun be-

came black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood.” These conditions will prevail shortly before the return of Christ, and will increase in intensity. When the Antichrist has completed his global destruction, he will deploy all the remaining armies in Israel to fight his last two battles (Rev. 16:14-16). The one will be against the Jews and the other one against Christ Himself. The Antichrist is aware of Christ’s return with a large heavenly army, and will await His coming at the Mount of Olives. In the ensuing confrontation the Antichrist will bring about his own downfall, as well as that of his followers who accepted his number. John says:

And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh (Rev. 19: 19-21).

Zechariah supports this statement with the following prophecy:

And this shall be the plague wherewith the LORD will smite all the people that have fought against Jerusalem; Their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their holes, and their tongue shall consume away in their mouth (Zech. 14:12 KJV).

Diseases

It is obvious that the pollution caused by nuclear warfare and the firing of chemical and biological warheads, will cause unheard of diseases, poisoning and irradiation. In the case of a nuclear war, people who have been exposed to a great flood of neutron rays will die immediately. As the energy of the rays diminish, it can still remain a source of serious consequences for millions of people. The extent of the damage will depend upon the intensity of the radiation and the population density of the area. These rays can change a person’s cell structure and cause various kinds of cancer. It may vary from skin cancer to malicious tumours in the intestines. If the neutron radiation contains a high energy potential, it can cause disruptions deep into the body tissue. It can also change the structure of a woman’s oviducts and lead to genetic divergence and the malformation of children born during this time.

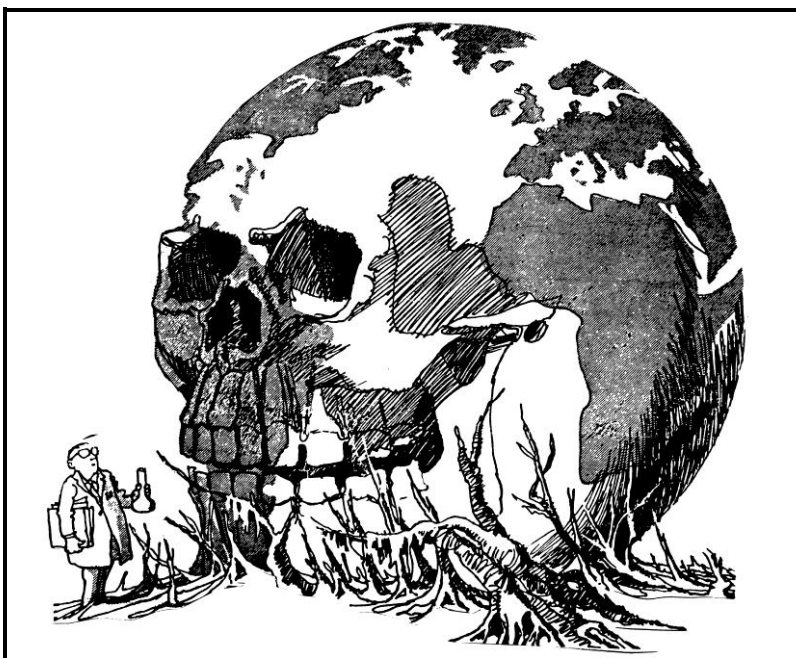


Figure 9. No remedy for a terminally ill planet.

The effect of nuclear warfare on the ecology will be disastrous as natural resources such as water, air, soil and plants will be radioactive after the nuclear explosions. Plants that grow in radioactive soil absorb this pollution, and cattle and sheep that feed on it become polluted. Consequently, their milk and meat will not be fit for human consumption. Even rain-water from clouds that are exposed to radiation becomes radioactive. Besides this, there are various other after-effects of such explosions. Atomic clouds will be driven by the winds and cause radioactive dust to settle over large areas outside the war zone where sickness, misery and death will result among all living creatures.

The animal kingdom is just as vulnerable to this invisible but fatal attack as humans. Maritime animals will also suffer because of the shock waves and irradiation. Should there be nuclear explosions in the sea, as implied by Revelation 8:8, it will prove destructive for marine life, while huge waves and storms will cause many ships to sink. Revelation 16:3-4 refers to a situation where marine life will become extinct and all fresh water sources will be polluted and rendered unfit for consumption. The effect of this disaster on human life and health is inestimable.

Man has acquired the technology to cause a multitude of illnesses and plagues. Various Arab nations are in the process of supplementing their chemical weaponry with bacteriological weapons. They have the means of spreading bacteria over the armies and cities of their enemies, and to cause dysentery (inflammation of the intestines), diarrhoea, anthrax (splenic fever) and abdominal typhus (enteric fever). A biological installation is more compact and less sophisticated than one required for the manufacture of chemical weapons. Several Third World countries are showing an interest in germ warfare.

A disease that is more selective since it will affect only those who have accepted the number of the Antichrist, will be rampant during the great tribulation:

So the first (angel) went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image (Rev. 16:2 KJV).

An end-time disease that can also be classified as selective since it is confined mainly to drug addicts, homosexuals, and sexually permissive groups (especially prostitutes and their customers), is AIDS (Acquired Immunity Deficiency Syndrome). The number of innocent individuals who have contracted this disease through blood transfusions are statistically insignificant.

This virus destroys people's immunity to diseases. Death results mostly from secondary causes such as TB, pneumonia, skin cancer, diarrhoea or any other disease. A person can carry this virus for several years and be HIV positive before it starts to get active and develop into full-fledged Aids. During this period, however, the individual distributes the virus through body fluids (mainly during sexual intercourse) without showing any of the symptoms related to it. Research has revealed that there are up to 100 HIV positive persons for every Aids victim who already shows the symptoms. Cancerous sores on the skin are very common with terminally ill victims of Aids.

The whole of Africa south of the Sahara faces disaster because of Aids if an effective vaccine is not found in time. According to estimates, the populations of many African countries were almost 40% HIV positive at the beginning of the new millennium. In Africa, there are approximately as many women as men who are carriers of the disease. There are already thousands of HIV orphans.

In the Western world, Aids is mainly confined to homosexuals and drug addicts who use infected needles for intravenous injections. Indications are that in cities like New York there are increasing numbers of prostitutes who are carriers of the disease, and this is a

phenomenon that will largely increase the incidence of Aids.

The Lord warns against homosexuality and prostitution. This may be the reason why no remedy has as yet been found for Aids, despite intensive research by the best medical scientists in the world. The Lord directs the following warning to those who persist in these and other sins:

Don't fool yourselves. Those who live immoral lives, who are idol-worshippers, adulterers or homosexuals – will have no share in His Kingdom. Neither will thieves or greedy people, drunkards, slanderers or robbers (1 Cor. 6:9-10 LB).

Adultery, sexual immorality and homosexuality all feature in this list. Remember the fate of Sodom, from which the word sodomy is derived, where homosexuality was the order of the day. The Bible condemns these sinful practices and also mentions the retribution that the transgressors will suffer **in their bodies**:

For this reason God gave them over *and* abandoned them to vile affections *and* degrading passions. For their woman exchanged their natural function for an unnatural *and* abnormal one. And the men also turned from natural relations with women and were set ablaze with lust for one another, men committing shameful acts with men and suffering in their own bodies *and* personalities the inevitable consequences *and* penalty of their wrong doing *and* going astray, which was (their) fitting retribution (Rom. 1:26-27 AB).

During the end-time there will again, as in the days of Noah and Lot, be a perverse and immoral generation of people who will submit their bodies to vile affections, be numbered by the Antichrist and even sell their souls to the Devil for financial gain. Despite this pernicious state into which they have degraded themselves, and amid the greatest anxiety, they will remain impenitent. The sinners in the great tribulation will harden themselves time and again, and refuse to repent in spite of the plagues sent by God. The hideous sores that will appear on their bodies, the excruciating heat, the famine and all the natural disasters, will cause them to blaspheme even more. They "...blasphemed the name of God, which had power over these plagues: and they repented not to give Him glory" (Rev. 16:9 KJV).

In Revelation 9, a grim account is given of a situation in which the survivors of the terrible disasters, surrounded by starving people and decaying corpses, continue with their Satanism, immorality and other evils, with no intention of changing their ways. Instead of repenting, they will blaspheme God:

And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see nor hear, nor walk. Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts (Rev. 9:20-21 KJV).

A person who has wilfully and publicly made his choice for Satan and his works, is so blinded that his senses will only respond to lies. He will perpetually reject the truth, while being unaware of the mad race he is following on the road to perdition.

Natural disasters

Several signs around us point towards the approach of terrible natural disasters, such as those that the Bible associates with the great tribulation. According to scientists there is a steady rise in temperature that will significantly change the climate of the earth. This can be attributed to the immense quantity of carbonic acid gas and other contaminated matter set free at random in the atmosphere. Irreparable damage has already been caused to the ozone layer around the earth, and large holes have formed. This protective layer is a shield against ultra-violet rays. The decay caused to it by dangerous gases constitutes a tremendous threat to all living creatures on earth. Together with the increased heat, it will cause the ice in the polar regions to melt. This, in turn, will lead to a rise in the coastal lines and the flooding of low-lying areas.

The prevalence of pollution continues unabatedly. Certain gases from factories lead to acid rain, and the result has been the destruction of plantations and natural forests in many parts of the world. Add to this grim picture the depletion of natural resources and the serious damage caused to rivers, lakes and the oceans by waste from factories, the spilling of crude oil, and the uncontrolled dumping of poisonous and radioactive waste.

Climatic changes also lead to a noticeable polarisation in weather conditions, as is evident from the increasing droughts, floods and unusually high and low temperatures. On the other hand, millions of people are threatened by steadily expanding deserts, while other parts of the world are subject to an extraordinary high rainfall, floods and typhoons. These extreme conditions have an adverse effect upon crops. With a rapidly increasing world population of about 6 billion people, phenomena such as these hold the prospect of large-scale famine and hardship for millions of people. It is because of these serious concerns that the first Earth Summit was held in Brazil in June 1992.

One natural disaster that features prominently in end-time prophecy is the increase in earthquakes. Rising strain and instability in the surface of the earth suggests the possibility of a considerable increase in earthquakes. In densely populated areas with high buildings, the scene is set for violent disasters should earthquakes occur there. In His prophetic discourse on the time of great tribulation, the Lord Jesus said:

There will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear, and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory (Lk. 21:25-27).

Apart from earthquakes, there will also be cosmic signs and disasters that will strike the world from outer space. Among these will be meteor showers and asteroids that will cause devastation on earth. These disasters will clearly be recognised as the judgements of God. When things are at their worst, Christ will suddenly appear on planet earth during His second coming. The sinners will be overwhelmed with fear and attempt to flee away from the presence of the Son of God:

I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks: Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand? (Rev. 6:12-17).

Revelation 16 describes a similar scene:

And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done. And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, *and* so great. And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations

fell; and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, *every stone* about the weight of a talent (50 kg.); and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great (Rev. 16:17-21 KJV).

Many Old Testament prophets have also recorded similar prophecies about the day of the Lord. On the one hand people will be harassed by scorching heat and drought, and on the other hand by suffocating darkness and the rumble of earthquakes. Sinners who have hardened their hearts will be cast down and perish with their works. Their bodies will be devoured by the birds of prey and the beasts of the earth... Isaiah says about this time:

Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine. I will punish the world for *its* evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. I will make a mortal more rare than fine gold, a man more than the golden wedge of Ophir. Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will move out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts and in the day of His fierce anger (Is. 13:9-13).

Other similar warnings about the judgements of the Lord on that day are on record:

Behold, the LORD makes the earth empty and makes it waste, distorts its surface and scatters abroad its inhabitants.... The land shall be entirely emptied and utterly plundered, for the LORD has spoken this word..... The earth is also defiled under its inhabitants, because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore the curse has devoured the earth, and those who dwell in it are desolate. Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men *are* left (Is. 24:1-6).

Words by Christ in the New Testament concerning the end-times are closely related to the above:

For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but

for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened (Mt. 24:21-22 KJV).

Christians are admonished in no uncertain way to take note of these warnings. Like Noah, they should make the necessary preparations while at the same time warning others around them against the rapidly approaching judgements. Lot was regarded worthy to escape the judgement of Sodom and Gomorrah and, in accordance with the will of God, took haste to evacuate the disaster area. If he should have cherished any doubts in his mind about the certainty of these judgements and became reluctant to part with his earthly possessions, he would have perished in the flames with them.

We are not objects of God's wrath, but then we must be vigilant and spiritually worthy to appear before Him:

And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man (Lk. 21:34-36 KJV).

Have you made the necessary preparations to flee from the impending judgements of God? When the people of Israel were redeemed from the Egyptian bondage, they had to take shelter under the blood of the Lamb. Have **you** done that?

Chapter 8

THE KINGDOM OF THE MESSIAH AND THE NEW CREATION

The return of Christ

In the climax of the battle of Armageddon, on the last day of the great tribulation, Jesus will go to battle on a white horse, accompanied by His heavenly armies:

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him *was* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes *were* like a flame of fire, and on His head *were* many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He *was* clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on *His* robe and on His thigh a name written: **KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS** (Rev. 19:11-16).

After the enemy has been defeated and the Antichrist, the false prophet and their followers have been judged (Rev. 19:20-21), the Devil will be imprisoned and kept in custody for a thousand years:

And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season (Rev. 20: 1-3 KJV).

The description of the binding of the Devil is an extension of the scenario of Revelation 19 and is therefore a direct result of the return of Jesus. It follows immediately after the final judgement on the Antichrist and the false prophet, and is therefore not an event that can be estranged from this context and applied to the present

dispensation of the Church.

At the cross, victory was indeed gained over the Devil. We can accept this fact in faith and lead a life of victory over the enemy. But that does not mean that Satan was removed from the scene after Calvary and imprisoned somewhere. On the contrary! Peter says that he still goes around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he can destroy (1 Pet. 5:8). This warning is given to Christians so that they may remain sober, watchful and clad in the armour of God. We can live in the victory of Calvary if we consistently stay near to our Saviour and resist the Evil One:

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you (Jas. 4:7 KJV).

The peace of God that we as saved ones experience, does not suggest that we are already in the millennial age (the thousand years of peace). The present battle with the Devil and his evil powers can in no way be associated with a situation in which he is **bound, shut up and sealed so that he cannot mislead the nations**. We do not yet find ourselves in a position where peace reigns. Instead, we are involved in a spiritual battle that extends right through the dispensation of the Church:

Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places* (Eph. 6:11-12).

About our position in this evil world, Jesus said: "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword" (Mt. 10:34). In the present dispensation the peace of God reigns in our hearts and strengthens us for the struggle against adverse forces in a hostile world: "We know positively that we are of God, and the whole world *around us* is under the power of the Evil One" (1 Jn. 5:19 AB).

In the great tribulation, Satan's efforts will be intensified (Rev. 12:12). He will instigate the nations of the world to take up arms, advance to the Middle East, attempt to eradicate Israel and even risk battle against Jesus and His armies. John describes this incitement as follows:

And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs *come* out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, *which* go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole

world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty (Rev. 16:13-14 KJV).

It is only during Christ's return that the power of the satanic triumvirate will be destroyed. Two of them, the beast and the false prophet, will be confined to the lake of fire. The dragon will be sealed up in a bottomless pit and given over to chains of darkness, where he is to remain for a thousand years.

Judgement of the nations

Matthew describes the judgement of the nations when Christ, on His return, will sit on His throne of glory:

When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats (Mt. 25:31-32).

This judgement of Christ will be accompanied by an international rearrangement. The nations will, among others, be given their position or forfeit it on the grounds of their past relationship with Israel.

The wedding feast of the Lamb

After the return of Christ, the wedding feast of the Lamb will be celebrated on earth. By then, the marriage will have been consummated in heaven but the feast will still have to be celebrated. John says:

Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, Write: Blessed *are* those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb! And he said to me: These are the true sayings of God (Rev. 19:7-9).

During His secret coming before the tribulation, Jesus will be united with His bride. She will immediately be caught up to be with the Lord in heavenly places. Now, seven years later, the public revelation of Jesus and His bride will occur. The glorious occasion of the marriage feast of the Lamb will be the venue for many guests. They will include the remnant of Israel who will just have accepted Jesus as their Messiah.

Because Jesus will bring His bride with Him from heaven and introduce her to the world, the promise made in Colossians 3:4 will be fulfilled: "When Christ *who is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory." His bridal Church will share with Him His greatest moment of triumph – to return as King of kings to the world where He suffered and died, to break the power of the enemy and

establish a kingdom of righteousness in its place.

The two resurrections

The doctrine of the two resurrections is clearly exemplified in the events of Revelation. Only those who have had a part in the first resurrection (Lk. 14:14, 1 Thes. 4:16), including the martyrs of the great tribulation, will rule with Christ.

Blessed and holy *is* he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years (Rev. 20:6).
...the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection (Rev. 20:5).

The millennial kingdom

During the millennial age, the Church of Jesus Christ will reign with Him on earth. The elders, who depict the glorified Church around the throne in Revelation 5, are looking forward to the time when they will return with Jesus to the earth to be appointed as kings in His millennial kingdom. When they sing their song of praise to Him, they also assume their new positions:

You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us **kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth** (Rev. 5:9-10; emphasis added).

The parable in Luke 19:11-28 also refers to this reign of the Lord Jesus with His saints. The man of authority who went to a far land to receive his kingdom, and then to return, points to Jesus. He is the nobleman who, at His first coming, was not recognised and accepted as King. As a humble Servant and the Lamb of God He laid down His life for sinners. After that, with His ascension, He went to a *far land* where God gave Him a name above every name and highly exalted Him (Phil. 2:9).

When He returns to exercise His kingship, He will also appoint His servants as kings. The one will be given authority over ten cities, the other over five cities, while the unfaithful servant who has not fulfilled his duty and appears before Him empty-handed, will not be entrusted with authority in His kingdom.

Many people wrongly assign this reign to heaven. The Lord must also reign *on earth*, on the throne of David in Jerusalem, to do justice to all the prophecies in this regard. Before the birth of Jesus, the angel said to Mary:

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son,

and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord will give Him the throne of His father David (Lk. 1:31-32).

The throne of David is not in heaven, but in Israel, in the city of Jerusalem. Christ's millennial kingdom will, however, not be confined to Israel alone, but extend to the uttermost parts of the earth. Although His kingdom will be characterised by peace and tranquillity, strong discipline will still be needed because of the presence of unsaved people born of parents who survived the great tribulation. In heaven there can't be a situation that will require people to be ruled with a rod of iron. We *must* therefore accept the fact of a future dispensation of the kingdom of Christ on earth before the perfect and sinless conditions of the new heaven and earth will prevail.

When Jesus Christ comes again, "the government will be upon His shoulder" (Is. 9:6). His coming as King will coincide with the sounding of trumpets and an announcement from heaven: "Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" (Rev. 11:15).

Revelation 12:15 states that Jesus will rule all the nations with a rod of iron, and in Revelation 2 Jesus says to His faithful servants:

But hold fast what you have till I come. And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations – *He shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the potter's vessels shall be broken to pieces* – as I also have received from My Father (Rev. 2:25-27).

In the book of Acts there is a clear promise that Jesus will restore the throne of David during the visible manifestation of His kingdom:

After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen down. I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up, so that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the LORD who does all these things (Acts 15:16-17).

During the Messianic kingdom on earth, the throne of the Lord Jesus in Jerusalem will be the point of contact between heaven and earth. It will be the centre of divine wisdom, authority and a reign of righteousness. Isaiah gives the following exposition of this reign:

Now it shall come to pass in the latter days, *that* the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and

shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more (Is. 2:2-4).

A situation like this, where no wars are waged, no military training is given and no weapons are manufactured, has never before prevailed on earth. It still awaits fulfilment in a future dispensation after the Prince of Peace has come and taken the government upon His shoulders. When doing so, He will first bind the *strong man* of the present age, called *the god of this age* (2 Cor. 4:4) who, with his large force of demons, are *the rulers of the darkness of this age* (Eph. 6:12). Because the Devil will be bound during the millennial rule of Christ, he will not be able to deceive the nations as he presently does (Rev. 20:2-3). Consequently, there will be no crime or war. All forms of rebellion against God will disappear and the whole world will acknowledge and practise only the Christian religion:

...the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (Is. 11:9).

Jerusalem will be spontaneously accepted as the capital city of the world. Hostilities and tensions caused by political differences, will not exist:

At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the LORD, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem; they shall walk no more after the stubbornness of their evil heart (Jer. 3:17).

The only form of misbehaviour will be laxity among some nations in giving honour and worship to the Lord, as befits His subjects. For this reason they will be ruled with a rod of iron, while punitive actions may also be instituted:

And it shall come to pass, *that* everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. And it shall be *that* whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, on them there will be no rain (Zech. 14:16-17).

From this statement it is evident that although the Devil will not be present to tempt sinful persons, they will still have a carnal nature in need of discipline to maintain a positive relationship towards the things of God. They will be mortal beings of flesh and blood who do not have glorified bodies. Because of their fallen nature, they will need to have a spiritual experience of salvation in order to belong to the Lord.

According to Zechariah 14:16-17, only a small remnant of the nations will survive the great tribulation and the battle of Armageddon without having accepted the number of the Antichrist or worshipped his image. They will probably all be saved after the second coming of Christ (Mt. 24:30). However, their children will be born with a sinful, Adamic nature and will have to be born again to become Christians. To evangelise them will be the task of the saved Israel, who will also be mortal but born-again people.

The final judgement

The Devil will not immediately after the coming of Christ be confined to the lake of fire, as will happen to the Antichrist and the false prophet. The reason for his binding before his final condemnation is because he will, at the end of the millennium, be released for a short while to uncover the latent evil of unsaved people. In this way a clear distinction will be made between them and the saved ones. The incredible fact will then become manifest that the majority of the people born on earth during the millennial reign of Christ will **not** truly repent and become saved people:

Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number *is* as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. And the Devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet *are*. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever (Rev. 20:7-10).

The dramatic end of the millennium will conclude the sixth of the seven dispensations in God's plan for mankind. These are:

- The dispensation of innocence in paradise.
- The dispensation of fallen man, guided by his conscience.
- The dispensation of the law in the history of Israel.

- The dispensation of grace (the hidden kingdom) during the Church age.
- The dispensation of the Antichrist's kingdom during the tribulation period.
- The dispensation of the revealed kingdom of God on earth (Christ's thousand year reign of peace).
- The everlasting dispensation of perfection during eternity.

Throughout the ages those who chose to walk the narrow way, were a minority. This will also be the case during the coming millennial kingdom. Although people will enjoy the privileges of the messianic kingdom, the majority of them will not really humble themselves before the Lord to be born again. When the Devil is released at the end of the thousand years, all the unsaved people will be spontaneously attracted to him. Because of their unchanged hearts, Satan will be able to deceive and mobilise them for a final attack on Christ and His saints. After that rebellion, the eternal and dreadful night of horror for the Evil One and his hordes will ensue.

At the end of the thousand years of the millennial kingdom, a great white throne will appear in heaven. The second resurrection will occur and all those who lived without Christ will be judged and condemned to eternal death in the fires of hell. The narrow and the broad way will each reach its final and eternal destination – the one in the new Jerusalem with its pearly gates, and the other one in the lake of fire: “And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:15 KJV).

The Bright and Morning Star

In Revelation 22:16 the Lord says, “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star.”

Jesus is the Root and Offspring of David. As the Root of David His Deity is asserted – He is David's Lord! As the Offspring of David His Manhood is involved (Lk. 20:41-44). He is the promised Messiah who was born from the house of David in the tribe of Judah – the seed of Abraham through whom all the nations would be blessed (Gen. 12:3). Throughout the centuries, Satan hated and persecuted Israel because of the promises made to them about the coming Messiah. Satan is still waging this war because the Messiah of Israel, who is also the Saviour of the world, is coming again to annihilate the Antichrist and his forces, and to reign as King!

As the Bright and Morning Star, Jesus Himself is the promise of a new day that will dawn over this troubled world. The morning star is

visible only during the latter part of the night – just before and heralding the dawn. It is still night now and the world is sinking ever deeper into moral and spiritual darkness. The true believers will meet Jesus as the Morning Star during the rapture in the fourth night-watch of this dark dispensation. The darkest part of the night will then ensue on earth under the evil reign of the Antichrist. With His second coming Jesus will, as prophesied, “arise” as “the Sun of Righteousness... with healing in His wings” (Malachi 4:2), dispelling all darkness and usher in His millennial reign as Prince of peace, King of kings and Lord of lords!

The new creation

Directly after the great white throne judgement the earth will be burned, the heaven will depart like a scroll that is rolled together, and a new heaven and a new earth will be created. The new Jerusalem, that wonderful city which Jesus prepared for those who love Him, will descend from heaven and rest upon the new earth.

The city and its streets are built of pure and transparent gold. The foundation stones of the wall are decorated with precious jewels that vary from crystal clear stones to deep red sardius, green chrysolite and sparkling blue sapphire. In the high walls that surround the city are twelve gates made of pearls – each gate is a single pearl. The idea of a tear is conveyed by a pearl, since its formation is associated with pain and suffering. When the oyster is injured, a shiny pearl is formed in the wound. When the feet and hands of Jesus Christ were pierced by the rough nails and He gave His life on the cross, the gates of paradise were again opened to fallen humanity. On the merit of His tears and suffering He became a precious pearl to us, which in itself is a gateway to the new Jerusalem. Through Him we can enter into the kingdom of heaven and delight ourselves in the glory of the Lord.

Spiritual preparation

After the reader has been given a glimpse of the new heaven and the new earth in Revelation 22, his attention is drawn back to the present. Equipped with new insight into the glorious destination of all Christians, as well as the terrible abode of the wicked, the reader is challenged with an unambiguous reaction and a genuine commitment on his part. The Lord expects from all Christians a readiness for the day of His return. We are clearly called to a life of dedication, godliness and separation from the present evil world:

And he said to me, ‘Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand. He who is unjust, let him be unjust still;

he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still. And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward *is* with Me to give every one according to his work' (Rev. 22:10-12 KJV).

Paul has the same message to Christians, who are all called to a godly life of service to the Lord:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works (Tit. 2:11-14).

In the book of Revelation, God also reminds us that we are not to follow the pattern of Babylonian thinking of unity at all cost. In terms of this ideology people are taught to go along with anything that comes their way, and to accommodate all religions and their non-Christian traditions. In our dispensation, which is characterised by the presence of two opposing spiritual forces, the ideal of global unity is not feasible. We should rather, because of our faith in the Lord Jesus, be prepared for greater polarisation with an evil world. Such an attitude calls for spiritual as well as moral divergence from the mainstream of the permissive and corrupt life-styles that are the order of the day.

You cannot compromise and revert to the sinful practises and ideologies of this world that is in the power of the Evil One. Follow the straight and narrow road all the way. Do not deviate from God's principles and don't become concerned when the world, as well as the compromising, worldly churches, turn their backs on you. When Jesus was on earth, the religious leaders persecuted and rejected Him. He cautioned us that His disciples will have the same experience (Jn. 16:33). Nominal Christians who compromise with the world, will obviously not be judged and persecuted; but in the end they will pay dearly for this temporary advantage.

Because of the uncompromising attitude of fundamental Christians towards secular life-styles, polarisation will inevitably occur between them and the world. This is the reason why friendship with the world is emphatically branded as enmity against God (Jas. 4:4; 1 Jn. 2:15-17). No bridges can, therefore, be built between the two ideologies and life-styles. Each Christian must take an unequivocal stand on his convictions.

You are invited at this very moment, even should the tribulation

already have begun, to turn from the pathway of darkness and iniquity to the Saviour, Jesus Christ. To everyone who truly wants to be saved, the Lord says in the closing chapter of the Bible: "And let him who thirsts come. And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely (Rev. 22:17).

Don't delay for another moment, but go down on your knees and confess your sins to Jesus Christ. His promise is that those who come to Him, He will in no way cast out (Jn. 6:37). He waits for you now: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Is. 1:18 KJV).

The Lord pardons abundantly (Is. 55:7). Even if you have backslidden time and again, you can still have the confidence to return to the Lord. Don't allow the Devil to prevent your salvation or spiritual restoration with the idea that your sins are too big and even unpardonable. That is one of his many lies! Confess everything to the Lord and accept 1 John 1:9 as the promise of complete forgiveness and salvation: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:9). He delights in the repenting of a sinner who comes to Him with a broken heart.

Testify to others about your faith and take a public stand for Christ (Rom. 10:9-10), even though it may bring persecution. Do not be ashamed to acknowledge your Redeemer, and don't keep quiet about the great things He has done for you. Read the first epistle of Peter, and rejoice even in the suffering you have to undergo because of your faith. The hardships in this hostile world don't weigh up against the eternal glory that is shortly to be revealed to us (2 Cor. 4:16 - 5:1). Time is so short that not a moment can be wasted to get into the right relationship with the Lord. What you do *now*, or neglect to do, will be decisive for your eternal destiny.

At the conclusion of Revelation, the assurance is given that if we have been reconciled with God through the blood of the Lamb, the Holy Spirit will bring a deep longing for the return of Jesus in our hearts. The Spirit and the bride call on the heavenly Bridegroom: **Come, Lord Jesus!** His response to this is: **Surely I come quickly!** (Rev. 22:17, 20).

Chapter 9

IT IS FINISHED!

We are in a terminal situation very close to the end of the dispensation of the Church. Soon, the trumpet will sound and the long wait will be over for the bride of Christ. Then, suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, the born-again Christians will be caught up and united with the heavenly Bridegroom.

Soon afterwards, when the Antichrist is revealed, he will race against time as his days will be numbered – 1 260 days to the middle of the tribulation, followed by another 1 260 days to his sudden destruction. The Bible says that “when he does arrive he must stay *but a brief time*” (Rev. 17:10 AB).

The consummation of this dispensation is directly linked to the critical moment almost 2 000 years ago when Jesus cried out on the cross: **“It is finished!”** All the demands for the salvation of sinners were met on the cross, and people everywhere were to be confronted with the choice of either accepting or rejecting it. The time for world evangelism is, however, drawing to a close. We are now rapidly heading for the day when the faithful servants of Jesus will be rewarded, while His adversaries under the leadership of the Antichrist will be judged and punished.

To be *for* or *against* Christ, and soon to be judged for all eternity in terms of your relationship with Him, calls for a clear understanding of what the atoning death of Jesus on the cross means to you. What is the full significance of His dying-word when He shouted with a loud voice: **“It is finished”**?

Jesus was nailed to the cross to pay the penalty for the sins of lost humanity (Is. 53:5-6). As “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6: 23), He was not only to suffer physically but also to be executed on our behalf. It was therefore only when He died that He fulfilled all the requirements for God’s plan of salvation. During those very last moments when Jesus gave up His life, He said: “Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit!” and then exclaimed loudly: **“Tetelestai!”** - “It is finished!” (Lk. 23:46; Jn. 19:30).

To fully comprehend the significance of the word **tetelestai** that was uttered by Jesus at the moment of His death, we should briefly investigate its applications during the first century. This word was more meaningful to those people than to us today, and we will do well to retrieve its original meaning.

Fully paid

In the first instance, according to the *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, the word **tetelestai** was used as the first word on a receipt. It therefore conveys the meaning of **fully paid**.

Have you ever considered the fact that Jesus actually bought you when He shed His blood and gave His life for you? Paul reminds us of this truth: “For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:20).

Peter said:

...you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

The testimony of the elders in heaven confirms their full realisation that they have been bought with the blood of the Lamb, when they sang: “You were slain (sacrificed) and with Your blood You purchased men unto God from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9 AB).

Dear reader, do you have the assurance that the price for *your* sins has been fully paid? Do you comply with the condition of repentance and confession of your sins to have them forgiven? The Word of God says: “He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes *them* will have mercy” (Prov. 28:13; see also 1 Jn. 1:8-9).

After conversion, we ought to walk with the Lord and keep our record clean by confessing all sins of which the Holy Spirit convicts us (1 Jn. 2:1-2). Do you have fresh date stamps on your receipt?

The Corinthians were very carnal due to a lax attitude, and this disposition seriously hampered their spiritual growth to maturity:

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual *people* but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able *to receive it*, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere* men?... Do you not know that you are the temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you? (1 Cor. 3:1-3, 16).

Don’t enter the new life with a heritage of carnal attitudes and unconfessed sins. It will eventually cripple you spiritually. Jesus has paid the full price to do a complete work in your life. He wants to save *and* sanctify you. Don’t leave the throne of grace with hidden sins that have not been confessed and forsaken.

Sentence served

During the first century it was common practice to nail the charge-sheet of a prisoner to his cell-door. The offences for which he was convicted were written on the charge-sheet, as well as the penalty imposed upon him. After he served his sentence, the charge-sheet was removed from the door and cancelled by writing across it in big letters: **Tetelestai** ('Fully served'). It was then given to him and nobody could ever charge him again for these offences. He had paid the price for his trespasses in full by serving the entire sentence.

In a spiritual sense all human beings are captives of Satan, "for all have sinned" (Rom. 3:23). They find themselves in his death cells awaiting their trial before the great white throne where they will be condemned to eternal death. The prison master is the Devil, and no person can free himself of his own accord from this severe bondage, or from the death sentence imposed upon him.

To save lost sinners, Jesus Christ willingly served the death sentence that has already in principle been imposed upon all sinners (Rom. 6:23). After His resurrection from the grave, He is in a position to cancel the charge-sheet of every lost sinner by writing in red letters with His blood across it: **Tetelestai - Sentence served.**

You were dead in sins, and your sinful desires were not yet cut away. Then He gave you a share in the very life of Christ, for He forgave all your sins, and blotted out the charges proved against you, the list of his commandments which you had not obeyed. He took this list of sins and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ's cross (Col. 2:13-14 LB).

The Saviour was indeed sent to earth "to bring out the prisoners from the prison, *and* them that sit in darkness out of the prison house" (Is. 42:7 KJV).

His mission to free those who are spiritual captives of Satan, is also reiterated in Isaiah 61:

The Spirit of the Lord GOD *is* upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to *those who are* bound (Is. 61:1).

Have all the sins of which the Devil accuses you before the throne of God been blotted out by the blood of the Lamb? If so, nobody can ever accuse you again for those sins, no matter how serious they were, because the sentence for them has fully been served.

Victory gained

A third usage of the term **tetelestai** was related to successful mili-

tary campaigns against the enemy. When a general returned from the battle-field and paraded his captives of war in the streets of Rome, he proclaimed his victory by shouting: **Tetelestai... tetelestai...** By this victory shout a clear statement was made that the enemy was conquered and its power broken: **mission accomplished!**

Although it was His dying-word on the cross, Jesus also proclaimed His victory over the enemy with the shout: **Tetelestai!** To die was a major victory for Jesus, “that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the Devil” (Heb. 2:14).

Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it (Col. 2:15).

Jesus conquered the enemy, but has not yet obliterated him. The Devil is still very active on earth, therefore we are called upon to share in the victory of Calvary and become “more than conquerors through Him that loved us” (Rom. 8:37). There is a battle to be fought and a victory to be gained.

An end-time strategy

Let us make the most of the remaining time and buy it out for serving the Lord and extending His kingdom on earth. The shadows are falling and time is rapidly running out. Like the Lord Jesus, we should also say:

I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; *the* night is coming when no one can work (Jn. 9:4).

The night of God’s judgements in the great tribulation is fast approaching, and there is still uncompleted business in His kingdom to be done before the trumpet sounds. The lost must be saved and Christians must be spiritually prepared for the meeting with the heavenly Bridegroom. Allow the Lord to complete His wonderful work in your life:

Christ... loved the Church and gave Himself to it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it... that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:25-27).

Chapter 10

A BIBLICAL STRATEGY FOR SPIRITUAL SURVIVAL

In a book of this nature, it is necessary to offer a biblical strategy for spiritual survival during the tribulation period to those who will not be ready to meet the heavenly Bridegroom, and will consequently be left behind. In the light of what has already been said in the book, supplementary information and advice are given in this chapter. The main purpose with the strategy is to indicate to people how they can *spiritually* survive and ensure that they get to heaven despite the most gruesome tribulation and deception that they will have to face during the Antichrist's reign of terror.

The promise of escape from the tribulation is only for those who are spiritually ready and worthy (Mk. 13:33-37; Lk. 21:34-36). The fulfilling of this promise will be a tremendous shock to the backslidden, compromising and worldly-minded Church of the 20th century. Utterly panic-stricken, they will have to face the fact of their spiritual bankruptcy. The question on everybody's lips will be: "What will happen now, and what should we do?"

The Bible has clear answers to these and other questions. It will guide those who have been left behind to work out a proper plan of action. If biblical instructions are carefully followed, people **can** still be saved during the tribulation period and ensure that they inherit the kingdom of heaven.

However, it won't be easy to find the way to eternal life through the narrow gate during this time. Apart from the basic requirement of faith in the Lord Jesus as Saviour, a very high price of self-denial, economic impoverishment and public scorn and rejection will have to be paid. Counting the cost to become a Christian will also include the willingness to die as a martyr for your faith.

Although many people will accept the challenge to obtain eternal life the majority will, to their everlasting ruin, choose the easier way out of the dilemma. The mass deception of the false church will be so strong that millions of people will be swept away by it.

On the following page is a basic exposition of events in the two halves of the tribulation period. From the rest of the discussion the distinctive nature of the two periods, that is the false peace of 3½ years and the great tribulation of 3½ years, will be quite obvious.

THE TRIBULATION OF SEVEN YEARS

(THE 70th YEAR-WEEK OF DANIEL)

Rapture

0

Seven year long absence of the Bride of Christ from the earth. During her earthly ministry she shined as a light in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. After her departure, spiritual darkness will prevail on earth.

Second coming

0

RULE OF THE ANTICHRIST	
FALSE PEACE (3½ years)	GREAT TRIBULATION (3½ years)
↓ Antichrist is revealed as Prince of Peace. He bases his global leadership position on political, religious and economic structures.	↓ Antichrist desecrates the temple, abolishes the sacrificial service and declares himself as God. Israel abrogate their covenant with him.
↓ The New World Order with its universal government and World Peace Force is instituted, and it greatly empowers the alliance of world religions.	↓ The alliance of world religions (the false world Church) is destroyed and replaced by the forced worship of the Antichrist as God.
↓ The Antichrist concludes a covenant with Israel as their Messiah. All other religions accept and worship him in this capacity.	↓ Severe persecution is instituted against Jews and Christians who refuse to worship the Antichrist as God. They are convicted and executed.
↓ The third temple is built in Jerusalem next to the Islamic mosque. The lie is proclaimed that all religions worship the same God.	↓ The Antichrist becomes sole ruler and military dictator. He controls a cashless world economy by means of computerised 666 related numbers.

↓ Babylon is rebuilt in Iraq as the New Age capital and symbol of world unity. A temporary economic recovery and a false peace prevails on earth.	↓ An unprecedented death-toll is caused by wars, pestilences and natural disasters. Military mobilisation for the battle of Armageddon occurs.
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The hour of darkness

The moment when the rapture occurs, the light of the world will be gone. Great spiritual darkness will prevail after those who have witnessed for the true light, Jesus Christ, have left planet earth and are nowhere to be found. Panic will suddenly erupt, particularly in the traditional Christian world.

The backsliders, those who only had a form of godliness, the agnostics, and all the people who practised non-Christian religions will be perplexed and confused by this dramatic event. However, soon the most absurd and far-fetched explanations will be offered for the rapture in an effort to calm their feelings and allay their fears. More treacherous lies will soon follow in an attempt to deceive humanity into believing Satan's account of the events.

War in the Middle East

Around the time of the rapture, a surprise attack will be launched on Israel by a Russo/Arab alliance (Ezek 38-39). Nuclear missiles will in all probability be deployed against Israel, thereby creating the possibility of a full-scale world war. A crisis of global proportions will suddenly be caused. The political and economic stability of the world will be seriously threatened, stock markets will collapse, and military mobilisation will occur in Europe, the Middle East, Asia and in the USA. Then, events will take a quite unexpected turn...

The enemy forces deployed in Israel to annihilate the nation will in a highly surprising and dramatic way be destroyed by God (Ezek. 39:1-5). The besieged Israeli's will recognise the divine intervention and give glory to God. But then they will make the fatal mistake of accepting the wrong Messiah.

A man with astounding supernatural powers will appear on the scene (2 Thes. 2:9; Rev. 13:11-13). He will claim the credit for the victory and allege that he was sent by God to avert a third world war and thereby to save humanity from a terrible catastrophe. He will conclude covenants with all nations and religious groups, and soon rise to a position of world leadership. People everywhere will follow him in amazement. They will be highly impressed by his peace initiatives and his ability to reconcile even the most hostile groups.

They will refuse to see anything bad and deceptive in his actions, and openly worship and adore him as the long awaited Prince of Peace. They will even be prepared to reject and persecute the evangelical Christians who brand the new leader as the Antichrist. Such people will be regarded as negative and evil-minded.

A Marriage between religion and politics

One of the most conspicuous aspects of the Antichrist's reign will be the close association between religion and politics. He will right from the onset combine these two offices and concurrently be the head of a world government and universal messiah. His co-ruler will be the false prophet who will be heading the alliance of world religions. He will seduce the members of all religions to honour the beast and worship him as their messiah (Rev. 13:12).

Mass seduction as never before

The religious cloak of the Antichrist will render him a deceiver of the masses such as this world has never known before. He will transform himself into an angel of light – a messenger of God who has come to bring real peace, unity and reconciliation to mankind. Jesus strongly warned against this kind of deception that will be perpetrated in His name: “Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many” (Mt. 24:4-5; see also verse 11).

Dispensation of the Church ends here

The rapture will formally end the dispensation of the Church of Christ on earth. Up to this point the guarantee was effective that Jesus will protect His Church against the attacks and wiles of the Evil One. He said: “I will build My Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Mt. 16:18). In the great tribulation, the Antichrist will “make war with the saints and overcome them” (Rev. 13:7). He will defeat them physically but not spiritually if they remain true to the Lord Jesus Christ and their testimony of salvation (Rev. 12:11).

Long before the rapture most churches have already become victims of a lifeless form of godliness, false revivals, dogmatic deception and religious compromise through involvement with the Ecumenical Movement. In these compromising and lukewarm churches the standards are lowered as the clear condition of rebirth is not insisted upon for members to become Christians (Jn. 3:3).

All backslidden Christians (Mt. 24:12) as well as those who are

saved during the tribulation will have to dissociate themselves from churches. Because the Antichrist will gain control over all governments, churches and monetary systems, the only churches that will be allowed to exist during his reign will be the false churches who recognise him as their spiritual leader.

More shocking forms of spiritual compromise and apostasy will occur in the churches and religious groups that are seeking public recognition as well as the right to remain 'in business'. The small evangelical churches that were almost emptied by the rapture will not be allowed to exist during this time as they will refuse to worship the Antichrist as Universal Messiah. If they do compromise for the sake of continued existence they, too, will become false.

Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb

Much more than the resisting of the Antichrist and his ideologies will be needed to survive spiritually during the time of the tribulation. The blood of the Lamb of God that was shed for the atoning of the sins of a lost world will still be the only basis for salvation (Eph. 1:7; 1 Jn. 1:8-9; 1 Pet. 1:18-19). You will have to confess your sins to the Lord and also forsake them (Prov. 28:13). Accept His forgiveness in faith, become spiritually renewed (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 5:17) and experience deliverance from the power of sin (Jn. 8:36). Witness to other people about your salvation (Rom. 10:9-10) and your unconditional commitment to the Lord Jesus. Have fellowship with other Christians and encourage one another to persevere to the end.

144 000 saved Jews

A great outpouring of the Holy Spirit will occur among Jews: "And I will pour on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they have pierced" (Zech. 12:10).

Right at the beginning of the tribulation a group of 144 000 Jews will be saved. Endued with the power of the Holy Spirit, they will boldly proclaim that Jesus Christ (Yeshua Ha Mashiach) is the only true Messiah of Israel *and* the whole world. Their testimony will immediately bring them in conflict with the followers of the false messiah, whose deceit will be exposed by the Messianic Jews. Persecution of the followers of the true Messiah will commence in all fury, but the Lord will protect and keep them (Rev. 7:1-8).

Christians who are newly saved, must associate with the Messianic Jews and support them despite the risk of persecution. Regard

it as the very last chance to do something for the extension of the Lord's kingdom on earth. Don't be drawn into the structures of the false church of that time and in that way give credibility to the false messiah who will be sent by the Devil. They will both pretend to be 'angels of light' to deceive naive people (2 Cor. 11:13-15).

Persecution of Christians

The nature of the persecution of Christians will take different forms in the two halves of the tribulation period. The first 3½ years will be characterised by a **false peace and unity**, while the last 3½ years are aptly described as a **great tribulation**. During the first half the Antichrist will rule in association with other leaders, and also handle religious affairs in consultation with the leaders of the alliance of world religions. Force will be used, but not excessively so and only with the consent of his co-rulers. Softer methods of intimidation, bribery, deception and brainwashing will be employed to gain wider support. When the use of force is necessitated, an international 'Peace Force' will be commissioned to discipline the opponents of the New World Order. They will be branded as rebels whose actions and beliefs constitute a major threat to world peace and unity.

An extensive propaganda campaign and psychological war will be waged against the fundamental Christians who only worship the true Messiah, Jesus Christ, and explicitly dissociate themselves from the alliance of world religions. They will be hated and condemned by all nations, and also by the powerful religious alliance of the false messiah.

The following scenario of the persecution of Christians will progressively manifest during the tribulation period. Initially, the fundamental Christians will experience hatred, rejection and intimidation. With the passing of time, pressure against them will mount and culminate in a campaign of extermination:

Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another... But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come (Mt. 24:9-14). ...yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me (Jn. 16:2-3).

The Christians of the tribulation must refrain from compromising in any way whatsoever. Be among those who refute the kingdom of

the beast, and instead proclaim the gospel of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Be prepared to die as a martyr for your faith and never shrink from the implications of your decision: “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Mt. 10:28).

Guidelines for a strategy

In order to achieve the maximum advantage for the kingdom of God, it is important to follow the right approach from the very beginning of the tribulation. Guard against the tendency to live a life of self-interest in which you only pursue the economic survival of your family and yourself. Not one Christian will physically survive the tribulation, and should never regard the challenge of economic and physical survival, as well as hiding, as major objectives. The following are guidelines for a sensible strategy:

□ You are commissioned to resist the Antichrist and, like Daniel's three friends, not to bow the knee before the modern king of Babylon. Warn as many people as possible against the deception and spiritual dangers of recognising the false messiah. Collaborate with other Christians to organise an awareness campaign against the dangers of deception and compromise.

□ Don't make futile attempts to dethrone the Antichrist or to promote your endangered national interests. The tribulation is the hour of darkness, and to its leader will be given authority over every tribe, tongue and nation (Rev. 13:7). Warn people against being loyal to this deceiver and dictator, and convince them to be prepared to pay the highest price for their faith in the true Messiah.

□ Don't do foolish things which may at an early stage lead to your arrest, imprisonment or execution. Try to stay out of the reach of the Antichrist and his forces for as long as possible. Guard against their treacherous methods to get information about the movements and whereabouts of Christians. They will most definitely also plant informants among the true believers to spy on them. Daniel says that “many shall join with them by intrigue” (Dan. 11:34). Make very sure about a person's testimony of salvation and don't reveal unnecessary information to newcomers.

□ As in the time of the early Church, Christians should assist one another to survive economically. Sell your fixed property, unless it can be used as a basis for survival or as some kind of Christian centre. Remember that you won't be able to sell any property during the second half of the tribulation when a cashless monetary system

based on the number of the Antichrist will be in operation. Also sell other assets that you don't really need on the short term. Spend the money on evangelism and the provision of places of refuge for fellow Christians. Food, cooking facilities, clothes, blankets and medical supplies should also be bought and stored in a safe place. Don't resign your work and abandon your source of income during the first 3½ years unless unacceptable pressure is exerted upon you.

□ During the first 3½ years, centres for evangelism should be established in various centres where Bibles and Christian literature can be stored and even printed. Only use the King James Version of the Bible as a reliable account of the Word of God. Store some of the Bibles and literature in secret places where it can't be easily traced and confiscated by the antichristian authorities. Remember that the Word of God will become unobtainable: "They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, but shall not find it" (Amos 8:12).

The great tribulation

A very shocking event will occur after 3½ years, in the middle of the tribulation period. The Antichrist, who is depicted as a beast with seven heads in the book of Revelation, will be assassinated but revive again after a few days (Rev. 13:3). To the amazement of all people he will miraculously arise from the dead. People will fear him as a divine ruler with the most astounding supernatural powers. They will worship him, as well as Lucifer through whose power he was revived from the dead: "And all the world marvelled and followed the beast. So they worshipped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" (Rev. 13:3-4).

The satanic triumvirate of the Devil, the Antichrist and the False Prophet will move swiftly to usurp all power on earth. Satanism will be the only officially recognised religion in the world, and those who refuse to subject themselves to it will be executed in public (Rev. 13:15). All adversaries of their rule will be mercilessly killed.

Of these terrible evils the Lord Jesus said: "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved" (Mt. 24:21-22).

Economic dictator

In order to obtain absolute control over all people the Antichrist will

institute a centrally controlled, cashless economic system for the world. 666 related personal identity numbers will be issued to all economic active people, without which it will be impossible to gain access to the cashless monetary system. The 666 qualifies this number explicitly as the number of the beast; consequently it associates the bearer with the satanic rulers of the New World Order.

An oath of allegiance will have to be made to the Antichrist and his world government before a personal identity number will be issued. The oath will also imply allegiance to the beast as the god of this world, and for that reason the taking of the oath will be a covenant with death (Rev. 14:9-11). This absolute form of control will extend much further than buying and selling, as people will subject themselves body, soul and spirit to the control of this evil dictator. Don't follow the example of Esau by selling your soul to the Devil for financial gain (Heb. 12:16-17).

The refusing of the Antichrist's number will have such severe implications that only strongly committed Christians will be able to face it. Among these are the following:

- Persons who refuse it will forfeit their identity number as well as their right of citizenship of their own country and the world state. That will be a punishable act.
- It will be regarded as the rejection of the New World Order and its leader, whose mark will be part of the new ID numbers. Those without the number will be charged for high treason and summarily executed in public.
- It will also be regarded as a rejection of the compulsory religion of the New World Order, which is the worshipping the beast as God. The death penalty will equally apply to this offence.
- Without the number, no access will be gained to the system of electronic funds transfer (EFT). Such a person will not be able to buy, sell or settle any accounts. It will be impossible to license a car and to buy fuel. Bills for services and taxes will remain unpaid, as well as instalments on property, motor cars and other commodities. In default of payment property will be confiscated or repossessed. The message is clear: nobody without the number will be able to remain economically active within this system.
- People will lose their jobs and they won't be re-employed without an ID number, as these future numbers will at the same time serve as pay and bank numbers.
- After the introduction of the cashless economy, all the money that a person have will be converted to credit that can only be transferred to other accounts or utilised for payment by making

use of the new personal identity number.

It is evident that economic control will be a mighty weapon in the hands of the Antichrist to force people to accept his New World Order, and to worship him as their god. In this way he will enslave the entire world population by depriving them of all the political, economic and religious liberties they previously had.

Those who refuse the number will become unemployed, robbed and impoverished fugitives. Because of high treason against the Antichrist and his governance structures, they will face a certain death penalty when they are arrested. Special task forces will hunt them down and drag them to the guillotines. Some will be shot while fleeing, and many others will die of starvation, polluted water, diseases and exposure to harsh climatic conditions.

Murderer of Jews and Christians

When the Antichrist declares himself to be God, the Israeli nation will reject him and break their covenant with him. He will then become their biggest enemy on earth and try to annihilate all of them. For a remnant of Jews to survive, they will have to flee from Israel to a place in the wilderness (probably Petra south of the Dead Sea) where the Lord will sustain them for the 3½ years of the great tribulation. It is to this hasty flight that Matthew 24:15-21 refers.

Christians will likewise be pursued and executed for refusing to worship the Antichrist as God (Rev. 6:9-11; 13:15). Despite their own suffering and hardships they should help the fugitive Jews and inform them about the true Messiah and His coming on the Mount of Olives at the end of the false messiah's 3½ year reign of terror (Dan. 12:11-12; Zech. 14:4-5). Concerning the Jews, the Lord said: "I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you" (Gen. 12:3).

Victory in the struggle

Although the Antichrist will muster awesome political, military, economic and religious power during his reign on earth, he will never be able to force true Christians into subservience to him. He will succeed in killing the saints, but he won't gain their worship if they prefer to remain true to Jesus. During this dark hour the Lord will empower His witnesses to resist the Antichrist and remain faithful unto death: "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death" (Rev. 12:11).

In the quoted verse, three powerful weapons are mentioned that are to be used by Christians in the struggle:

- ✠ The first one is the blood of the Lamb. It forms the basis of salvation when a person confesses his sins to the Lord (1 Pet. 1: 18-19; 1 Jn. 1:8-9). The blood of Christ also protects you against the attacks of the enemy. Trust the Lord Jesus to protect you with His blood when you are in spiritual danger.
- ✠ The second weapon is the word of testimony. To witness about the saving grace and redemptive power of your Redeemer, renders the enemy of your soul incapable of influencing you. A testimony of this nature will give sinners the courage to stand up and commit their lives to the conqueror, Jesus Christ. Never stop witnessing!
- ✠ To be without fear for death, even in the face of a martyr's death to which the Antichrist will subject Christians, is a mighty spiritual weapon. It will give undisputed credibility to your witness if you are prepared to die for it. If you are afraid of death, and perhaps even prepared to deny Jesus for the sake of pardon, your Christian witness will be powerless and unconvincing. The enemy will then scoff at you.

Destiny of the Antichrist

The Antichrist and his followers are heading for everlasting punishment away from God and His glory in the lake of fire: "Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone" (Rev. 19:19-21; see also Rev. 14:9-11).

Destiny of the Christians

Despite the fact that Christians stand to lose all material possessions, rights and privileges they have during the great tribulation, their final destiny will be glorious (see Rev. 7:9-17 and 21:4-5). Will you be among the multitude of redeemed ones from all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues? There is also room for you!

In the light of these wonderful promises of ultimate victory, the martyrs can take courage to persevere on their arduous course. If they remain faithful unto death, they will inherit the kingdom of God and soon rule with Jesus Christ on earth:

And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgement was committed to them. And *I saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received *his* mark in their foreheads or in their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years (Rev. 20:4).