



"The Outpouring of the Seven Bowls" - Hand Tinted Luther Bible Woodcut

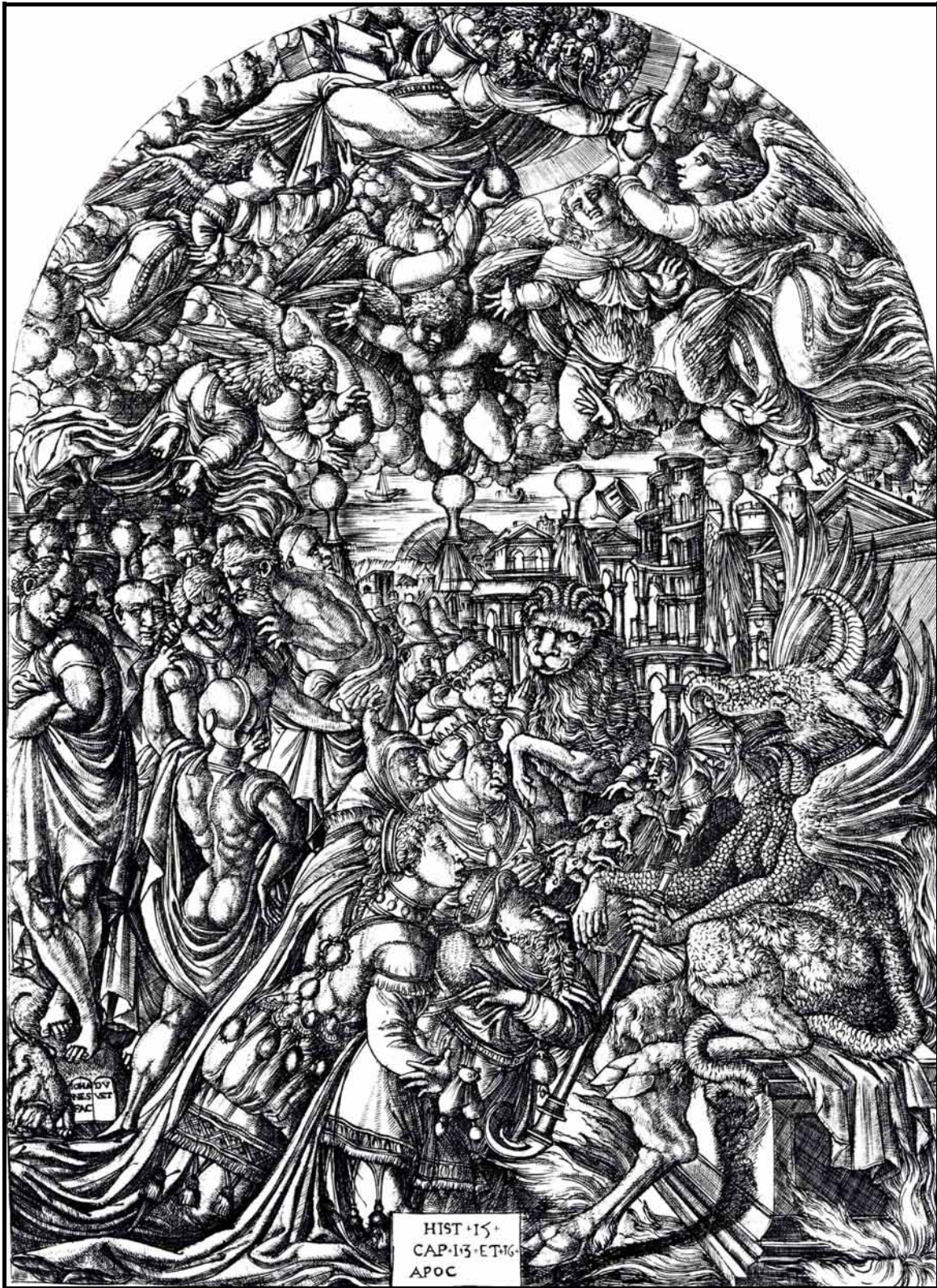
The Fifth Vision - The Outpouring of the Seven Bowls

Revelation 16:1-21

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath upon the earth." The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea and it turned into blood like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died. The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say, "You are just in these judgments, You who are and who were, the Holy One, because You have so judged; for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink as they deserve." And I heard the altar respond: "Yes, Lord Almighty, true and just are Your judgments!" The

fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire. They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify Him. The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done. The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of the Lord Almighty. "Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed." Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon. The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is done!" Then came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake. The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of His wrath. Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.

"Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath upon the earth." - The voice of command sounds forth, not from the "temple" (NIV) but from the sanctuary of the tabernacle (cf. Revelation 15:5 - "After this, I looked, and in heaven the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the Testimony was opened."). Although the speaker is not specifically identified, since no one could enter the sanctuary because of the presence of God's glory (Revelation 15:8 - "And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.") it can be safely assumed that the voice is that of God Himself. The wording of the phrase may be an allusion to the judgment proclamation of Isaiah 66:6 - "Hear that uproar from the city, hear the voice from the temple! It is the voice of the Lord, repaying His enemies all they



"The Seven angels and the Outpouring of the Seven Bowls" by Jean Duvet



“The First Plague - Water to Blood” by E. Bernard

deserve.” The sound that is heard is *“a loud voice”* (Greek - *“phone megale”* - literally a great voice). The phrase occurs twenty times in Revelation to describe a voice that speaks with power and authority. The sound of this voice causes things to happen. The command is addressed to the seven angels from the preceding chapter. They are instructed to immediately commence their work of judgment - *“Go, pour out the seven bowls of God’s wrath upon the earth.”* The perfect *“seven”* serves to emphasize the fact that God’s judgment will be carried out completely without omission or exception. The image of the wrath of God poured out from the libation bowl of the sanctuary is drawn from the Old Testament. In Jeremiah 10:25, the prophet prays that God would vindicate His righteousness and holiness by the destruction of His enemies: *“Pour out Your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge You, on the peoples who do not call on Your Name.”* Earlier in Jeremiah, God had warned: *“My anger and My wrath will be poured out on this place, on man and beast, on the trees of the field and on the fruit of the ground, and it will burn and not be quenched.”* (Jeremiah 7:20; cf. also Lamentations 2:4; 4:11; Ezekiel 22:21-22; 30:15-16; Zephaniah 3:8). The language of Psalm 79, which combines the image of God’s wrath poured out upon that nations and the perfect number seven, closely parallels the imagery of the seven bowls: *“Pour out Your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge You, on the kingdoms that do not call on Your Name...Pay back into the laps of our neighbors seven times the reproach they have hurled at You, O Lord.”* (Psalm 79:6,12).

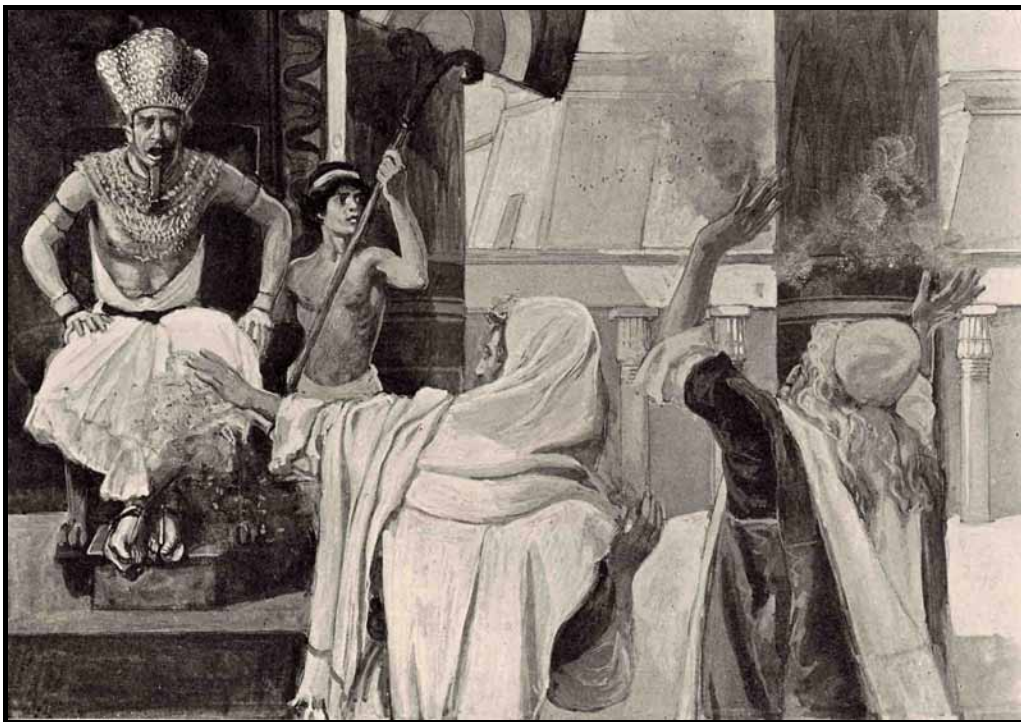
“The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image.” - The sequence and the substance of the plagues inflicted by the seven bowls closely parallels that of the seven trumpets (Revelation 8:6-9:20; 11:15-19). Both the bowls and the trumpets are clearly derived from the ten plagues which God inflicted upon Egypt in the days of Moses (cf. Exodus 7:14 - 11:10). A definite progression and intensification can be observed between the plagues of the trumpets and the plagues of the bowls. The trumpet plagues were partial in their impact (i.e. - the killing of one fourth of mankind (6:8), the burning of a third of the earth and the trees, and the destruction of a third of the sea, the sea creatures, and the ships (8:7-8). The bowl plagues are universal without restriction or limitation of any kind. The trumpet plagues are largely indirect, that is, they impact mankind by striking his environment. The bowl plagues afflict and destroy man himself from the outset. These differences are indicative of the general progression within the Book of Revelation. Each of the seven visions, while covering largely the same ground, focuses more clearly on the last judgment and the eternity which will ensue. That same progression is indicated by the language used to describe the bowl plagues. The introduction to the vision of the seven bowls in Chapter 15 had emphasized that these are ***“the seven last plagues”*** (Revelation 15:1), thus linking the plagues to the end of time and the last judgment. The progression the plagues present, gradually



“The Second Plague - Frogs” by G. Freemann

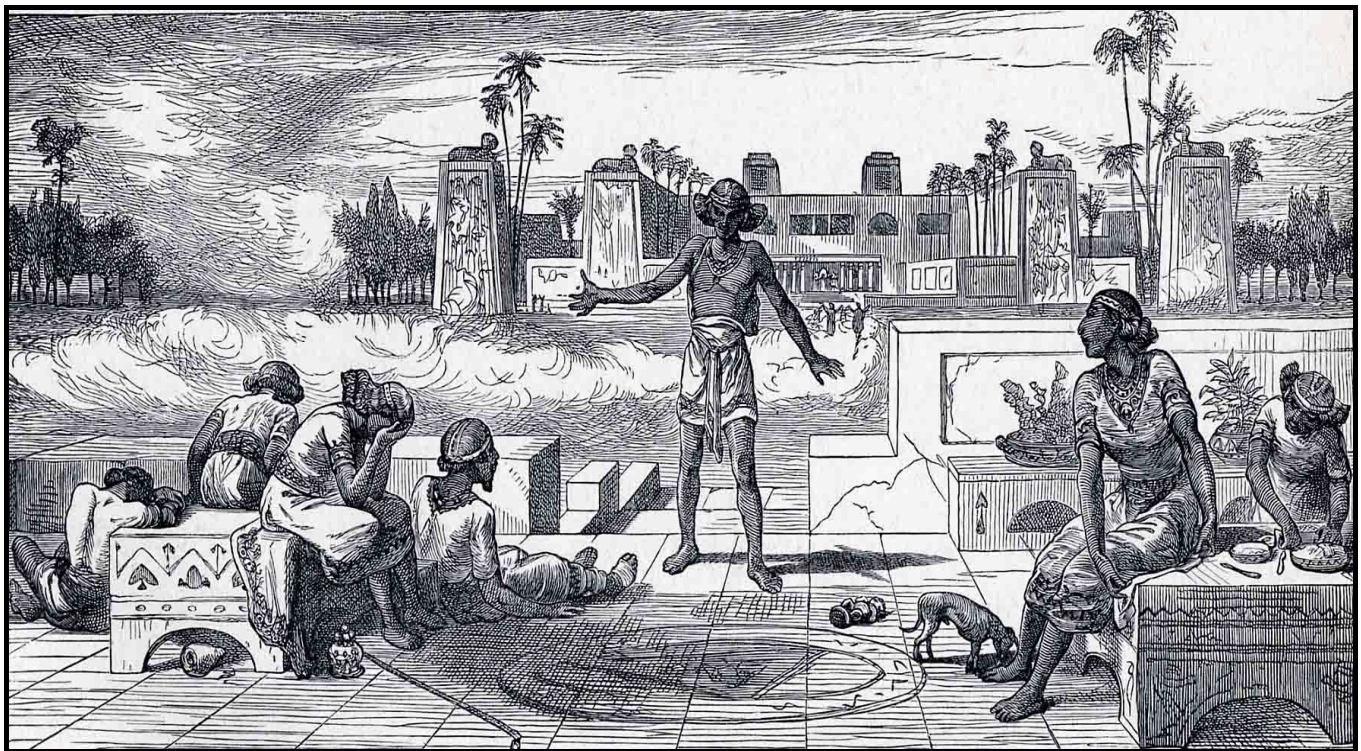
growing more severe, serves to remind us that God's judgments throughout time will intensify and culminate in the end of time and the final judgment.

The bowl of the first angel is poured out ***“on the land.”*** The result of this judgment is that ***“ugly and painful sores broke out on those who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image.”*** The plague obviously parallels the sixth of the plagues of Egypt, the plague of boils which God inflicted throughout that unfortunate land (Exodus 9:8-12). It falls upon all of unbelieving mankind, described in the imagery of Revelation 13 as has been the case throughout this segment - ***“all those who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image.”*** The horror of this affliction is described in graphic detail in the Old Testament book of Job: ***“So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes.”*** (Job 2:7-8). The imagery does not describe a particular ailment but instead represents the totality of all the physical pain and suffering which sinful men will be compelled to endure throughout the latter days.



“The Plague of Boils” by J. James Tissot

All of the awful diseases, all of the physical pain and suffering leading up to and including physical death, all of the disfigurement and distortion of God's originally perfect design for immortal humanity which sin brought crashing down upon Adam's descendants, is represented in this gruesome image. It is, of course, true that believers must also endure all of these things here in time. But the physical suffering of those who are in Christ is transformed by the faith recognition *"that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him"* and *"that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."* (Romans 8:28,18). That trust puts our physical suffering in an entirely different category. To be called upon to endure these horrors without the presence and promise of Christ is a tragedy which for the believer is blessedly unimaginable.



"The Plague of Boils" - 19th Century Bible Illustration

"The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died." - The first of Egypt's plagues saw the life giving water of the sacred Nile turned to blood (Exodus 7:14-24; cf. also the second trumpet - Revelation 8:8-9). This is not merely a transformation of color - the sea doesn't merely turn blood red. The water is changed into *"blood like that of a dead man"* - that is, black, coagulated and rotting with the cloying stench of death



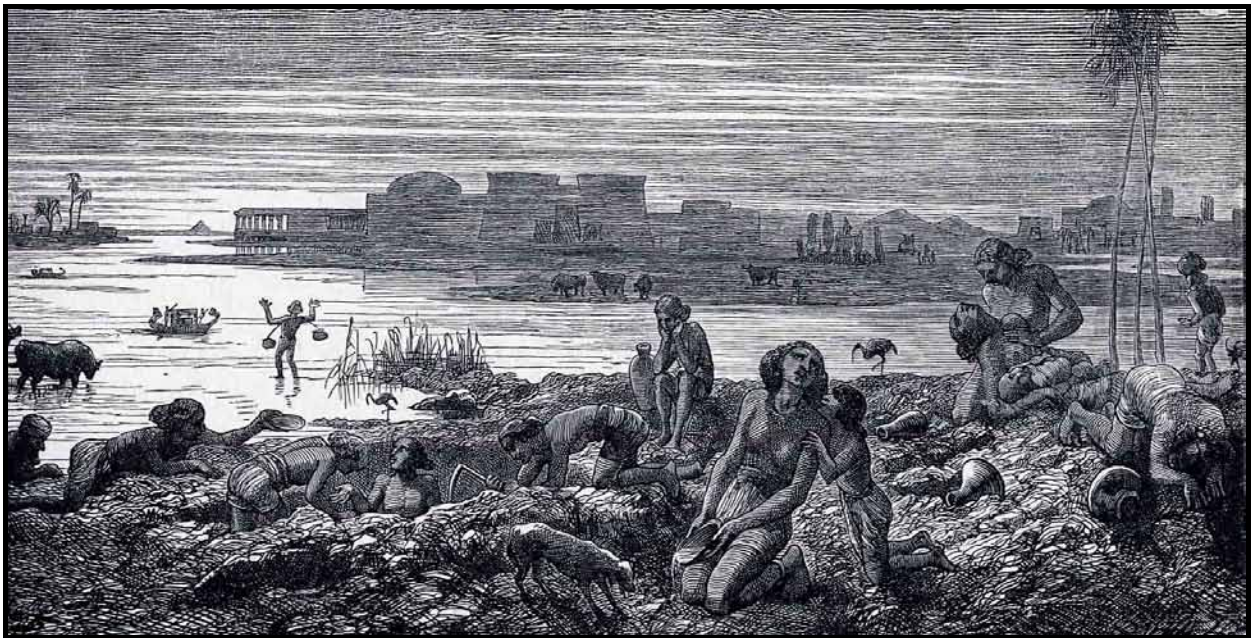
"The Water Carriers of Egypt" - 19th Century Bible Illustration

itself. In Egypt the transformation of the Nile to blood resulted in death of all the fish and a stench that permeated the entire country (Exodus 7:21). So also in John's imagery *"every living thing died."* The term *"sea"* (Greek - *"thalassa"*) occurs 24 times in Revelation. In the majority of those instances it carries the symbolic connotation of the Old Testament in which the waves of the sea represent the seething chaos of sinful humanity. That would also appear to be the case in this instance. The transformation of the waters of the sea into the stinking blood of a corpse signifies the fatal dominion of death over fallen mankind.

"The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood. Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: "You are just in

these judgments, You who are and who were, the Holy One, because You have so judged; for they have shed the blood of Your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve." And I heard the altar respond: *"Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are Your judgments."* - The third angel pours out his judgment bowl upon the world's fresh water sources. This corresponds to the third trumpet plague in which the burning star turned the world's water bitter (Revelation 8:10-11). In the first Exodus plague the blood pollution of the Nile spread to all the springs, wells, and water sources of Egypt despite the frantic efforts of the Egyptians to set aside some potable water (Exodus 7:19; cf also Psalm 78:44). The nature of the plague here is clearly defined by the angel's comment which follows. Those who *"shed the blood"* of *"saints and prophets"* are to be punished

in kind - ***“You have given them blood to drink as they deserve.”*** Those who have dealt in death must now face the grim reality of death themselves (cf. Genesis 9:5-6). The sinful kingdom of this world is the realm of death. As the latter days draw to their inevitable conclusion, death’s viselike grip upon the throats of her subjects will grow ever tighter. Violence and destruction, devastation and death will increase and intensify until finally there is no life left at all. This is only fair. The justice of God in bringing death to those who have dealt in death is undeniable. As the *“Wisdom of Solomon”* declares: *“By what things a man sinneth, by these he is punished.”* Through His prophet Isaiah, God declares that those who have sought to devour Israel will be compelled ***“to eat their own flesh; they will be drunk on their own blood as with wine.”*** (Isaiah 49:26) The punishment perfectly fits the crime (*“lex talionis”*).



“The Water to Blood” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

“The Lord of all history, in His even handed justice, has exacted from those who have shed the blood of saints and prophets, the very blood of those who have revered and proclaimed the sanctity of the life given by the Creator. They would have blood. God’s justice commends the ingredients of their poisoned chalice to their own lips. He gives the bloodthirsty their due; they shall have blood to drink.” (Franzmann, p. 108)

The angel who responds to God’s judgment is called ***“the angel in charge of the waters.”*** The language reflects the typical Hebrew insight that all of the elements of



“The Seven Angels with the Seven Bowls” - 10th Century Spanish Apocalypse

the natural world are controlled and directed by God’s angels in the supernatural world. Elsewhere in Revelation we have heard of the angels in charge of the four winds (7:1) and of an angel who held power over fire (14:18). These angels are the agents of the divine Creator who sustains and maintains all that which He has made. In this instance the affirmation of God’s justice comes from the angel responsible for the element afflicted by the judgment plague.

The angel’s affirmation of the righteousness and justice of God’s judgment is immediately seconded by a response from *“the altar.”* Earlier, in Revelation 6:9, the souls of the martyrs were depicted beneath the heavenly altar. In Revelation 8:3-5 the prayers of the saints were signified by the incense arising at the altar. Now, the altar itself, becomes the personification of the prayerful desire of God’s people for the vindication of His righteousness. The altar testifies to the perfect appropriateness of God’s judgment upon the wicked. It could not be otherwise for the Judge is *“the Holy One,” “Lord God Almighty,”* whose divine judgments are always *“true and just.”*

“The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to

scorch people with fire. They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues. But they refused to repent and glorify Him.” - In Revelation 7:16-17 the elder had described the blessedness of the redeemed in heaven with these beautiful images from the world of nature: *“The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat, for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their Shepherd; He will lead them to springs of living water.”* The serenity and comfort of that image is now reversed as the fourth angel pours out his bowl of divine judgment *“and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire.”* Protection from the burning rays of the sun had served as an effective metaphor of God’s providential care of His people in the harsh desert climate of Old Testament Israel. The psalmist had previously assured Israel: *“The Lord watches over you - the Lord is your shade at your right hand; the sun shall not harm you by day nor the moon by night.”* (Psalm 121:5-6). Later in days of dark despair, God’s prophet Isaiah had promised His exiled people that when the Messiah finally came - *“They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat upon them.”* (Isaiah 49:10; cf. also Psalm 89:11; Malachi 4:2) John dramatically reversed this familiar picture. In the imagery of the apostle’s vision, the beneficent sun has mutated into an agent of judgement which would scorch people with fire and cause



“The Outpouring of the Seven Bowls” by Matthias Merian

them to be *“seared with the intense heat.”* C.H. Little aptly described the meaning and significance of the scene as he noted: *“This presents to us a picture of all that makes life comfortable turned into intolerable burning and poured out unceasingly upon the enemies of God and the Lamb.”* (Little, p. 163) The imagery does not merely apply to the natural world, but to everything in life which was intended to bring man joy and satisfaction. All is perverted and destroyed by sin and life apart from God is reduced to misery and torment.



*“The Outpouring of the Seven Bowls”
15th Century Bible Illumination*

The response of sinful mankind is not repentance, but further defiance and blasphemy. The intensity of the plague is emphasized in the Greek text by repetition - literally, *“they were burned, the human beings, with a great burning.”* Like Pharaoh of old, their hearts are hardened, and *“they cursed the name of God who had control over these plagues but they refused to repent and glorify Him.”* Their obstinate blasphemy reflects that of the false god of this world to whom they have foolishly given their allegiance. *“They have wholly taken on the character of the false god they serve.”* (Mounce, p. 297) Note well the progression evidenced here. Man’s reaction to God’s judgment is intensifying even as the plagues themselves rise toward the final judgment crescendo. We have progressed, if one can rightly call such movement progression, from mere desperation (Revelation 6:15-17),

to impenitence (Revelation 9:20-21) on to the same defiant blasphemy which has characterized the beast himself (Revelation 13:5-6).

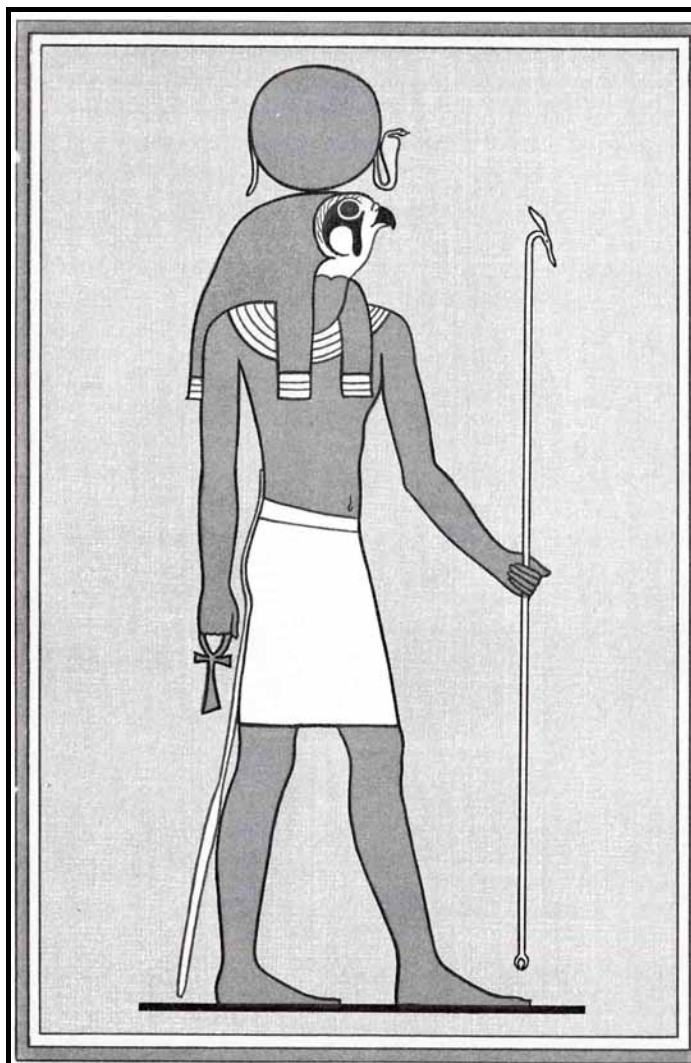


“The Angel of Death Passing Through the Land of Egypt” by Arthur Hacker

“The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.” - With the outpouring of the fifth bowl of God’s wrath, the focus of the attack upon the realm of the devil sharpens. Now the very ***“throne of the beast”*** itself is assaulted and ***“his kingdom was plunged into darkness.”***

A throne is the official seat of the monarch. It represents the royal power and authority of the king. Nothing is more precious or sacred to a royal ruler than his throne. The language here recalls ***“the throne of Satan”*** in the letter to the church at Pergamum (Revelation 2:13), a reference to the seat of Roman power in the province of Asia and the center of the imperial cult throughout the province. ***“The throne of the beast”*** in this instance is no mere object or place. It is a symbol which represents the entirety of the antichrist’s kingdom - all of his power and authority in this world. This is consistent with the vision of the beast from the sea which had informed us that ***“The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority.”*** (Revelation 13:2).

Darkness was the ninth of Egypt's plagues (Exodus 10 :21-23). This was no ordinary absence of light, but a darkness so profound that ***“No one could see anyone else or leave his place for three days.”*** (Exodus 10:23). . The *“Wisdom of Solomon,”* from the Old Testament Apocrypha, presents the darkness that fell upon the land of Egypt as a symbol of the spiritual darkness of a nation cut off from God and lost in idolatry, a harbinger of the eternal damnation that was to come for those who had chosen to turn their backs on the light of God. The apocryphal book describes the abject terror and psychological torment of those who endured this supernatural darkness graphically and at great length :



***“Amun-Ra, God of the Sun - Father of the Gods
and Protector of the Land of Egypt”***

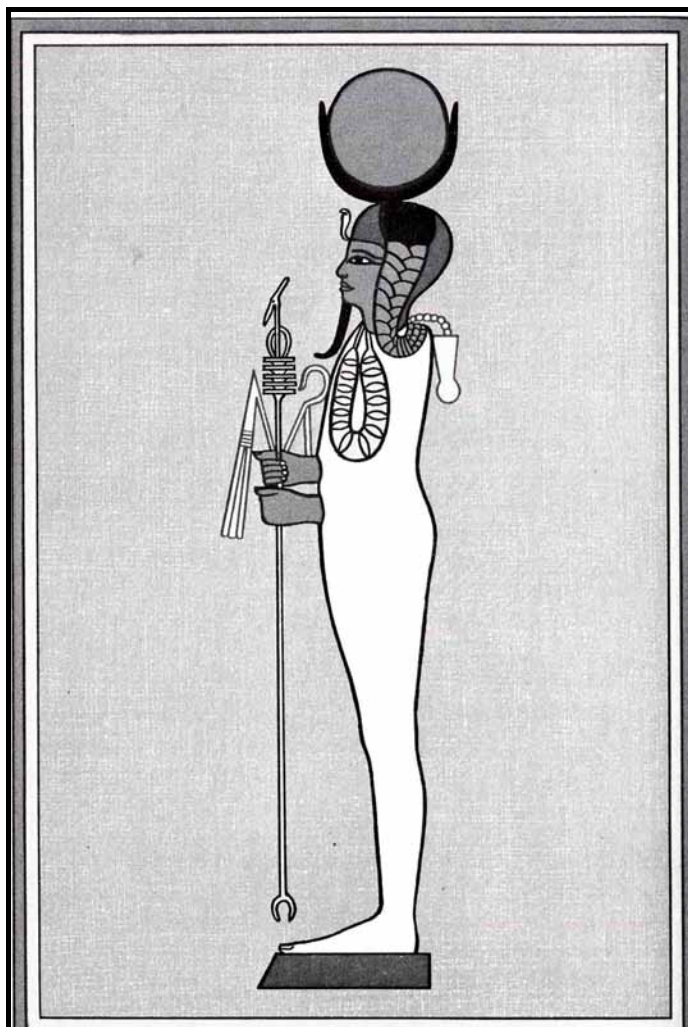
“For when lawless men supposed that they held the holy nation in their power, they themselves lay as captives of darkness and prisoners of long night, shut in under their roofs, exiles from eternal providence. For thinking that in their secret sins they were unobserved behind a dark curtain of forgetfulness, they were scattered, terribly alarmed, and appalled by specters. For not even the inner chamber that held them protected them from fear, but terrifying sounds rang out all around them, and dismal phantoms with gloomy faces appeared. And no power of fire was able to give light, nor did the brilliant flames of the stars avail to illumine that hateful night. Nothing was shining through to them except a dreadful, self-kindled fire, and in terror they deemed the things that they saw to be worse than the unseen appearance. The delusions of their magic art lay humbled, and their boasted wisdom was scornfully rebuked. For those who promised to drive off the fears and disorders of a sick soul were sick themselves with ridiculous fear. For even if nothing disturbing frightened them, yet scared by the passing of beasts and the hissing of serpents, they perished in trembling fear, refusing to

look at the air, though it nowhere could be avoided... But throughout the night, which was really powerless and beset them from the recesses of powerless Hades, they all slept the same sleep and now were driven by monstrous specters, and now were paralyzed by their souls surrender, for sudden and unexpected fear overwhelmed them. And whoever was there fell down, and thus was kept shut up in a prison not made of iron; for whether he was a farmer or a shepherd or a workman who toiled in the wilderness, he was seized and endured the inescapable fate; for with one chain of darkness they were all bound...over those men alone heavy night was spread and the image of the darkness that was destined to receive them.” (Wisdom of Solomon 17:2-10, 16-17,21)

Darkness in Scripture is often a symbol of death, damnation, and separation from God. Thus, Jesus describes the fate of the damned - ***“they will be thrown outside into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”***

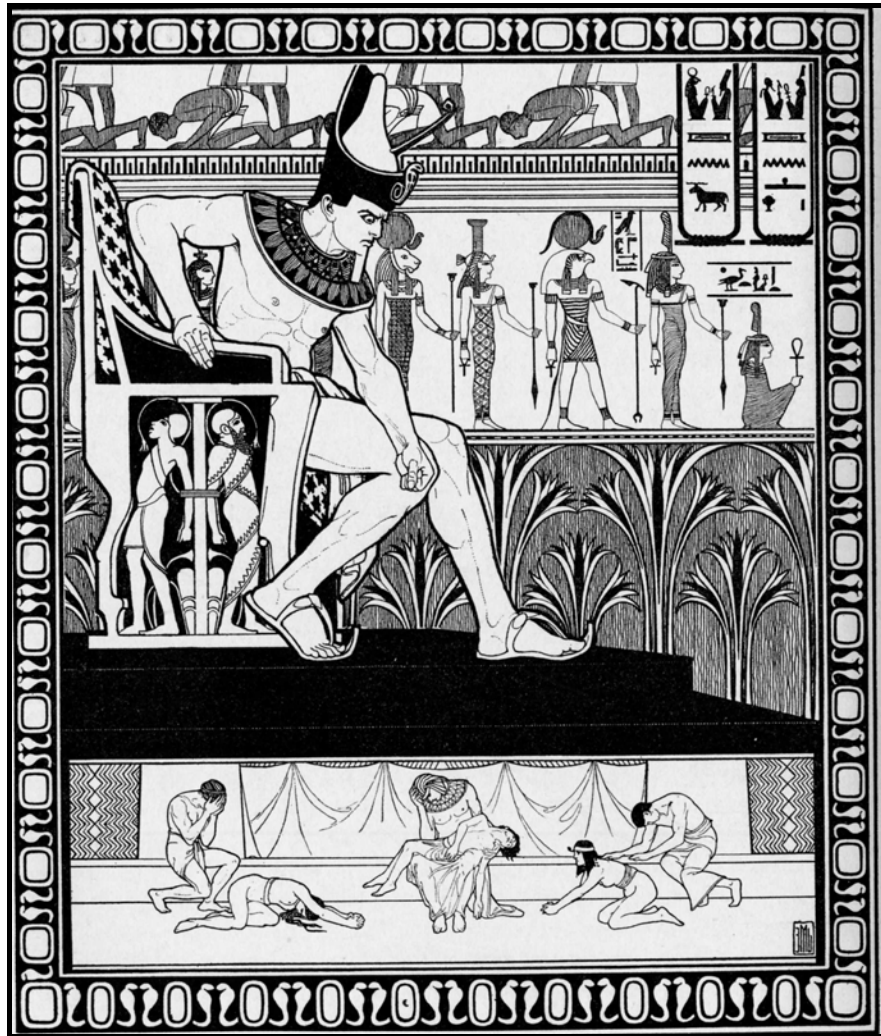
(Matthew 8:12; cf. also Matthew 22:13; 25:30; 2 Peter 2:17; Jude 13). In Jeremiah 13, the prophet urges Israel to give glory to God - ***“before He brings the darkness, before your feet stumble on the darkening hills. You hope for light but He will turn it to thick darkness and change it to deep gloom.”*** (Jeremiah 13:16; cf. also Psalm 23:4) So also in this text, the darkness into which the Antichrist’s Kingdom is plunged is not merely the absence of physical light but the lostness, the anguish, the terror and the torment of those whose defiant sin has separated them from God and doomed them death and eternal damnation.

“Men gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven...” - The cumulative impact of the first five plagues is not humble repentance but obstinate, bitter rejection of the judgement of God. The imperfect tense of the verb ***“gnawed”***



“The Egyptian Moon God - Aah”

denotes continuous, ongoing action. The phrase *“gnawed their tongues in agony”* is intended to describe the most excruciating pain and suffering. But even in the face of this torment, they will not yield nor turn from the way of sin. Like Pharaoh and his heathen priests, they recognized this judgement as *“the finger of God”* (Exodus 8:19) but rather than bow before Him, they curse His Name and stubbornly refuse to repent.

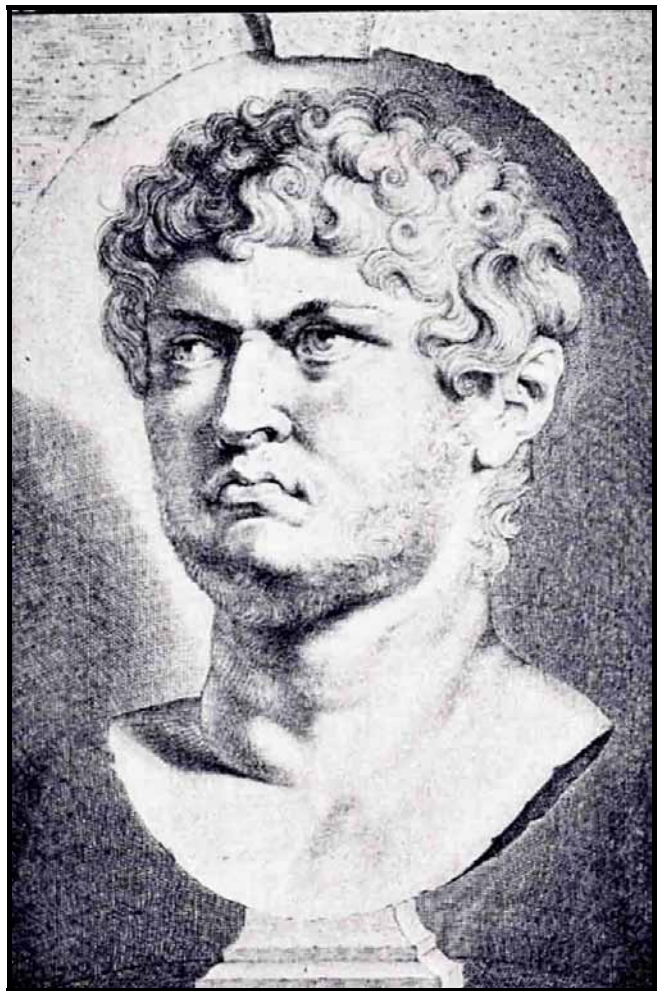


“The Hardening of Pharaoh’s Heart” by E.M. Lilien

“The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of the Lord Almighty.” - The

outpouring of the sixth bowl of God's wrath depicts the final culmination of the age old conflict between good and evil, God and Satan. The imagery parallels that of the sixth trumpet vision in which four angels bound the mighty Euphrates River to enable the invasion of a grotesque horde of demonic riders to slaughter a third of mankind. (Revelation 9:13-19) This is not a prophecy of a specific or a particular battle. As the end of time draws near, Satan's opposition to God and His Gospel will grow increasingly desperate and increasingly successful. It will finally come to the point where the true Church is driven to virtual extinction. The imagery of this scene in the vision depicts the crescendo of this intensifying warfare throughout the latter days.

The pivotal role of the Euphrates River in the history of the Israelites and the other nations of the Fertile Crescent, its significance as the far north-eastern boundary of civilization, and the manner in which the prophets used the lands beyond the Euphrates as the symbolic abode of evil from which the enemies of God would one day arise have been previously noted (cf. pp. 256-265). As John wrote the Book of Revelation, the Euphrates formed the boundary between Rome and the great empire of the Parthians which posed a constant threat to the peace and security of the entire eastern Mediterranean basin. This may well be the context for the reference to unidentified *"kings from the East."* There was a popular legend, currently prevalent throughout the region that emperor Nero had not truly died but had fled to the East to escape his foes. Nero would one day return, the legend declared, leading hordes of Parthian warriors to retake his throne and bring death and devastation to his enemies. The tale is reported in the 1st century



"The Emperor Nero"

19th Century Engraving



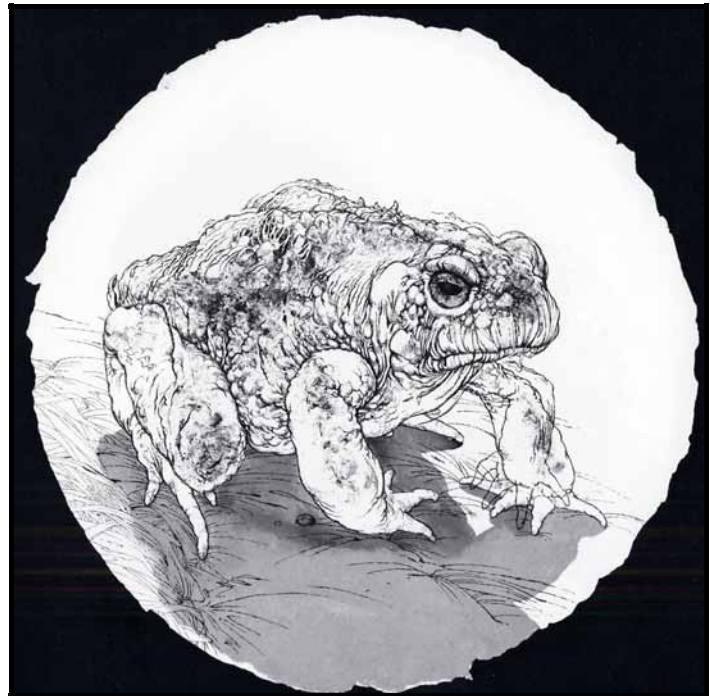
“The Outpouring of the Seven Bowls of God’s Wrath” by Hans Burgmair - 1523

apocryphal writing *“The Sibylline Oracles:”*

“Then a great king will flee from Italy like a run-away slave unseen and unheard over the channel of the Euphrates...and when he runs away beyond the Parthian land, many will bloody the ground for the throne of Rome...Then the strife of war being aroused, will come to the West, and the fugitive from Rome will also come, brandishing a great spear, having crossed the Euphrates with many myriads.”
(“The Sibylline Oracles” 4:115-150)

“Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs...” - The Satanic anti-trinity - ***“the dragon,” “the beast,”*** and ***“the false prophet”*** now come forward as their hosts are mustered for battle (cf. Revelation 12 & 13). This is the first use of the title ***“the false prophet”*** (Greek - *“pseudo prophetou”*) in reference to the Beast from the earth (Revelation 13:11ff.) It will recur in Revelation 19: and 20:10. It serves to highlight the central role of deception and false doctrine in the realm of the Antichrist. The

nature of the impending conflict is clearly indicated by the demonic spirits which spring forth from their lips. This is not merely a military engagement or campaign. This is spiritual warfare waged in the hearts and minds of men. The goal of the anti-trinity is not merely military or political domination but eternal damnation. In the imagery of the vision the demons ***“looked like frogs.”*** The allusion is to Egypt’s second plague (Exodus 8:5). Frogs were unclean animals which were to be detested by the people of God (Leviticus 10:10-11,41). Frogs and toads have historically been associated with Satanism and the practice of witchcraft. It was traditionally believed that the devil would bestow a demonic servant upon witches who dedicated themselves to him. These demons would empower the witch’s magic. But in order to remain in the physical world the demons, or *“familiar spirits,”* as they were called, needed to possess the body of an animal. Frogs or toads were often chosen for this role. In the imagery of this vision, these are not actual frogs but hellish creatures ***“that looked like frogs.”*** These frog-like creatures represent the deceptive speech (***“they came out of the mouth”***) and false miracles that comprise the arsenal of hell. The text explains: ***“They are the spirits of demons performing miraculous signs and they go out to the kings of the whole world to gather them for battle on the great day of God Almighty.”*** The ***“miraculous signs”*** of these demonic spirits are the ***“lying signs and wonders”*** which St. Paul had warned would characterize the realm of the Man of Lawlessness (2 Thessalonians 2:9-11). The choice of frogs jumping out of the mouths of the anti-trinity may also

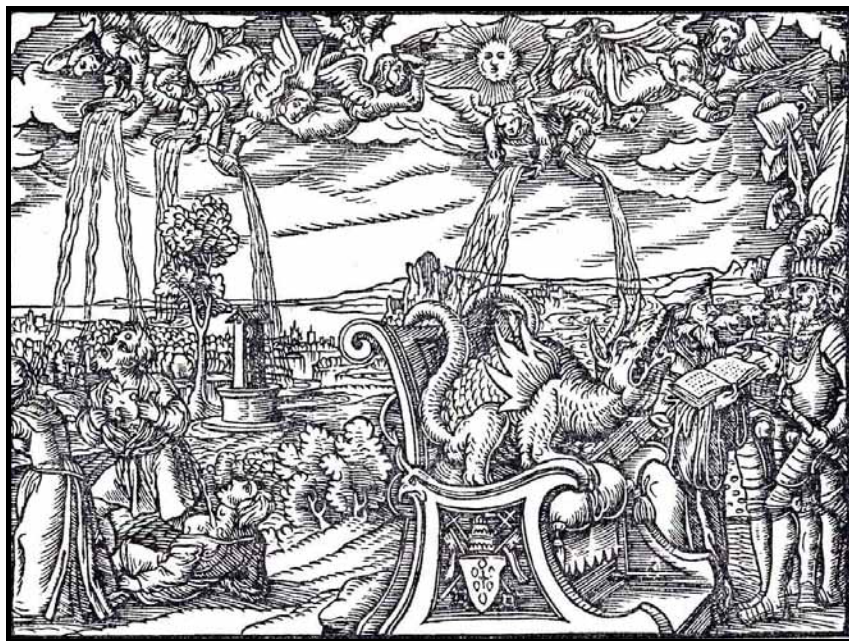


“The Frog - A Witch’s Familiar”

be linked to the frogs characteristic croaking sound which is loud but meaningless. In rabbinic tradition, the frogs’ croaking represents the confusion and consternation brought about by deception. This view originates with the plague of frogs in Egypt. The plague of frogs was one of the two plagues which the Egyptian magicians were able to duplicate. The rabbis taught that the magicians were only able to accomplish

this feat with the assistance of the demon goddess Heket, the Egyptian deity of birth and resurrection, who was typically depicted as a frog. This connection serves John well because of the resurrection imitation which figures prominently in the beast visions of Chapter 13. *“The deceptive activity is appropriately portrayed as frog-like, since the evil triumvirate are attempting to deceive people about the purported fact of the beast’s resurrection.” (Revelation 13:1ff).”* (Beale, p. 833) The anti-trinity sends forth its legions to deceive and deny so that the minds and hearts of men might continue to be held in bondage to evil and sin. They will enlist the support of all the powers of this world - social, political, economic, intellectual and spiritual - ***“the kings of the whole world.”*** The time will come when their victory seems nearly complete, when they are poised to eliminate the true Church altogether and destroy the people of God once and for all. Our Lord warned: ***“For false christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect - if that were possible.”*** (Matthew 24:24) But at the very moment which seems to hold their greatest triumph, our Lord will return and ***“the great day of God Almighty”*** will finally come. This is the day of which the prophet Joel had written:

“Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on My holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming. It is close at hand - a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and darkness...The day of the Lord is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?” (Joel 2:1-2,11)



“The Outpouring of the Seven Bowls” by Hans Lufft - 1522

Many of the prophets had foretold a time when all the might of sinful men, from every nation upon the face of the earth - ***“the whole world”*** -will gather together against God and His people. Zechariah had prophesied:

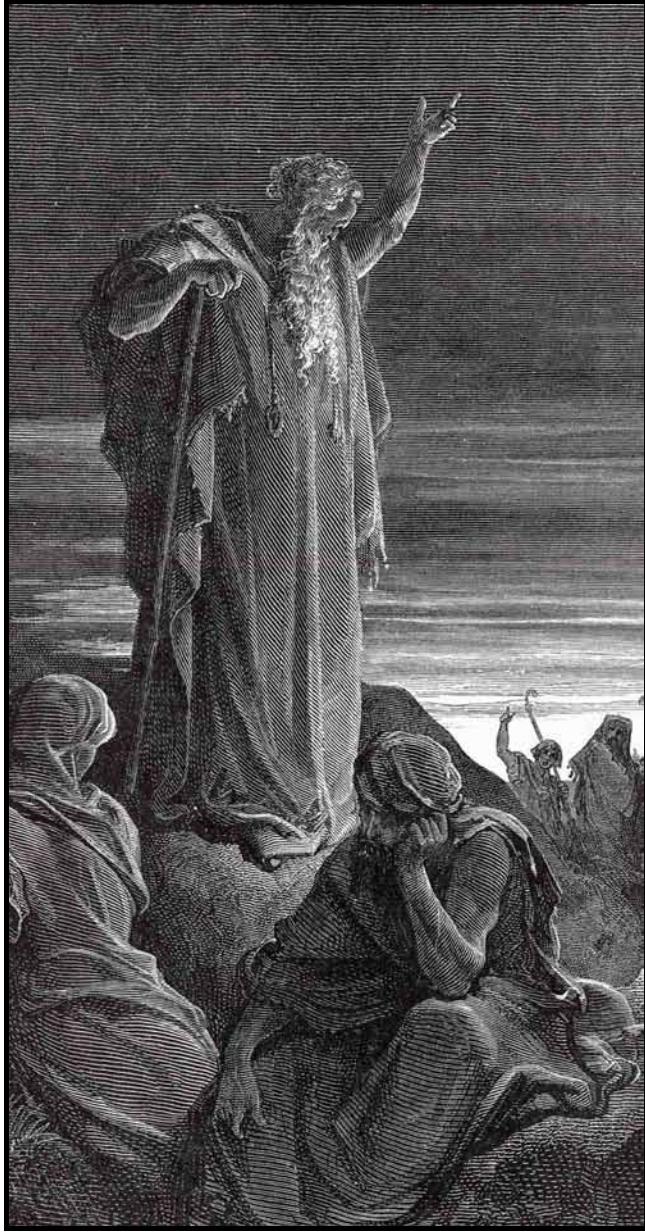
“A day of the Lord is coming...I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it...Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations as He fights in the day of battle. The Lord will be King over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and His Name the only name.” ((Zechariah 14:1-9)



“The Prophets Zephaniah, Joel, Obadiah and Hosea” by John Sargent

God’s spokesman Zephaniah had confronted the nation of Judah with this grim prediction of the coming of the great day of the Lord:

“The great day of the Lord is near - near and coming quickly. Listen! The cry on that day of the Lord will be bitter, the shouting of the warrior there. That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, and day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a



"The Prophet Ezekiel" by Gustave Dore

day of clouds and blackness, a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the corner towers." (Zephaniah 11:4-16)

Ezekiel also included all of the heathen nations of the world among the hordes of "***Gog from the land of Magog***" and warned that they will descend upon the people of God with dreadful destructive power. (Ezekiel 37-38) And yet, the prophet Micah assured the faithful that even this mighty gathering was by God's design to accomplish His judgment purpose:

"But now many nations are gathered against you. They say, 'Let her be defiled, let our eyes gloat over Zion!' But they do not know the thoughts of the Lord; they do not understand His plan, He who gathers them like sheaves to the threshing floor." (Micah 4:11-12)

That confidence in God's sovereign control was echoed by Zephaniah through whom the Lord declared: "***I have decided to assemble the nations, to gather the kingdoms and to pour***

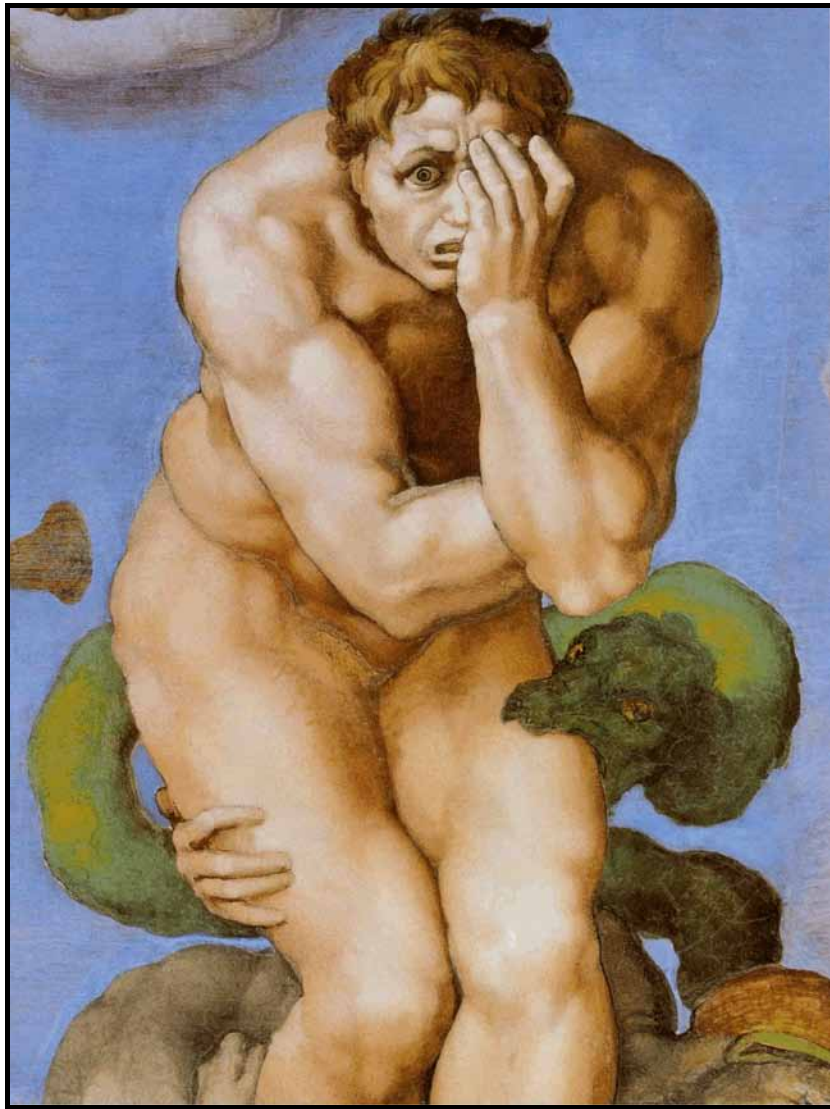
out My wrath on them - all My fierce anger. The whole world will be consumed by the fire of My jealous anger." (Zephaniah 3:8)

The details and locations of the battle sites vary widely in the imagery of the prophets. This indicates the symbolic nature and universal application of the prophecies. The Great Day of the Lord does not merely involve one nation or an individual place. It is for all of humanity everywhere. Joel places the conflict in the

Valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 3:2). Zechariah indicates that the battle will occur on the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:4). Ezekiel sites the assault of Gog and the hosts of Magog across all the mountains of Israel (Ezekiel 38:21; 39:2). Elsewhere in Revelation, John places the final battle around the walls of Jerusalem itself (Revelation 14:20; 20:8-9). These references are not to be understood as literal geographic sites but as significant historical places in the history of God's people which have become universal. The term "*Armageddon*," which John will introduce shortly, is still synonymous with ultimate catastrophic conflict. In more recent history, battlefields like "*Appomattox*" (equated with surrender) or "*Waterloo*" (equated with decisive defeat) have come to be used in the same way.

The battle described in these scenes is not an individual military conflict fought out on a particular battlefield. This warfare is cosmic not local. It is the final settlement of the age-old warfare between good and evil, the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Satan. All of the enemies of the Lord and His people will finally be called to account. Their pomp and pretense of power will be revealed for the falsehood that they have always been and faithless men and fallen angels will quail in terror before the Almighty Judge.

"Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed. - In the midst of these prophecies of doom upon the unbelieving world, John inserts a parenthetical word of exhortation and benediction for the people of God. It is the Lord Christ Himself who declares ***"Behold, I come as a thief!"*** (cf. Revelation 3:3-5) The image is familiar. Jesus had warned His disciples: ***"If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You must also be ready because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you least expect Him."*** (Luke 12:39-40; cf. Matthew 24:43). St. Paul reminded the date setting, prediction prone Thessalonians: ***"You know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night."*** (2 Thessalonians 5:2). St. Peter used similar language in his admonition: ***"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare."*** (2 Peter 3:9) The image is obviously intended to emphasize that sudden unexpectedness is of the essence of the coming of the Great Day of the Lord. The apostles therefore summon the people of God to watchful preparedness. ***"The kind of spiritual preparedness that Christ requires is the spiritual discernment which cuts through the deceptive propaganda of Satan and his henchmen."*** (Mounce, p. 301)



*“The Shame and Despair of the Damned”
Detail from “The Last Judgement” by Michelangelo*

“Blessed is he who stays awake...” - The warning of the thief in the night is followed by the third of Revelation’s seven beatitudes: ***“Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed.”*** The language here is clearly figurative, although in the great judgement frescos of the Renaissance the humiliating nakedness of the damned often became an effective visual means of conveying their shame and despair in contrast to the glorious vesture of the redeemed. For example, in Michelangelo’s magnificent *“Last Judgment”* in Rome’s Sistine Chapel, the damned are stripped of their clothes as they tumble down toward Hell, gleefully exposed and abused by the demons swirling around them. The ***“clothes”*** to which the Lord refers in this text are a metaphor for salvation by grace through faith. The only defense when He comes again will be the

pure white robes of Christ's righteousness, cleansed for us in His blood (Revelation 7:14). Apart from those precious garments of salvation, the shameful deeds of all men will be exposed before the righteous Judge.

The image of nakedness and shameful exposure as the consequence of idolatry and spiritual unfaithfulness may be an allusion to Ezekiel 16:36-39 where the prophet compares the idolatry of Israel to the adultery of a prostitute and warns that appropriate punishment will be forthcoming:

“Therefore I am going to gather all of your lovers, with whom you found pleasure, those you loved as well as those you hated. I will gather them together from all around and will strip you in front of them and they will see your nakedness...Then I will turn you over to your lovers and they will tear down your mounds and destroy your lofty shrines. They will strip you of your clothes and take your fine jewelry and leave you naked and bare.” (Ezekiel 16:35-42)



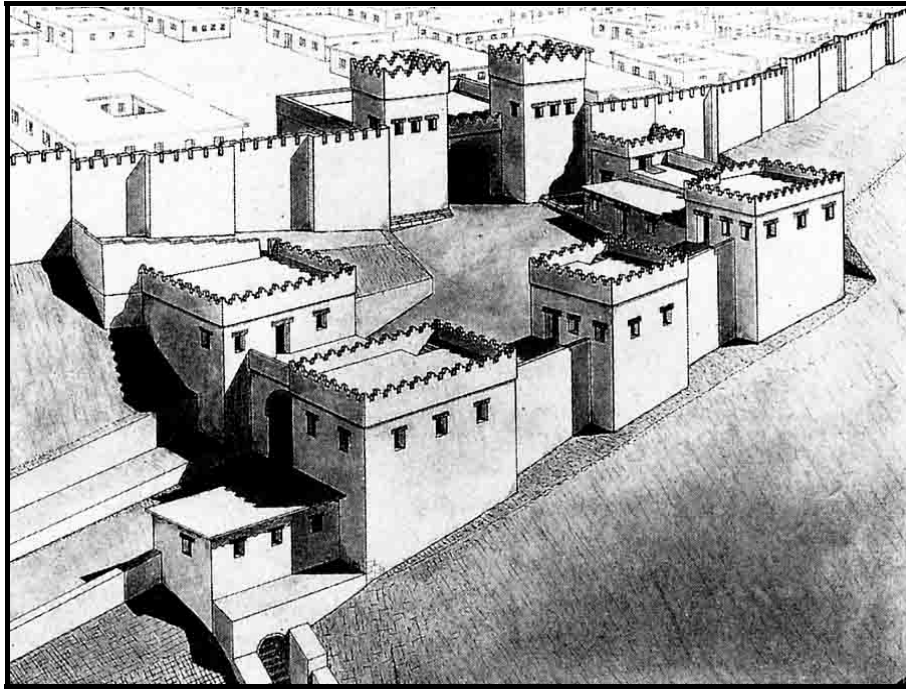
“The Torments of the Damned” - Detail from “The Last Judgement” by Luca Signorelli, The San Brizio Chapel, Orvieto

“Then they gathered the kings together to the place that is called in Hebrew Armageddon.” - The emphasis upon the unholy trinity as the motivating and empowering force in this muster of the armies of evil continues. The hosts of this world are gathered ***“to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.”*** The Greek transliteration *“harmageddon”* is based upon the Hebrew compound *“har-megiddo”* - literally *“the mount of Megiddo.”* The ancient city of Megiddo, situated on the north slope of the ridge of Mt. Carmel, commanded the strategically crucial Valley of Jezreel which passes through Palestine’s rugged central mountains to connect the coastal plain of Sharon with the trade routes to Mesopotamia. Conquerors across the centuries have recognized that Megiddo was essential for control of central Palestine. Pharaoh Thutmose III captured Megiddo in 1468 B.C. and made its Canaanite king a vassal of Egypt. The Egyptian ruler is heroically depicted on the wall reliefs of his tomb, leading the chariots of Egypt on the battlefield at Megiddo, his bow drawn to strike the enemies of the two lands.



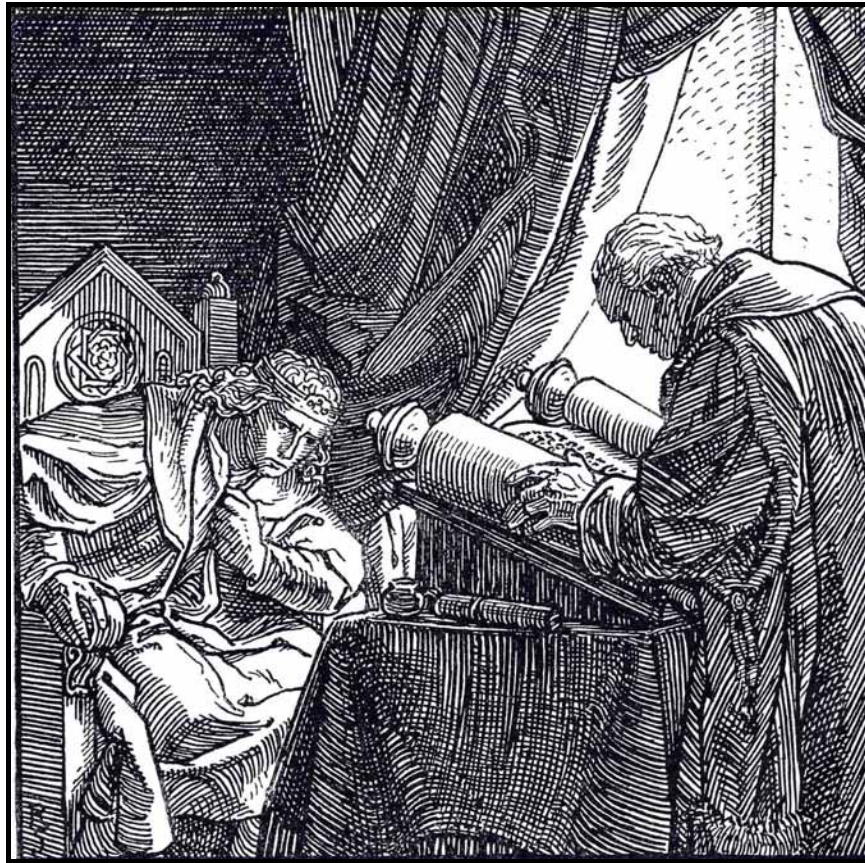
“Pharaoh Thutmose II Leading the Egyptian Assault at Armageddon”

During the Israelite conquest of Canaan, Joshua defeated the King of Megiddo but failed to occupy the city (Joshua 17: 11-12; Judges 1:27). Deborah and Barak defeated the armies of Hazor ***“by the waters of Megiddo”*** but again the town and its



“A Reconstruction of Solomon’s Fortifications at Megiddo”

strategic citadel remained under Canaanite control (Judges 4:15, 5:19). At the height of Israel’s power, Solomon made Megiddo the capital of one of his twelve districts, a major fortress center with stables to accommodate 450 horses and chariots (1 Kings 4:12). After the division of the kingdom, Pharaoh Shishak took the city from Solomon’s son Rehoboam in 926 B.C. Both Ahaziah, the King of Judah and Joram, the King of Israel, died at Megiddo during the rebellion of Jehu (2 Kings 9:14-29). In 609 B.C. Pharaoh Necho II led the armies of Egypt north through Palestine in a desperate attempt to rescue his Assyrian allies from the rising power of Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar. King Josiah of Judah unsuccessfully attempted to halt the Egyptian advance at Megiddo. Josiah died there under a hail of Egyptian arrows (2 Kings 23:29-30). His effort, although futile, caused enough of a delay to prevent Egypt from coming to Assyria’s aid in time. Nebuchadnezzar met the Egyptian army alone on the bloody battlefield of Carchemish and dealt them a devastating defeat. Babylon then became the dominant power in the region. The death of good King Josiah was particularly significant because, in effect, it marked the end of the existence of Judah as an independent nation. Josiah’s death on the bloody ground of Megiddo was an event which *“burnt itself into the memory of the Jewish people.”* (Swete, p. 209) With this long and varied history of conquest and warfare, Megiddo had come to be associated in the Hebrew mind with desperate battle and catastrophic



*“King Josiah Rediscovered the Book of the Law”
by Rudolf Schäfer*

defeat. This is the sense in which Megiddo appeared in its final Old Testament reference, Zechariah 12:11. The prophet used the mourning of Megiddo as a metaphor of the bitter lament of the Church before the cross: ***“On that day, the weeping in Jerusalem will be great, like the weeping of Hadad-rimmon on the plain of Megiddo. The land itself will mourn.”*** Dr. Theodore Laetsch places the prophet’s words in their historical context:

“Hadad-rimmon was a city near Jezreel on the plain of Megiddo...At Megiddo pious King Josiah was slain by Pharaoh Necho. He was the first king of Judah to fall in battle and leave his country at the mercy of foreign conquerors. His death was a catastrophic loss for Judah for with him had passed away the last bulwark against the flood of wickedness which now swept through the land and carried it to its destruction. The entire nation lamented Josiah’s death and by official decree an annual day of mourning was appointed, still observed when the Book of Chronicles was written (cf. 2 Chronicles 35:24). Hadad-rimmon is named as the place or one of the places of such mourning, perhaps because it afforded a view of the battlefield, or, Josiah may have actually died here, when, mortally wounded, he was being rushed to Jerusalem. (2 Kings 23:29ff.; 2 Chronicles 35:22ff.) (Laetsch, p. 485)

So it was no accident that John chose this ancient place whose very name was laden with historical and emotional significance for God's people as the symbolic site for the climactic confrontation in the age old battle between God and Satan. G. K. Beale aptly summarizes:

"Like the place names 'Babylon' and 'Euphrates,' so 'Armageddon' does not refer to a specific geographic locale, but the whole world. The battles in Israel associated with Megiddo and the nearby mountain become a typological symbol for the last battle against the saints and Christ which occurs throughout the earth." (Beale, p. 838)

In the "Premillennial" theology so prominent among conservative American evangelicals, Armageddon must be a literal battle which will occur on the actual ruins of ancient Megiddo in the modern State of Israel at the end of a seven year tribulation period. This pernicious misunderstanding of the Biblical prophecies has resulted in an endless series of erroneous applications to current events. In his insightful study *Armageddon Now*, Dwight Wilson, himself a premillenarian, describes the unfortunate pattern in this way:

"The premillenarian's history, however, is strewn with a mass of erroneous speculations which have undermined their credibility. The current crisis was always identified as a sign of the end, whether it was the Russo-Japanese War, the First World War, the Second World War, the Palestine War, the Suez Crisis, the June War, or the Yom Kippur War. The revival of the Roman Empire has been identified variously as Mussolini's Empire, the League of Nations, the United Nations, the European Defense Community, the Common Market, and NATO. Speculation on the Antichrist has included Napoleon, Mussolini, Hitler, and Henry Kissinger. The Northern Confederation was supposedly formed by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the Rapallo Treaty, the Nazi-Soviet Pact, and then the Soviet Bloc. The 'Kings from the



"God's Judgement Upon Gog" by Asher Durand

East' have been variously the Turks, the lost tribes of Israel, Japan, India and China. The supposed restoration of Israel has confused the problem of whether the Jews are to be restored before or after the coming of the Messiah. The restoration of the 'latter rain' has been pinpointed to have begun in 1897, 1917 and 1948. The 'end of the times of the Gentiles' has been placed in 1895, 1917, 1948 and 1967. Russia as Gog has been an impending threat since the Crimean War, both under the czars and the communists." (Wilson, pp. 216-217)



"The Destruction of Babylon the Great" Luther Bible Woodcut - 1534

"The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne saying, "It is done!" Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake. The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of His wrath. Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so

terrible.” - The outpouring of the seventh bowl brings us to the completion of God’s judgement, the Last Day and the end of time. Like its predecessors, which struck the land, the waters, and the heavenly bodies - this plague is directed at one of the basic components in the world of nature, **“the air.”** In the verses which follow, the details of the plague are provided, all drawn from previous manifestations of God’s presence and His power recorded in the Old Testament. The lightning, thunder and earthquake of Sinai (cf. Exodus 19:16-19) are combined with the hail which was the sixth plague of God upon the land of Egypt (Exodus 9:13-35). The imagery also parallels that of Ezekiel’s description of the final judgement:

“In My zeal and fiery wrath I declare that at that time there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. The fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the beasts of the field, every creature that moves along the ground, and all the people on the face of the earth will tremble at My presence. The mountains will be overturned, the cliffs will crumble and every wall will fall to the ground. I will summon a sword against Gog on all My mountains, declares the Sovereign Lord. Every man’s sword will be against his brother. I will execute judgement upon him with plague and bloodshed. I will pour down torrents of rain, hailstones, and burning sulphur on him and on his troops and on the many nations with him. And so I will show My greatness and My holiness, and I will make Myself known in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord.” (Ezekiel 38:19-23)

“And out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne...” - The unidentified voice from the throne within the temple is certainly that of God Himself (cf. Revelation 21:5-6). ***“The throne”*** within the temple is probably a reference to the sacred Ark of the Covenant. The inspired authors of the Old Testament commonly described the Lord as ***“enthroned between the cherubim,”*** the majestic angel guardians carved upon the lid of the Ark. (1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Samuel 6:2; 2 Kings 19:15; 1 Chronicles 13:6; Psalm 80:1; 99:1; Isaiah 37:16)

“It is done!” - The declaration from the throne announced that God’s judgement purpose had been realized and fully accomplished. All that is necessary has been done. Not one single detail has been overlooked or omitted. Now the end can come. Lenski emphasizes the perfect tense of the Greek verb, indicating action completed:



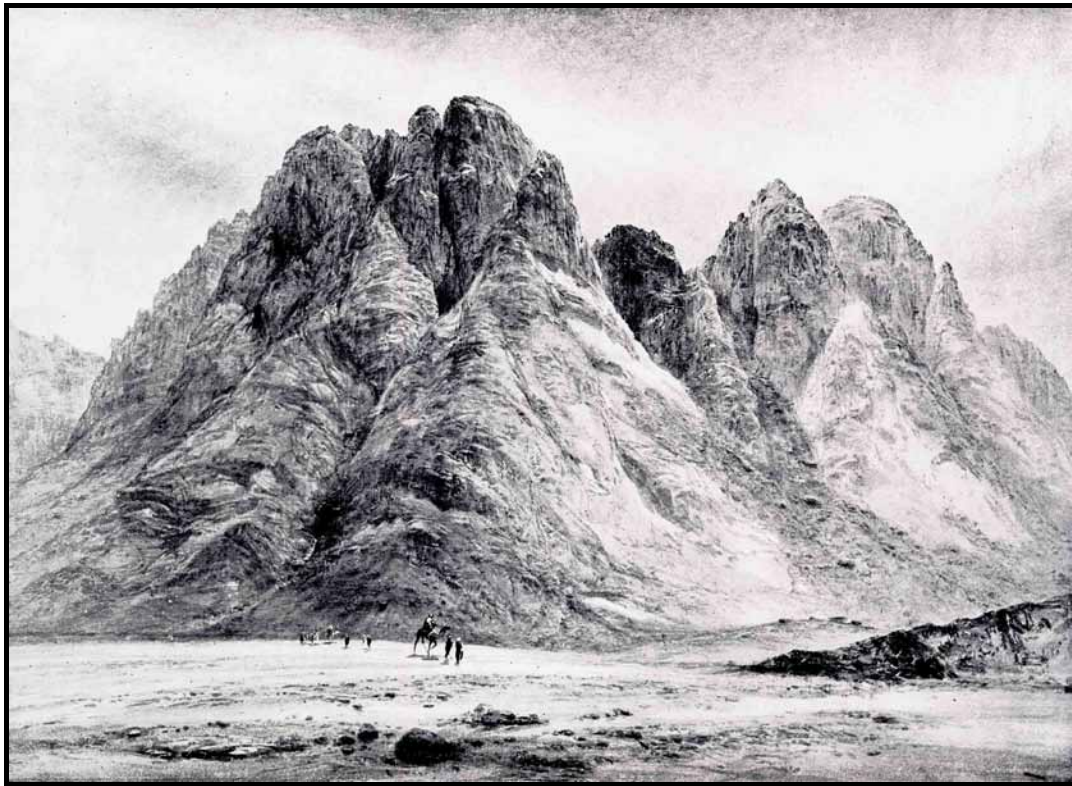
"The Glory of the Lord Upon Mt. Sinai" by Rudolf Schäfer

"The perfect is like that one word of Jesus on the cross 'telesthai!' - 'It has been finished!' The tense means that the climax has come to be and so remains now and forevermore...The perfect means that what has been developing during a long time in the past has now occurred as in a final explosion. The sword of Damocles which had for so long a time been trembling on a thread now breaks the thread, and, point down, plunges into Babylon." (Lenski, pp. 482-483)

"Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder..." - The language closely parallels that of the theophany at Sinai: ***"On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast...The smoke billowed up from it like the smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently."*** (Exodus 19:16-18; cf. Revelation 4:5; 8:5; 11:19) These physical phenomena are the signs of the coming of the holy, majestic God and His righteous judgement. The earthquake which signals

the end is of a magnitude unprecedented in the long history of humanity - ***“No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on the earth, so tremendous was the quake.”*** The words recall those of our Lord as He described the global upheaval which will immediately precede the Day of Judgement: ***“Those will be days of distress unequalled since the beginning of the world until now - and never to be equaled again.”*** (Mark 13:19; cf. Daniel 12:1)

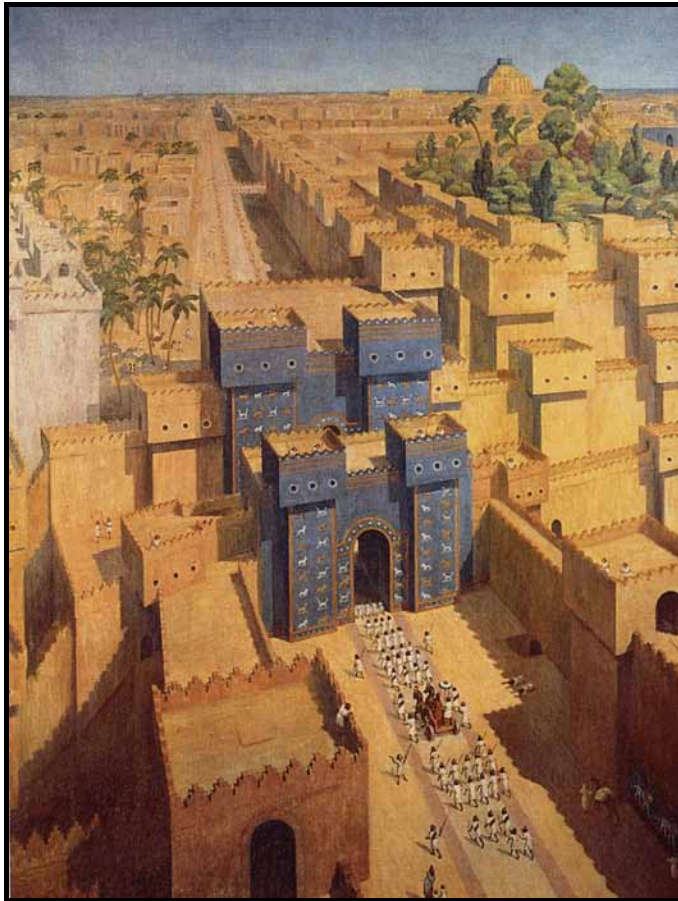
“The great city split into three parts and the cities of the nations collapsed.” - Prophets and apostles had long foretold the coming of a worldwide earthquake as the Lord returns in judgement. ***“He stood and shook the earth; He looked and made the nations tremble. The ancient mountains trembled and the ancient hills collapsed.”*** (Habakkuk 3:6) ***“On that day, His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half the mountain moving north and half the mountain moving south.”*** (Zechariah 14:4; cf. also Hebrews 12:26-27) In the imagery of St. John, ***“the great city”*** which is ***“the cities of the nations”*** is the specific object of divine judgment. ***“The great city”*** is identified as ***“Babylon the Great”*** - the personification of all of the wickedness and corruption of mankind. Dr. Brighton explains that Babylon here represents:



“Mount Sinai” by Elijah Walton

“The Satanic powers opposed to Jesus and His Church...in particular, political, economic, and social orders, and pagan spiritual philosophies which under the dragon’s influence attempt to destroy God’s saints on earth.” (Brighton, 428-429)

John is explicit in defining the representative role of **“Babylon the Great”** **“the great city”** with the appositive phrase **“the cities of the nations collapsed.”** **“Babylon the**



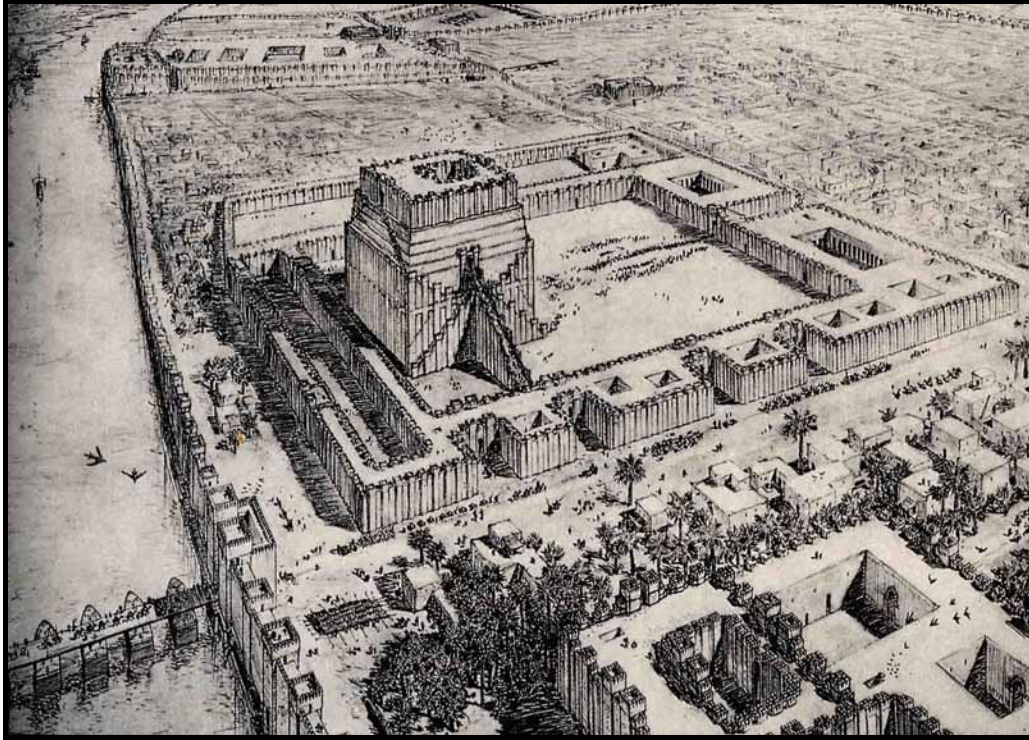
“The Ishtar Gate of Ancient Babylon”

Great” is not one city: it is every city. The destruction presented here is not local: it is global. In Revelation 11:13 only **“one tenth of the city fell.”** Now the destruction is total. John uses the phrase **“split into three parts”** to describe the city’s complete collapse. The image of a three part division for total destruction is an idiomatic Hebrew expression. Lenski presents the Hebrew idiom:

“The language is idiomatic; it does not mean that great rents in the earth divided the city into three parts, but that the whole city and every structure in it fell in a heap in utter ruin. Every structure collapsed, one wall falling to the right, another to the left, the roof and the floors falling down between them. Three parts indicates this form of disintegration.” (Lenski, p. 483-484)

In this instance, the language may well be drawn from Ezekiel Chapter 5 where the Lord separates the citizens of Jerusalem into three parts to emphasize their total destruction: **“A third of your people will die of the plague or perish from famine inside you; a third will fall by the sword outside of your walls; and a third I will scatter to the winds and pursue with a drawn sword.”** (Ezekiel 5:12)

“God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of His wrath.” - The concept of God’s punitive remembering emphasizes



“The Temple of Marduk in Ancient Babylon with Its 300 Foot Step Pyramid”

that the just and righteous God cannot overlook the sinful wickedness of men forever. His just punishment for sin is absolutely inevitable. Speaking through His prophet Hosea, God had warned the Northern Kingdom of Israel:

“They do not realize that I remember all of their evil deeds. Their sins engulf them; they are always before Me...They offer sacrifices given to Me and they eat the meat but the Lord is not pleased with them. Now He will remember their wickedness and punish their sins...They have sunk deep into corruption as in the days of Gibeah. God will remember their wickedness and punish them for their sins.” (Hosea 7:2; 8:13; 9:9)

Jeremiah had issued a similar warning to the Kingdom of Judah:

“This is what the Lord says about His people: ‘They greatly love to wander; they do not restrain their feet.’ So the Lord does not accept them; He will now remember their wickedness and punish them for their sins.” (Jeremiah 14:10)



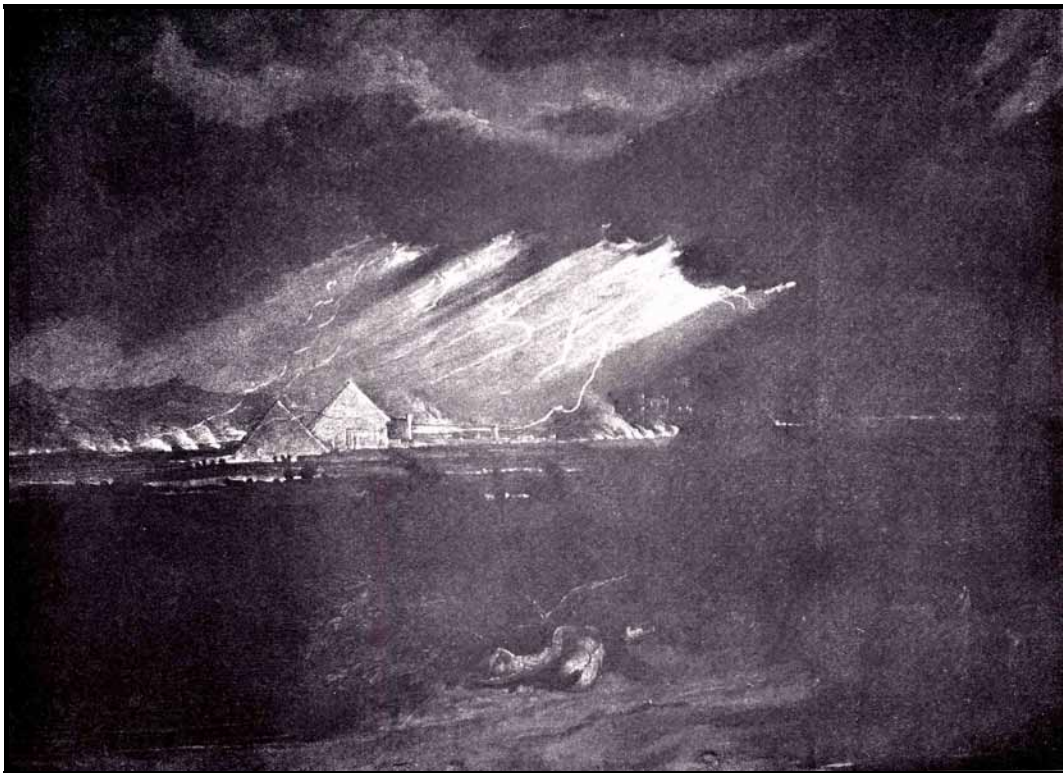
"The Madness of Nebuchadnezzar" by G. Rochegrosse

In the same way, the final reckoning for the whole world cannot be avoided. The day will finally come when God will ultimately and permanently render justice to all of mankind. On that great day, those who have misunderstood the patient longsuffering of God as forgetfulness will all be condemned (cf. 2 Peter 3:3-6). The pretentious title *"Babylon the Great"* occurred previously in Revelation 14:8. The designation is drawn from Nebuchadnezzar's proud boast *"Is this not great Babylon which I have built!"* (Daniel 4:30) The king was struck with madness by God as punishment for his arrogance (Daniel 4:31-37).

The image of God's judgement as bitter wine poured out from the cup of divine wrath - ***“and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of His wrath”*** - is also drawn from the Old Testament. It occurred previously in Revelation 14:8-10.

“Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found.” - The message of universal judgement is reinforced by images of cosmic upheaval. Virtually identical language is used in Revelation 6:14 and 20:11 to describe the demise of the old order. There will be no escape or refuge for the sinner from the awesome justice of the holy God. Neither the most distant island nor the tallest mountain will be able to provide safety. On that great and terrible day, only those who stand by grace through faith upon the Rock of Ages shall prevail.

“From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds...” - The sixth plague of Egypt is replicated on a massive world-wide scale (cf. Exodus 9: 13-35). The image is one of nature gone mad, raining death and destruction down upon the world of men. But the response of condemned mankind to this irrefutable demonstration of the power and glory of God is only further defiance, rage and blasphemy - ***“And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.”***



“The Plague of Thunder, Lightning, and Hail” by J. W. Turner



"The Harlot Astride the Beast" by Lucas Cranach

The Sixth Vision

The Downfall of Babylon the Great and the Defeat of the Antichrist - Revelation 17:1 - 19:21

The Great Harlot (Revelation 17:1-18)

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters. With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries." Then the angel carried me away

in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. This title was written on her forehead: MYSTERY - BABYLON THE GREAT - THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly astonished. Then the angel said to me: "Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns. The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come. This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven



"The Harlot Upon the Beast" - Luther Bible Woodcut

and is going to his destruction. The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom but for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because He is the Lord of lords and the King of kings - and with Him will be His called, chosen and faithful followers.” Then the angel said to me, “The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leaving her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish His purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule until God’s words are fulfilled. The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.”

“One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters. With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries.” - The judgment of the beast and his kingdom, Babylon the Great, was the subject of the three final scenes in the vision of the seven angels with the seven bowls. That topic is now expanded and explained in the new vision which follows. God’s people had longed and prayed for the day when the righteousness of God would be vindicated in the destruction of evil and now those prayers will finally be answered. Throughout the ages wickedness had maintained the pretense of victory, boastfully proclaiming its power. Now that pretense will be revealed once and for all. Revelation’s pattern of interlocking visions continues as the sixth vision is introduced by *“one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls.”* The linkage serves to emphasize the role of the sixth vision as an expansion of its predecessor. In the typical manner of apocalyptic literature the angel narrates the details of the scene and explains its symbolism (cf. Revelation 5:5; 7:13). The wording of the angel’s invitation to John - *“Come, I will show you”* is identical to that used by the angel in Revelation 21:9 to introduce *“the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”* This is only the first in a series of parallels which clearly indicate the intended contrast between the true church - the bride - and the anti-church - the prostitute. The latter is a deliberate parody and perversion of the former - its opposite in every way. The prostitute is the counterpart and the opponent of the bride. The angel promises to show John *“the punishment of the great prostitute.”* The Greek noun used in this phrase is the legal term *“krima”* which refers both to the pronouncement of a verdict and the implementation of the sentence which results from that verdict, thus the NIV’s translation *“punishment.”* The object of this



"Harlot Babylon" by Albrecht Dürer



*“The Harlot - the Mother of Heresy”
17th Century Engraving*

punishment is identified as ***“the great prostitute”*** (Greek - *“tes pornes tes megalas”*). In Revelation 14:8, Babylon was accused of leading all the nations to imbibe ***“the maddening wine of her adulteries.”*** The Greek noun used in that instance was *“pornia”* which is a general term describing sexual sin of every sort and description. The word ***“prostitute”*** (Greek - *“pornes”*), one who offers sexual favors in return for payment, is drawn from the same root word. Cultic prostitution was a common feature of the fertility religions of the Biblical world. As previously noted (cf. pp. 314, 324) the Old Testament often used adultery and prostitution as a image for the spiritual unfaithfulness of idolatry. The prophet Isaiah lamented the unfaithfulness and idolatry of Jerusalem with these words: ***“See how the faithful city has become a harlot! She was once***

full of justice; righteousness used to dwell in her - but now murderers!” (Isaiah 1:20) Jeremiah used the same imagery to describe the Israelite worship of Baal and Asherah in the oak groves and the high places:

“Long ago you broke off your yoke and tore off your bonds; you said, “I will not serve You!” Indeed, on every high hill and under every spreading tree you lay down as a prostitute...You have lived as a prostitute with many lovers - would you now return to Me? Declares the Lord.” (Jeremiah 2:20; 3:1)

The depiction of the pseudo-church as a prostitute serves to emphasize both her attractiveness and her corruption. The contrast between the image of the alluring



“The Harlot Upon the Beast” by Jean Duvet



"The Whore of Babylon" by Hans Holbein

prostitute and the pure modesty of the virgin bride which will represent the true church (cf. Revelation 19:7) could not be more striking. Beneath the deceptive veneer of her beauty lurks the ugly reality of falsehood and death. The anti-church looks genuine, but it is not. This harlot is further identified as ***"the great prostitute"*** to stress her connection to ***"Babylon the Great."*** John adds one more detail to strengthen the Babylon link still more - ***"the great prostitute who sits on many waters."*** The phrase is drawn from Jeremiah 51:13 where the prophet describes the people of Babylon as ***"the people of Babylon, you who live by many waters and are rich in treasures."*** Jeremiah's reference is to the River Euphrates and the complex system of canals and irrigation ditches which the Babylonians had constructed to draw the water of the river into their fields and city. The angel will later explain that the ***"many waters"*** in this scene are a symbol of the nations and peoples of the earth (cf. Revelation 17:15).

The Great Prostitute is yet another symbolic representation of the beast from the land in Revelation 13. Revelation 13 presents the Anti-Christ, and all the anti-Christ of this world from two perspectives. The first beast, the beast from the sea, represented the Anti-Christ and the anti-Christian powers brazenly and boastfully flaunting their strength to coerce the obedience and obeisance of mankind. The second beast, the beast from the land, revealed the more subtle, devious side of the Anti-Christ and his works. The creature with the outward appearance of a lamb but the voice of the dragon (Revelation 13:11) showed the devil at work not in overt persecution but in internal subversion within the church itself, always carefully concealed beneath a mask of piety. The beast from the land was not what he appeared to be. Behind the

false facade of the lamb lurked the deadly jaws of the dragon. Deception is the essence of his being. The masks behind which he conceals his menace are constantly changing in the imagery of Revelation. First he is the lamb/beast (Revelation 13;11-18); next he appears as the false prophet (Revelation 16:13); and now he is presented as the harlot of Babylon. The shifting disguises signal the deceptiveness of our foe.

“With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries.” - Unlike the true church which must endure rejection and persecution, the false church achieves widespread consistent success. *“Until God’s judgment at the End, the pseudo-church, which appears to be beautiful and attractive (the harlot), will be accepted and honored by the world, for she flatters and encourages the lifestyles of the ungodly.”* (Brighton,



“John Is Shown Harlot Babylon” by Hans Burgkmair



"The Whore of Babylon" by Albert Birkle - 1945

p. 437) The language of the first phrase ***"With her the kings of the earth committed adultery"*** is similar to that of Isaiah 23:17 where the prophet says of the city of Tyre: ***"At the end of the seventy years, the Lord will deal with Tyre. She will return to her trade as a prostitute and will commit adultery with all the kingdoms on the face of the earth."*** Isaiah uses the imagery of prostitution and adultery to characterize the vast commercial empire of the great Phoenician trading city. John's use of the same imagery here adds an economic connotation to the picture of immorality and idolatry already depicted. The second phrase - ***"the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries"*** is, once again an allusion to Revelation 14:8 -

"Babylon the Great which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries." (Cf. Jeremiah 51:7) The prostitute is not only corrupt but corrupting. She spread her wickedness throughout the world, an intoxicating and immoral influence upon all of the powers and authorities of this world. The mindlessness of evil, which abandons common sense, reason, and decency in the desperate pursuit of selfish, sensual satisfaction is presented as the drunkenness of ***"maddening wine."***

"Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. This title was written on her forehead: MYSTERY - BABYLON THE GREAT - THE MOTHER OF

PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.” - John reports that ***“The angel carried me away in the Spirit.”*** Revelation refers to the Spirit’s influence upon the revelator four times. In Revelation 1:10 and 4:2 he is said to be ***“in the Spirit;”*** and here in 17:3 and later in 21:10 he is ***“carried away by the Spirit.”*** These references may indicate that at times during the inspiration of this unique book the power of the Holy Spirit came upon John in such a way that he not only observed his visions but was enabled to enter and experience them. (Cf. Ezekiel 8:3; 11:24; 2 Corinthians 12:1-4).

The desert setting of the next scene recalls Isaiah’s vision of judgment upon Babylon - ***“An oracle concerning the desert by the sea: Like whirlwinds sweeping through the southland, an invader comes from the desert, from a land of terror.”*** (Isaiah 21:1) It also serves to place the harlot in the same environment as the woman who represents the true church in the earlier vision of the Woman and the Dragon (Revelation 12). Grant Osbourne offers this summary of the significance of ***“the desert”*** in Scripture:

“In Scripture a ‘desert’ can be used positively as a place of comfort and revelation (Exodus 19; 1 Kings 19:4-6; Isaiah 40:3; Ezekiel 34:25; Mark 1:35,45; 6:31-35) or negatively as a place of testing and devastation (the forty years in the wilderness; Psalm 95:7-11; Isaiah 1:7;35:25; Jeremiah 51:36; Matthew 4:1; Hebrews 3:8,17). In Revelation, the desert is positive in 12:6,14, where the woman finds a place of refuge from the dragon in the desert, and negatively here, where it is become the location of Babylon the Great, which will become ‘a home for demons’ (18:2; for deserts as the home of demons see Isaiah 13:21; Tob. 8:3; Matthew 12:43). (Osbourne, p. 610)

“There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast...” - The harlot who had been seated upon the many waters which represented the nations of men is now depicted astride ***“a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns.”*** This is the first beast of Revelation 13, the beast from the sea. The description here provided is virtually identical to that of the sea beast (cf. Revelation 13:1-3) John provides one significant additional detail. The color of the beast is ***“scarlet,”*** the color of the dragon (cf. Revelation 12:3). Scarlet is the color of Rome, royalty and royal power. ***“Kokkinos,”*** the Greek word used here, also describes the royal robe which the soldiers mockingly placed upon Jesus during the torture which accompanied His trial (cf. Matthew 27:28). Scarlet further denotes luxury and extravagant wealth. The harlot is arrayed in ***“purple and scarlet”*** to



"The Rise and Fall of the Harlot Upon the Beast"
15th Century Bible Illumination

indicate her great wealth and power. In Revelation 18:12, the purchase of "**purple and scarlet cloth**" is cited to illustrate the rich prosperity of fallen Babylon. In the more general symbolism of Scripture scarlet is the color of sin and corruption (cf. Isaiah 1:18)

In the visions of the beasts from the sea and the land (Revelation 13) the beast from the land was presented as the servant of the beast from the sea. Now the roles are reversed. The beast from the land, in the guise of the harlot, sits astride the beast from the sea, suggesting mastery and control. This interchange of roles further reinforces the view that the two beasts are not separate and distinct creatures at all, but rather different dimensions of the same reality. The beasts represent the Antichrist and all the anti-Christian forces of this

world. The beast from the sea presents the cultural and political aspect of the anti-Christian attack while the beast from the land stresses the Anti-Christ's assault within religion and the church. Our foes are relentless in their opposition to the true Christ and His Church. But while their opposition is constant their tactics are ever changing to meet the needs of the moment. The goal is always the same, but the means used to achieve that goal - political, military, social, economic, theological or ecclesiastical - are adjusted as necessary to accomplish that which the dragon above all else - the

destruction and damnation of mankind.

The scarlet beast is “**covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns.**” In his earlier appearance, the beast’s blasphemous names were limited to his seven heads (cf. Revelation 13:1); they now cover his entire body. The expansion serves to intensify the message that blasphemy is the characteristic activity of the beast. The beast’s seven heads signify his perfect craftiness and cleverness while his ten horns represent governmental and political power (cf. p. 270). Many commentators also view the combination of seven and ten in this context as an allusion to Rome, the city built upon seven hills, and to the ten original imperial provinces of the Roman Empire.

“The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls.” -

The harlot is clearly a figure who celebrates her wealth and power. She flaunts her riches before the world in an extravagant and profligate lifestyle which only serves to arouse the admiration and envy of the powerful. From the colors of her clothing to the richness of her elaborate jewelry everything in the appearance of this figure sends the message of self-indulgence and success. “**Purple**” cloth was associated with royalty in the ancient world and remains so today. Purple material was extremely expensive, its dye marketed exclusively by the city of Tyre produced from two species of shellfish which lived along the Phoenician coast. “**Scarlet**” cloth was also synonymous with luxury and wealth, its deep red color derived from the juice of the rare Kermas berry (thus



“Salome Dancing Before the King in the Garb of a Temple Prostitute” by George Rochegrosse

the Greek term - “*kokkinon*” - “*scarlet*”). The Greek text emphasizes the tasteless excessiveness of the harlot’s jewelry by the double repetition of the word gold in the original text - literally - “*and was made gold with gold*” (Greek - “*kechrysomene chrysio*”). Add to all this the extravagance of an abundance of precious stones and the picture of a prostitute plying her trade is complete. Jeremiah’s tragic image of Israel as the *devastated one*? ***Why dress yourself in scarlet and put on jewels of gold? Why shade your eyes with paint? You adorn yourself in vain, your lovers despise you; they seek your life.***” (Jeremiah 4:30) In stark contrast, the pure bride of the Lamb is simply dressed in “*fine linen, bright and clean.*” (Revelation 19:8)



“Ecce Homo” - Pilate Presents Christ Before the Mob With the Crown of Thorns and the Purple Robe by Ciseri

“She held a golden cup in her hand filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries.” - The seductive nature of this temptress is effectively represented by the golden goblet she holds in her hand. As previously noted, the image is drawn from Jeremiah 51:7 - ***“Babylon was a gold cup in the Lord’s hand: she made the whole world drunk. The nations drank her wine, therefore they have now gone mad.”*** Like everything else about the harlot, the golden goblet is a lie. Its outward

appearance seems to enhance her royal regalia, the image of her wealth and power. But within the golden cup there is only corruption, contamination and filth.

“A “golden cup” invites and entices to drink, for who would offer anything but the most precious drink in a golden cup? Indeed, in such a cup the antichristian seduction is served, and the earth’s dwellers drink to drunkenness. There is the gold of exquisite poetry and prose in the whore’s literature; the chased gold of her seductive science; the exquisite cup of her philosophy; the brilliance of her music and entertainment. Extend the list yourself. Yet within “abominations,” “the unclean things of the great whore’s whoring.” (Lenski, p. 495)

The golden goblet contains a hellish brew of idolatry and blasphemy. The language of the text is most emphatic. **“Abominable things”** are those things which are detestable, absolutely intolerable to the holiness and righteousness of God. The term is characteristically used in the Old Testament in reference to the worship of demons and idols (i.e. Deuteronomy 18:9; 29:17; 32:16; 1 Kings 14:24; 2 Kings 16:3; 21:2; 23:24; Ezekiel 8:6,9,13,16,17; 11:18; 14:6; 16:2; 20:7,8). **“The unclean things of her fornications”** reiterates the point. This is also language that applies to cultic prostitution and idolatry.

“This title was written on her forehead...” - The prostitutes of Rome identified themselves to their prospective clients by wearing their names on their foreheads. In the same way the Great Harlot of John’s vision reveals her true identity and nature by the inscription which she bears. The inscription begins with the word **“MYSTERY.”** This term refers to that which is secret or concealed, a truth which can only be known by revelation from God. Its use here indicates the need for divine



“The Woman Upon the Beast” by Modern Occultist Aleister Crowley -1944

assistance in deciphering the symbolism of the Harlot - Babylon the Great. It suggests once again the deceptiveness which is to be expected in all that pertains to the Anti-Christ and his realm. St. Paul uses the same word in 2 Thessalonians 2:7, where he warned that the Anti-Christ's "*mystery of iniquity*" was already secretly at work in the first generation of the church. The word recurs later in the chapter when John's angel guide applies the symbolism of the harlot - "*I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides.*" (Revelation 17:7). Everything about this figure is false and misleading. The truth can only be known by



*"The Harlot Offers Her Poisoned Chalice"
15th Century Bible Illumination*

looking beneath or behind that which appears to be. The harlot's name is "**BABYLON THE GREAT.**" There are six (the number of the Anti-Christ) references to Babylon in Revelation (Revelation 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2,10,21). The symbolic significance of the ancient city of Babylon, which destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, as the epitome of the worldly powers which oppose and persecute the people of God has been previously discussed (cf. pp. 324, 375). The representative nature of the title "**BABYLON THE GREAT**" is further indicated by its linkage to the term "**MYSTERY**" in this passage. Babylon the Great is not one city; it is every city. The harlot is further identified as "**THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.**" The language reflects the disgusting contents of the harlot's golden goblet. To be

"**THE MOTHER OF**" indicates the dual significance of both origin and superlativeness. As a mother is the source of her children, so Babylon the Great is the source of all the wickedness and corruption of this world (cf. Hosea 2:2-13; Jeremiah 50:12). "*Not content with her own evil vice, she spawns her harlotry and corrupt practices throughout the world.*" (Mounce, p. 310) She is "*the Supreme*

Antichristian Seductress of the World, all of whose daughters are whores.” (Lenski, p. 496) Robert L. Thomas aptly identifies her as “*the pro-genitress of everything anti-Christian.*” (Thomas, p. 290) At the same time, to be “**THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH**” is to be the most depraved and corrupt of all, the absolute epitome of these perversions. The Roman historian Tacitus described his own city in this sense when he reported that Rome had become a place “*where all the horrible and shameful things in the world congregate and find a home.*” (Tacitus, *The Annals*, xv, 44).

“*I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints...*” - John depicts the woman, Babylon the Great, in a drunken stupor. But it is not wine that has brought about her drunkenness. The harlot is also a murderess - “*drunk with the blood of the saints.*” Evil cannot tolerate the good. Those who will not yield and conform must be destroyed. Throughout history Babylon the Great will persecute, oppress, and murder the saints of God. The theme of becoming drunk on blood as a metaphor for slaughter and violent destruction is drawn from the Old Testament. “*Among the ancients, being drunk with blood spoke of a lust for violence, vastness of slaughter,*



“The Harlot Upon the Beast” - Luther Bible Woodcut

and their maddening effect on one who was inclined to initiate savagery.” (Smith, p. 290) Scavengers and birds of prey are summoned to the battlefield, by the prophet Ezekiel, to feast upon the slaughtered hosts of Gog with these gruesome words:

“Assemble and come together from all around to the sacrifice that I am preparing for you, the great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel. There you will eat flesh and drink blood. You will eat the flesh of mighty men and drink the blood of the princes of the earth as if they were rams and lambs, goats and bulls - all of them fattened animals from Bashan. At the sacrifice I am preparing for you, you will eat fat until you are gluttoned and drink blood until you are drunk.” (Ezekiel 39:17-19)

Isaiah foretells the violent self-destruction of the enemies of Israel - ***“I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh; they will be drunk on their own blood as with wine.”*** (Isaiah 49:26). Jeremiah promises the downfall of Egypt using the same



“A Faithful Martyr for Christ” by Waldemar Irninger

imagery - ***“But that day belongs to the Lord, the Lord Almighty - a day for vengeance on His foes. The sword will devour until it is satisfied, til it has quenched its thirst with blood.”*** (Jeremiah 46:10). In this instance, the victims of the carnage are identified as ***“the saints - those who bore testimony to Jesus.”*** The second phrase defines and explains the first. The designation of Babylon’s victims explains why they had to die. The harlot cannot tolerate God’s people because they are ***“saints”*** - literally ***“holy ones”*** (Greek ***“ton hagioi”***). They have refused to be corrupted by the harlot’s iniquity and are pure - cleansed in the blood of Christ. In the face of the lies and the falsehood of Babylon the Great they have offered the good confession as faithful witnesses (Greek - ***“martyron”***) to the truth of Jesus Christ. That is why the harlot lusts for their death and destruction. ***“Yea, bloodthirsty is this whore.”*** (Lenski, p. 497)

Verses 7-8

When I saw her, I was greatly astonished. Then the angel said to me: “Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has seven heads and ten horns. The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the Book of Life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come.”



“The Beast With the Appearance of a Lamb Preaching” by Matthias Gerung

“When I saw her, I was greatly astonished.” - St. John’s response to this incredible sight is readily understandable. The Greek text is most emphatic. The term ***“thauma”*** (***“a marvel”***) occurs twice in the phrase with the addition of the adjective

“great” (Greek - “mega”) - literally - *“I marveled a great marvel.”* The word also carries the connotation of perplexity or confusion. The English phrase - *“I was overcome with complete astonishment and confusion”* might convey the same intensity. The specific cause of John’s astonishment/confusion is not cited, which may prompt the angel’s question: ***“Why are you astonished?”*** The interchange becomes the opportunity for the angel to expound the mystery of the harlot astride the scarlet beast - ***“I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and beast she rides which has seven heads and ten horns.”*** That which was hidden in the symbolism of the vision will now be set forth as the angel explains the scene.



“The Kings of the Earth Worship the Harlot” - Luther Bible Woodcut

“The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction.” - The majority of the angel’s exposition pertains not to the harlot herself but to the beast which she rides. The two are inextricably bound to one another, contrasting dimensions of the same reality - the Antichrist and all the anti-Christian forces of this world. The angel’s description of the beast ridicules his pretensions of divinity. The threefold formula for the eternity of God appears frequently in Revelation - ***“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”*** (Revelation 1:8; cf. also 4:8;



"The Whore of Babylon Astride the Beast Upon the Many Waters" by Georg Rochegrosse

11:16). Variations of the same formula assert the divinity of Christ - ***“These are the words of Him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again.”*** (Revelation 2:8; cf. also 1:18). The angel applies the same formula to the beast to mock his arrogant blasphemy and reveal him as nothing more than a pathetic parody of the only true God. In the original beast visions (Revelation 13), the beast’s ability to recover from a fatal wound to one of his seven heads arouses the admiration and



“The Descendant of the Woman Will Crush the Serpent’s Head” by Rudolf Schäfer

awe of humanity (Revelation 13:3,12-14). The angel now alludes to the beast’s pseudo-resurrection as he adjusts the language of the formula to convey his mockery - ***“once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction.”*** As previously noted (cf. pp. 272-273) the decisive moment in the age old battle between God and Satan, Christ and Anti-Christ, was the sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection of Jesus. At that time the ancient prophecy that the Descendant of the Woman would crush the serpent’s head (Genesis 3:15) was fulfilled and the devil’s power was broken. It is around that critical moment that the tenses of these three verbs (past - present - future) turn. The rebellion of Satan and the onslaught of his minions has vexed mankind since the beginning (***“once was”***). The devil’s power to condemn and destroy was shattered at Calvary (***“now is not”***). Nonetheless, he rose

up from the depths of Hell once more and his foredoomed attempts to frustrate God’s plan of salvation continue with the appearance of great power and success (***“and will come up out of the Abyss”***). However, unlike the Christ whom he seeks to replace (cf. Revelation 1:18), Satan and his Anti-Christ do not rise up in triumph to live and reign throughout eternity. Instead their destiny is certain destruction and damnation

(***“and go to his destruction”***). G.K Beale summarizes the intent of the parody in this way:

*“The application of the formula for divine eternity to the beast is intended to ridicule the beast’s vain efforts to defeat the true eternal being and his forces. The application also suggests that the beast’s existence extends from the beginning of history to its end, but the close of the formula shows a clear contrast with God’s existence; the beast’s apparently sovereign existence throughout history will cease...The beast’s imitation of Christ will be shown as a sham in the end. Whereas Christ’s resurrection results in His being **“alive forever”** (1:18), the beast’s resurrection results in his destruction.”* (Beale, pp. 864,865)

“The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life...” - The world loves a winner and that is exactly what the beast appears to be. His seeming ability to overcome God and His Christ, and to recover from the fatal wound inflicted upon him will astonish and impress all those who lack the spiritual discernment to see things as they truly are. Power, wealth, size and success will always be on the side of the devil until the Lord comes again in judgment. Until then, the true church will always be a small remnant, scorned and persecuted by the world while the false church of the Antichrist glories in its magnitude and majesty.



“The Lamb’s Book of Life” by Rudolf Schäfer

“This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. The beast who once was, and now is not is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction.” - The ***“wisdom”*** (Greek - *“sophia”*) called for here is the

spiritual discernment to see through the deceptions of the harlot and beast and recognize true reality. The angel's explanation of the vision now grows more complex and the spiritual wisdom of the believer whose name has *"been written in the book of life from the creation of the world"* is called for to follow and understand the meaning of the text.



"1st Century Roman Coin of the Emperor Vespasian Depicting the Goddess Roma Seated upon the Seven Hills"

"The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits." - In his great epic the *"Aeneid,"* the Roman poet Virgil describes Rome as a *"city of seven hills."* (Virgil, 6, 782-83). Thus Rome came to be known throughout antiquity as the city built upon seven hills. A Roman coin, minted in A.D. 71, during the reign of Vespasian, actually depicts the goddess Roma seated upon seven hills alongside the legendary she-wolf who was said to have raised Romulus and Remus, the founders of the city. The angel's identification of the seven heads of the beast as *"seven hills upon which the woman sits"* is thus clearly an allusion to the city of Rome. The harlot astride the beast is linked in a unique sense to the imperial city of Rome.

However, there is more to the symbolism of the seven hills than a mere allusion to Rome. The angel continues - *"They are also seven kings."* The use of hills or mountains as a figurative symbol for kings or kingdoms is common in the Old



“The Imperial Roman Forum”

Testament. (On the interchangeability of kings and kingdoms in prophetic language cf. Daniel 7:17,23) Isaiah describes the prominence of the Messianic kingdom over all the nations of the earth with these inspire words: ***“In the last days the mountain of the Lord’s temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills and all the nations will stream to it.”*** (Isaiah 2:2). Jeremiah uses the same mountain imagery to predict the downfall of the Babylonian kingdom: ***“I am against you, O destroying mountain, you who destroy the whole earth,” declares the Lord. “I will stretch out My hand against you and roll you off the cliffs, and make you a burned out mountain.”*** (Jeremiah 51:25; cf. also Ezekiel 35:3; Daniel 2:35,45; Zechariah 4:7). Accordingly, John’s linkage of the heads with both hills and kings would be a natural one for his original audience. The fact that there are ***“seven”*** heads/hills/kings signals that these are not literal historical kings or kingdoms but a symbolic picture of all of the oppressive governments of this world that lend their coercive power to the cause of the Antichrist and false religion. The number seven occurs some 45 times in Revelation outside of this section. In every instance its use is clearly figurative. Seven is the most powerful numerological symbol in the book. It is always the perfect number, signifying totality and



“John’s Vision of Harlot Babylon” - 15th Century Belgian Apocalypse

completion. Dr. Brighton rightly concludes: *“The number seven is symbolic and represents all earthly powers and rulers who claim spiritual authority by which they justify and sanction their despotic dominion over their subjects, in particular as it is used in opposition to the church of Christ.”* (Brighton, p.449)

“Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come he must remain for a little while.” - John proceeds to reintroduce the ironic threefold past/present/future formula which he had used earlier to mock the divine pretensions of the beast (cf. vs. 8, p. 392 f.). The endless variety of attempts to identify the ***“five,”*** the ***“one”*** and the ***“other”*** with specific kings or kingdoms is futile and basically misunderstands the symbolic nature of the language. The past/present/future formula serves to emphasize the continuous rise and fall of the rulers and kingdoms of this earth. This will remain the case throughout time and history (past/ present/future) as the devil uses and casts aside his instruments of destruction. Emperors and tyrants come and go; great empires arise and conquer only to fall and disappear into the dust of history; but the nefarious work Satan and his Antichrist continue subverting the powers of this world to work their hellish will. Franzmann suggests that the five, one and one division of the seven kings is designed to emphasize the unique role of the great Antichrist. The five fallen kingdoms of the

past, plus the one ruler of the present still only total six, the devil's number, short of the perfect seven. The other who is still to come is the great Antichrist himself, who blasphemously presumes to present himself within the very heart of the church as the substitute for the perfect one, our Lord Christ. He will arise from the chaos of Rome's downfall to combine the powers of church and state in a manner unprecedented in history. *"The seventh is the very incarnation of the power of Antichrist, clothed in pseudo-Christian awe, and he is, apparently, a horrible contradiction of the law of the divine control of history."* (Franzmann, p. 118) John hastens to assure his readers that even this most dangerous adversary of the faith will not prevail. God remains in absolute control. Even the time of the seventh is limited - *"But when he does come he must remain for a little while."*

"The beast, who once was and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction." - Any remaining doubt about the symbolic nature of these numbers and images should be dispelled by the addition of the beast itself to the other seven rulers. The facile manner in which John shifts and adjusts the images precludes the possibility of a coherent literal interpretation. Each of the beast's seven heads is a king and now the entire beast becomes yet another king. The mocking threefold formula is cited once again - *"who once was and now is not...and is going to his destruction"* - as the beast is declared to be an eighth king. This is not yet another monarch in a sequence of rulers. The beast is the summary and epitome of the other seven - *"He belongs to the seven"* literally - *"He is of the seven."* Earthly rulers, new tyrannies and



"The Kings of the Earth Worship the Harlot Upon the Beast" - Luther Bible Woodcut

forms of government, false Christ's and anti-Christ's come and go, but behind and through them all the anti-trinity does its work. The beast's claim to fame in Revelation 13 was its miraculous recovery from a mortal wound, a parody of the resurrection of Christ (Revelation 13:3,14). In the numerology of the early Christian Church eight was the resurrection number. Christ died on the sixth day of the week. He rested in the grave on the Sabbath, the seventh day. He rose from the dead on Sunday, the eighth day. To label the beast as *"an eighth king"* ridicules his mimicry of the resurrection of Christ. Once again, the text clearly asserts the total defeat and destruction of the beast and his kingdom - *"He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction."*



"Daniel's Vision of the Four Kings" by E.M. Lilien

"The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because He is the Lord of lords and King of kings - and with Him will be His called, chosen, and faithful followers." -

Having interpreted the beast's heads the angel turns to the interpretation of the horns. Once again the image is drawn from Daniel 7:4-8 by way of Revelation 13. Ten is the ordinal number upon which our numerical system is based. It is the symbol for the power and

authority of government and the law. The horn itself represents power, as the horns which comprised the altars of the ancient Middle East. Accordingly a configuration of ten horns represents the coercive power of governmental authority. The angel

explains: ***“The ten horns you saw are ten kings.”*** This image of governmental power is directed toward the future for these are kings ***“who have not yet received a kingdom.”*** As throughout this vision, the language is figurative. The reference is not literally or exclusively to monarchy as a particular form of government but to all governmental authority no matter what form it may take. The emphasis on the ten horns constituting a distinct threat in the future seems to suggest that the anti-Christian use of perverted governmental power will intensify as the end times draw to their tumultuous conclusion and judgment approaches. The rise in the modern era of totalitarian states of both left (Communist) and right (Fascist) which have wreaked unprecedented havoc within the community of nations is consistent with this emphasis. The phrase ***“but who for one hour will receive authority along with the beast”*** emphasizes the sovereign control of God and the brevity of the sway of these evil governments and the satanic force which manipulates them. ***“For one hour”*** is a Biblical idiom for a very short period of time. The time constraint applies to both the kings and the beast itself. The text is careful to note that even within the brief time span allotted, whatever ***“authority”*** the beast and his proxies in government are able to exercise is not their own but has been given to them by the sovereign God - ***“will receive authority.”*** While the image of the ten horns stresses the multiplicity of the governmental powers that serve the cause of the Antichrist, they remain completely united in the allegiance and ultimate goal - ***“They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast.”*** The devil does not enlist allies -



“The Beast With Ten Horns”
Detail from an Woodcut by Albrecht Dürer



Lutheran Pastors Give the Nazi Salute After a Service in Berlin - 1934

he makes slaves. To be sure, most of the enslaved do not recognize their status, but they remain slaves nonetheless. The sole purpose of the anti-Trinity is the destruction of the Church and the damnation of humanity. To that end the powers ***“make war against the Lamb.”*** The military metaphor is drawn from Daniel 7:21 where the anti-Christian ***“little horn”*** ***“was waging war against the saints and defeating them.”*** John significantly alters the language in that it is now the Lamb, not the Antichrist who overcomes.

“But the Lamb will overcome them because He is the Lord of lords and the King of kings.” - Earthly kings, rulers and lords may conspire, rage and defy but in the end their warfare is doomed to defeat for there is One whose power and authority far surpasses theirs. In striking contrast the Lamb, the image of meekness and vulnerability is hailed as the ***“Lord of lords and King of kings.”*** These titles apply directly to the context of the ten kings. They are also used in Revelation 19:11-16 to identify the victorious Son of Man who will come again in power and glory as the Judge of humanity (cf. also Deuteronomy 10:17; Daniel 2:47; 4:17; 1 Timothy 6:15).

This conflict has raged across the ages and will not cease until the judgment trumpet sounds. In a sense, this phrase provides the conclusive answer to the crucial question posed in Revelation 13:4 - ***“Who is able to make war with the beast?”*** Only ***“the Lamb”*** is capable of successfully waging war against the beast and decisively defeating it. But by grace the Lamb’s victory is not His alone. He graciously chooses to share that victory with all who are His own - ***“and with Him will be His called, chosen and faithful followers.”*** The language strongly emphasizes the monergistic nature of salvation. God’s people are the elect, those who He has called and chosen.

“Then the angel said to me, “The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire.

For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish His purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God’s words are fulfilled. The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.” -

When the harlot was first introduced the angel had described her as ***“the great prostitute who sits on many waters.”*** (Revelation 17:1) Now the angel returns to that grim title and explains the symbolic significance of the ***“many waters.”*** The waters represent ***“peoples, multitudes, nations and languages.”*** The use of the earth number, four, signifies the universal dominion of the harlot over unregenerate mankind, in a manner typical of the Revelation (cf. Revelation 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6). However, the universal domination will not preserve her from the judgment of God.



“The Beast With Ten Horns”
Detail from an Engraving by Jean Duvet



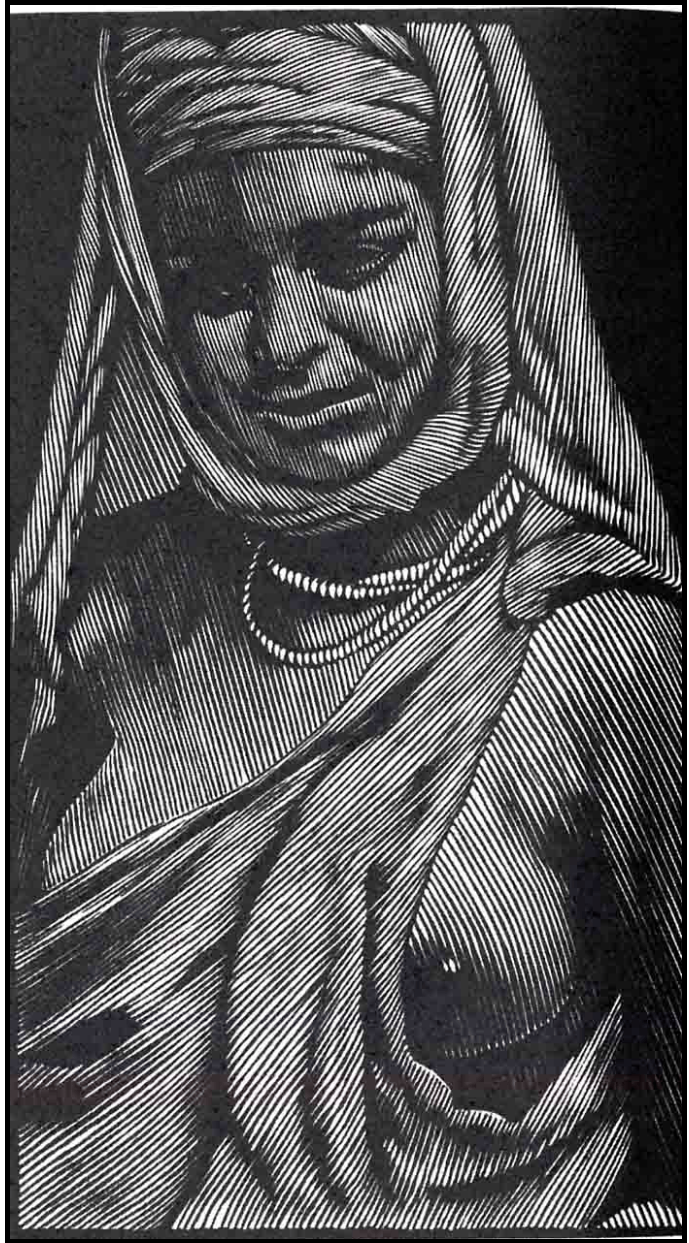
*“The Downfall of the Whore of Babylon”
14th Century Apocalypse*

“The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute.” - The angel’s initial invitation promised ***“I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute who sits on many waters.”*** (Revelation 17:1). The angel brings John back to that theme and offers a preliminary account of the judgement of the whore which serves as an introduction to the more lengthy account which will follow in chapter 18. Evil is inherently destructive and those who are slaves to evil are ultimately self-destructive. Despite the harlot’s compelling allure and her semblance of overwhelming power the downfall of her anti-Christian spiritual reign is certain and will, in fact, come about at the hands of those who were her most devoted allies. The passionate attraction and admiration which had characterized the attitude of the political, economic, and military powers represented by the beast, the seven heads, and the ten horns will be

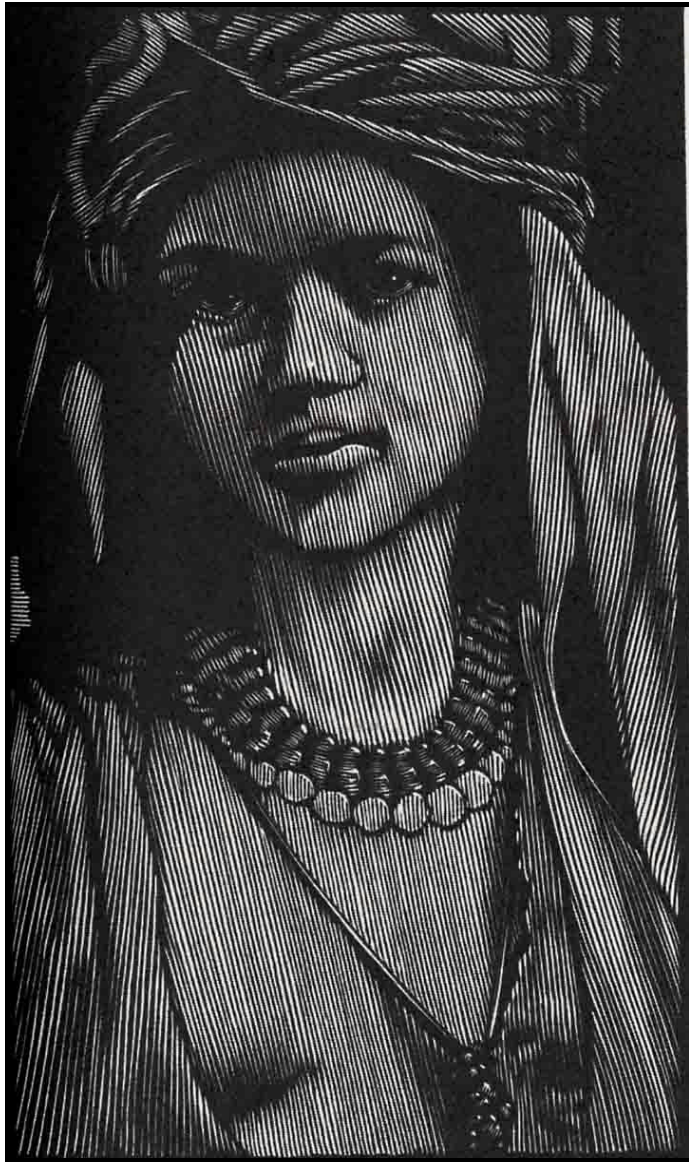
replaced by bitter hatred and loathing. The same is often true in life. Once those who have yielded to temptation achieve the object of their desire, that which had appeared to be irresistible and beautiful now becomes repulsive and disgusting. In its aftermath, sin's promises of delight are always revealed to be empty and false. The specific catalyst which brings about this change is not cited. Given the end times, final judgment, character of these events, it may be that as the Lord returns in glory the powers and dominions of this world will realize that they have been deceived and misled by the harlot. They will be roused from their drunkenness to sober reality. But at that moment it will be too late. Judgment has come. Nonetheless, they will strike out in bitter rage to destroy the source of their destruction.

“They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked...” The brutal imagery of the harlot's downfall is drawn from Ezekiel 23 where the prophet foretells God's judgment upon the apostate kingdoms of Israel and Judah, depicting them as ***“Aholah”*** and ***“Aholibah,”*** a pair of adulterous sisters who have indulged in prostitution:

“They became prostitutes in Egypt, engaging in prostitution from their youth. In that land their breasts were fondled and their virgin bosoms



***Ezekiel's Image of Judah as the Harlot “Aholah”
by Barry Moser***



*Ezekiel's Image of Israel as the Harlot "Aholibah"
by Barry Moser*

caressed...I will stir up your lovers against you, those you turned away from in disgust, and I will bring them against you from every side...I will direct My jealous anger against you and they will deal with you in fury. They will cut off your noses and your ears and those of you who are left will fall by the sword. They will take away your sons and daughters and those of you who are left will be consumed by fire...They will also strip you of your clothes and strip you of your fine jewels. They will deal with you in hatred and take away everything you have worked for. They will leave you naked and bare, the shame of your prostitution will be exposed. Your lewdness and promiscuity have brought this upon you because you lusted after the nations and defiled yourself with their idols...You will drink your sister's cup, a cup large and deep, it will bring scorn and derision for it holds so much. You will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, the cup of ruin and desolation, the cup of your sister

Samaria. You will drink it and drain it dry; you will dash it to pieces and tear your breasts...For they have committed adultery and blood is on their hands. They committed adultery with their idols; they even sacrificed their children whom they bore to Me, as food for them...Then I said about the one worn out by adultery: "Now let them use her as a prostitute, for that is all she is." (Ezekiel 23)

The similarity between the two texts is remarkable. In both instances God uses His enemies to punish His fallen church, whose unfaithfulness and idolatry is depicted as

adultery and prostitution. The imagery of drinking a deadly cup to its bitter dregs is common to both passages. Like Israel and Judah, Harlot Babylon is stripped and humiliated before her hateful foes. The Great Prostitute is devoured and burned with fire just as Ezekiel's adulterous sisters see their own children fed to their idols and devoured by the flames.



"Mary Magdalene - The Penitent Adulteress" by Marius Vasselon - 1887

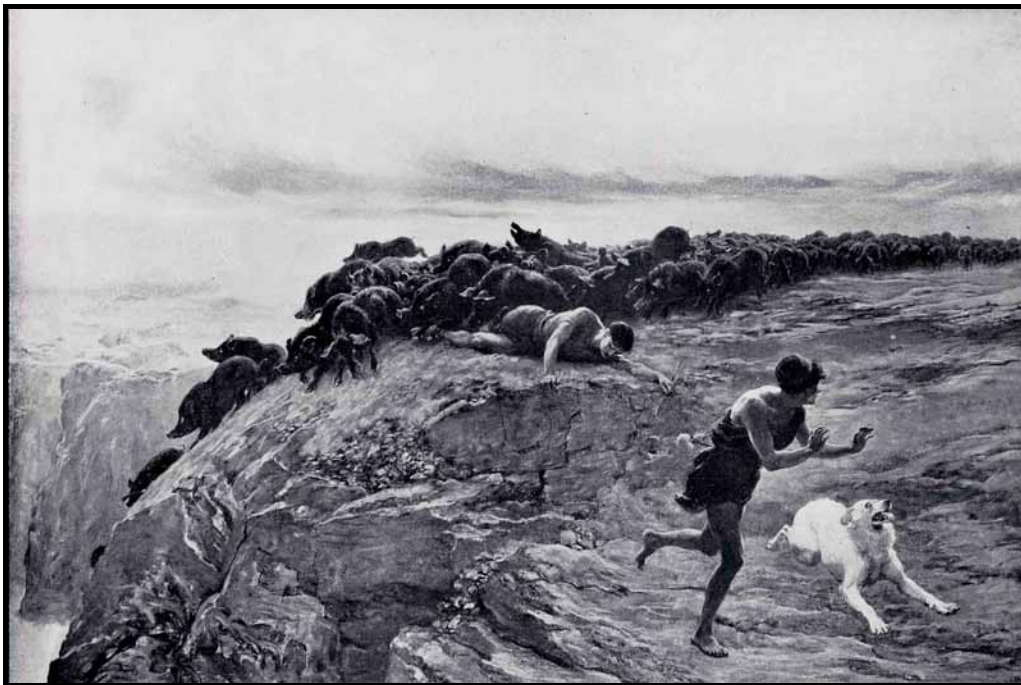
Three grim metaphors combine to describe the total destruction of Harlot Babylon. *"With a hatred as satanically irrational as their former devotion had been, they turn upon the harlot who once charmed them and made them drunk, to ravage and destroy her."* (Franzmann, p. 119) She is stripped and ravished like a common whore - *"They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked."* She is torn apart and devoured as by wild beasts of prey - *"they will eat her flesh."* Finally she is consumed by the flames like a vanquished city set to the torch - *"and burn her with fire."* Each metaphor of destruction serves to highlight a major aspect of the vision: the Great Prostitute receives the shameful execution of a harlot: the ferocious scarlet beast dismembers and devours his prey: and, Babylon the Great, the magnificent city, is reduced to dust and ashes by the fires of conquest.

Dissension in the ranks of the damned is a recurrent pattern throughout history, expressive of the inherent self-destructiveness of evil. Jealousy, envy, and the lust for power or pleasure have caused the slaves of the Lord of Darkness to turn upon one

another in vicious rage again and again. Like the Gadarene demons who destroyed the herd of swine into which they had begged to be cast out, the rage of Satan and his servants is always self-destructive (cf. Matthew 8:32). When the end comes this pattern will intensify and come to a final culmination as the enraged beast strikes down the Great Harlot. It will be just as Jesus predicted: ***“If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come.”*** (Mark 3:24-26)

“For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish His purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule...” - The sovereign Lord remains in absolute control. Even His enemies do His will and serve His purpose. *“They think they are fulfilling their own plans, but in reality they are blindly fulfilling the divine counsel.”* (Smith, p. 305) Whatever power the anti-Trinity possesses comes from God and can only be used in a manner consistent with His plan. The Word of God will stand unshakably firm and sure through all generations. His promises unfailingly hold true. That which He has prophesied will most surely come to pass.

“The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.” - The theme of this awesome vision is repeated once more at its conclusion, identifying the woman and specifying the nature of the city which she personifies.



“The Self-Destruction of the Gadarene Swine” by Briton Riviere