

"The Visions of the Beasts and the War in Heaven" - The Cologne Bible, 1479

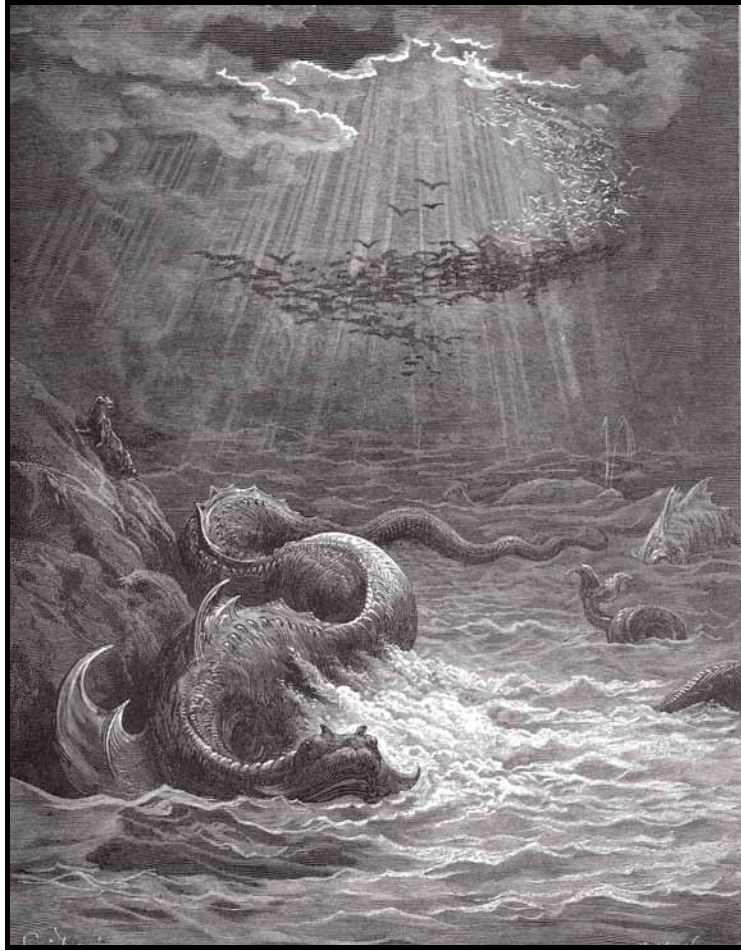
The Third Scene - The Beast from the Earth Revelation 13:11-18

Then I saw another beast coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. He exercised all of the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down to earth in full view of men. Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that none could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name. This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is a man's number. His number is 666.

“Then I saw another beast coming out of the earth.” - The characteristic ***“Then I saw”*** (Greek - *“kai eidon”*) signals the change of scene. The appearance of a second beast completes the satanic anti-Trinity - the dragon/Father, the beast from the sea/Son, and the beast from the land/Spirit. In the divine Trinity, the role of the Holy Spirit centers on sanctification, that is, the giving and maintaining of faith. In that light, the beast from the earth will be presented in this scene as the agent of the beast from the sea. His work is to create and foster faith in his fellow beast. Thus, John’s contemptuous dismissal of the devil as the imitator, the mimic of the one true God is completed. Like its predecessor, this figure is a ***“beast”*** (Greek - *“therion”*), a wild ferocious animal of great destructive power. But the menace represented by this beast is different, as the detailed description will show. The second beast arises not from the sea, but from the land. The distinction may simply be a matter of staging within the scenes of the vision. The dragon stood on the shore of the sea (Revelation 13:1). One beast rising from the sea and the other from the land places one on either side with the dragon in the prominent center, thus indicating that both serve and derive their power from him. It is significant to note that despite their different points of origin: *“The two beasts have this in common, that they do not descend from heaven above, but come from below. To borrow the words of James 3:15, they are earthly, sensual, devilish.”* (Poellet, p. 173) At the same time, the concept of beasts from the land and the sea may reflect the Old Testament tradition of Leviathan, the fire breathing monster of the sea and Behemoth, the massive creature of the land (cf. Job 40-41).



*“The Visions of the Two Beasts”
15th Century Luther Bible Woodcut*



“Leviathan” by Gustave Dore

“He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon.” -

The beast from the seas depicted the Antichrist and all his anti-Christian powers of this world brazenly and boastfully flaunting their strength to coerce the obedience and obeisance of mankind. Now, the more subtle devious side of our enemy is revealed. The same power is present, but it is carefully hidden. This is not external coercion and persecution from the unbelieving world, but sabotage from within, subversion inside the Church itself concealed beneath a mask of piety. The outward appearance of this creature is disarming and reassuring - ***“he had two horns like a lamb.”*** The real nature of this beast, however, is indicated by the sound of his voice - ***“but he spoke like a***

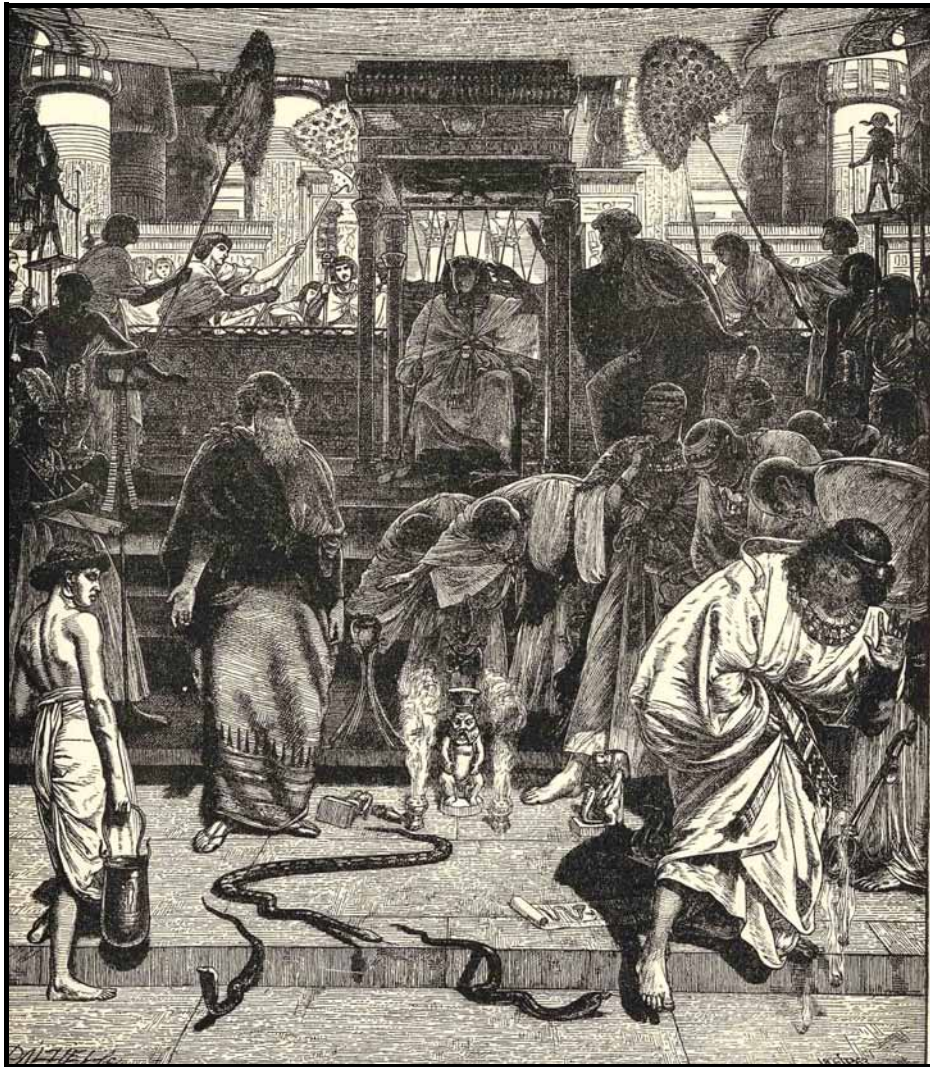
dragon.” The beast from the earth is not what he seems to be. Behind the false facade of the lamb lurk the deadly jaws of the dragon. Deception is the essence of his being. In subsequent scenes even his name will change as he shifts from one disguise to the next. In Chapter 16 he becomes ***“the false prophet”*** (Revelation 16:13) and in Chapters 17 and 18 he appears as ***“the great prostitute”*** (Revelation 17:1), Harlot Babylon. Instead of the seven horns of the Messianic Lamb (Revelation 5:6) the disguise of the beast from the earth bears two lamb-like horns. He mimics the two witnesses, lampstands, and olive trees which signified the Church in Chapter 11. He also reflects the second beast of Daniel’s vision - ***“a ram that had two horns.”*** (Daniel 8:3) Christ had warned that false prophets and messiahs would infiltrate the Church (Matthew 24:5). John’s imagery here may well have been based upon the words of Christ’s warning - ***“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.”*** (Matthew 7:15)

“The image of a wolf in lamb’s clothing suggests a traitor within the fold of the Church. Though the beast professes to represent the truth and appears as harmless as a lamb, his inner Satanic nature is revealed through his speaking with the authority of the dragon, reflecting the alluring, deceptive speech of Satan, the dragon, that led to the sin of Adam and Eve.” (Beale, p. 708)



“The Beast from the Land” by Albrecht Dürer

“He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast whose fatal wound had been healed.” - As the Holy Spirit of God leads people to faith in Christ, crucified and risen from the dead, so the anti-Spirit of the Satanic Trinity leads people to *“worship the first beast whose fatal wound had been healed.”* The language of the text emphasizes the close and intimate relationship between the two beasts. The Greek text literally reads - *“and he exercises all the authority of the first beast before him.”* The first beast had received his power and authority from the dragon (Revelation 13:2). In the imagery of the text he now delegates the power which he had received from the dragon to the beast from the land to utilize it on his behalf. The whole pattern is a blasphemous parody of the inter-relationships of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit within the divine Trinity. The description of the beast from the sea was characterized by the repeated use of the Greek verb *“dokeo”* (*“to give”*). In a similar way, the description of



*“Jannes and Jambres Confront Moses and Aaron Before Pharaoh”
19th Century Bible Illustration*

the beast from the earth is characterized by the use of the Greek verb “*poieo*” (“*to do*”). Forms of the verb occur five times in this segment to describe the beast’s actions on behalf of his hellish counterpart. They form an effective team! The goal of the beasts is remove God from His place and substitute themselves - ***“and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast.”***

“And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men.” - The beast from the earth authenticates his message with ***“great and miraculous signs.”*** (Greek - “*semeia megala*”) The noun “***signs***” is typically used in connection with the supernatural or miraculous.

Thus the NIV adds the adjective “*miraculous*.” Moses had warned the children of Israel long ago not to judge a prophet merely by the miraculous signs which accompany his message but by the substance of the message itself:

“If a prophet comes to you or one who foretells by dreams appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, ‘Let us follow other gods (gods you have not known) and let us worship them,’ you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The Lord your God is testing you.” (Deuteronomy 13:1-3)

St. Paul had warned that the coming of the Antichrist (“*the Man of Lawlessness*”“) would be accompanied by “*all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing.*” (2 Thessalonians 2:9) The miraculous signs in question are “*counterfeit*” not in the sense that they are not genuinely supernatural. Although those who serve Satan are often charlatans who practice deceit and trickery, the devil can and does use genuinely supernatural power to accomplish his nefarious goals. These miracles are “*counterfeit*” in the sense that the message they serve to authenticate is false, as, for example Jannes and Jambres, the notorious magicians of Pharaoh, who duplicated the wonders performed by Moses and Aaron in order to harden the heart of Egypt’s king (Exodus 7:11; 2 Timothy 3:8)



“Moses and Aaron Before Pharaoh” by J. James Tissot

The 1st Century apocalyptic writing *“The Ascension and Martyrdom of Isaiah”* describes the miracles of the Antichrist in this way:

“By his word he will cause the sun to rise at night, and the moon he will make to appear at the sixth hour. And he will do everything he wishes in the world; he will act and speak like the Beloved and will say; ‘I am the Lord and before me there was no one’...And the power of his miracles will be in every city and district.” (*“The Ascension and Martyrdom of Isaiah”* 4:5-9)



“Saul and the Witch of Endor” by J. James Tissot

The beast from the land mimics the great miracles of God prophets in the past like Elijah who called the fire of God from heaven in his confrontation with the prophets of Baal upon Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18:36-40). To seek particular historical events as the literal fulfillment of this (or any other) specific detail of the vision is to misunderstand the nature of apocalyptic revelation. John uses the image of fire called down from heaven to convey the truth that the signs and wonders of the beast will imitate the mighty deeds of Christ and the true prophets and apostles of God. The use of false signs and wonders in endless variety - through apparitions, magical relics, spectacular direct revelations, etc. - will be characteristic of the Satanic efforts of anti-Christian religion throughout the latter days between the first and second comings of the true Christ.

The Christian believer must walk by faith, not by sight, in humble obedience to the Word of God. For the believer there is no need of external supernatural confirmation or information. Our rallying cry must be that of the ancient prophet Isaiah - *“To the Law and to the Testimony!”*

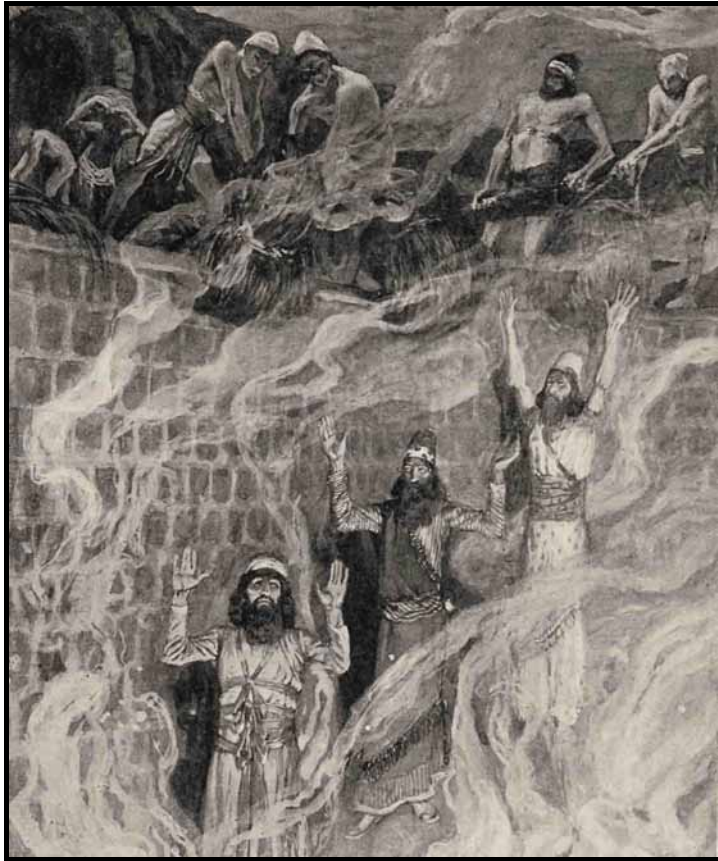


“Elijah and the Prophets of Baal” by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

“When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, ‘Should not a people inquire of their god?’ Why consult the dead on behalf of the living! To the Law and to the Testimony! If they do not speak according to this Word they have no light of dawn.” (Isaiah 8:19-20)

“Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth.” - As has consistently been the case throughout these visions, the text emphasizes the divine consent under which the beast must operate - ***“the signs he was given power to do.”*** The miracles of the beast make a powerful impression upon humanity. The majority of men have always been drawn to that which is spectacular and grandiose. But, to use the experience of Elijah once again, the true God is not to be found in the mighty wind or the great earthquake but in the still small voice of His Word (1 Kings 18:11-13). The dragon is ***“the deceiver of the whole world”*** (Revelation 12:9). The beast is his apt pupil as he carries out the same pattern of deception across the earth. The Greek verb *“plana”* (***“deceived”***) is in the present tense indicating a repetitive process of ongoing action.

Deception is his characteristic trait, and he is a master at it! He will deceive the world over and over again. The phrase *“the inhabitants of the earth”* refers to the entire body of unregenerate humanity.



*“The Three Men in the Fiery Furnace”
by J. James Tissot*

“He ordered them to set up an image of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and caused all who refused to worship the image to be killed.” - The world’s idolatrous acceptance of anti-Christian religion is symbolically presented in a sequence of events all too familiar throughout the course of human history. Daniel tells of the golden statue erected by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, which the people were commanded to worship on pain of death. The enforcement of this decree led to the attempted execution of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3). Later, Daniel predicted

the coming of a tyrant whose arrogant self-deification and desecration of the Holy Place in Jerusalem would be precursors of the Great Antichrist to come in the end times (Daniel 8). The prophet’s warning found grim fulfillment in the atrocities of the Greek King Antiochus Epiphanes during the inter-testamental period. As his boastful name suggests, Antiochus actually believed himself to be the earthly incarnation of the great god Zeus. He erected an idol of himself within the Holy of Holies in Jerusalem and had swine sacrificed in his own honor upon the sacred altar. Thousands who refused to bow down before his image were slaughtered and the streets of Jerusalem ran red with the blood of the faithful. The cruel excesses of this mad man provoked the Jewish revolt which led to the establishment of the Kingdom



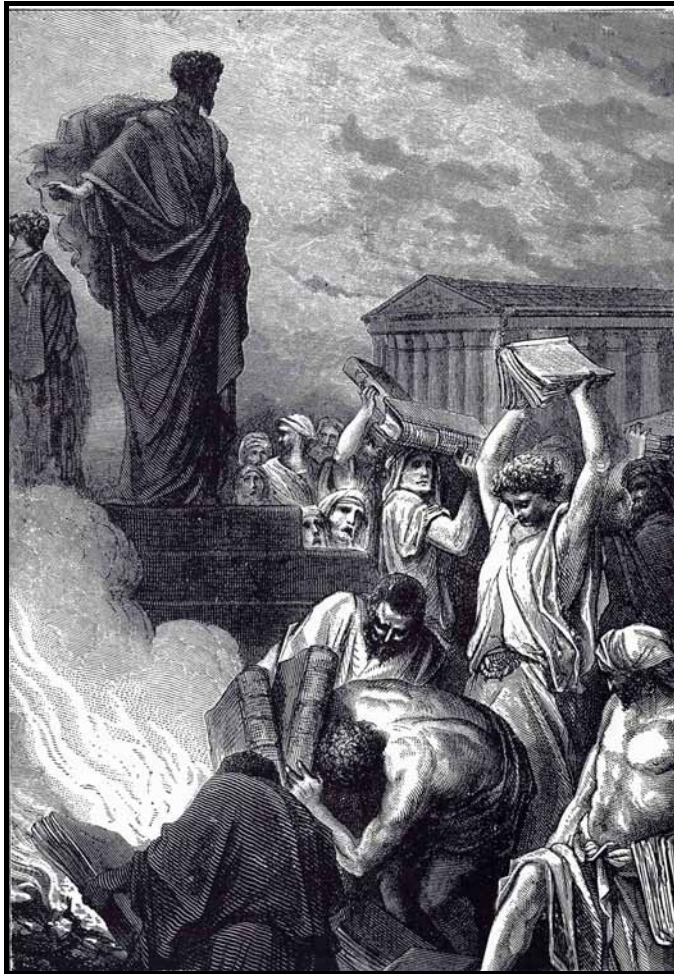
***“The Idol of Antiochus Epiphanes in the Temple”
by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld***

of the Maccabees (1 Maccabees 1:44-60; 2 Maccabees 6:1-9). John’s original audience did not have to look to history to see this insidious pattern at work. They would have been painfully familiar with the scenario outlined in this portion of the vision. These people knew from personal experience about the combination of the brutal power of the state with idolatrous religion. The cult of the divine emperor flourished in Asia Minor in the latter part of the 1st Century. Caligula had established temples dedicated to himself throughout the region and only his assassination in A.D. 41 prevented the forced installation of his image within the Holy of Holies in Jerusalem. Domitian, the current emperor, was also an enthusiastic supporter of the imperial religion. In Ephesus, the site of John’s home congregation, the imperial temple housed a colossal idol of Domitian.

“He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed.” - Scripture asserts that the worship of idols is, in fact, demon worship. Whatever genuine supernatural power an idol may have must have hell as its source (cf. 1 Corinthians

10:19-22). In the ancient world, the priests and priestesses of the various idol cults often sought to convey the impression that the statues of their idols could be brought to life through the utilization of what today would be called “*special effects*.” Sceptics and philosophers denounced the priests as charlatans, frauds and imposters

who used ventriloquism, speaking tubes, air shafts, levers and pulleys to deceive the credulous masses. David Aune summarizes the practice and beliefs of the ancients:



***“The Burning of the Ephesian Sorcerer’s Books”
19th Century Bible Illustration***

“This reflects the world of ancient magic in which the animation of the images of the gods was an important means for securing oracles. The general Greek view was that the images of the gods were not the actual gods themselves but only reminiscent of them...The popular view of the Roman and Hellenistic world, however, was that the gods inhabited their statues. There were many reports in the ancient world of statues turning, sweating, weeping, or speaking...Magical rituals for achieving animation are preserved in the magical papyri. Christians, such as Minucius Felix, were convinced that unclean spirits concealed themselves inside of the cult images and were able to give oracles. The Babylonians had rituals intended to give life to the statues of the gods. In ancient Egypt, beginning at an even earlier period, statues of the gods vitalized through a ceremony of ‘opening the mouth.’ This procedure is reflected in the hermetic treatise ‘Asclepius’ - ‘I mean statues, but

statues living and conscious, filled with the breath of life and doing many mighty works, statues which have foreknowledge and predict future events by the drawing of lots and prophetic inspiration and by dreams and in many other ways; statues which inflict diseases and heal them, dispensing sorrow and joy according to men’s deserts.’” (Aune, II, p. 762)

The practice of Satanic magic is well attested in the New Testament (i.e. Elymas - Acts 13:6-12; the fortune teller at Philippi - Acts 16:15; the Ephesian sorcerers - Acts



"The Number of the Beast Is 666" by William Blake

19:13-20). Simon the Sorcerer is reported to have boasted to Peter: *"I have made statues move. I gave breath to inanimate objects."* (Aune, II, p. 764) In this context, there is no reason to assume that the animation of the statue of the beast from the earth in this scene of the vision is not being portrayed as a genuine demonstration of supernatural power from Hell. The statue actually does come to life, speaks, and commands the execution of all who will not bow down before it. *"This is the monstrous tyranny of the lamb/beast - death to all who refuse to surrender conscience and soul."* (Lenski, p. 409) Thus, once again, John symbolizes the demonic supernatural power of anti-Christian religion through a scenario with which his readers would have been most familiar.

"He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive

a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.” - The host of the Lamb received His protective seal to mark them as His own and guard them during the impending tribulation (Revelation 7:1-8). That which the Lamb does the beasts imitate. All who submit to them must wear their brand of ownership. The coercive nature of this action is signaled by the verb **“forced.”** Its comprehensive application is indicated by the word **“everyone”** and the three couplets which define it - **“small and great, rich and poor, free and slave.”** The focus is on economic or cultural status. There are no exceptions - to serve the beast is to bear his brand. The noun **“mark”** (Greek - *“charagma”*) refers to the brand or tattoo which indelibly marked a rebellious slave as the property of his owner. It was also used to punish disobedient or deserting soldiers. At times, the most fanatical devotees of religious cults would also brand themselves with the image of their god. This practice may be reflected by the fact that the mark is **“the name of the beast or the number of his name.”** The mark of the beast, branded on the forehead or the hand symbolically reminds us that those who worship the world’s false gods are truly slaves of Satan. The Christian who refuses to bow down before the world’s idols, who will not play the world’s game by the world’s rules will be excluded and penalized both

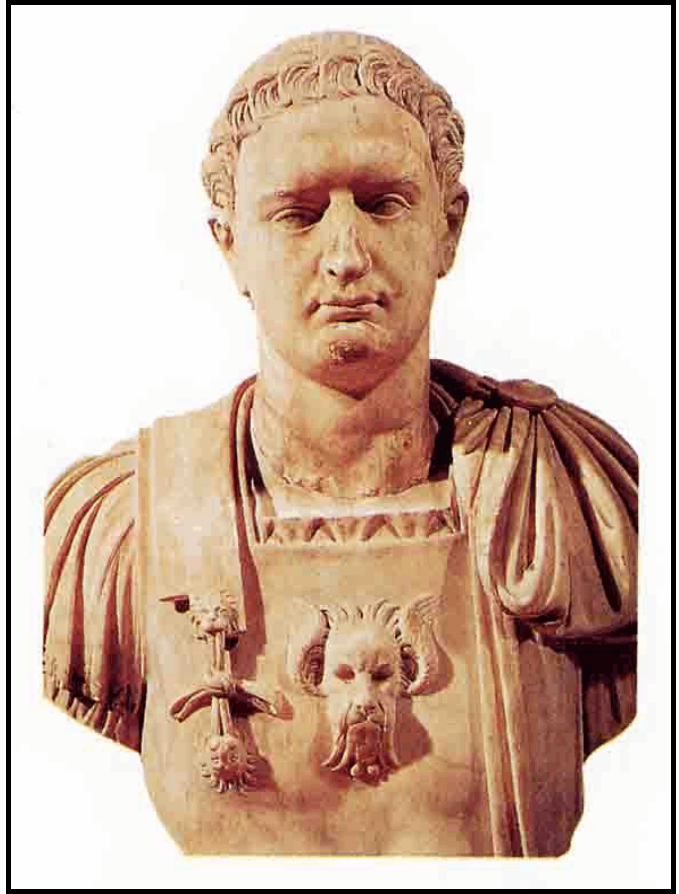


“Christian Martyrs in Rome” - 19th Century Bible Engraving

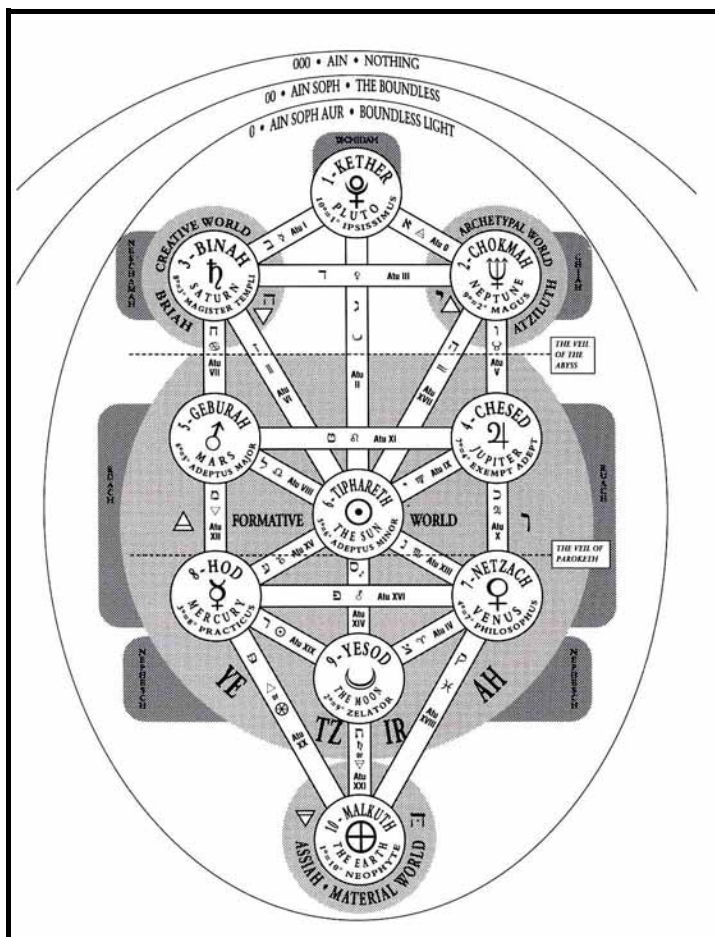
economically and socially. John notes that without the mark of the beast ***“no one could buy or sell.”*** This may be an allusion to the fact that the term ***“mark”*** was also used in reference to the official seal of the divine emperor which appeared on all legal documents and business contracts and to describe the image of the emperor which was stamped upon all of the Roman Empire’s coins.

“This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is a man’s number. His number is 666.” - Dr. Mounce asserts *“No verse in Revelation has received more attention than this one with its cryptic reference to the number of the beast.”* (Mounce, p. 263) This is not an exaggeration. When St. John speaks of ***“The number of his name”*** and

“the number of the beast,” he is referring to the obscure practice of *“gematria”* which evolved within the *“Kabbalah”* (Hebrew - *“Tradition”*), a movement of Hebrew mystics and magicians on the fringes of Judaism. The *“Kabbalah”* became quite prominent in the early centuries of the Christian era and many of the occult practices of the West are derived from it. The practice of *“gematria”* assigned a numerical equivalent to each letter of the alphabet. The word itself was adapted in Hebrew from the Greek noun *“geomatria”* which means *“manipulation with numbers.”* In the magical ceremonies of these Jewish mystics, *“gematria”* was designed to provided insight into the nature of words and the realities they represented through the symbolic meaning of numbers. Its practitioners believed that this was particularly true of names. Each letter of various alphabets had a numerical equivalent. For instance, the first nine letter of the Greek alphabet represented the numbers one through nine, the next nine represented the numbers ten through ninety, and so on. When the alphabet in use lacked sufficient letters to provide the numbers



“Domitian - Persecutor of the Church”
1st Century Marble Bust



A 19th Century Diagram Displaying the Kabbalah's "Tree of Life" With the Magical Letters and Numbers of the Hebrew Alphabet

necessary, archaic or modified letters were added. Accordingly, the system could become extremely complex. The calculation of the number of a name provided a cryptogram, or secret code which could provide mystical insight into that person's nature or identity based on the symbolic meaning of the numbers. The code could then be used in magical spells and incantations to manipulate or influence that individual. A poignant example of this process at work can be seen in an inscription left on a wall in the destroyed Roman city of Pompeii which reads: *"I love her whose number is 545."* (Aune, II, p. 772) While "gematria" does not occur elsewhere in Scripture, it is a regular feature of contemporary extra-biblical apocalyptic writings throughout this period.

Accordingly it should come as no surprise that it would occur in the Book of Revelation. Many features of Revelation, the only completely apocalyptic book in the Bible, are rare or unheard of elsewhere in Scripture. Verse 17's comment ***"which is the name of the beast or the number of his name"*** strongly suggests the use of "gematria." Verse 18's somewhat esoteric introduction of the symbolic number - ***"This requires wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is a man's number."*** - further reinforces this impression. The opening words of the phrase - ***"This requires wisdom"*** are echoed in Revelation 17:9 - ***"This calls for a mind with wisdom."*** The "wisdom" (Greek - "sophia") called for in this context, joined with "insight" (Greek - "noun") reflects the language of the Old Testament book of Daniel, which also includes some apocalyptic material. Daniel declares: ***"None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will***

understand.” (Daniel 12:10; cf. Also Daniel 11:33)

In this instance, John is using the system in reverse to make his theological point about the nature of the beast. Rather than deducing the number from the name, John reversed the process. He provided the number of the beast - “666” - and then invited the reader to decipher its name. The challenge of that reverse decoding has resulted in a host of various interpretations.

“The man with understanding is called upon to calculate or count up the number of the beast. This is an invitation to work backwards from the 666 to the name for which it is the numerical equivalent. Gematria was widely used in apocalyptic because of its symbolic and enigmatic quality. It served as a precaution against the charge of sedition.” (Mounce, p. 264)

The symbolic significance of the number “666” is not at all difficult to recognize. It is intended to indicate the ultimate imperfection of the beast. The number six falls one short of the perfect seven. The triple repetition of the number constitutes the superlative expression of its meaning. The beast is the personification of absolute imperfection. His quest to imitate and replace the perfection of God is foredoomed to pathetic and utter failure. An intriguing contrast to the beast’s “666” is provided by “*The Sybilline Oracles*,” a 1st Century extra-Biblical apocalypse. Using the same numerical symbolism, the “*Oracles*” report that the “*gematria*” of the name “*Jesus*” is “888.” The triple repetition of the number eight, which surpasses the perfect seven by one, represents the superabundant



“The Number of the Beast” by Peter Grau - 1945

perfection of the eternal Son of God. (Beale, p. 727) Robert Mounce summarizes the symbolic message of the “666”: *“This evil trinity, 666, apes the holy Trinity, 777, but always falls short and fails.”* (Mounce, p. 265)

But while the symbolic significance of the number is clearly evident, the name concealed within that number is not. The Revelator informed his readers that the “666” was “*a man’s number*” (Greek - “*arithmos gar anthropou estin*”), that is to say, it is a human number which pertains to man not to God. The decipherment of this number does not require special divine revelation. It can be calculated - the Greek verb is “*psephisato*” based on the term used for the pebbles used by the ancients in counting and calculating. At the same time, John called for the application of “*wisdom*” in deciphering this numeric code. The wisdom required is the spiritual discernment which enables the believer to comprehend the true meaning of the signs of the times throughout the latter days. Given the strong emphasis upon deception which has predominated throughout the vision of the beast from the earth, this call to wisdom and discernment is not unexpected. The encouragement of the text is that believers not allow themselves to be fooled by outward appearance. Instead, discern the true meaning hidden beneath the false facade. The history of the interpretation of this phrase indicates that all too often such wise discernment has been sadly lacking. Luther Poellet notes:

“Wisdom and understanding have not always been brought to bear on this passage, with the result that especially Revelation 13:18 has been made the point of departure into an almost unlimited and fanciful world of speculation and misinterpretation.”
(Poellet, p. 178)

Scores, perhaps hundreds, of specific identifications for the beast have been offered, labeling virtually every villain throughout the long history of the Church. One of the earliest and most plausible among this legion of alternatives comes from Ireneas, Bishop of Lyon in the Roman Province of Gaul (A.D. 130-200). In the middle of the 2nd Century, Ireneas wrote a book entitled “*Against Heresies*” in which he discussed the threats which confronted the Christian Church in his day. Rather than a particular individual, Ireneas suggested that the name concealed within the number code of Revelation 13 is the Greek term “*lateinos*” - pointing to Rome and a power which would arise from the ruins of the imperial city and her empire to endure throughout the latter days.



"The Preaching of the Antichrist" - 16th Century Woodcut

Excursus - The Biblical Doctrine of the Antichrist

Scripture indicates that God's people will be called upon to endure relentless persecution, opposition, and infiltration throughout the New Testament era (Matthew 24:24; John 15:18; Acts 20:29-30). From the outside the devil will utilize all the powers of this world - the coercive might of civil government, economic pressure, and influence of cultural institutions - in support of his bitter quest for the damnation of humanity. Within the Church itself an endless variety of false prophets and teachers, false Christs and antichrists, will seek to lead Christians away from the Lord

and His precious Gospel of salvation. Satan, the Father of the Lie, will hurl deception of every sort against the one Truth of God, often using the sincerity of fanatical or misguided Christians as his most effective means of wrecking havoc within the Church.

Among all the enemies of the Truth one ominous figure stands out, shrouded in mystery and menace. The Bible calls him *“the Antichrist”* and *“the Man of Lawlessness.”*

“Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.” (1 John 2:18-19)

“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.” (1 John 4:1-3)

“Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He opposes and exalts himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, and even sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God. Don’t you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? 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 splendor of His coming. The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that

deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refuse to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason, God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.” (2 Thessalonians 2:3-12)

Already foretold in the writings of the Old Testament prophets (cf. Daniel 7 & 11), the rise and the rule of the Antichrist is a characteristic feature of the latter days, the entire era between the first and second comings of Jesus Christ. The presence of the Antichrist in the world is God’s constant reminder that we have entered upon the final hour (1 John 1:28).

The power of the Antichrist was already secretly at work in the Church in the days of the apostles (2 Thessalonians 2:7; 1 John 4:3) and his nefarious activity will continue until the time of his destruction when the Lord comes again to judge the living and the dead (2 Thessalonians 2:8). Christ summons His Church to watchfulness and prayer and admonishes His people to beware of the enemy who is among us now. Those who consign the Antichrist to a safely distant future in the days immediately prior to the Second Coming have fundamentally misunderstood the prophecy and its purpose. They leave the



“The Downfall of the Papal Antichrist and the Turkish Sultan” by Nicholas Gerung

Church vulnerable and defenseless, unable to recognize the enemy within her midst or protect herself against him.

The term “*the antichrist*” occurs five times in the Johannine letters of the New Testament (1 John 2:18,22; 4:3; 2 John 7). In its initial occurrence (1 John 2:18), it is used in both singular and plural forms to contrast a particular phenomenon - “*the antichrist*” - with multiple manifestations of false teaching and deception which are designated as “*many antichrists*.” All false teacher and opponents of the Gospel are

antichrists in the broad sense. This general usage should not be confused, however, with the specific reality which Scripture calls “*the Antichrist*.” At times, our theologians have used the title “*the Great Antichrist*” to emphasize this distinction. Given the time frame of the Antichrist’s activity - currently over 2,000 years - it is evident that the Great Antichrist cannot be a individual human being. The ongoing, trans-temporal nature of his activity throughout the New Testament era indicates a collective reality, a permanent institution which will be represented or personified by a succession of individuals throughout the centuries.

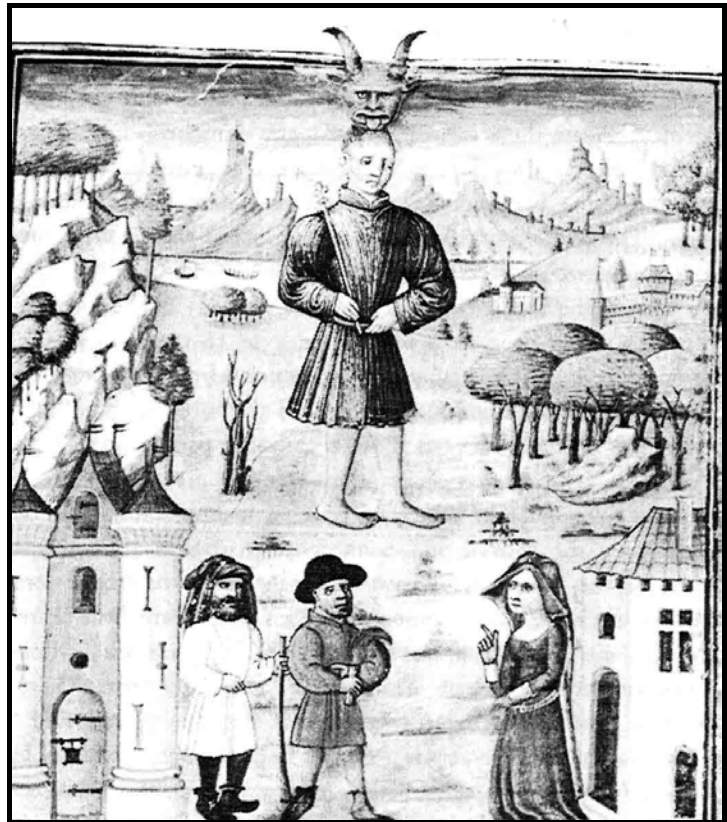
Like its English counterpart, the Greek preposition “*anti*” when used as a prefix can mean “*against*” or “*in opposition to*.” However, the Greek prefix differs from its English counterpart in that it also carries the connotation of “*alongside of*” or “*in place of*.” Thus, the use of this Greek prefix in the term “*antichrist*” indicates a more subtle enemy whose opposition



“*The Birth of the Antichrist Upon the Papal Throne*” by Nicholas Gerung

to Christ comes in the form of replacement or substitution. The Antichrist is not an overt opponent of Christ, but a counterfeit who seeks to take the place of Christ or to stand in as His substitute. John effectively demonstrates this crucial dimension of the Antichrist's nature in the imagery of Revelation through the consistent use of parallel symbolism for the true Christ and the beasts which represent the Antichrist. The beast from the earth conceals his real appearance behind the semblance of a lamb. This parallelism continues throughout the imagery of the beasts. G. K. Beale offers this helpful summary of the parallels:

“There are so many parallels between the beasts in Chapter 13 and that of the Christ elsewhere in the Apocalypse that it is clear that John intends to identify the beasts with the grand nemesis himself rather than with just one emperor or one historical empire. Both Christ and the beast (1) have swords; (2) have followers who have their names written on their foreheads (13:16-14:1); (3) have horns (5:6; 13:1,11); (4) are slain (5:6; 13:3,8); (5) rise to new life and are given new authority; (6) have authority over “every tribe, tongue, people, and nation” (5:9; 7:9; 13:7; 17:12,15), and (7) receive universal worship (5:8-14; 13:4,8). There are other noteworthy parallels...The dragon, the sea beast and the land beast form a competing trinity with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As the Son receives authority from the Father, so the sea beast receives authority from the dragon; and as the Spirit glorifies the Son, so the second beast does with respect to the first beast. The parody of the Trinity is also hinted at by the triple six in imitation of - but short of - the triple seven for the divine Trinity. The point of the parody in Daniel, and especially in Revelation is that, though the satanic beasts appear to feign the truth successfully in their attempts to deceive, they remain ever evil and never achieve the divine character they mimic.” (Beale, pp. 691, 729)



“Satan Concealed Beneath the Pious Facade of the Antichrist” - 14th Century Illumination

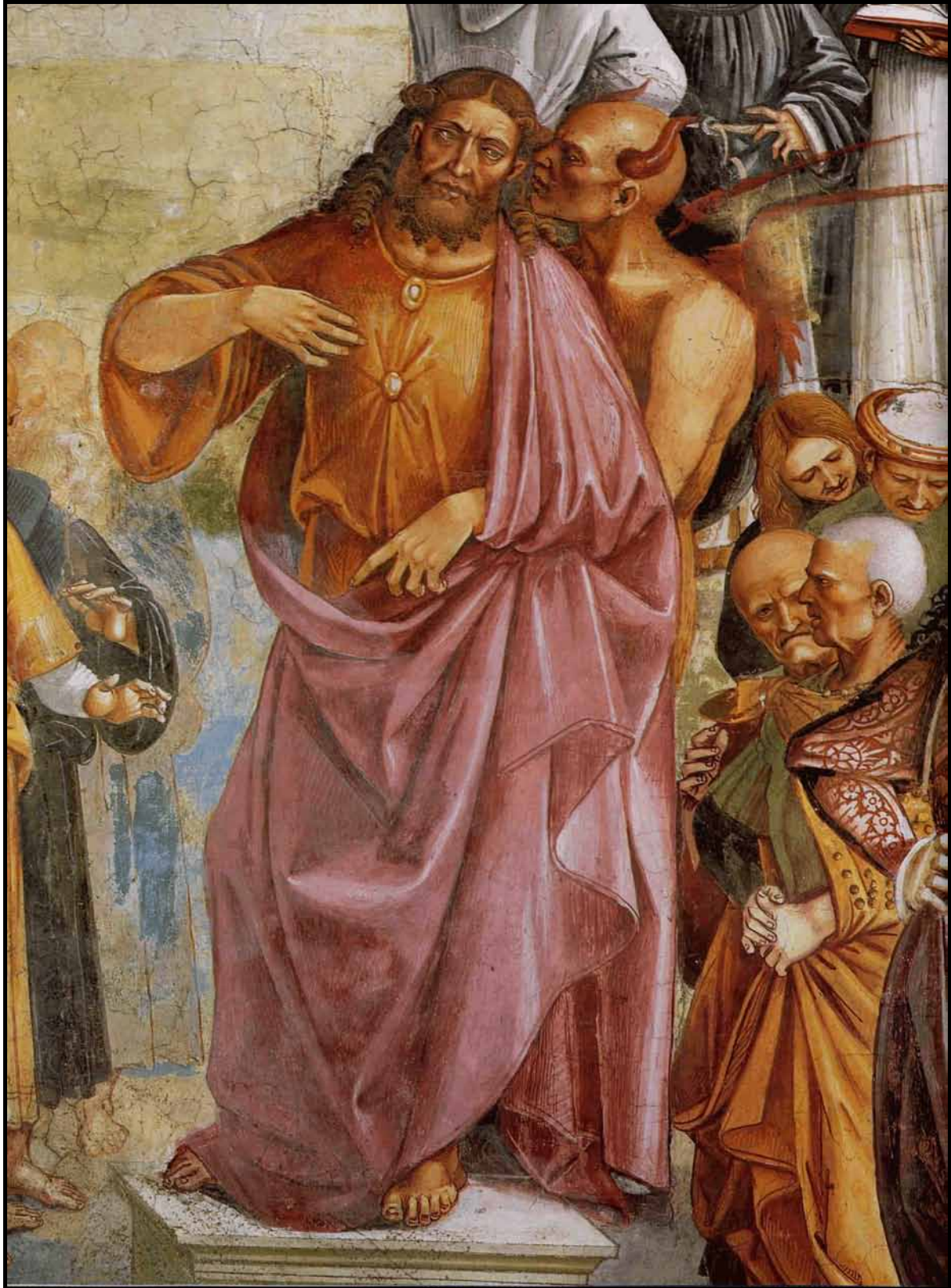
The Antichrist is the greatest of all Satan's counterfeits, carefully designed to appear as the mirror image of the true Christ. This is the essence of the threat posed by the

Antichrist - secret seduction. The danger which he presents to the people of God is his virtually unrecognizable presence in their midst. The most dangerous enemy is the foe who is trusted and accepted as a friend. St. Paul categorizes his activity as ***“the mystery of iniquity.”*** (2 Thessalonians 2:7) Lutheran theologian Herman Sasse emphasizes the unique threat of the Antichrist:

“The Antichrist is more dangerous than all of the other enemies of the Church. No Roman Caesar, no modern dictator is so dangerous as the enemy of Christ within the Church...The Antichrist’s great art is that he can bring Christians to fall away without persecution...The highest art of the Antichrist is that he can make falling away a work of religious piety.” (Sasse, p. 114)

Those who anticipate an Antichrist who is blatantly evil or satanic - a figure who can be readily identified by his wickedness and corruption - fail to understand the nature of this menace. The Antichrist will appear to be - and may well believe himself to be - a pious and devoted servant of Christ (Matthew 16:13-23). To all outward appearances he will be the most Christian of Christians, the least likely suspect of all. Every one of his denials of the Gospel will be carefully concealed within a fervent affirmation of the Gospel. His replacement of Christ as Savior and Lord will be advanced as humble ministry to the Lord Jesus. Unlike the swaggering world dictators and megalomaniacal idolaters of millennialist fantasies, the Biblical Antichrist will be the personification of Christian piety and virtue. The great Renaissance artist Luca Signorelli captured this crucial dimension of the Antichrist’s nature in a fresco entitled *“The Rule of the Antichrist.”* (cf. p. 389) in the San Brizio Chapel of Italy’s Orvieto Cathedral. The Antichrist stands in the foreground of the scene, preaching to a receptive crowd. Satan stands behind him, whispering into his ear and the devil’s arms reach through his robe to become his own. The face of the Antichrist in this masterpiece is the face of Christ himself. By deliberate design, the Antichrist appears to be identical to Christ. He becomes the Christ mask behind which the devil conceals himself as he deludes the people of God. The evil of Satan lurks behind that mask, ever hidden - always dangerous - like the deadly serpent that strikes without warning from its place of concealment.

Scripture warns that the Antichrist will arise within the Church itself, at the very heart of Christendom - ***“He sets himself up in God’s temple.”*** (2 Thessalonians 2:4) The Antichrist is a religious figure, whose fundamental goal is the damnation of men through the subversion and distortion of the Gospel of salvation. As the true Christ came to the people of God and carried out His ministry among them, so also the



"The Antichrist and Satan" by Luca Signorelli - 1500

Antichrist “*set himself up*” among God’s people as their leader, protector, and guide. The Antichrist claims for himself honor, glory and power which rightfully belong to God alone. When St. Paul designates him as “*the man of lawlessness*” (2 Thessalonians 2:3), he is indicating that while the Antichrist demands that all men submit to his authority, he will himself acknowledge no authority beyond his own. At the same time, the reign of the Antichrist represents an ungodly combination of the power of both church and state. While he is essentially a religious figure, a spiritual leader within the church, the Antichrist will also control and manipulate political and military power along with vast material wealth. He will command armies and rule over nations. From his position of privilege and power within the church, he will stand as an equal among the political leaders of the world.



“The Antichrist Performing False Miracles Before His Temple” by Luca Signorelli

The realm of the Antichrist will be sustained through and characterized by the use of “*all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders.*” (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10; cf. also Revelation 13:2,13-14) These attempts to prey upon the superstition and credulity inherent in sinful men will meet with widespread success - “*Because of the*

signs he was given to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth.” (Revelation 13:14) The triple repetition - **“miracles, signs and wonders”** - reminds us that the false miracles of the Antichrist are an integral part of his overall effort to replicate and replace the ministry of the true Christ. This is language which has been frequently used in Scripture to characterize the ministry of Christ and His apostles. In Acts 2:22, Peter hails Jesus as **“a man accredited by God to you by miracles, signs and wonders.”** According to Hebrews 2:4, God corroborated the preaching of the apostles **“by signs, wonders and various miracles.”** However, unlike the miracles of the true Christ, the miracles of the Antichrist are **“counterfeit”** - not because they are not real, but because they are designed to validate falsehood. F.W. Schlink explains the vast difference between miracles that are true and miracles that are false:



“The Antichrist Distributes Gifts” - 1496

“Christ’s miracles were true miracles, miracles of truth, as He Himself is the Truth. The miracles of the Antichrist, on the other hand, are ‘counterfeit signs and wonders.’ The apostle does not mean to say that all the miracles of the lawless one are deceptions without reality, fraudulent mystifications, coarse swindles, trickery, or the results of illusions or hallucinations. That may be true in innumerable cases, yet it cannot be denied, and the apostle does not mean to dispute the fact, that many of the strange feats performed can neither be classed as outright frauds nor be explained according to the known laws of nature. Yet, even granted that many of the Antichrist’s miracles are unexplainable, are supernatural, they are nevertheless counterfeit signs and wonders. The Antichrist boasts that they are divine miracles, performed by divine power, proving him to be the divinely appointed head of the Church; while in truth he does not perform even one miracle by the authority and power of God, but from the Satanic power of the Prince of Darkness...His miracles proceed from falsehood since they deceive and mislead men into unbelief.” (Schlink, p. 580)



“The Church of Christ and Antichrist” by Lucas Cranach the Younger - 1545

The prominence of signs and wonders in the life of the people of God is significantly different today than it was in the days of the prophets and apostles. As we have seen, God used signs and wonders throughout the centuries during which the Bible was being written to validate the ministry of His Son and the prophets and apostles whom He had chosen as His inspired spokesmen. With the completion of the Bible, the written Word of God, the Lord calls upon His people to live by faith in humble submission to His Word. Impressive signs and miraculous wonders are now unnecessary, and should not be demanded or expected by those to whom God has spoken, once for all, through His prophets and apostles. Signs and wonders in the latter days will be the mark of the Antichrist, not the true Christ.

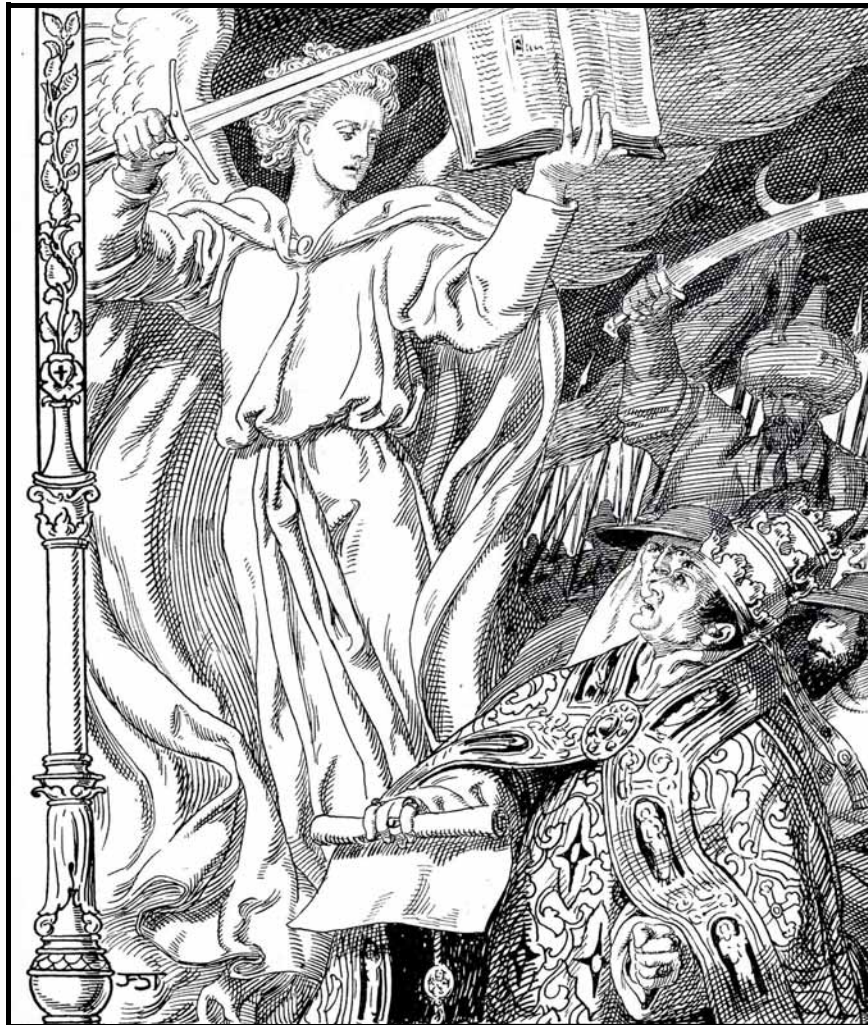
The Lutheran Confessions identify the institution of the papacy as the Antichrist prophesied in Holy Scripture. For example, in *“The Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope,”* Phillip Melancthon declares:

“But it is manifest that the Roman pontiffs and their adherents defend godless doctrines and godless forms of worship, and it is plain that the marks of the Antichrist coincide with those of the pope’s kingdom and his followers. For in

describing the Antichrist in his letter to the Thessalonians Paul calls him ‘an adversary of Christ who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.’ (II Thessalonians 2:3-4) He speaks, therefore, of one who rules in the church, and not of the kings of the nations, and he calls that man ‘an adversary of Christ’ because he will devise doctrines which conflict with the Gospel and will arrogate to himself divine authority. On the one hand, it is manifest that the popes rule in the church and that he has set up this kingdom for himself on the pretext of the authority of the church and the ministry, offering as pretext these words, ‘I will give you the keys’ (Matthew 16:19). On the other hand, the doctrine of the pope conflicts in many ways with the Gospel, and the pope arrogates to himself a threefold authority. First, because he assumes for himself the right to change the doctrine of Christ and the worship instituted by God, and he wishes to have his own doctrine and worship observed as divine. Second, because he assumes for himself not only the power to loose and bind in this life but also the jurisdiction over souls after this life. Third, because the pope is unwilling to be judged by the church or by anybody, and he exalts his authority above the decisions of councils and the whole church. Such unwillingness to be judged by the church or by anybody is to make himself out to be God. Finally, he defends such horrible errors and such impiety with the greatest cruelty and puts to death those who dissent. Since this is the situation, all Christians ought to beware of becoming participants in the impious doctrines, blasphemies, and unjust cruelties of the pope. They ought to rather abandon and execrate the pope and his adherents as the Kingdom of the Antichrist.” (“The Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope”, 39-41; cf. also “Apology of the Augsburg Confession” XV; “Smalkald Articles” II, IV)

It is important to maintain the distinction between the office of the pope and the individual occupants of that office. The particular men who hold the office may well be acting in all sincerity, in the firm belief that they are serving Christ and His Gospel. Herman Sasse emphasizes the importance of this distinction between the office and the man in Lutheran theology:

“It is not only human beings who are engaged in this drama. It was not only Eugenio Pacelli (Pope Pius XII; 1939-1958) who proclaimed the false doctrine of the Assumption of Mary as a revelation given to Christianity. It was not actually and not alone Giovanni di’ Medici (Pope Leo X; 1513-1521) who cast Luther out of the church. It was not actually Alessandro Farnesse (Pope Paul III; 1534-1539) who repudiated sola fide and so also the Lord Christ Himself. Rather it was the Antichrist who spoke and acted through them. For this reason we, as also Luther did, can have some human sympathetic understanding for those men who bore the fearful office of the papacy. This is especially true in the case of those popes who, as far as human eyes can see, were noble figures in the history of the papacy.” (Sasse, p. 125)



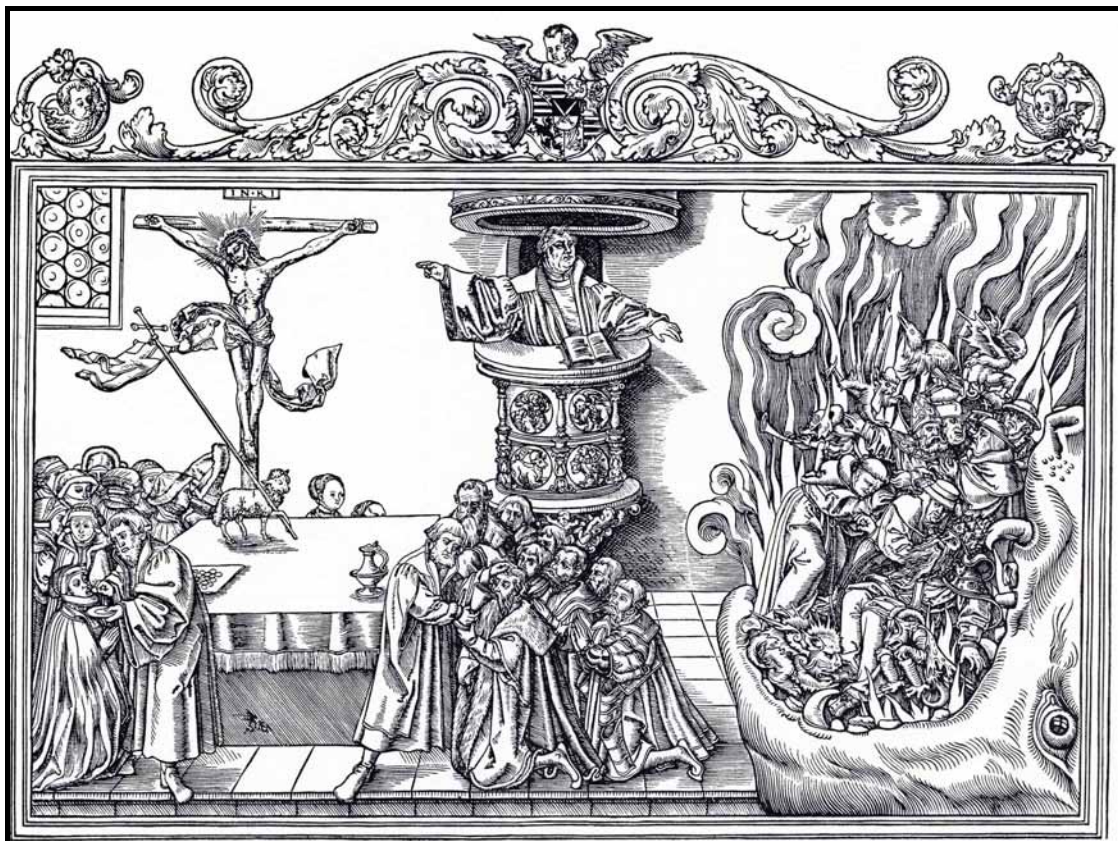
“Lord Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Word and Curb the Turks’ and Papists’ Sword; Whom Jesus Christ, Thine Only Son, Now Seek to Drive From Off His Throne” Martin Luther - 1542

It is bitterly ironic that the personal integrity and piety of individual popes only serves to enhance the credibility of the papal office, thereby enabling Satan to more effectively pursue his work of undermining Christ and His Gospel within the Church through the Antichrist. But here, as so often throughout history, the devil’s most effective servant is the man who genuinely believes that he is serving the Lord.

The institution of the papacy, both in its official doctrinal position, and in the authority and power which it claims for itself by divine right, exhibits all of the Biblical marks of the Antichrist.

The presence of the Antichrist will persist throughout the New Testament era. Its

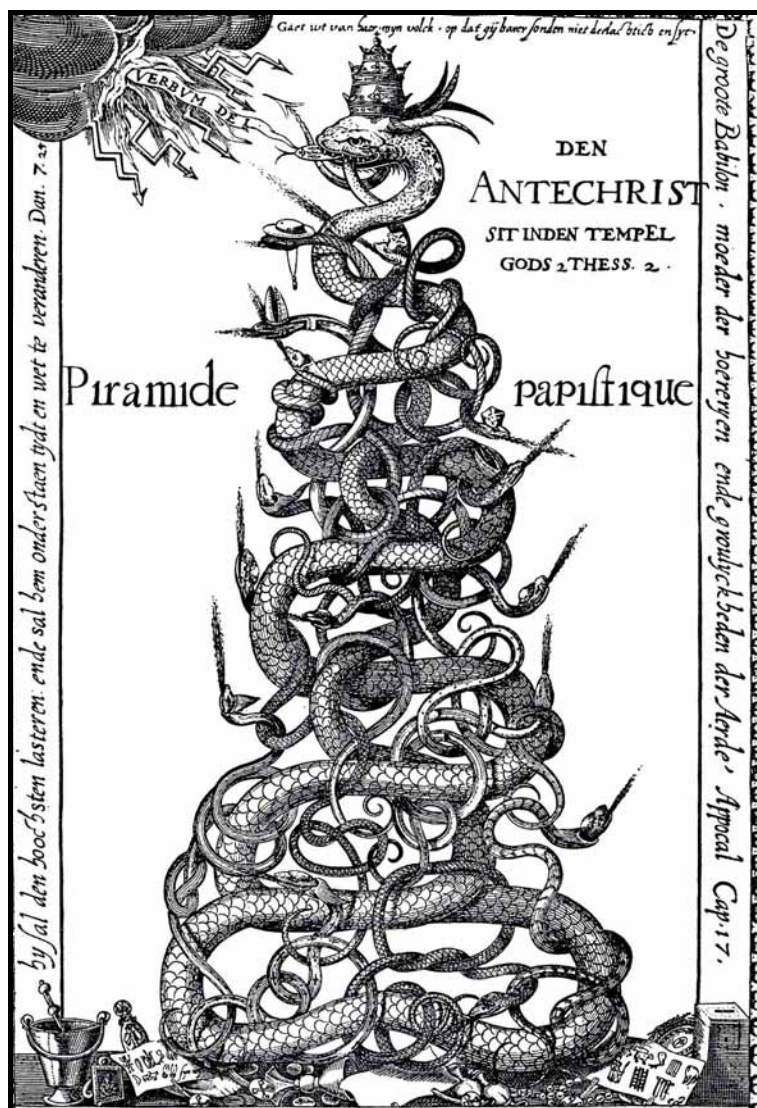
beginnings were already present in the days of the apostles and it will remain until its destruction on the Day of Judgement (cf. Daniel 7:21-27; 11:36,39; 1 John 4:3; 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7; Revelation 13:5). The papacy has existed without interruption throughout the interval between Christ's first and second comings. Although its means and methods have changed many times across the centuries to accommodate the need of the moment, the papacy itself always remains. In its earliest years, the public establishment of the papal hierarchy was restrained by the opposition and persecution of the Roman government (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7). That restraint was removed early in the 4th Century with the legalization of Christianity and its elevation to the status of official state religion. From that moment on, the aspirations of the Bishops of Rome, and their pretensions of supreme power within the Church



"Christ and Antichrist" by Lucas Cranach the Younger - 1540

proceeded rapidly. As the Roman Empire weakened and eventually collapsed in the West, the power of the papacy increased and expanded, moving to fill the vacuum left by Rome's decline and fall.

The Kingdom of the Antichrist will be a unique combination of both spiritual and



*"The Pyramid of Papal Power"
16th Century Dutch Engraving*

Christ on Earth" (Latin - "*vicarius*" - "*substitute*") - through whom alone the Church is constituted and ruled is blasphemous presumption. Such absolute authority is the prerogative of God alone. The Biblical prophecies of the Antichrist indicate that he will honor and glorify himself above God and refuse to recognize any authority beyond his own (Daniel 11:36-37; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4; Revelation 13:1,5,6). The official pronouncement of papal infallibility by the First Vatican Council in 1870 conferred upon the pope God-like authority well beyond the boldest pretensions of the most notorious popes of the Dark Ages and threatened all who would question or deny that authority with eternal damnation in Hell.

temporal power (Daniel 11:38; Revelation 13:1-8). The papacy represents a unique combination of both religious and political authority. The pope is not only the spiritual leader of the Roman Catholic Church, he is also the political ruler of the Vatican State, a tiny sovereign nation of only a few square blocks in the heart of the city of Rome. This was not always the case. For many centuries, the Papal States occupied much of the Italian peninsula. Popes commanded armies and conquered nations. Although significantly reduced in size, the existence of the Vatican State continues to enable the pope to function as an equal among world leaders, enjoying all of the privileges and prerogatives of statehood and diplomacy.

The papacy's assertion that the pope is the infallible "*Vicar of*

“If, then, any should deny that it is by institution of Christ the Lord, or by divine right, that blessed Peter should have a perpetual line of successors in the primacy over the universal Church, or that the Roman pontiff is the successor of blessed Peter in this primacy, let him be anathema...We teach and declare that by the appointment of our Lord, the Roman Church possesses a sovereignty of power over all other churches, and that this power of jurisdiction of the Roman pontiff, which is truly episcopal, is immediate, to which all - of whatever right and dignity - both pastors and faithful are bound to submit...not only in matters which belong to faith and morals, but also in those which appertain to the government and discipline of the Church throughout the world...And since by divine right of apostolic primacy, the Roman pontiff is placed over the universal Church, we further teach and declare that he is the supreme Judge of the faithful...Therefore, faithfully adhering to the tradition received from the beginning of the Christian faith, for the glory of God our Savior, the exaltation of the Catholic religion, and the salvation of Christian people, with the approval of the sacred council, we teach and define that it is a dogma divinely revealed that the Roman pontiff, when he speaks ‘ex cathedra,’ that is, when in the discharge of the office of pastor and teacher of all Christians, by virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine regarding faith or morals to be held by the universal Church, is, by the divine assistance promised him in blessed Peter, possessed of that infallibility which the divine Redeemer willed that His Church should be endowed in defining doctrine regarding faith and morals; and that therefore, such definitions of the Roman pontiff are of themselves, and not merely from the consent of the Church, irreformable. But if anyone - which may God avert - presume to contradict our definition: let him be anathema.” (Schaff, II, pp. 261-262, 270-271)

Such absolute assertions leave little room for ambiguity or doubt. There is no comfortable, uncommitted middle here. *“The pope is either Christ’s vicar or he is the Antichrist...Either the papacy is indeed instituted by God or it is an institution ‘instituted by the devil.’”* (Sasse, p. 120)

The central mark of the Antichrist is his bitter opposition to the Gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone. All that the Antichrist is and does is directed toward overturning and denying salvation by grace. This is the core teaching of Christianity, the Truth upon which the Church stands or falls. In the aftermath of the Reformation, the pope summoned the cardinals and bishops together in the Italian city of Trent to formulate the official doctrinal position of the Roman Catholic Church. *“The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent,”* issued in 1563, emphatically rejected and condemned this central doctrine of the Christian faith:

“If anyone says that men are justified either by the sole imputation of the justice of



"The Papal Antichrist" - 16th Century Woodcut

Christ, or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost and remains in them, or also that the grace by which we are justified is only the good will of God, let him be anathema! If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else than that confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ's sake, or that it is this confidence alone that justifies us, let him be anathema!" (Schaff, II, pp.112-113)

This unequivocal denial of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone remains the official doctrinal position of the Roman Catholic Church today.

The foundational truth that Jesus is the world's only Savior and Redeemer is further undermined by Rome's growing emphasis on the alleged contribution of the Blessed Virgin Mary to the salvation of humanity. The papacy in the modern era has taken the lead in this movement with the proclamation of Mary's

"Immaculate Conception" (1854) and physical *"Assumption"* into heaven where she now reigns as the Queen of saints and angels (1950). In recent years Rome has gone so far as to refer to Mary as the *"Co-Redemptrix"* of the human race and the *"Mediatatrix"* between God and man. The Latin motto on the personal coat of arms of Pope John Paul II was *"Totus tuus sum Maria"* (*"Mary I am Totally Yours!"*) Roman Catholic theologian M. I. Miraville describes papal doctrine on this subject:

"We have learned to know Mary better and better as the partner of the Redeemer, who was allowed to add her contribution to Christ's immense act of atonement. This was taught to us by Pope Leo XIII 'that she was a participant with Jesus in the most

difficult work for the reparation of the human race.’ And Pope Benedict XV said it just as clearly that ‘in this way she suffered with her suffering and dying Son, and to appease the justice of God to the extent that she could, she offered her Son.’ The truth has been borne in upon us more clearly and distinctly that the Mother of Men helped to merit the salvation of her children. This co-appeasing and co-meriting was realized, in the first place, in her painful compassion. Pope Benedict said in this context: ‘The fact that she was with her Son, crucified and dying, was in accord with the divine plan. To such extent did she suffer and almost die with her dying Son, and to such extent did she surrender her maternal rights over her Son for man’s salvation, and immolated Him insofar as she could in order to appease the justice of God that we may rightly say that she redeemed the human race together with



***“The Pope Cast Into the Mouth of the Beast”
Hand Colored Woodcut by Matthias Gerung - 1536***

Christ. In all this, God's intention was that Mary who would be Co-Redemptrix by obtaining the graces of salvation, would also be partner and help in the distribution of these graces...In this way Mary became in God's plan of salvation, the general distributor of all grace. In this way, Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and men has wanted to add His Mother as Advocate for Sinners, as Mediatrix of all Graces. In this way, Mary became in the full sense the Mother of Mankind." (Miraville, pp. 28ff.)

In this connection, the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the host of alleged miracles which have occurred in conjunction with those appearances at the shrines built to commemorate them must also be noted. The Bible warns that one of the hallmarks of the Antichrist will be dependance upon ***"all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders."*** (2 Thessalonians 2:9; Revelation 13:13-15) In order to accomplish the goals of his hellish master, the Antichrist must divert God's people



"The Assumption of the Virgin Mary" by Paolo Veronese - 1560

from the objective truth of the Word to follow after the inclinations of their own hearts. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that Mary has repeatedly served as *"God's special emissary to earth"* to convey unique revelations of warning and encouragement from God. In a recent study entitled *"The Woman and the Dragon - Apparitions of Mary"* (a title drawn directly from the imagery of Revelation 12), Catholic scholar David Michael Lindsey lists twelve major Marian apparitions since December 9th, 1531, when a Mexican peasant name Juan Diego reported the appearance of Our Lady of Guadalupe. In 1858, Bernadette Soubirous saw the Blessed Mother in a grotto near the French village of Lourdes. Since then, millions of pilgrims from around the world have journeyed to the site and the waters of the spring at Lourdes have been

credited with tens of thousands of miraculous healings. Our Lady of the Rosary appeared to three shepherd children near Fatima in Portugal in 1917. She revealed three secrets which were to be revealed only to the Holy Father in Rome. Pope John Paul II is convinced that the failure of his attempted assassination on May 13th, 1981, (the 64th anniversary of the Virgin's first appearance at Fatima) was prophesied by Mary at Fatima and that his survival was the result of the Virgin of Fatima's miraculous intervention. The assassin's bullet removed from his body now rests in Mary's golden crown at the Fatima Shrine. Most recently, Mary is believed to have appeared to three young Croatian girls at Medjugorje in the Balkans. In addition to these major apparitions, thousands of other local Marian visitation in every Roman Catholic country in the world are commemorated and venerated. There are presently 937 Marian shrines in

France alone. These sites where Mary is believed to have appeared have become the focus of pilgrimage and intense devotion among Roman Catholics, validated by miraculous healings, prophecies and revelations. Almost six million pilgrims visit Lourdes every year. The veneration of holy relics, statues that weep or bleed, and images of the saints continue to play an important role in Roman Catholic piety. For instance, five million pilgrims travel each year to the remote Polish village of Czestochwa to pray before the famous "*Black Madonna*," an icon of the Virgin Mary. The image is said to have been painted by St. Luke on the plank of a table belonging to the holy family in Nazareth. All of this serves to distract God's people from the Word and the precious Gospel of salvation which it conveys. This is precisely what the Antichrist prophecies of Scripture had warned against.



"The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin" by Jose Antolinez

Scripture reveals the prophecies of the Antichrist in order to enable the people of God to recognize and guard against this dire threat to the Gospel of salvation. Without these warnings, the Antichrist, shielded by a cloak of piety and devotion, would have been able to operate with impunity within the Church. Those who would disregard, deny or distort the prophecies of the Antichrist imperil the Gospel and jeopardize the salvation of souls. For the father of the Reformation, the identification of the papacy as the Antichrist was not a matter of mere denominational polemics. Nor was it a judgment upon the personal morality or piety of individual popes. The reformers were convinced that the doctrinal position of the papacy represented a denial of the essence of the Gospel. They were prepared to stake their lives and their eternal salvation upon that conviction. True love of Christ and of His Gospel necessitates hatred of the Antichrist and his denials of the Gospel. There is no comfortable middle ground in these matters. Indifference about the Antichrist is indifference about Christ Himself. The harsh attacks of Luther and his comrades - in written word and visual image - upon the papacy and its teaching are an embarrassment to most Christians today. We live in an era of indifferent permissiveness and easy-going tolerance that scorns the very concept of truth and falsehood. The Church has grown listless and complacent. The mystery of the Antichrist thrives in just such an environment. Now, more than ever, the Biblical prophecies of the Antichrist must be heard and heeded. He must be unmasked so that all the faithful may recognize him for what he is. Those who truly love the Christ and His Gospel must sound the alarm and rouse the people of God so that they may recognize the mortal danger in their midst. In 1545 Martin Luther took up his pen one last time. His health was failing. He knew that death was near. The reformer's final theological work was entitled - *"Against the Roman Papacy - An Institution of the Devil."* In it he explained the intensity of his passion on the subject of the Antichrist.

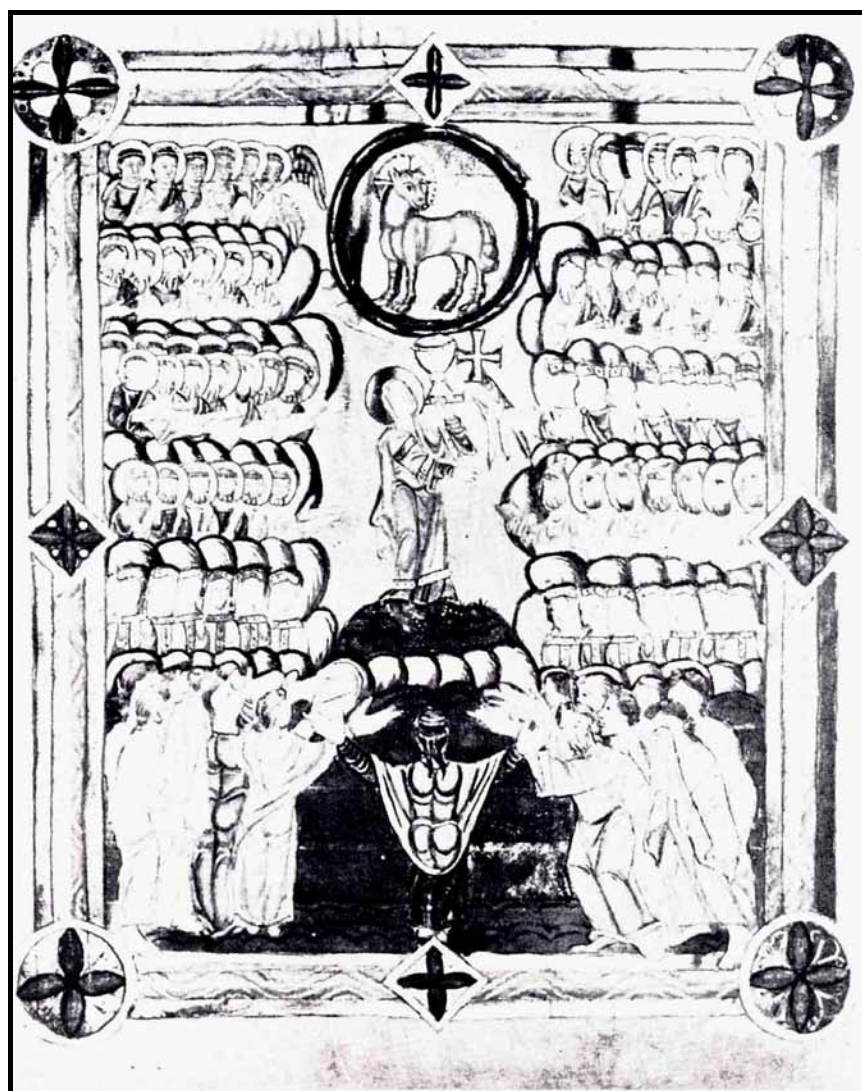
"Someone may think that here I am satisfying my own desire with such scornful, stinging, wounding words to the pope. O Lord God, I am far, far too insignificant to deride the pope. For more than six hundred years now he has undoubtedly derided the world and has laughed up his sleeve at its corruption in body and soul, goods and honor. He does not stop and he cannot stop. No man can believe what an abomination the papacy is! A Christian does not have to be of low intelligence either to recognize it! God Himself must deride him in hellish fire. Our Lord Jesus Christ - St. Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 - 'will slay him with the breath of His mouth and destroy him by His glorious coming.' I only deride him with my weak derision so that those who now live and those who come after us should know what I have thought of the pope, the damned Antichrist, and so that whoever wishes to be a Christian may be warned against such an abomination." (Luther, AE, 41, 273)

Wider das Papstum zu Rom vom Teuffel gestiftet/ Mart. Luther D.



Wittenberg/1545.
durch Hans Lufft.

*The Title Page of Martin Luther's Last Theological Work - "Against The
Roman Papacy Established by the Devil" - 1545*



"The Adoration of the Lamb" - 11th Century Illumination

The Fourth Scene

The Lamb and the 144,000

Revelation 14:1-5

Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with Him 144,000 who had His name and His Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. These are they who did not defile themselves with

women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever He goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as first fruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.

“Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb...” - The first three scenes of the vision displayed the rampant power of Satan and his minions. In impressive array we have seen the dragon and his beasts from sea and land come forth for war. All the powers of this world have bowed down before the masters of hell and have given their aid and support to their increasingly desperate resistance to the Creator. The Christian reader might well be growing apprehensive at this point, intimidated by the impressive panoply of the foe. In Chapter 6, John terrifying vision of the great tribulation was followed by the reassuring image of the sealing of the 144,000 (Revelation 6:2-17; 7:1-17). Now, once again, the fearsome symbolism of the dragon and his beasts is followed by the comforting vision of the Lamb and the 144,000. The characteristic phrase *“Then I looked”* (Greek - *“eidon kai idou”* - literally - *“I looked and behold”*) signals the change in scene. Cavorting beasts and dragons are replaced by the image of the Lamb. The deliberate juxtaposition of the false lamb who spoke with the voice of the dragon (Revelation 13:11) and the true Lamb of God makes the contrast between them unmistakably clear. This is the



“The Adoration of the Lamb” - 13th Century Illumination

Lamb's second appearance in Revelation. His exaltation and coronation were described in connection with the presentation of the seven-sealed scroll (Revelation 5-7). The symbolic representation of Christ as the Lamb of God serves to emphasize His sacrificial death and the meekness and vulnerability with which He came into this world. The devil flaunts his power. The Son of God reveals His strength in that which the world scorns as weakness.

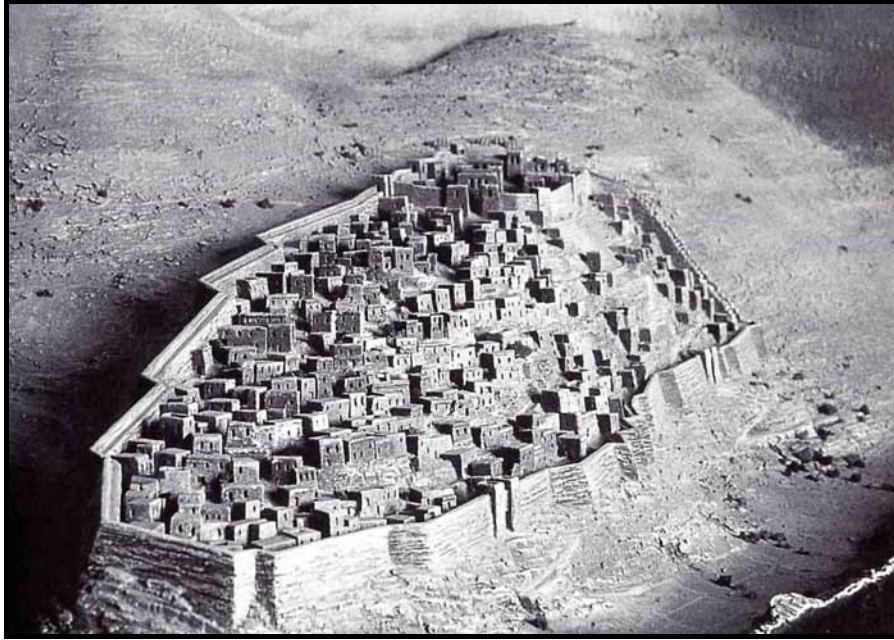
The Lamb stands upon "**Mount Zion.**" Mount Zion was the most prominent of Jerusalem's hills. The term is derived from an Arabic root which means "*protection*" or "*fortress.*" The original acropolis or citadel of the Jebusite city was located on the crest of this ridge. It was conquered by David and became his capital city (2 Samuel 5:6-16). Subsequently the temple of Solomon was constructed on Mount Zion. The Old Testament uses the word Zion 155 times in a variety of ways to refer to the

physical location itself, the entire city of Jerusalem, the people of God, the temple, and the heavenly Jerusalem. The term occurs seven times in the New Testament. In five of those instances, the New Testament author is quoting an Old Testament text (Matthew 21:5 quoting Zechariah 9:9; John 12:15 quoting Zechariah 9:9; Romans 9:33 quoting Isaiah 28:16; Romans 11:26 quoting Isaiah 59:20; and, 1 Peter 2:6 quoting Isaiah 28:16). The sixth reference comes in Hebrews 12:22 and the seventh is here in Revelation 14. Both of the latter texts use the word in its characteristic Old Testament sense. In these texts, Mount Zion is not a physical location but "*the place of redemption, where God and His messianic King reign in grace among His people.*" (Brighton, p. 365)



"The Lamb Upon Mt. Zion and the Fall of Babylon" - Luther Bible Illustration by Hans Burgkmair -1534

The Psalmist had prophesied that God



*“Jerusalem - The City of David With Its Citadel Upon Mt. Zion”
Model from The Museum of the History of Jerusalem*

would install His messianic King upon Mt. Zion to provide a place of refuge for His people and to bring judgment upon His enemies: ***“I have installed My King on Zion, My holy hill...Therefore you kings, be wise; be warned you rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling... Blessed are all who take refuge in Him.”*** (Psalm 2:6-12) John envisions this fulfillment of that prophecy as he depicts the Lamb standing upon Mount Zion surrounded by ***“the 144,000”***. As in its previous usage (Revelation 7:4-8), ***“the 144,000”*** is a numerological symbol representing the entirety of the people of God. Twelve, the number of the church, is multiplied by itself to embrace both the Old Testament (tribes) and the New Testament (apostles) people of God. That number ***“144”*** is then multiplied by ***“1,000”*** to emphasize its perfect completeness. Not one saint will be omitted or forgotten. All the people of God, from the beginning of time to its end will be included. ***“The 144,000”*** are identified as those who ***“had His name and His Father’s name written on their foreheads.”*** In Chapter 7, ***“the 144,000”*** were sealed, but the specific nature of that seal was not identified. Now John informs us that the seal is the name of the Lamb and His Father. This parallels the mark of the beast upon the foreheads of his slaves - ***“the mark which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.”*** (Revelation 13:17) The close identification of the Lamb and the Father serves to further distinguish the true Lamb of God from its devilish counterpart in the anti-trinity. The seal is a mark of ownership and allegiance. Those

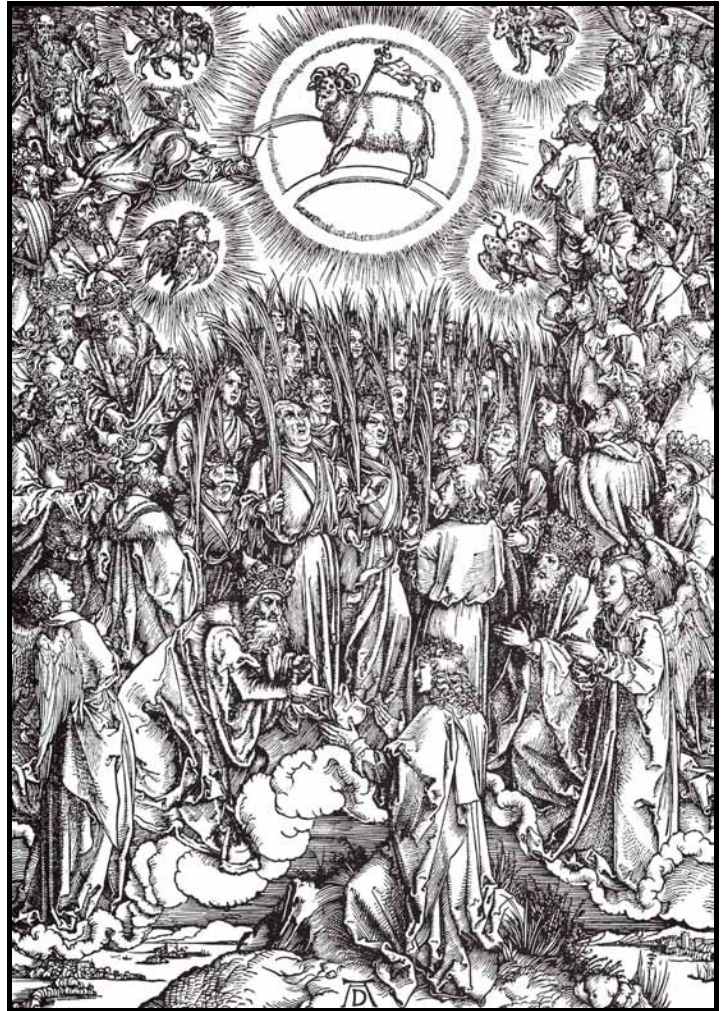
who bear the name of the Lamb and His Father belong to Him, are under His protection and care, and are empowered to serve Him.

“And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters...” - John reports the occurrence of a massive and magnificent sound reverberating from heaven. The emphasis in the text is on the magnitude of this sound - ***“like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder.”*** In Revelation 1:15, the voice of Christ is said to be ***“like the sound of rushing water.”*** The simile will recur in Revelation 19:6 in reference to the chorus of the victorious saints. The prophet Ezekiel uses the same phrase to describe the voice of the Almighty God (Ezekiel 1:24; 43:2). The sound of loud thunder is used twice elsewhere in Revelation; once to describe the voice of one of the four living beings (Revelation 6:1) and again in Revelation 19:6 in reference to the song of the saints. The imagery is combined in this text to describe the overwhelming volume of the ***“new song”*** performed by ***“the 144,000.”*** A third more musical simile is also provided - ***The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps.”*** The sound from heaven is not only overwhelmingly powerful, it is also beautifully melodious. The Greek title for this instrument is *“kithara.”* This was the instrument of David, Israel’s sweet singer, and the book of Psalms. It was commonly used by the Levites to provide music for the temple services. The Greek text uses variations of the same word three times for alliterative effect - literally *“harpists harping upon their harps.”* In Revelation, harps also appear in 5:8 and 15:2.



“Like That of Harpists Playing Their Harps” by Rudolf Schäfer

“And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders.” - The host of the redeemed burst forth in joyful song. Revelation 5:8-9 also tells of the singing of a ***“new song”*** (Greek - *“oden kainen”*). There the four living beings and the elders sing to celebrate the victory of the Lamb. Although the lyrics of the new song are not repeated here, the context makes it clear that this is also a victory anthem, celebrating the triumph of God over His foes. The text is strongly reminiscent of Psalm 33: ***“Praise the Lord with the harp; make music to Him on the ten-stringed lyre. Sing to Him a new song; play skillfully and shout for joy!”*** (Psalm 33: 2-3; cf. also Psalm 96:1-2). This majestic song of praise and thanksgiving is the sole possession of those who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb - those who have received salvation as a gift of God’s grace in Jesus Christ. ***“No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.”*** ***“Only the 144,000 can know and sing that song, for they have been redeemed from the earth; they have emerged triumphant from that haunt of sin and Satan, from the miasma which clogs and chokes man’s singing in praise of his God.”*** (Franzmann, p. 99)



“The Adoration of the Lamb” by Albrecht Dürer

“These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever He goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as first fruits to God and to the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths.” - Three figures describe the 144,000. First - ***“These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure.”*** The language is clearly figurative. The 144,000 are all the people of God



*“The Parable of the Wise and the Foolish Virgins”
by W. J. Wainright*

both male and female. Scripture often portrays the people of God as a pure virgin bride, undefiled by the corruption and impurity of this sinful world (cf. Isaiah 37:22; Jeremiah 14:17; 18:13; 31:4,21; Lamentations 1:15; 2:13; Amos 5:2; 2 Corinthians 11:2). The prophets often used adultery and sexual impurity as an image for idolatry and the worship of false Gods (cf. Jeremiah 3:6; Hosea 1-3). This is not surprising, given the nature of many pagan religions, particularly those of the Canaanites, as fertility cults whose worship involved temple prostitution. In this instance the virgins are male, which is unusual in Biblical imagery. Perhaps this is a reflection of the abstinence required of God’s warriors as they prepare to go into holy war for Him

(Deuteronomy 23:9-10). The gender shift may also anticipate the harlot of Babylon imagery to follow in Revelation 17 where the people of God are those who have not committed adultery with the whore and have not yielded to the temptation of her impurity.

Secondly - ***“They follow the Lamb wherever He goes.”*** The verb is a present participle indicating ongoing continuous action. In Mark 8:34 Jesus declares: ***“If any man would come after Me let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me.”*** Like a loyal army in marching order behind its general, the people of God follow their Lord. They will not live by the standards of this world nor bow down before its idols. They march to the beat of a different drummer, following in the footsteps of the Savior who offered His life in their place as a sacrificial offering upon the cross. To follow Christ is to live by His Word, submitting to His will - in short, to walk the way of the cross. This discipleship was made possible by Christ’s redemption of His Church. ***“They were purchased from among men and offered as first fruits to God and to the Lamb.”*** The first fruits offerings of the Old Testament were the finest

portion of the harvest, the very best, set aside and given to God in humble gratitude for the abundance of His blessing. Having been purchased in the blood of Christ, believers are liberated from the loyalties of this world, to live as the sole possession of God. The basic motive of the Christian life must be to offer praise and thanksgiving to God - to glorify the name of the God of our salvation (cf. Romans 12:1). The image of the people of God as the first fruits offering also anticipates the vision of the harvest of the earth which follows later in the chapter (vss. 14-20).

Finally, truthfulness is set forward as a basic characteristic of those who belong to Christ. ***“No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.”*** The wording of the text is very similar to the description of the Messianic Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53: ***“Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.”***

(Isaiah 53:9) *“After purity, truthfulness was perhaps the most distinctive mark of the followers of Christ, when contrasted with their heathen neighbors; cf. Eph.4:20-25”* (Swete, p.180) Lying is a sin which is often singled out in Scripture as being particularly hateful to the God of Truth (cf. Proverbs 6:17; Psalm 5:6). The devil is the ***“Father of Lies”*** (John 8:44). The pagan world has ***“exchanged the truth of God for a lie.”*** (Romans 1:25). Among those who will be excluded from the eternal city of God are ***“everyone who loves and practices falsehood.”*** (Revelation 22:15) Lies cannot be found in the mouth of those who have been cleansed in the blood of the Lamb. Like the ancient prophet, their lips have been cleansed by the purifying fire of God (Isaiah 6:7). ***“They are blameless.”*** because in Christ they stand before God justified, their sins forgiven and forgotten. Now they are free to speak and live the truth of God as witnesses to Jesus Christ.



“The Rich Young Man” by George Watts



*“The Adoration of the Lamb and the Three Angels”
by Lucas Cranach*

The Fifth Scene - The Three Angels

Revelation 14:6-13

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth - to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgement has come. Worship Him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the springs of water.” A second angel followed and said, “Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.” A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: “If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he too, will drink the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured out full

strength into the cup of His wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises forever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast or his image or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.” This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus. Then I heard a voice from heaven say: “Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labor and their deeds will follow them.”

“Then I saw another angel flying in midair...” - For the fifth time in this series of seven the typical phrase - *“Then I saw”* (Greek - *“kai eidon”*) signals the introduction of a new Scene. The first three Scenes had portrayed the nefarious anti-trinity in all of their destructive power. In Scene 4 the victory of God’s people over all the powers of hell was affirmed. The angels of the fifth Scene promise that the Gospel will be preached throughout the latter days and that the devil and all those who serve him will certainly receive the full measure of their judgment.

The first angelic messenger is described as *“another angel.”* There does not appear to be any special significance to the modifier *“another,”* other than to contrast this messenger with all those which have appeared in previous visions. The angel appears *“flying in midair.”* The Greek term



*“An Angelic Messenger”
by John Strudwick - 1900*

“meso-ouranema” literally means *“in the midst of the heavens.”* The word indicates that point in the sky which is directly overhead - as the modern fighter pilot would say, *“twelve o’clock high.”* The angel flies in mid-heaven to be seen and heard by all since his message is intended for all of humanity. The term is used three times in the New Testament, only in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 8:13; 14:6; 19:17). In all three instances it occurs in conjunction with an announcement about the coming of God’s judgment. Lenski further suggests that the placement of the angel in the midst of the heavens signals the failure of all the devil’s effort to suppress the message of the Gospel:

“Neither the dragon nor the dragon’s two heads can reach him in mid-heaven and stop his gospeling. All the anti-christian power and its blasphemies and the anti-Christian deceitful tyrannous propaganda are unable to reach this divine messenger in mid-heaven and to smother his great voice.” (Lenski, pp. 427-428)



*“The Angel with the Eternal Gospel”
19th Century Bible Engraving*

The angel’s message is characterized as ***“the eternal gospel”*** (Greek - *“euangelion aionion”*). The noun literally means *“good news.”* That characterization is reinforced by the use of the Greek verb *“euangelisai,”* based on the same root, which literally means to preach or proclaim the good news of salvation. It occurs frequently throughout the New Testament as the usual term for the good news of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The appearance of the word here is unique in that this is the only time in the New Testament that the word appears without the definite article. The NIV’s translation inserts the definite article ***“the eternal gospel”*** although it is not present in the Greek text. The content of the angel’s message, as specified in the verses which follow, is clearly not the good news of salvation, but an urgent warning of God’s impending judgment. This is not *“gospel”* in the ordinary sense of the term. Evidently the absence of the

customary definite article in this text signals a broader use of the word. In the Greek of the Old Testament Septuagint, “*euangelion*” more generally referred to a message, which could be either good or bad news. John’s usage here may reflect that more neutral connotation. David Aune’s suggested translation - “*an eternal message to proclaim*” - reflects both the absence of the definite article and that broader sense. The angel’s warning is not merely a pronouncement of judgment but is designed to stimulate repentance. In that way it serves the cause of the gospel in the narrow sense. At the same time, the announcement of God’s impending judgment is certainly good news for Christians eagerly awaiting Christ’s return and in this context that may explain the unusual use of the terminology. The message that is proclaimed is “*eternal*,” that is to say, it proclaims the changeless counsel of God for all time. It is immutable and permanently valid. As long as time and space endure the proclamation of this gospel will continue despite all the efforts of its enemies to suppress it.



*“The Angel in the Midst of the Heavens”
19th Century Bible Illustration*

The purview of the message is universal, for all of mankind. This is indicated by the two parallel phrases which follow - “*to those who live on the earth - to every nation, tribe, language and people.*” The language of the first phrase differs from the usual formulation in Revelation - “*those who live on the earth*” in which the Greek word “*katoikeo*” (“*to dwell*” or “*to make one’s home*”) is used (cf. Revelation 3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8,12,14; 17:2,8). This phrase ordinarily refers only to unbelievers. Here, a different Greek word (“*kathemenous*” - literally “*those who sit upon the earth*”) is used to signal that the proclamation of the angel is addressed not merely to unbelievers but to all mankind. The point is stressed again by the typical use of

the earth number in the fourfold division in the second phrase. The concept echoes that of the *“Little Apocalypse:”* ***“This good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come.”*** (Mark 13:10). The proclamation is irrepressible for the angel sounds forth his message - ***“with a loud voice.”***

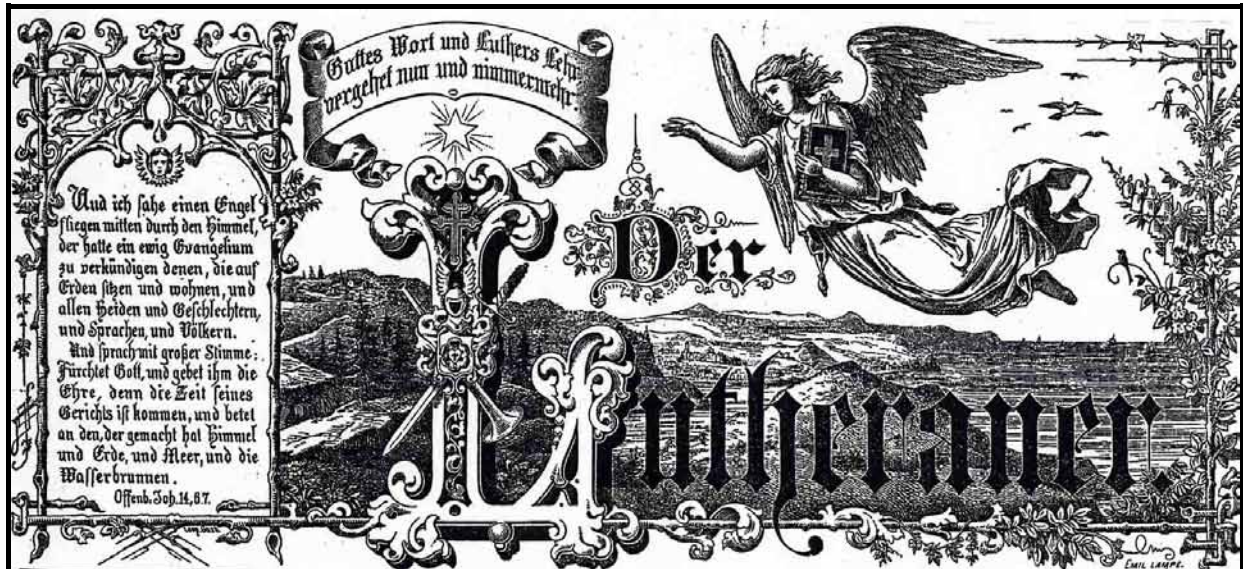
“Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come. Worship Him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.”
- The angel’s proclamation is a contradiction and a denial of all the lies of the devil and his legions of servants. The words recall Christ’s rejection of Satan’s insidious invitation to fall down and worship him: ***“Away from Me, Satan! For it is written: “Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only!”*** (Matthew 4:10)

In the face of the imminent judgment of God humanity is summoned to worship and praise God - ***“Fear God and give Him glory.”*** Dr. Siegbert Becker offers this helpful summary of the meaning of the often misunderstood concept of the fear of God:

“The term “the fear of God” covers a broad spectrum of meaning in the Holy Scriptures, ranging from abject terror before the wrath of God to childlike awe and respect before His ineffable grace. For the sinner, the fear of God is “terror smiting the conscience through the knowledge of sin.” That kind of fear is described by the Lord when He says: “Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matthew 10:28) For the forgiven sinner the fear of God is holy awe which results from the contemplation of the undeserved pardon which has come to him from the just and holy God who is also the God of infinite grace. Of this latter kind of fear the psalmist spoke when he wrote: “With You there is forgiveness; therefore You are feared.” (Psalm 130:3)...This should not be understood to mean that the first kind of fear is never found in the heart of a believing child of God. Because of weakness of faith we are not as sure as we ought to be of our forgiveness. Christians are sometimes also terrified at the thought of God’s holy wrath. Such fear, however, is characteristic of the Old Adam rather than of the new man. The Lutheran Confessions define the “childlike fear” of a Christian as a fear which is relieved by faith while the “slavish fear” of the unbeliever is the same kind of fear, but which is not relieved by faith (Apology to the Augsburg Confession XII,38).” (Becker, p. 224)

The angel’s words constitute ***“one last call for civilization to repent and give glory to God.”*** (Mounce, p. 273) The appeal is couched in the language of natural theology acknowledging God as the Almighty Creator of all things. Note the fourfold repetition - ***“the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.”*** The angel summons all of His creatures to worship and adore Him. The goal of this

proclamation is repentance and salvation. Paul and Barnabas used the reality of creation and judgment in the same way in their attempt to evangelize the citizens of Athens (Cf. Acts 17:8-18).



The Masthead of “Der Lutheraner” Showing the Angel with the Everlasting Gospel

Historically Lutheran theologians have viewed this scene as a prophecy of the Reformation. This passage is, in fact, the traditional Epistle Lesson for Reformation Day. Dr. Lenski comments:

“The older Protestants regarded this first flying angel as a prophecy of Luther and his gospel and to this day Revelation 14:6-7 is the regular pericope for Reformation Day...When commentators reject this interpretation they do so without sufficient reason. The text for Reformation Day is well chosen, for the fathers of Reformation days selected it not because they identified the first angel wholly with Luther. The reformer too preached only the old apostolic gospel. The angel for the eternal gospel is the messenger for the whole New Testament era and thus most certainly includes a man like Luther who once made the eternal gospel ring out in all its saving power and purity in the whole world despite all the devil’s effort to hush its voice. Use the text as the fathers intended it to be used and all is well.” (Lenski, p. 428)

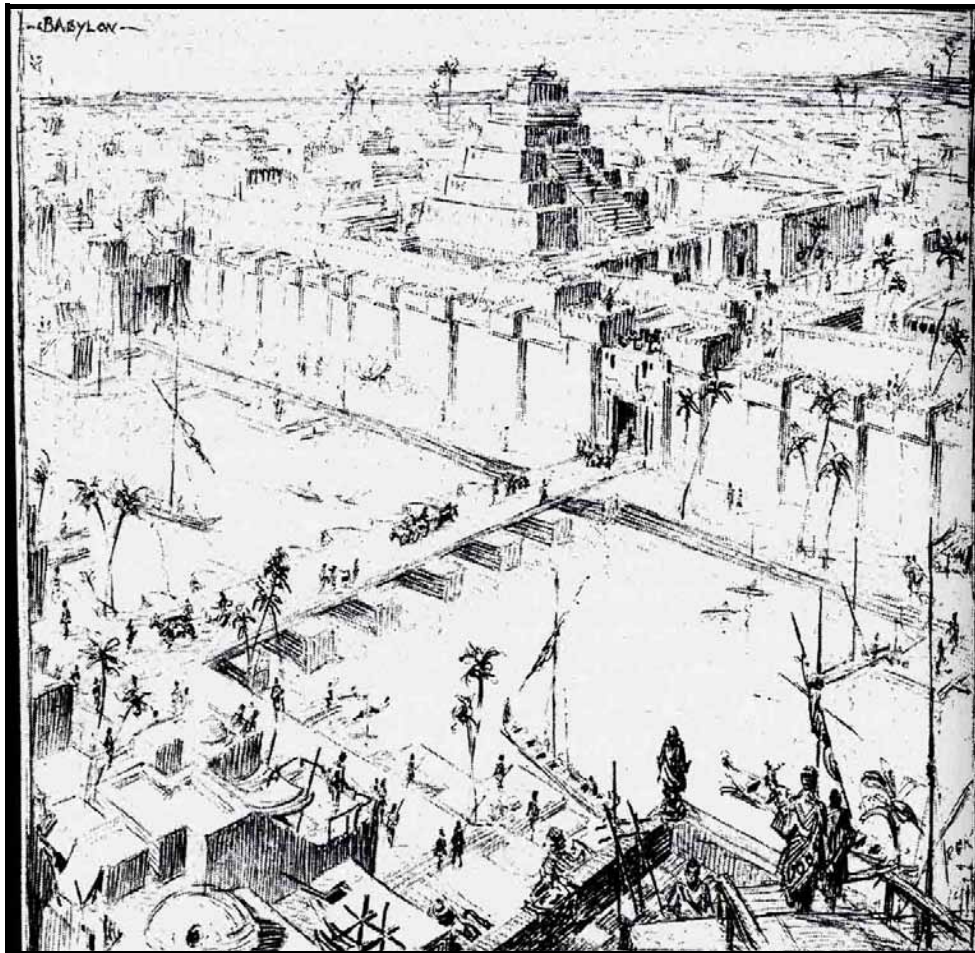
Reflecting this view, for many decades the masthead of the Missouri Synod’s German publication “*Der Lutheraner*” featured the image of the mighty angel flying in mid-heaven with the slogan - “*Gottes Wort und Luthers Lehr vergehet nun und nimmermehr!*” (“*God’s Word and Luther’s Doctrine Pure - May they Now and Evermore Endure!*”).



“The Fall of Babylon” - 19th Century Bible Engraving

*“A second angel followed and said, **“Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.”*** - A second angelic messenger follows immediately in the wake of the first. The first angel had affirmed the continuous, ongoing proclamation of the *“eternal gospel”* and had pleaded with mankind to acknowledge the one God and worship Him before the imminent coming of His judgment. The second angel takes the matter a step further with a more explicit declaration of judgment, actually announcing the downfall of all of the enemies of God. The announcement is abrupt, without introduction or explanation. John is evidently confident that his readers will understand exactly what he is talking about. The angel’s message is drawn from the Old Testament, from the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. *“Fallen, fallen is Babylon!”* (Isaiah 21:9) *“Babylon was a golden cup in the Lord’s hand, making all the earth drunken; the nations drank of her wine; therefore the nations went mad.”* (Jeremiah 51:7) The specific title *“Babylon the Great”* comes from Daniel 4:30 and the proud boast of Nebuchadnezzar - *“Is this not the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?”* John synthesizes and modifies the Old Testament language to meet the needs of his message. As the old theologians have said, when the Holy Spirit quotes Himself He has the right to quote freely. The Neo-Babylonian Empire dominated the ancient Near East in the Eighth

century B.C. As the political and religious capital of this great world empire, the city of Babylon was renowned for its luxury and moral corruption. The “*Hanging Gardens*” of Nebuchadnezzar’s massive palace were regarded as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Babylon’s massive walls and fortifications were believed to be impregnable. Cyrus the Persian conquered the city by treachery after diverting the waters of the great River Euphrates. In the Old Testament, Babylon came to represent all the enemies of the people of God. It was mighty Babylon which conquered Judah and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, carrying the people of God away into captivity. Babylon put an end to the independent existence of the Israelite nation. “*Because of the destruction and horror perpetrated by ancient Babylon she henceforth became a type of all the enemies of God.*” (Brighton, p. 378) For the early church at the beginning of the New Testament era Babylon, although long



“The Greatness That Was Babylon” by Roy Krenkel



“The Israelites Mourning Their Captivity in Babylon” by Herbert Schmalz

eclipsed as a literal world power (cf. Jeremiah 28:39; 50:39-40; 51:24-26,62-64; Isaiah 13:19-22), continued to epitomize the wickedness and corruption of the world in bitter opposition to the people of God. The name Babylon was often used by writers of the period as a designation for the city and empire of Rome. For example, the Sibylline Oracles, a Hebrew apocryphal book written in Egypt in the mid 70's, describes the reign of Nero and predicts the downfall of Rome in this way:

“Playing at theatricals with honey sweet songs rendered with melodious voice, he will destroy many men, and his own wretched mother. He will flee from Babylon, a terrible and shameless prince whom all mortals and noble men despise...A great star will come from heaven to the wondrous sea and will burn the deep sea and Babylon itself and the land of Italy, because of which many holy faithful Hebrews and a true people perished...It is the last time of the holy people, when God, who thunders on high, founder of the greatest temple, accomplishes these things. Woe to you, Babylon, of golden throne and golden sandal. For many years you were the sole kingdom ruling over the world...” (Sibylline Oracles, V, 143,159,434)

2 Baruch, Hebrew apocalypse written in Palestine in the aftermath of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., follows a similar pattern in calling down God’s judgment upon Rome for its treatment of the Jews:

“Now this, I, Baruch, say to you, O Babylon: If you had lived in happiness with Zion in its glory it would have been a great sorrow to us that you had been equal to Zion.

But now, behold, the grief is infinite and the lamentation is unmeasurable, because behold, you are happy and Zion has been destroyed...But the king of Babylon will arise, the one who now has destroyed Zion, and he will boast over the people and speak haughtily in his heart before the Most High. And he too will fall finally.” (2 Baruch 11:1; 67:7)

Many commentators believe that 1 Peter 5:13 is a New Testament example of this same pattern at work. Peter, presumably writing from Rome, concludes his epistle with these words: ***“She (the church) who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son, Mark.”*** The designation of Rome as Babylon served a dual purpose. First, it concealed what in many cases government officials would have considered the sedition of these authors. But more importantly the application of this ancient title was a theological statement about the nature of Rome and the Roman government. It said that Rome had become what Babylon once



“The Adoration of the Lamb and the Three Angels” - Luther Bible Woodcut

had been, the embodiment of all this world’s wickedness and corruption in opposition to the people of God.

This is the first of six references to Babylon in the Book of Revelation. The use of

the term six times (the number of the Anti-Christ) is certainly no mere coincidence (cf. Revelation 16:19; 17:5; 18:2,10,21). Babylon in Revelation is not a literal place but a powerful symbol, a symbol for all of the enemies and oppressors of God's people, past, present and future. John's ***"Babylon the Great"*** is not one city. It reaches beyond the seats of ancient empires and modern totalitarian governments. It is every city - *"The world city is the manufactory of all that inflames and satisfies those passions which make men unfaithful to their Creator and Lord; the Creator's good gifts are put to unhallowed uses."* (Franzmann, p. 101)

"Babylon the Great" is not only corrupt but corrupting - ***"which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."*** The imagery is that of a prostitute who plies her prospective client with wine to deprive him of his judgment so that she may lure him into her bed. The point of the text is not physical adultery but the spiritual adultery of idolatry and false worship. As noted in the previous scene (cf. p. 314) the prophets often use adultery as an image for the spiritual unfaithfulness of idolatry. Hosea (4:10-12) makes that link explicit in a passage that is strikingly similar to this text:



"Isaiah's Vision of the Doom of Babylon" by Gustave Dore

“They have deserted the Lord to give themselves to prostitution, to old wine and new, which take away the understanding of My people. They consult a wooden idol and are answered by a stick of wood. A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God.”



*“The Adoration of the Lamb and the Destruction of Babylon”
Luther Bible Woodcut*

The text also suggests the element of coercion - *“**which made all the nations drink.**”* Babylon uses her power to compel compliance causing the earth’s inhabitants to choose a path that they in no way would have chosen without her influence.

It is significant to note that the aorist tense of the verb - *“**Fallen is Babylon!**”*. In the Greek language the aorist tense is used to describe an event that has just happened, an event completed in the immediate past. Here the aorist tense is prophetic and speaks of a future event as of something that is irrevocably in the past. The sovereign control of God is absolute. His Word is sure. That which He says will happen is as certain as that which has already happened in time.

“A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: “If anyone worships the

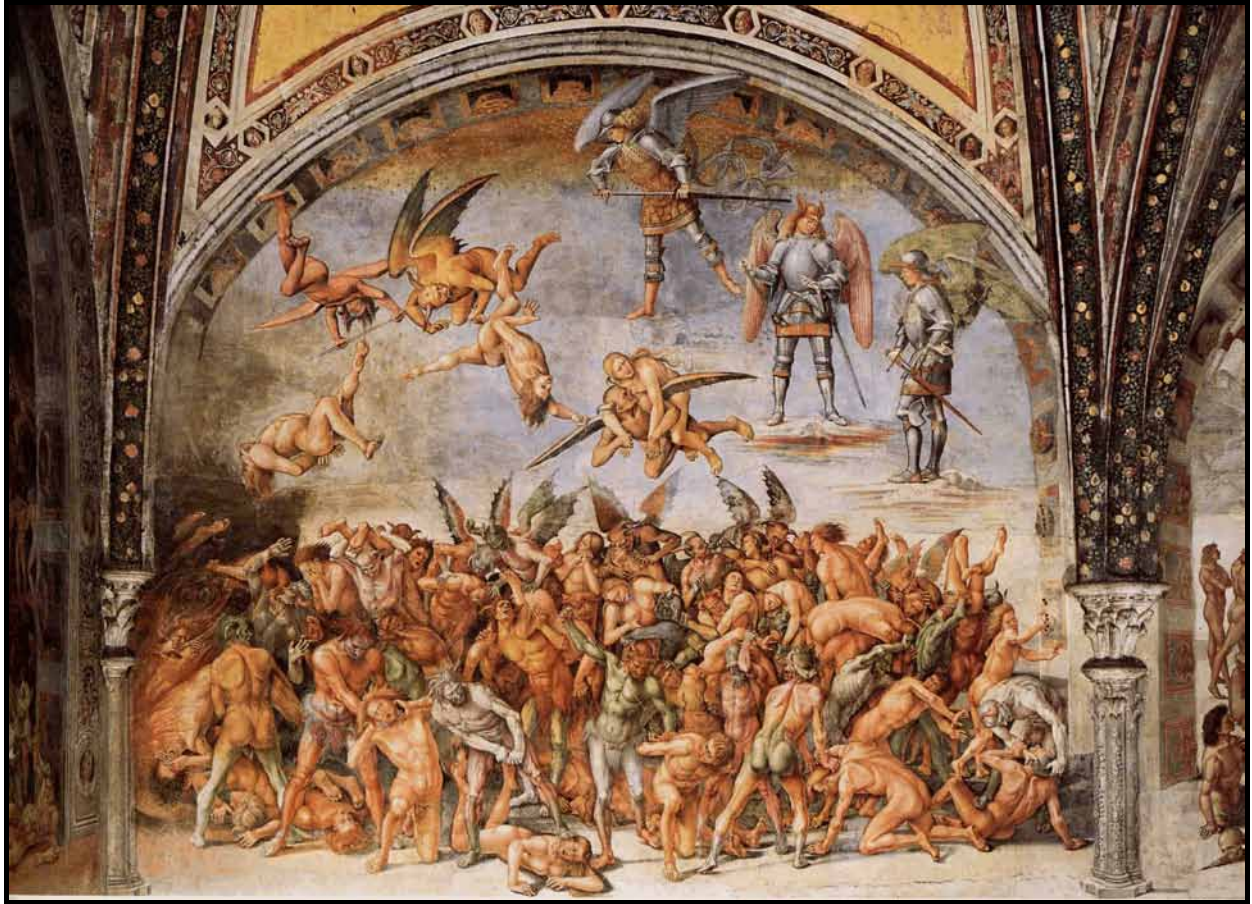
beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of His wrath." - Now the final angel in this scene makes his appearance and proclaims his ominous message. The message of impending judgment intensifies once more as the general announcement of the downfall of Babylon the Great is followed by a graphic description of the implications of Satan's defeat for every individual who has chosen to follow him. Allegiance to Satan is defined in terms of the imagery of the vision of the beast from the land (Revelation 13:11-18) - *"If anyone worships the beast and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand..."* The imagery includes all those who have spurned the worship of the true God and have chosen instead to live by the values of this world, having thereby chosen to worship the false gods of this world. The second angel had said that Babylon *"made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."* Now the punishment

fits the crime. Those who have chosen to drink of the wine of Babylon's adultery will be given *"the wine of God's fury"* to drink. That judgment will not be mitigated or diluted as *"the wine of God's fury"* *"has been poured full strength into the cup of His wrath."*



"The Adoration of the Lamb and the Doom of Babylon" - Luther Bible Woodcut

The image of God's judgment as strong, untempered wine is a common one in the Old Testament. David laments: *"You have shown Your people desperate times; You have given us wine that makes us stagger."* (Psalm 60:3) In Psalm 75, the psalmist depicts the judgment of God as foaming wine in the cup of God's judgment: *"In the hand of the Lord is a cup full of foaming wine mixed with spices; He pours it out, and all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs."* (Psalm 75:8) Isaiah combines the images in his warning to apostate Israel: *"Rise up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of His wrath, you who have drained to its*



“The Torments of the Damned” by Luca Signorelli

dregs the goblet that makes men stagger.” (Isaiah 51:17) In Jeremiah 25, compelling the nations to drink from the cup of God’s wrath serves as a graphic image of the prophet’s entire ministry:

“This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me: “Take from My hand this cup filled with the wine of My wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. When they drink it, they will stagger and go mad, because of the sword I will send among them.” So I took the cup from the Lord’s hand and made all the nations to whom He sent me drink it...Then tell them, “This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel says, “Drink, get drunk, and vomit, and fall to rise no more because of the sword I will send among you.” But if they refuse to take the cup from your hand and drink, tell them, “This is what the Lord Almighty says, “You must drink it!” (Jeremiah 25:15-16,27-28)

The image of the cup of God's wrath will recur twice more in the visions of Revelation (Revelation 16:19; 19:15).

“He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises forever and ever. There is no rest day and night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.” - The link between ***“burning sulfur”*** - (traditionally - ***“fire and brimstone”***) and divine judgment go all the way back to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. Genesis 19:28). This is the grim reality of hell. ***“We need not speculate about this fire, its nature and its effects. Human expressions are used to represent what is really beyond our present powers of conception.”*** (Lenski, p. 437) As the great Lutheran theologian John Gerhard advised many centuries ago: ***“It is wiser to be concerned about escaping this eternal fire than to engage in an unprofitable argument as to the nature of this fire.”***



“The Torments of the Damned” - 13th Century Illumination

The eternal punishment of the damned is to take place ***“in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb.”*** The phrase emphasizes the role of Christ as the eternal Judge of mankind. Jesus declared: ***“Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son...And He has given Him authority to judge because He is the Son of Man.”*** (John 5:22,27) The angelic host becomes the courtroom gallery before whom the judgment takes place. Jesus had warned: ***“I tell you, whoever acknowledges Me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. But he who disowns Me before men will be disowned before the angels of God.”*** (Luke 12:8-9) All are in full accord with the perfect justice

and righteousness of God's judgment. This judgement is final. There will be - there can be - no appeal.

"Their punishment is just; the angels who protect the servants of God (7:1-3), waft the prayers of all the saints into the presence of God (8:3), and to the very last have proclaimed an eternal gospel (14:6) will not intercede for them. Nor will the Lamb who loved them and died for them (1:5). He who once interceded for His executioners (Luke 23:34) will not intercede for them." (Franzmann, p. 102)



"Abraham Observes the Smoke of Sodom's Destruction" by Edward Armitage

And the smoke of their torment rises forever and ever. There is no rest day or night..." - When Abraham observed the dense column of smoke rising over the ruins of Sodom and Gomorrah he knew that God's judgment had finally come upon those sinful cities. (Genesis 19:28) So also here ***"the smoke of their torment"*** signals that the decisive judgment of God has taken place. The language recalls the description of God's judgment upon the land of Edom in Isaiah 34: ***"Edom's streams will be turned into pitch, her dust into burning sulfur; her land will become burning pitch. It will not be quenched night and day; its smoke will rise forever."*** (Isaiah 34:9-10) The text makes it painfully clear that the torment of the damned will be eternal - ***"forever and ever"*** and without interruption - ***"there is no rest day or***



*"The Mark of the Beast"
13th Century Illumination*

night." The objects of this unimaginable punishment are again defined as *"those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name."* The phrase repeats the language of Verse 9.

"This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus." - In the face of the dreadful fate awaiting those who allow themselves to be lured or coerced into the worship of the beasts, God's people are urged to remain steadfast and true. Do not yield. Do not follow the inclination of

your own sinful heart or conform to the ways of this world but *"obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus."* The temporary suffering and persecution which must be endured as the price of that loyalty pale into insignificance in comparison with the eternal torments of the damned.

"Then I heard a voice from heaven say, 'Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.'" - The appeal to steadfastness is followed by the second of the seven beatitudes of the Book of Revelation (cf. Revelation 1:3; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7). The command to *"Write"* emphasizes the importance of that which follows.

The specific source of the voice is not identified, but it comes from heaven, thus from God. The blessing is immediately affirmed by the Spirit of God Himself. *"Blessed"* is the Greek term *"makarios."* The basic meaning of the word is *"happy"* or *"happiness."* God promises this blessing to *"the dead who die in the Lord from now on."*

Faithfulness to Christ in a world where the devil and his minions rule and rage may well result in martyrdom and death. But those *"who die in the Lord from now on"*



"The Ramparts of God's House" by John Melhuish Strudwick

need no longer fear death, for man's ancient enemy has been transformed from a curse to a blessing for all those who are ***"in the Lord."*** By His death and resurrection Christ has broken the power of death. Death cannot destroy, nor even interrupt, the relationship of Christ with His people. The blessedness of the dead who die in the Lord is immediate ***"from now on"*** (Greek - *"ap arti"*). The Greek phrase might well be translated *"from this very moment."* The blessedness of the dead who die in the Lord begins at the instant of their death as they are immediately with Christ in heaven. There the struggle against the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh that characterized their life here on earth is over as they rest safe and secure in the loving arms of Jesus - ***"they will rest from their labor."*** The language stands in stark contrast to the fate of the damned - ***"There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image."*** (V.11) The deeds which are the unmistakable evidence of true faith will go with them to be presented as evidence on the final day of judgment.



"The Judgement Harvest" by Lucas Cranach

The Sixth Scene - The Judgment Harvest

Revelation 14: 14-20

I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one "like a son of man" with a crown of gold on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand. Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to Him who was sitting on the cloud, "Take Your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe. So He that was seated on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested. Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. Still another angel,

who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle. “Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth’s vine, because its grapes are ripe.” The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God’s wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses’ bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia.

“I looked and there before me was a white cloud....” - As the vision of the seven scenes draws to its conclusion, the focus upon the end of time and the final judgment sharpens. The image of the last judgment as a harvest is common in Scripture. The language of this scene closely resembles that of the prophet Joel who spoke of the judgment in these terms: *“Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow - so great is their wickedness.”* (Joel 3:13) Jesus frequently spoke of the harvest as a picture of the ingathering of God’s people (i.e. *“The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field.”* Matthew 9:37-38; cf. also Mark 4:29; Luke 10:2; John 4: 35-38). The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (Matthew 13:24-30) is based upon the comparison of the judgment to a harvest. The figure of *“One ‘like a son of man’”* sitting on a white

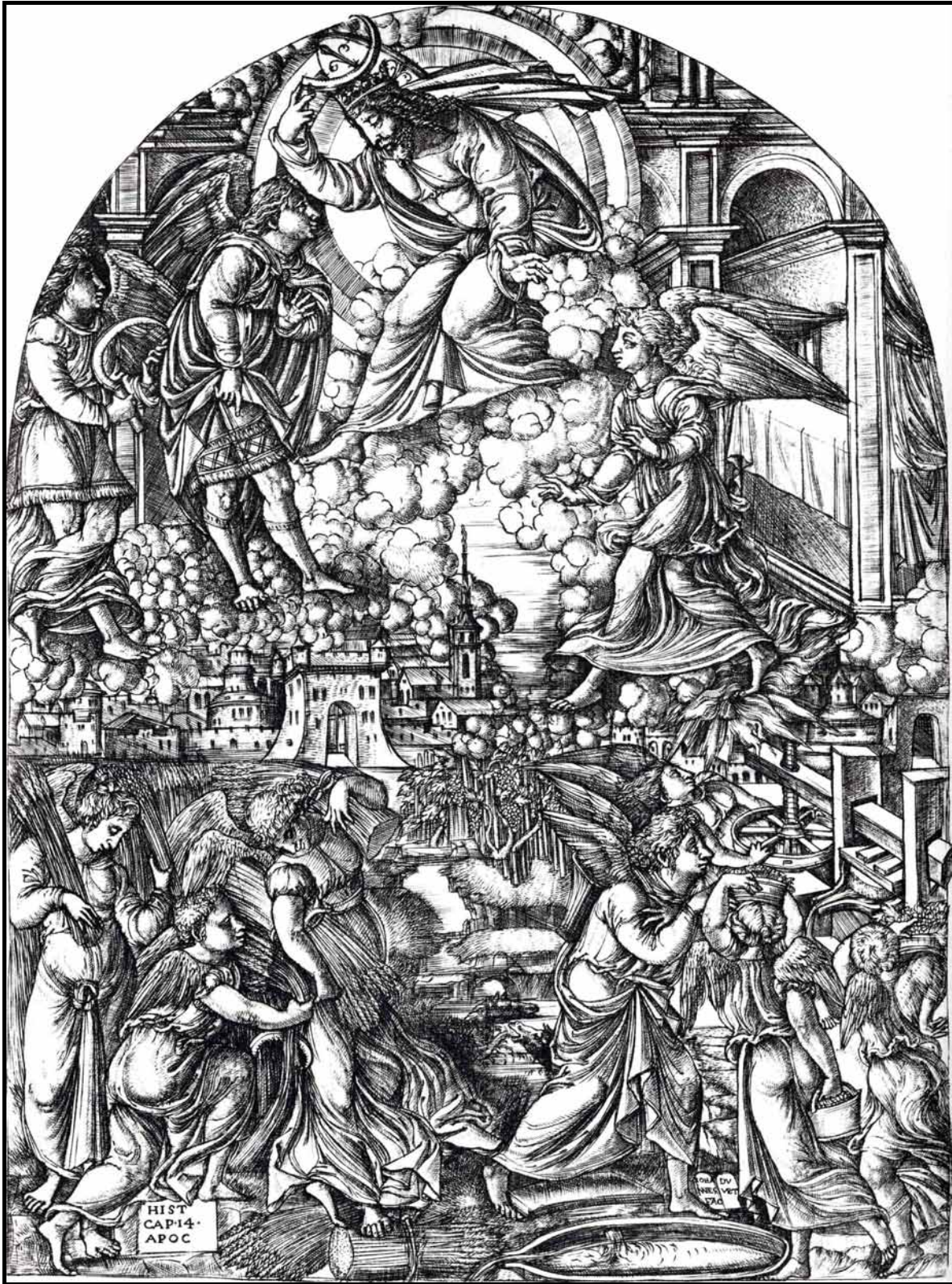


*“The Vision of the Harvest and the Winepress” - Luther Bible
Woodcut*

cloud introduces the scene. This is the Lord Christ. This classic Messianic title from the Old Testament was used in the Introduction to the Book to describe Jesus amid the golden lamp stands (cf. Revelation 1:13). The prophet Daniel had foretold that on the day of judgment the Son of Man would come ***“with the clouds of heaven.”*** (Daniel 7:13). Christ used the same words when He promised His disciples that on the Last Day ***“They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory.”*** (Matthew 24:30). He reiterated that theme in His warning to Caiaphas and the leaders of the Sanhedrin: ***“But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.”*** (Matthew 26:64) The cloud upon which the Son of Man is seated in this vision is specifically designated as ***“a white cloud”*** (Greek - *“nephele leuke”*). White is the color of purity, righteousness and holiness. In this context it signifies the righteousness of God in judgment.

Two further details define the identity and the role of the Son of Man in the scene. First, there is a ***“crown of gold”*** upon his head. This is the victor’s crown indicated by the Greek word *“stephanos.”* ***“Once before the Son of Man had worn a crown: a thorny crown, a crown of mockery in His suffering (Mark 15:17). That crown has been replaced by a golden crown, a crown denoting victory. So now in bearing the crown He comes as the victor.”*** (Brighton, p. 390) Later in Revelation 19:12, Christ will be portrayed wearing the royal crown to signify His royal authority as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. In His hand he bears the instrument of the harvest ***“a sharp sickle.”*** This sickle is ***“sharp”*** - it is honed and ready for use. He is fully equipped and prepared for the task before Him, to gather in the harvest of God’s judgment. The job will be done quickly and completely. The word is used eight times in the New Testament, seven of which are in the Book of Revelation.

“Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to Him who was sitting on the cloud...” - The time for judgment has finally arrived. God sends His messenger (***“another angel”*** - the fourth angel in this sequence) forth from the ***“temple”*** (Greek - *“naos”*) with the divine command for the harvest to commence. The temple is the holy place in which God dwells. The fact that the angel comes from the temple indicates that the command that he brings originates with God Himself. This is the first of three angels which come out of the temple in the scene. There is a compelling sense of dramatic urgency in the command which the angel relays to the Son of Man - ***“Take you sickle and reap because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.”*** The language closely resembles that of Joel: ***“Swing***



"The Judgement Harvest" by Jean Duvet



*“The Vision of the Harvest” by Hans Burgkmair
Luther Bible Woodcut*

*the sickle for the harvest is ripe.” (Joel 3:13) Mankind is like a field that has reached perfect readiness and ripeness. The farmer who harvests too soon finds his crop green and incomplete. The farmer who delays the harvest too long finds his crop over-ripe and past its prime. The harvest must occur at just the right moment. This is that perfect moment, as the Almighty Sovereign God sends forth His command. Let the reaping begin now! This is the right time. Bring in the harvest. The act itself is described in startling brevity without embellishment or detail - “**So He that was seated on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.**”*

“Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too

had a sharp sickle...” - The prophet Joel had used the dual image of a grain harvest and the crushing of the grapes in the harvest of a vineyard. John follows that pattern as the scene unfolds to represent the violent fury of God’s judgment upon His foes. Another angel comes forth from the temple - another messenger of the holy and righteous God. Like the Son of Man he bears a sharp sickle in his hand, the instrument of the judgment harvest. He is followed by yet another angel, the angel *“who had charge of the fire.”* This angel was the keeper of the flame on the incense altar. This may well be the same angel depicted in Revelation 8:3-5 who stood before the altar to offer the incense which represented the prayers of the saints. The martyrs beneath the altar had earnestly pleaded for the vindication of God’s righteousness in the destruction of the wicked (Revelation 6:9-11). Now their prayer is answered as the *“grapes from the earth’s vine,”* ripe and ready for harvest, are gathered to be

crushed and destroyed in the great ***“winepress of God’s wrath.”*** Long ago the prophet had spoken of God’s people as His previous vineyard: ***“My beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well.”*** (Isaiah 5:1-2). The bitter grapes of this harvest have sprouted from ***“the earth’s vine.”*** This is unbelieving mankind, disobedient and defiant to the end.

“The winepress in ancient times consisted of two bowls hewn out of solid rock. One was higher than the other and contained the grapes which someone walked on to squeeze the juice from them. The juice flowed through a duct into the lower basin where it was collected until being removed for storage or consumption.” (Thomas, p.223)



“The Judgement Harvest” by Karl Bauer

The winepress as an image of God’s judgment upon unbelievers was a favorite theme in the prophetic writings of the Old Testament. In the closing chapters of the Book of Isaiah, the prophet foretells the coming of the great day of the Lord’s vengeance and the total defeat and destruction of the enemies of the people of God exemplified by the heathen nation of Edom, Israel’s most bitter foe. Isaiah depicts the Messiah as a warrior champion returning victorious from the fight, his robes bloodstained and red:

“Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah, with His garments stained crimson? Who is this, robed in splendor, striding forward in the greatness of His strength? “It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save.” Why are your garments red like those of one treading the winepress? “I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations, no one was with Me. I trampled them in My anger and trod them down in My wrath. Their blood spattered My garments and I stained all My clothing. For the day of vengeance was in My heart, and the year of My redemption has come. I looked, but there was no one to help, I was appalled that no one gave support; so My own arm worked salvation for Me and My own wrath sustained Me. I trampled the nations in My anger; in My wrath I made them drunk and poured their blood on the ground.” (Isaiah 63:1-6; cf. also Lamentations 1:15)



***“Christ the Conqueror” - 19th Century
Engraving by Franz Stassen***

The brutal realism of the vision captures the fury of God’s wrath against those who have made themselves His enemies unto death. The Victorian hymnist Thomas Kelly composed a classic Easter hymn that expresses the sense of the text extremely well:

*“Who is this who comes from Edom, all his
raiment stained with blood,
To the captive speaking freedom, bringing and
bestowing good,
Glorious in the garb He wears, glorious in the
spoil He bears?”*

*‘Tis the Savior, now victorious, traveling
onward in His might;
‘Tis the Savior, O how glorious to His people
is the sight!
Satan conquered and the grave, Jesus now is
strong to save.*

*Why this blood His raiment staining? ‘Tis the
blood of many slain;
Of His foes there’s none remaining, none the*

*contest to maintain.
Fall'n they are, no more to rise; all their glory prostrate lies.*

*Mighty Victor, reign forever, wear the crown so dearly won;
Never shall Thy people, never, cease to sing what Thou hast done.
Thou hast fought Thy peoples' foes; Thou hast healed Thy people's woes.
(TLH # 209)*



“The Valley of Hinnon” by Thomas Seddon

“They were trampled in the winepress outside the city and the blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia.” - The grim consequences of divine judgment continue to be presented in gruesome detail. The contemplation of sin’s ultimate consequences is not for the squeamish. The grapes ***“trampled in the winepress”*** represent unrepentant, unbelieving humanity. The verb ***“they were trampled”*** is passive but the agent who carries out the treading is not specifically identified. Later, in Revelation 19, Christ Himself, as the agent of God’s judgment, is depicted as the one who ***“treads the winepress of the fury of God’s judgment.”*** (Revelation 19:15). It is safe to assume that the same is true in this instance. The fact that the winepress of God’s wrath is ***“outside the city”*** signals its role in the punishment of unbelievers. The city is the Jerusalem of God, where the elect dwell in His presence. By grace, they have been spared the fury of his judgment upon unbelief and sin. In the imagery of the prophets, the final judgment and the destruction of the wicked is frequently depicted as taking place outside of Jerusalem



*"The Judgement Harvest"
15th Century Bible Illumination*

so great that it overflows from the press out onto the ground. The deep purple color of the juice of the grape resembles that of blood. In the blessing of his son Judah, Jacob predicts: ***"He will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes."*** (Genesis 49:11; cf. also Deuteronomy 32:14). John uses this grisly image to describe the consequences of God's judgment. A vast sea of blood pours forth from the winepress to cover the land ***"rising as high as the horses bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia."*** The image is that of battlefield carnage on an unimaginable scale. Apocryphal 1 Enoch paints a similarly grotesque picture of the devastating judgment of God:

in one of the valleys that surrounded the city. Joel tells of the great Day of the Lord in the Valley of Jehoshaphat below Mount Zion (Joel 3:12-16). Zechariah describes the Mount of Olives splitting in two to create a great valley in which the Lord will do battle with the nations (Zechariah 14:1-5). The Valley of Hinnon, south of Jerusalem, was the site of pagan worship and child sacrifice late in the monarchy (2 Kings 23:10; 2 Chronicles 28:3). Jeremiah foretold a time when the Valley of Hinnon would become known as ***"the Valley of Slaughter"*** because it would be filled to overflowing with the bodies of the dead when the judgment of God finally came (Jeremiah 7:30-34). In fact, *"Gehenna,"* the Hebrew word for Hell, literally means *"the Valley of Hinnon."* Thus, the Revelator's image of the bloody destruction of the wicked outside the city of Jerusalem would have come as no surprise to those familiar with the Old Testament.

John goes to great length to emphasize the magnitude of this judgment. The volume of grapes in the winepress is

“In those days the father will be beaten together with his sons, in one place; and brothers shall fall together with their friends, in death, until a stream shall flow with their blood. For a man shall not be able to withhold his hands from his sons nor his son’s sons in order to kill them. Nor is it possible for the sinner to withhold his hands from his honored brother. From dawn until the sun sets they shall slay each other. The horse shall walk through the blood of sinners up to his chest; and the chariot shall sink down up to its top.” (1 Enoch 100:1-3)

Unfortunately, such bloodbaths are far from unknown in human history. In his letter to the pope announcing the Christian conquest of Jerusalem at the end of the first Crusade, Archbishop Daimbert proudly reported: *“God delivered the city and His enemies to us...And if you desire to know what was done with the enemy we found there, know that in Solomon’s Portico and in his Temple our men rode in the blood of the Saracens up to the knees of their horses.”* (*The Dream and the Tomb*, Robert Payne, p. 103).

The extent of the bloody outpouring is defined as **“1,600 stadia.”** By modern measurement this is a distance of some 184 miles. Some would link the number to the approximate length of the land of Palestine but this view misunderstands the message of the text. Here, as elsewhere throughout the visions of Revelation, the number is not literal but symbolic. Four is the earth number. The earth number squared times ten squared equals 1,600 to signal that God’s righteous judgment engulfs all of mankind. Every unbeliever who has ever lived on this earth, from time’s beginning to its end, will be included in the gruesome conflagration. Only those who dwell by grace within God’s holy city will be spared. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *“Battle Hymn of the Republic”* appropriated the imagery of this vision for the historic circumstances of the American Civil War. Her words have become one of the most powerful and enduring of America’s anthems. They convey a stirring sense of the irresistible righteousness of God triumphant over every evil that transcends any national or international conflict:

*“Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord,
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored.
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword,
His truth is marching on!
Glory, glory Hallelujah! Glory, glory Hallelujah!
Glory, glory Hallelujah! His truth is marching on.”*



“The Vision of the Seven Angels with the Seven Last Plagues” by Lucas Cranach

The Seventh Scene - The Seven Angels with the Seven Last Plagues - Revelation 15:1-8

I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues - last, because with them God’s wrath is completed. And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb: “Great and marvelous are Your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are Your ways, King of the Ages. Who will not fear You, O Lord, and bring glory to Your Name? For You alone are holy. All nations will come and worship

before You for Your righteous acts have been revealed.” After this I looked and in heaven the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the testimony was opened. Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests. Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and His power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

“I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign:” - Verse 1 serves as a superscription, a summary of the entire chapter. The final scene in this vision of seven scenes is introduced in the customary manner - *“And I saw”* (Greek *“kai eidon”*). As in the previous visions of sevens, this final scene serves as the interlocking link which provides the transition to the vision which follows. Twice before in this series- in reference to the woman with the child and the dragon (Revelation 12:1,3) - John had described his vision as a *“sign”* (Greek - *“semon”*). The particular significance of this third and final sign is indicated by the adjectives *“great and marvelous.”* This combination is repeated in Revelation 15:3 as a description of the works of the Lord. These are the only two appearances of the phrase in the New Testament. This sign is not only *“great”* (Greek - *“megas”*), like



“The Vision of the Seven Bowls” - Luther Bible Woodcut

the sign of the woman with child in Revelation 12:1, it is also ***“marvelous.”*** The adjective ***“marvelous”*** (Greek - *“thaumastos”*) denotes the fearful awe of the creature before the almighty power of the Creator. The ***“great and marvelous sign”*** is the appearance of the seven angels with the seven plagues. The term ***“plagues”*** recalls the ten visitations of God’s judgment upon the land of Egypt in the days of Moses (cf. Exodus 7-11). This connection will be specified and amplified in the verses which follow. The angels and the plagues which they bear are ***“seven”*** in number signaling the perfection and completeness of the task they are to carry out. These outpourings of God’s judgment will carry us through to the end of time and the Final Judgment. The point is further emphasized by the designation of these plagues as ***“the seven last plagues - last because with them God’s wrath is completed.”*** These seven plagues represent the righteous judgment of the holy God upon sinful mankind throughout the New Testament era culminating - that is, reaching its goal or completion - in the Last Judgment. ***“God’s wrath”*** (*ho thymos tou theou*) is not *“the freakish fury of an angered deity but is a designation of the impassioned but deliberate majesty of God the Judge.”* (Franzmann, p. 104)

“And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire...” - Having introduced the seven angels which are the agents of God’s judgment in history, poised and prepared to pour out the devastation of His fury, John pauses briefly to remind his readers of the victory celebration that is already under way before God’s throne in heaven. The Revelator observes ***“what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire.”*** In Revelation 4:6, John had spoken of ***“what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal”*** before the throne of God. In the imagery of the Old Testament and Revelation, the surging chaos of the sea is a symbol of evil, sinful mankind locked in endless violence and conflict. The crystal sea depicts the chaotic power of sin calmed and contained by the sovereign power of God. Fire in the Old Testament and Revelation is the symbol of God’s judgement, destroying and purifying. In Daniel 7:10 the prophet uses the image of ***“a river of fire”*** flowing forth from God’s heavenly throne to symbolize divine judgment upon the beast (cf. Daniel 7:10-12). John combines these two powerful images. The crystal sea is now ablaze with fire, the fire of God’s judgment impending over sinful mankind.

“Standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name.” - The Children of Israel had celebrated God’s victorious destruction of the army of pharaoh on the shores of the Red Sea (Exodus 15). John continues the ***“Exodus atmosphere”*** (Beale, p. 789) of the scene



“Miriam Leads the Children of Israel in Celebration at the Red Sea” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

as the celebration of the victorious saints of God is linked to the fiery crystal sea. The NIV translates the Greek preposition “*epi*” as “*beside*.” While that translation is possible, in this context, given the text’s emphasis on the sea’s solid surface, the word more likely means “*on*” or “*upon*” (Cf. Revelation 11:11; 12:18; 14:1). The fact that the saints are standing upon the sea itself stresses the reality of the saints involvement in the struggle against the dragon and all who serve him. The sea is “*the battlefield on which the warfare between the church and the beasts of Satan is taking place*.” (Brighton, p. 400) The nature of their victory is defined in terms of Revelation 13 and the beasts from the sea and the land. The threefold repetition - “*over the beast and his image and over the number of his name*” - serves to remind



"Sing Hosanna!" by Simeon Solomon

the reader of the relentless nature of the struggle and of the constant pressure to conform and to yield which the faithful are called upon to resist. The saints in heaven are presented as warriors who have victoriously come forth from the battle to celebrate the magnificent triumph that has been won. While the dragon and his minions successfully maintain the illusion of victory and power on earth, their downfall and defeat is already being celebrated in heaven. The Israelites' victory celebration at the Red Sea was accompanied by musical instruments. So also John's vision of the heavenly victory celebration includes musical instruments. Once again, the harp (Greek - "*Kitharas*") is the instrument of choice for their songs of praise and rejoicing (cf. Revelation 5:8; 14:2). To make

the Exodus connection unmistakable John entitles the victory anthem - ***"the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb."*** This is not two songs, but one united anthem. The Greek conjunction "*kai*" is epexegetical, adding a second phrase which explains or defines the first. The English translation "*that is*" or "*even*" would reflect this use of the conjunction. The rabbis of Israel called Moses the first Deliverer and the Messiah the Last Deliverer. That which God accomplished through His servant Moses was a preview of the deliverance of humanity from its bondage to sin, death, and the power of the devil. Moses was, in that sense, a precursor of the Savior, the Lamb of God, Who was to come. The writer to the Hebrews draws the contrast between the servant and the Son in this way: ***"Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future. But Christ is faithful as a Son over God's house."*** (Hebrews 3:5-6) The combination of Moses and the Lamb as the authors of this song of praise in response

to the mighty acts of God in delivering His people joins the church of the Old Testament and the New in one magnificent chorus of praise and thanksgiving. Many years earlier, the prophet Hosea had foretold that when the Messiah would finally come the church: ***“Will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt.”*** (Hosea 2:15). Now that prophecy is fulfilled.

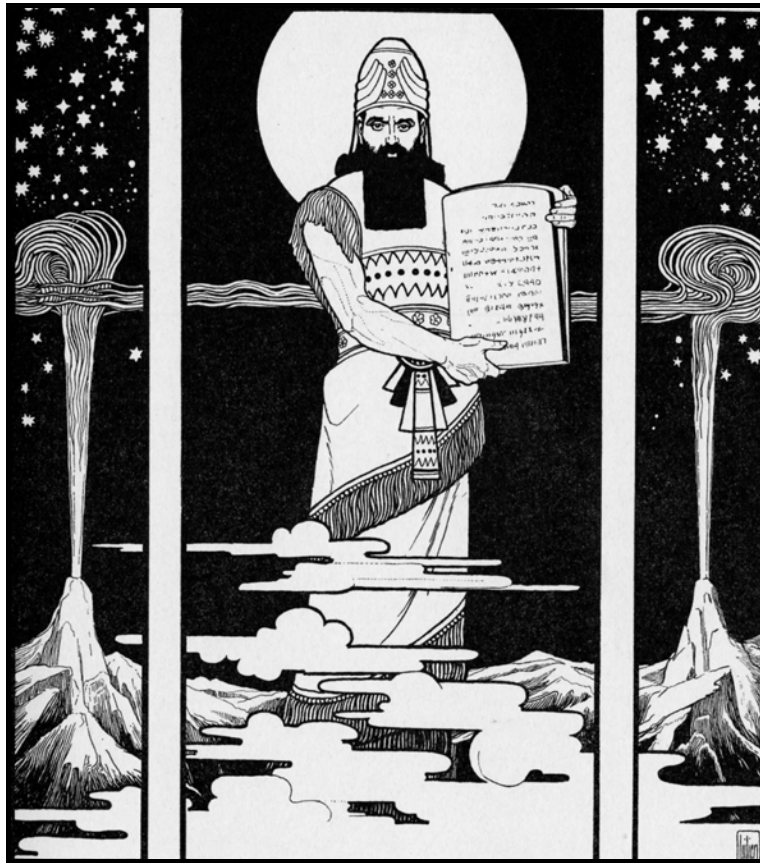
“Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty...” - The content of the song is not drawn from Exodus 15 or any other particular passage but from texts throughout the Old Testament which extol the gracious power and majesty of God. Like ancient song of Moses on the shores of the Red Sea (Exodus 15) and the song of the host arrayed in white before God’s heavenly throne - those cleansed in the blood of the Lamb - this is a celebration of victory. ***“In its form the song is a perfect example of beauty in variety of expression and balance, following the pattern of the Psalms.”*** (Poellet, p. 200)

The first part of the song extols the marvelous works and ways of God - ***“Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of all ages.”*** The language of the opening phrase is reminiscent of Psalm 111 - ***“Great are the works of the Lord; they are pondered by all who delight in them. Glorious and majestic are His deeds, and His righteousness endures forever.”*** (Psalm 11:2-3) The righteous judgment of God upon sinful mankind elicits the wonder and adoration of His people. The formal



“Moses” by J. James Tissot

title of God in this phrase - **“Lord God Almighty”** (Greek - *“kyrie ho theos ho pantokrator”*) is the Greek equivalent of the Old Testament Hebrew title *“Yahweh Sabaoth”* - *“Lord God of Hosts.”* The title emphasizes the infinite sovereign power and authority of God. The ways of God Almighty are **“just and true.”** (Greek - *“dikaiai kai alethinai”*). It also occurs in Revelation 4:8 and 11:17. The phrase is drawn from the second song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:4, emphasizing the



“Moses” by E.M. Lilien

absolute justice and complete accuracy and truthfulness of the judgments of God. There is a textual variation in the end of Verse 3. The NIV chooses the phrase **“King of all Ages”** (Greek - *“ho basileus ton aionon”*). However, our best and most reliable manuscripts for the Book of Revelation render the phrase **“King of all Nations”** (Greek - *“ho basileus ton ethnon”*). The latter reading also seems to best fit the context in its stress of the sovereign power of God.

The only appropriate and proper response of the creature to these attributes of the Creator God is humble awe and adoration- **“Who will not**

fear You, O Lord, and bring glory to Your Name?” The negative rhetorical question obviously implies a negative answer. There is no one who can contemplate the majesty and the justice of God with reverence and praise. This response is in marked contrast to the blatant blasphemy of the dragon and his beasts who rail against God and all His works and who advance themselves as rivals and replacements for Him. The word **“fear”** (Greek - *“phobethe”*) is used in a twofold sense in Scripture. Dr.

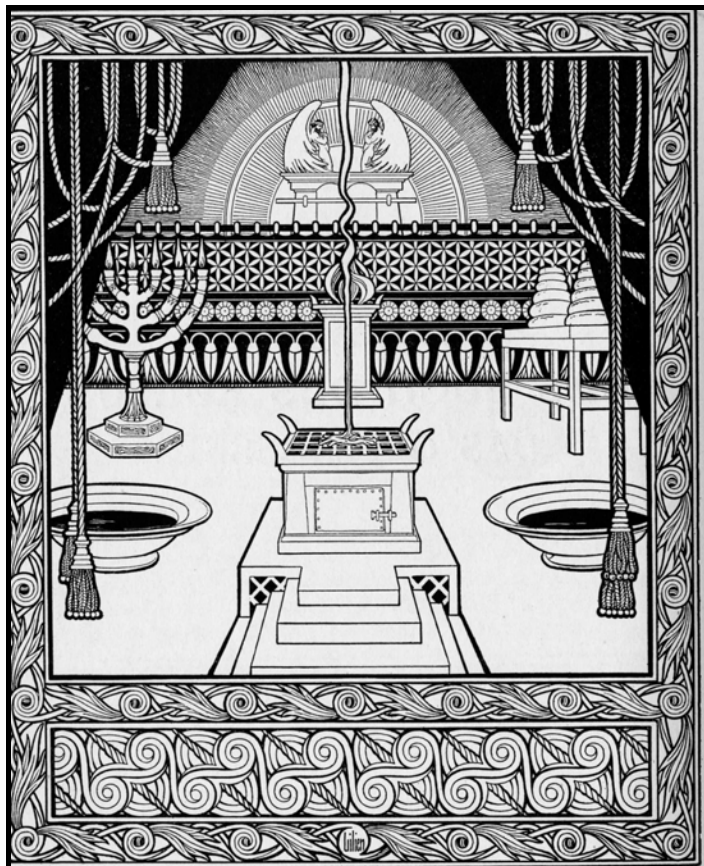


"The Holy Trinity" by Albrecht Dürer

Becker explains the application of the term to both unbelievers and believers:

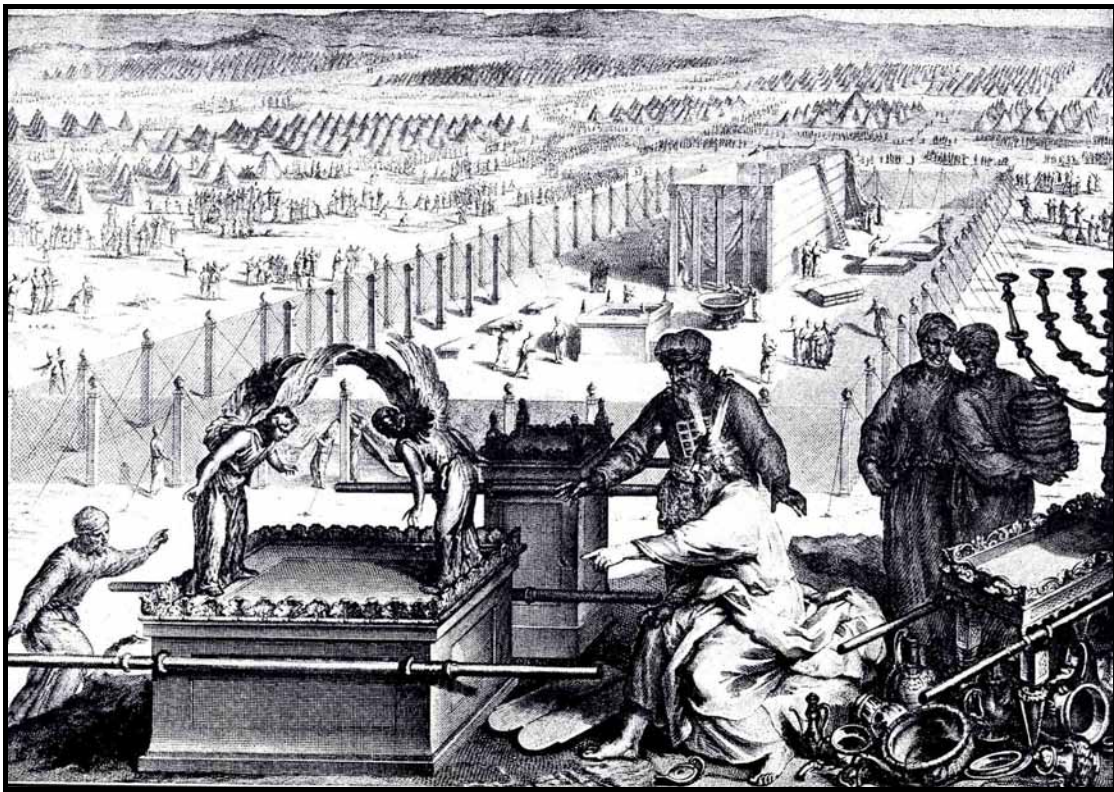
“The first and basic meaning of “phobeomai” is to be frightened or terrified. This will be true of the enemies of God when they come to know from experience what these victorious saints in glory know. But the word also means to reverence or to respect, In that sense the question also applies to the believing children of God. They have already overcome the terrors of conscience by faith in the forgiveness of sins. Thus all men will finally fear God, either with the fear of a terrified conscience or with the awe and respect of a believing heart.” (Becker, pp. 238-239)

The universal fear of God will result in the universal magnifying of His Name. The name of God is not merely a particular title or designation for God but the total revelation of Who He is. *“It includes everything we know of Him from the Bible - His essence, His attributes, His works, His commandments, and His promises. The Name of God is God Himself as He has revealed Himself to us...God’s name is God’s Word.”* (Poellet, p. 201)



*“The Holy Place and the Holy of Holies”
by E.M. Lilien*

“For You alone are holy!” - This clause, introduced by the Greek preposition *“hoti”* (English - *“because”*) explains the basis for mankind’s fear of God. The text does not use the typical New Testament term for the holiness of God *“hagios”*. Instead, the Greek word in this phrase is *“hosios”* which emphasizes not merely moral purity or sinlessness but the uniqueness and the majesty of God as the One absolutely set apart from that which He has created - *“the sum of divine attributes distinguishing God from His creation.”* (Beale, p. 796). The qualifier **“alone”** (Greek - *“monos”*) reinforces this emphasis. God is to be feared by all because He is the one and only



“The Erection of the Tabernacle” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

God. There is none other like Him nor could there be. He is by definition *“sui generis”* - *“one of a kind.”* The same emphasis on the uniqueness of the one true God can be seen in Jeremiah 10 from which the wording of this segment is drawn. Jeremiah compares the one true God with the idols of the nations which are silent and helpless *“like a scarecrow in a melon patch.”* (Jeremiah 10:5). The prophet concludes: *“Do not fear them; they can do no harm, nor can they do any good. No one is like You, O Lord; You are great and Your Name is mighty in power. Who should not revere You, O King of the Nations? This is Your due...there is no one like You.”* (Jeremiah 10:5-7). The only other instance in the New Testament where this adjective is ascribed to God is in Revelation 16:5.

“All nations will come and worship before You for Your righteous acts have been revealed.” - The effect of the incomparable holiness of the one God is universal acknowledgment and worship from the nations. The *“righteous acts”* of God in this phrase are His righteous pronouncements of judgment, the eternal verdicts which He will issue upon humanity. On the great day of judgment all mankind shall stand before the throne as the perfect righteousness of God is demonstrated and declared both in the salvation of the redeemed, who have received by grace the perfect

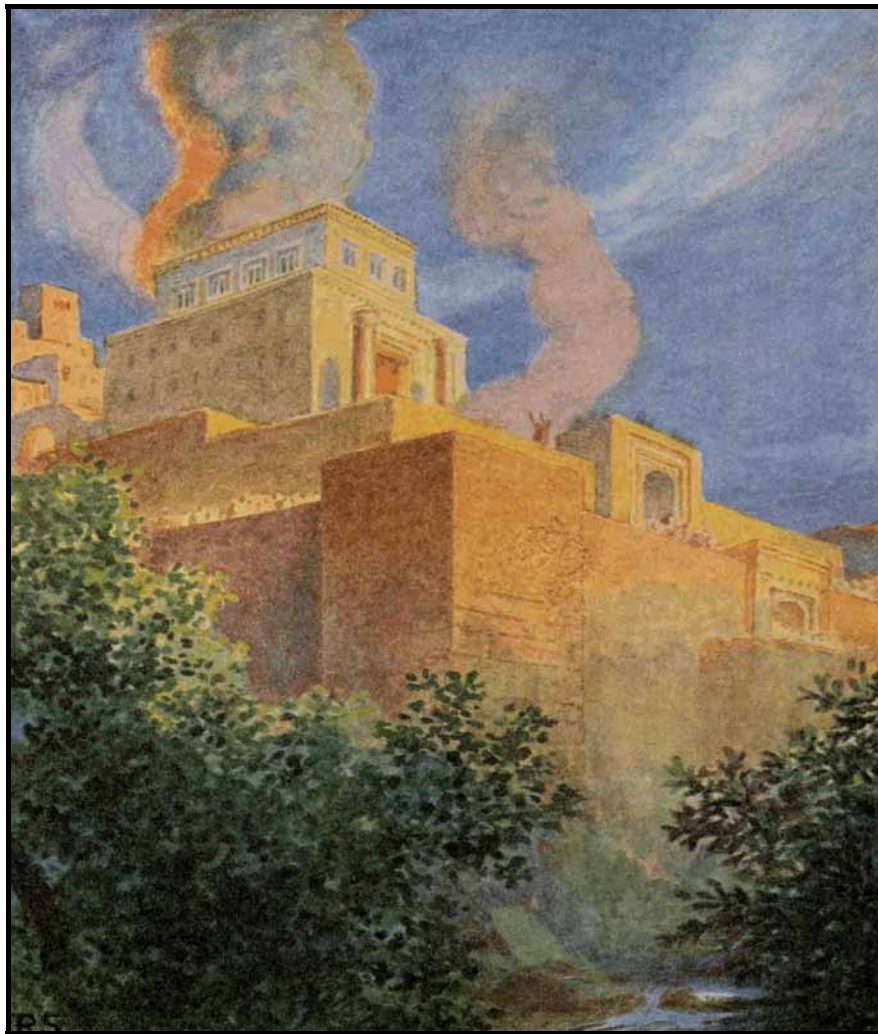
righteousness of Christ, and the condemnation of the damned. No one shall be able to challenge or deny the justice or the fairness of all of God's acts and verdicts. This is indeed the purpose of Judgment Day - the public irrefutable demonstration of God's perfect justice and righteousness. It is significant to note that the victorious saints do not celebrate their own victory, but instead they rejoice in the ultimate vindication of the justice and righteousness of God.

“After this I looked and in heaven the temple, that is the tabernacle of Testimony, was opened.” - The focus now returns to the seven angels bearing the seven bowls of God's wrath. The NIV's translation - ***“the temple, that is the tabernacle of Testimony”*** is somewhat misleading with its dual reference to temple and tabernacle. The Greek text literally reads *“ho naos tes skenes”* - *“the sanctuary which is the tabernacle.”* The reference is to the portable worship center designed by God for the



“The Serephim Upon the Ark” by E.M. Lilien

Children of Israel during the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. The tent was called ***“the tabernacle of Testimony”*** because of the presence of the Ten Commandments - called ***“the two tablets of the Testimony”*** (Exodus 32:15; 40:20-21) - within the Ark of the Covenant inside the Holy of Holies. The designation is common in the Old Testament (cf. Numbers 17:4,7-8;18:2; 2 Chronicles 24:6). The tabernacle was also called ***“the Tent of Meeting”*** because there God would meet with the people and their leaders (cf. Exodus 29:42-46). In this instance, the tabernacle is

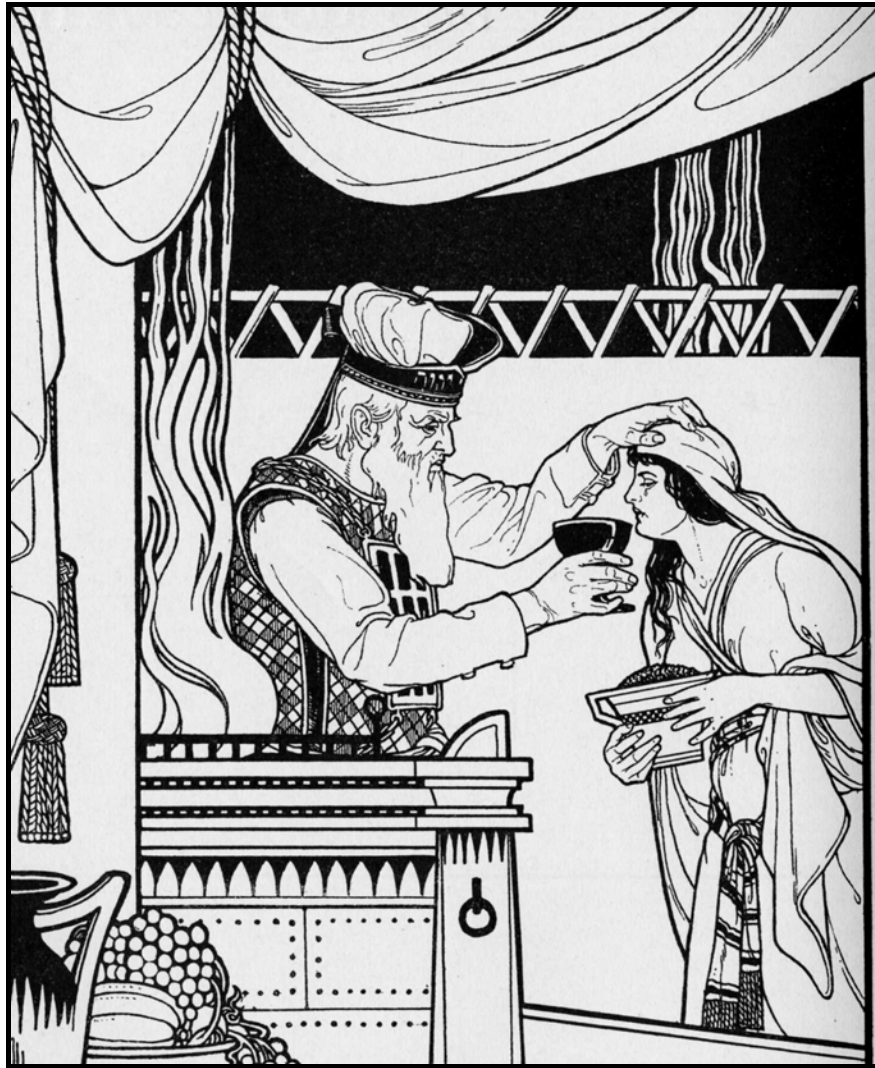


“The Temple of Solomon With the Shekinah” by Rudolf Schäfer

in heaven where God dwells in the midst of His saints in the same way that He once dwelt in the midst of the camp of Israel. The language is nearly identical to that of Revelation 11:19 - ***“Then God’s temple in heaven was opened and within His temple was seen the ark of His covenant.”*** The opening of the temple and the tabernacle in these texts emphasize the fact that the judgments proclaimed come from God Himself - *“In this context it emphasizes that the final plagues come from the presence of God and are the expression of His unalterable opposition to sin.”* (Mounce, p. 289). The angels come forth from the heart of the sanctuary, the Holy of Holies. The judgment which they bear is an affirmation and an expression of the perfect holiness of God.

“Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues.” - These seven

angelic messengers of God's judgment and the plagues which they bear were first introduced in Revelation 15:1. The specific description of the outpouring of their bowls of wrath will follow in chapter 16. The image of "**seven plagues**" is reminiscent of Leviticus where God repeatedly threatens to punish His faithless people with "**seven plagues**" for their idolatrous and sinful ways (cf. Leviticus 26:18,21,24,28). As throughout Revelation, the number is figurative, not literal. It



"Aaron and Miriam Within the Sanctuary" by E.M. Lilien

signifies the fact that God's judgment will be visited upon mankind perfectly and completely. The angels are garbed in the sacred vestments of the priesthood - "***They were dressed in clean shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests.***" (Cf. Exodus 28:4,39) The description is very similar to that of the Son of Man in

Revelation 1:13 which in turn was drawn from the vision of the prophet Daniel (cf. Daniel 10:5). The purity of their raiment is indicative of the mission of purification upon which they have been dispatched.

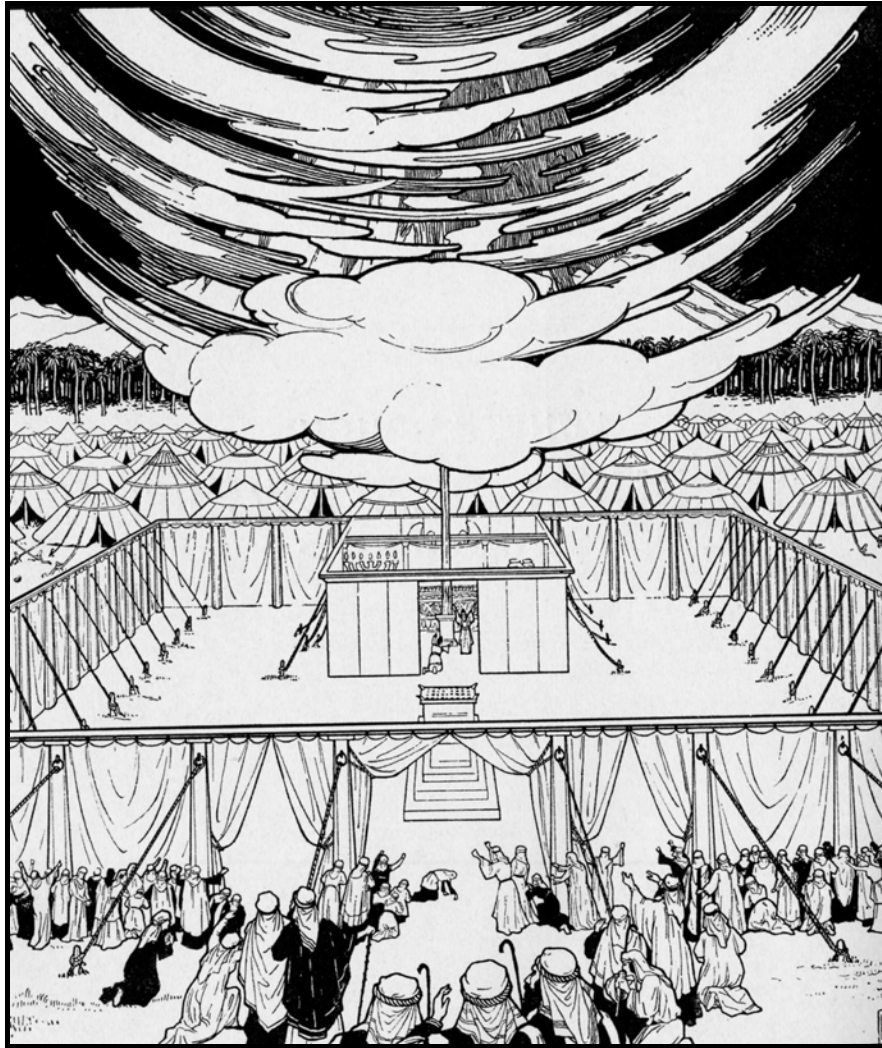
“Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever.” Like those who came before them (cf. Revelation 6:6-14; 8:2) the seven angels are commissioned and empowered from the throne of God. The text does not indicate which of the four living creatures acts as the representative of God in this instance. The living creature presents the angels with ***“seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God.”*** The image of the wrath of God as liquid in a bowl or cup is familiar in the Old Testament. In Isaiah 51, the prophet promises that the bitter dregs of the bowl of God’s wrath which has been poured out upon His people will finally be poured out upon the enemies of God:

“Rise up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of His wrath, who have drained to its dregs the goblet that makes men stagger...See, I have taken out of your hand the cup that made you stagger; from that cup, the goblet of My wrath you will never drink again.” (Isaiah 51:17,22)

The Greek noun used in this passage, *“phialas,”* is the equivalent of the Hebrew word used in Isaiah 51. It refers to a cultic utensil used in the temple to pour out



***“The Seven Angels Receive the Seven Bowls”
15th Century Bible Illumination***



“The Glory Cloud Resting Over the Tabernacle” by E.M. Lilien

libation offerings, typically wine. St. Paul alludes to this practice in 2 Timothy 4:6 - ***“For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure.”*** At times, the imagery of the Old Testament depicted the wrath of God like liquid slowly, gradually rising in the bowl until it finally poured out over the rim (cf. Genesis 15:16). In this instance, the Greek text emphasizes that the bowls of God’s wrath are filled to the brim, ready to overflow (Greek - *“gemousas”*). The time of judgment has come.

The author of that judgment is ***“God, Who lives forever and ever.”*** The awesome title sets the one true God apart from all false gods and idols (i.e. the image of the beast). The eternity of God is cause for great joy on the part of the saved (Psalm

16:11; 23:6) but for the damned God's eternity means endless torment in hell (Mark 9:42-48). As the writer to the Hebrews notes: ***"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."*** (Hebrews 10:31)

"And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power..."

- The concluding statements of Chapter 15 focus on the glorious majesty of the holy God and emphasize again that the seven angels are merely the dispensers of God's righteous wrath. Smoke is a consistent indicator of the glorious presence of God in the Old Testament. Bengel, the classic Lutheran commentator, calls it *"tegmen majestatis divinae"* (Latin - *"the covering of divine majesty."*) When the Lord descended upon the heights of Sinai - ***"Mount Sinai was covered with smoke,***

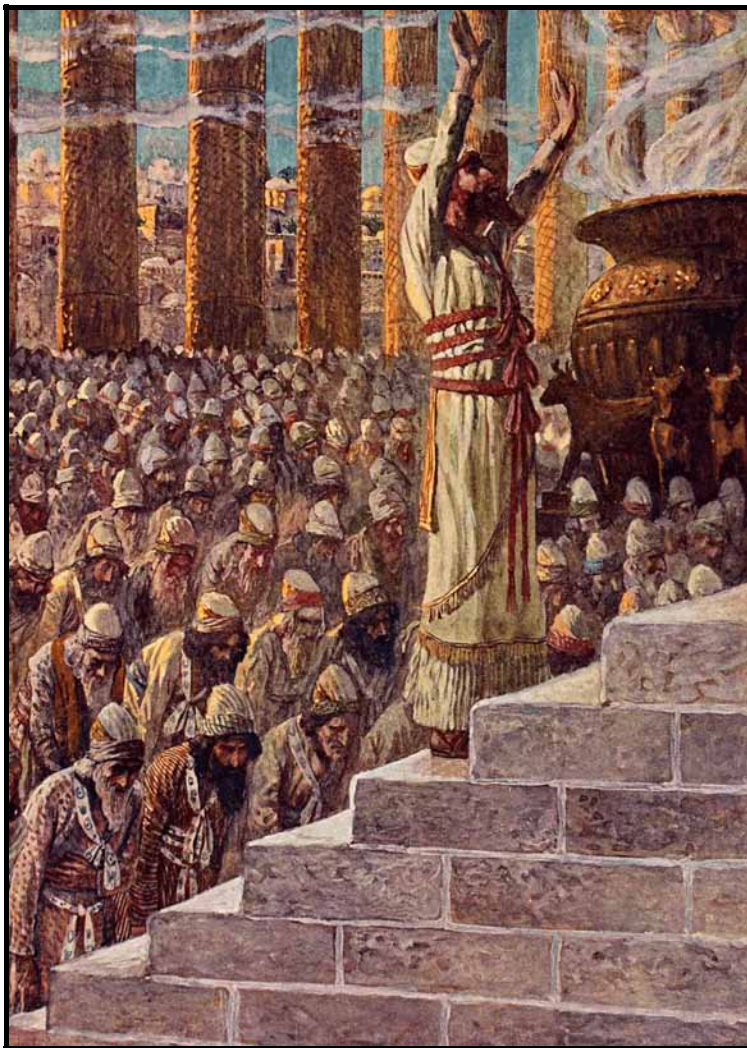


"The Pillar of Fire Upon the Ark Leading the Children of Israel"
by William West

because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed upon on it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder." (Exodus 19:18-19) Dr. Swete suggests that the smoke in Old Testament theophanies signifies the imminence of divine judgment:

“The terrors of the imminent judgment are still further emphasized by the smoke which is seen to fill the sanctuary...Smoke is an O.T. symbol of the divine presence when the awful majesty of God is to be insisted upon.” (Swete, p. 199)

The judgment connotation here is reinforced by directly linking the smoke which fills the heavenly sanctuary with ***“the glory of God”*** and ***His power.*** The specific wording of this phrase appears to be drawn from Isaiah 6: ***“I saw the Lord, seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of His robe filled the temple...At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.”*** (Isaiah 6:1,4)



“The Dedication of Solomon’s Temple” by J. James Tissot

“And no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.” - In the original tabernacle Moses was not permitted to enter the sanctuary while the *“shekinah,”* the cloud of God’s glory had settled upon it (cf. Exodus 40:34-38). In the temple of Solomon the same prohibition applied to the priests: ***“When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled His temple.”*** (1 Kings 8:10-11) The closing of the temple represents the irrevocable judgment of God. The tabernacle was the place of mercy and prayer. Now access to those resources is cut off. The time of grace is over. The time of judgment is at hand.