



"The Destruction of Babylon the Great" by Lucas Cranach

The Downfall of Babylon - Revelation 18:1-24

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. With a mighty voice he shouted "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. For the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries." Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "Come out of her, My people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive

any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes. Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup. Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart she boasts, 'I sit as queen; I am not a widow; and I will never mourn.' Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her. When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry: "Woe! Woe, O great city, O Babylon, city of power! In one hour your doom has come." The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes any more - cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and bodies and souls of men. They will say, 'The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your riches and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered.' The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified at her torment. They will weep and mourn and cry out: "Woe! Woe, O great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls! In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!" Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, 'Was there ever a city like this great city?' They will throw dust on their heads and with weeping and mourning cry out: "Woe! Woe, O great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin! Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you." Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said, "With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again. The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again. No workman of any trade will ever be found in you again. The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of the bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again. Your merchants were the world's great men. By your magic spell all nations were led astray. In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth."



“The Downfall of Babylon the Great” - Luther Bible Woodcut

“After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by His splendor. With a mighty voice He shouted: “Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries.” - At the beginning of the previous chapter the angel had promised a vision of *“the punishment of the great prostitute who sits on many waters.”* (Revelation 17:1). The remainder of the chapter had dealt with a description of the woman, the seven headed beast upon which she was seated, and a brief account of her downfall in the context of the betrayal of the harlot by the beast. The scene now shifts back to the subject of the punishment of the prostitute in order to present a detailed account of God’s judgment upon harlot Babylon. The closing verse of chapter 17 (Revelation 17:18), which re-emphasized the identification of the woman

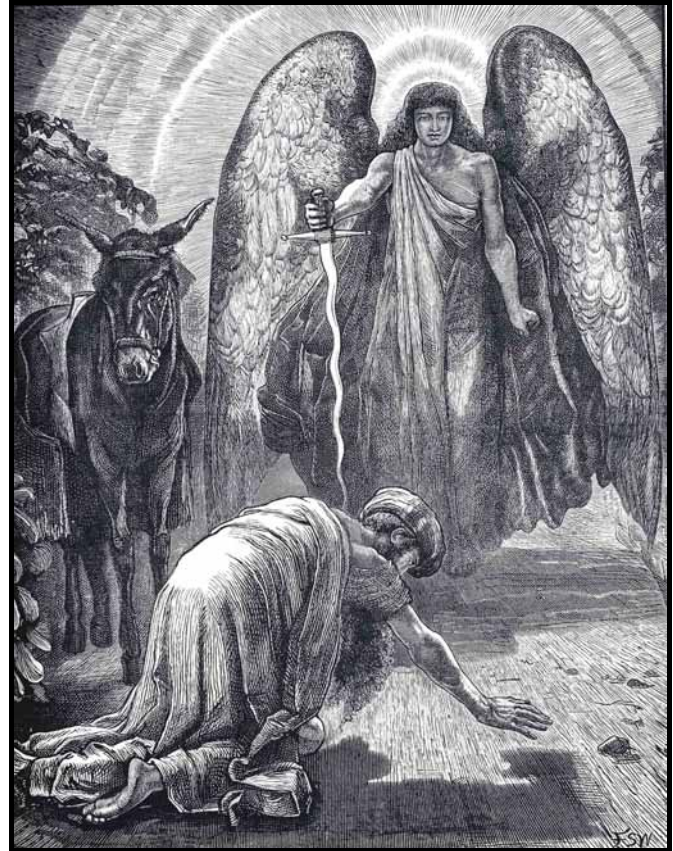
and the great city provided the transition to the vision of Babylon's downfall which now follows. The opening phrase, ***"after this"*** (Greek - *"meta tauta"*) occurs nine times in Revelation to signal the shift from one scene within a vision to the next (cf. Revelation 1:19; 4:1; 4:1; 7:9; 9:12; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1; 20:3). It indicates the sequence of the scenes from the seer's perspective, not the chronological sequence of the events described in the visions. In this case, for instance, what now follows is, to a large extent, an expansion and explanation of events already presented in the preceding scene. The scene opens with the appearance of a magnificent angel ***"coming down from heaven."*** The text places particular emphasis upon the unique stature of this messenger from heaven - ***"He had great authority and the earth was illuminated by his splendor."*** The only other comparable angel in the visions of



"Guardian Angel" by Franz von Stuck

Revelation is the ***"mighty angel"*** of Revelation 10. The angel in that instance is depicted with the accouterments of deity - ***"He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars."*** (Revelation 10:1). We concluded that the angel in Revelation 10 was, like ***"the angel of the Lord"*** in the Old Testament, the Lord Jesus Himself. A similar conclusion seems to be warranted here. This is no ordinary angel but the Son of God. The Lord comes to pronounce God's judgment upon the sinful city, Babylon the Great. He brings with Him the splendor of the presence of God. Throughout the book of Revelation, whenever ***"glory"*** (Greek - *"doxas"*) is ascribed to a heavenly figure it refers to God or to Christ (cf. Revelation 1:6; 4:9,11; 5:12-13; 7:12; 11:13; 14:7; 15:8; 16:9; 19:1;

21:11). This is the same language used to describe the glorious presence of God and the Lamb in the heavenly Jerusalem - *“The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.”* (Revelation 21:23; cf. also 22:5) The precedent for referring to Jesus as an angel is well established in the Old Testament where the pre-incarnate Christ is consistently referred to as the Angel of the Lord. The Angel of the Lord is also closely associated with the cloud of God’s glory which traveled before Israel in the wilderness and stood between Israel and Egypt at the Red Sea (cf. Exodus 14:19-20). The language here in Revelation 18 is very similar to that of Ezekiel’s messianic vision of God’s *“shekinah”* glory returning to the temple:



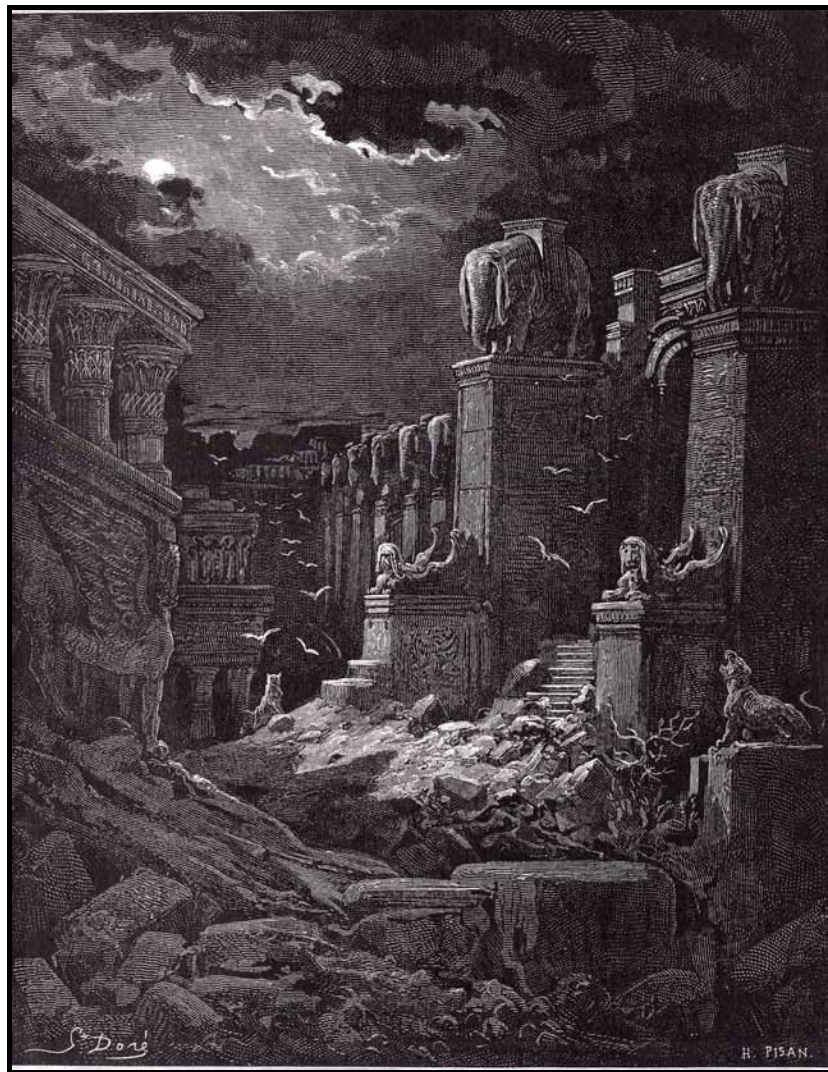
“The Angel of the Lord Before the False Prophet Balaam” by F.S. Waltges

“Then the man brought me to the gate facing east and I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east. His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with His glory. The vision I saw was like the vision I had seen when He came to destroy the city and like the visions I had seen by the Kebar River, and I fell face down. The glory of the Lord entered the temple through the gate facing east. Then the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple.” (Ezekiel 43:1-5)

Ezekiel reports that *“the land was radiant with His glory.”* In virtually the same words John indicates *“the earth was illuminated by His splendor.”* In both texts the appearance of God’s glory is accompanied by the sound of a loud voice - *“His voice was like the roar of rushing waters”* (Ezekiel) - *“With a mighty voice He shouted”* (John). Ezekiel also tells us that this vision of God’s gracious glory was

“like the vision I had seen when He came to destroy the city” which is precisely the purpose for which he appears in the vision of St. John. John’s evident reliance upon this prophetic text strongly reinforces the view that this angel is in fact the Angel of the Lord, our Lord Jesus Himself.

“With a mighty voice he shouted, ‘Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!’” - The Lord’s *“mighty voice”* (Greek - *“ischyra phone”*) reverberates across the world. Other angels in Revelation have spoken with loud voices (cf. Revelation 5:2; 7:2; 10:3; 14:6-7). But the sound of this voice far surpasses them. This particular adjective - *“mighty”* - is characteristically applied to God alone in the context of



“Fallen, Fallen Is Babylon the Great” by Gustave Dore



"Harlot Babylon Upon the Beast" by William Blake - 1809

heaven throughout Biblical literature. It emphasizes not only the volume but the divine authority of the voice which makes this great announcement.

The structure of Revelation 18 closely parallels the taunting dirges sung by the Old Testament prophets over the enemies of Israel (i.e. Isaiah 14:3-23; 47:1-15; Jeremiah 50:1-51:64; Ezekiel 27:1-36; 30:1-19; 32:1-16). These anticipatory funeral songs announced the death and destruction of kings and nations that were still very much alive and at the height of their power. But they had already been judged by God. Therefore their downfall was as certain as if it had already occurred. The opening words of the Lord's announcement repeat Revelation 14:8. Both texts are drawn from Isaiah 21:8-9 - ***"And the lookout shouted...Look, here comes a man in a chariot with a team of horses. And he gives back the answer: Babylon has fallen, has fallen! All the images of its gods lie shattered on the ground."*** The verb ***"fallen"*** is in the Greek aorist tense which refers to action completed in the past. The fall of the harlot,

Babylon the Great, has not yet actually taken place. Nonetheless, the prophet speaks of it in the past tense to indicate the absolute certainty of the judgment of God. The verb in Revelation is repeated for dramatic effect as in Isaiah's original announcement. The literal city of Babylon fell to Persia in 539 B.C., never to rise again as a significant world power. Here Babylon the Great represents all the forces of evil in this world. She is the harlot (cf. Revelation 17:18), the realm of the Anti-christ and all of the anti-Christian forces that have opposed and persecuted the people of God throughout history. New Babylon's rise and fall in every era, only to be replaced by others "*no less magnificent and depraved*" (Swete , p. 226) than their predecessors. Her ultimate downfall and destruction will be the culmination of human history, the final vindication of God and His faithful people.



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

"She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit." - The devastation of harlot Babylon will be total. The facade of her luxury and power will be stripped away to reveal the hideous reality of demonic presence which has always lurked there as Babylon's guiding and empowering force. John's language recalls that of Isaiah and Jeremiah:

“Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms, the glory of the Babylonians pride, will be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah. She will never be inhabited or lived in through all generations; no Arab will pitch his tent there, no shepherd will rest his flocks there. But desert creatures will lie there, jackals will fill her houses; there the owls will dwell, and there the wild goats will leap about. Hyenas will howl in her strongholds, jackals in her luxurious palaces. Her time is at hand and her days will not be prolonged.” (Isaiah 13: 19-22)

“A sword against the Babylonians! Declares the Lord - against those who live in Babylon and against her officials and her wise men! A sword against her false prophets! They will become fools. A sword against her warriors! They will be filled with terror. A sword against her horses and chariots and all the foreigners in her ranks! They will become women. A sword against her treasures! They will be plundered. A drought on her waters! They will dry up. For it is a land of idols, idols that will go mad with terror. So desert creatures and hyenas will live there, and there the owl will dwell. It will never be inhabited or lived in from generation to generation. As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah along with their neighboring towns, declares the Lord, so no one will live there; no man will dwell in it.” (Jeremiah 50: 35-40)



“The Prophet Isaiah” by Michelangelo

The birds and animals to which the prophets refer are those which haunt places of darkness and death. They are eaters of carrion that feed upon the bodies of the dead. Rabbinic commentators consistently linked these creatures to demons and the powers of darkness. The Septuagint's Greek translation of Isaiah 13 uses the word “*daimonia*” (“*demons*”) in place of “*wild goats*” in Isaiah 13:21. The apocryphal book of Baruch notes the fall of Babylon with these words: “*For fire will come upon*

her from the Everlasting for many days, and for a long time she will be inhabited by demons.” (Baruch 4:35) John affirms the historic understanding of the teachers of Israel when he warns - ***“She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit.”*** Dr. Brighton comments on the intriguing manner in which metaphor and reality overlap in this description:

“So destructive and fearful will be her judgement that all that is left within her, together with the jackals, hyenas, and birds of prey, are the ghost-like memories of those who once inhabited this house of wealth and sensual pleasure. Terrifying memories of the fallen, decaying corpses now haunt and eerily moan over the corpse of the fallen harlot herself. However, demons and unclean spirits could here be more than merely the memories that haunt the empty shell of Babylon. They could be the actual demons of hell itself which - have been all along the companions of the harlot as they inspired her to carry out her anti-Christian activities. Now, at her demise, having used her for their own devilish purposes, all that is left of the once proud city are the demons hovering over her corpse.” (Brighton, p. 465)



***“The Demons of the Seven Deadly Sins”
Tinted Woodcut by Hans Baldung Grien***

“For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries.” - The Revelator sets forth the basis for God’s severe judgment upon harlot Babylon. Once again, using the imagery of Jeremiah and Isaiah, John reminds us of the harlot’s role in seducing the nations and their rulers into idolatry and sin. Beneath a deceiving facade of piety she has enticed the world into sin. *“Sanctioned by her perverted form of Christianity, they received from her license to indulge in and live by filthy lucre and sensual power and immorality.”* (Brighton, p. 466) Those who have benefitted most directly from ***“the maddening wine of her adulteries,”*** namely the rulers of the earth whose abuse of power was sanctioned by her

pseudo-religion and its merchants who grew fat and rich “*from her excessive luxuries*”, are specifically cited in the indictment. They will lead the chorus of lament through the balance of the chapter.



*“The Downfall of Babylon the Great”
Luther Bible Woodcut by Hans Burgkmair*

“Then I heard another voice from heaven say: “Come out of her, My people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes. Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup. Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart she boasts, “I sit as queen, I am not a widow, and I will never mourn.” Therefore, in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning, and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.”

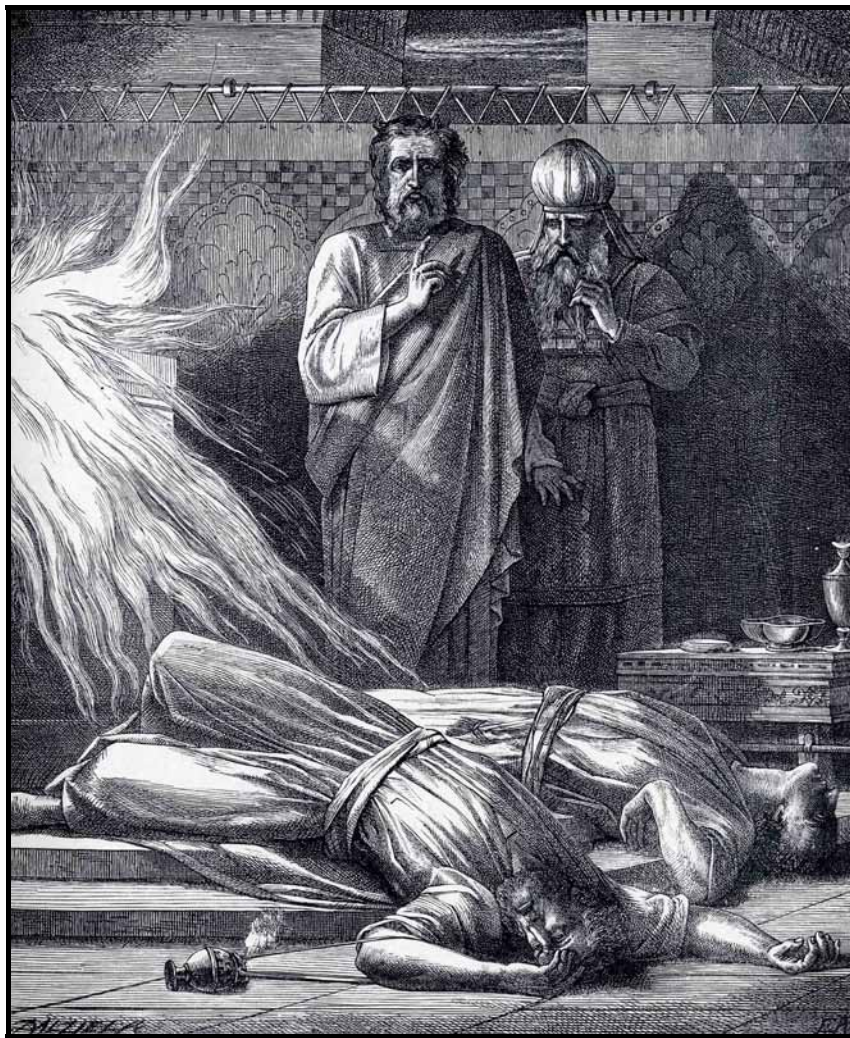


“Lot and His Daughters Escape from Sodom” by John Martin

“Then I heard another voice from heaven say: “Come out of her, My people...” - The voice from heaven is unidentified. The speaker refers to the people of God in the first person ***“My people”*** (which is never done by an angel in Revelation) while at the same time it speaks of God as distinct from the voice itself (i.e. ***“And God has remembered her crimes”***). It seems most likely that the voices remains that of Jesus Christ in which case the opening phrase might be translated - *“The I heard the voice from heaven again, saying...”*.

The appeal for God’s people to separate themselves from the realm of the Anti-Christ is couched in the language of the Old Testament prophets. ***“Leave Babylon, flee from the Babylonians! Announce this with shouts of joy and proclaim it.”*** (Isaiah 48:20) ***“Flee out of Babylon; leave the land of the Babylonians, and be like the goats that lead the flock.”*** (Jeremiah 50:8) ***“Flee from Babylon! Run for your lives! Do not be destroyed because of her sins. It is time for the Lord’s vengeance; He will pay her what she deserves...Come out of her, My people! Run for your lives! Run from the fierce anger of the Lord.”*** (Jeremiah 51:6,45)

Our Lord's appeal is not a call for physical separation from a literal city. It is a call to shun the temptations and enticements of man made religion. At the heart of all the religions man devises for himself is self-righteousness and self-reliance. The Lutheran Confessions call the innate tendency of man's sinful nature to depend upon one's own efforts and good works the "*opinio legis*" (opinion of the law). The Confessions warn that this universal human inclination seeks to compromise and undermine the teaching of God's grace in Christ at every opportunity (Apol. IV, 146). Since the beginning, the fundamental temptation has been to spurn the gracious love of God in favor of human effort so that we might ourselves be like gods. This is the essence of the anti-Christian religion embodied by Babylon the Great. Beneath the deceiving facade of Christian piety, it glories in human wisdom and wealth, luxury and power.



The Deaths of Korah and the Levites" by E. Armytage

The concept of separation from evil, unbelief and false doctrine in order to avoid contamination and punishment is a consistent theme in Scripture. In the days of Korah's rebellion, Moses had warned the children of Israel to separate themselves from the tents of the wicked men so that they would not be punished along with them before Korah and his followers were slain by fire from the altar (cf. Number 16:25-27). Jesus urged His followers ***“to flee and not look back or go back to rescue anything”*** when they saw the Abomination of Desolation rise over Jerusalem (Mark



“The Desecration of the Great Altar of Sacrifice and Destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Roman Legions in A.D. 70” - 19th Century Engraving

13:14-16). The Lord's language clearly alluded to the deliverance of Lot and his family from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the *“lingering fondness of Lot's wife for Sodom”* which led to her transformation into a pillar of salt (Genesis 19:1-29). In the same way, St. Paul quoted Isaiah 52:11 in support of his appeal to the Corinthians not to associate with the idolatry and immorality of unbelievers:

“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship



“Lot and His Family Reluctantly Leaving Sodom” by Ruebens

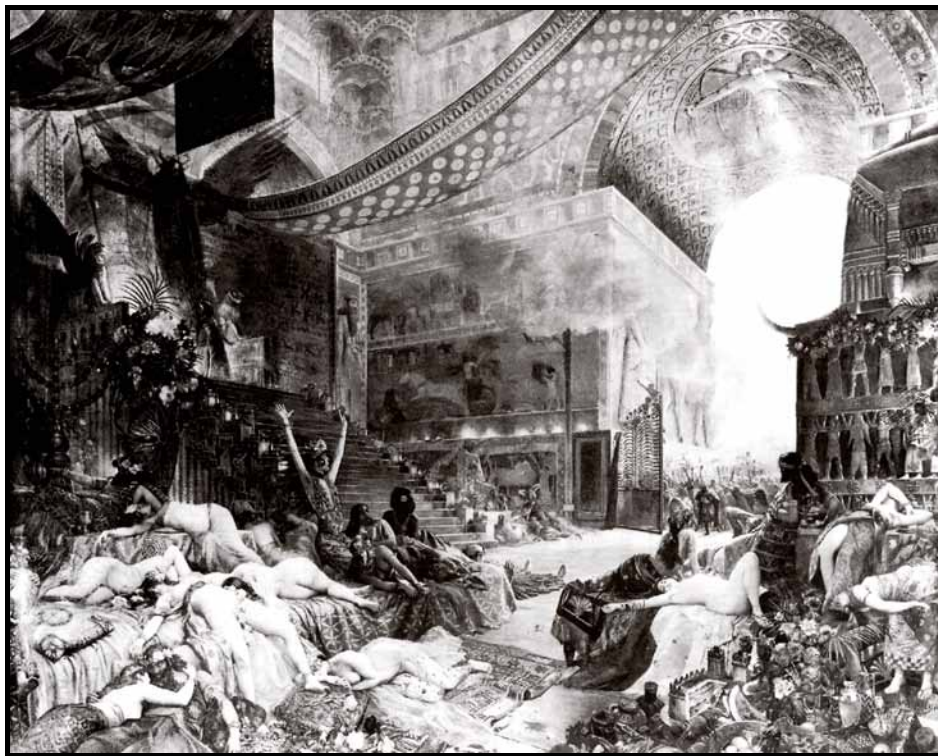
can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols...”Therefore, come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing and I will receive you.” (2 Corinthians 6:14-17)

There is a deep sense of urgency in these texts which contradicts the lackadaisical attitude which prevails in much of the modern church toward false doctrine and moral impurity. The easy going tolerance which allows truth and error, right and wrong, to comfortably co-exist with one another is misguided and dangerous. Sin is never benign. It is always malignant. It corrupts and destroys. Sin is inherently contagious, reaching out to contaminate and spread. Living as God’s faithful people, *“in the world but not of the world”* (John 17:11,16), temptation to sin cannot be avoided. But to deliberately place one’s self in the path of temptation is spiritual folly. Luther notes: *“You cannot prevent the birds from flying in the air over your head, but you can certainly prevent them from building a nest in your hair.”* (AE,42,p.73). In his classic *“The City of God,”* St. Augustine demonstrates the same sense of urgency as he pleads with Christians not to underestimate the peril to their

salvation posed by the demonic forces of darkness which are at work in Babylon the Great. This is not a threat to be taken lightly. Augustine defines flight from Babylon spiritually as growth in the faith, ever greater watchfulness against the wiles of the enemy and dependence upon God's grace in Christ:

"For this prophetic precept is to be understood spiritually in this sense, that by going forward in the living God, by the steps of faith, which worketh by love, we must flee out of the city of this world, which is altogether a society of ungodly angels and men. Yea, the greater we see the power of the demons to be in these depths, so much the more tenaciously must we cleave to the Mediator through Whom we ascend from these lowest to the highest places." (NPNF, 2, p. 369)

Accordingly our Lords pleads: ***"Come out of her, My people, so that you will not share in her sins."*** The Greek verb *"synkoinonesete"* literally means *"to participate in something together."* The word clearly suggests the contagious nature of sin and the risk that Christians will be drawn into the sinful conduct that surrounds them. Paul uses the same verb in Ephesians 5:11 as he admonishes Christians to recognize the unique identity of those who are in Christ and to live in a manner distinctly different from the unbelieving world: ***"Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds***



"The Fall of Babylon" by George Rochegrosse



“The Tower of Babel” by Pieter Bruegel

of darkness.” “The persecuted church has always faced the temptation to compromise with worldliness and thus ease the tension of living in a hostile environment. Separation is the order of the day: sometimes physical, always ideological.” (Mounce, p. 324) Those who fail “to come out of her,” who are entrapped in the devil’s deadly web of temptation and sin, will be forced to endure the “plagues” of God’s judgment that are visited upon the anti-church and all of her worldly supporters.

“For her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes.” - John’s language recalls historical Babylon’s first appearance as a focal point of anti-Christian religion and opposition to God. Shortly after the flood, mankind gathered on the “plain in Shinar” and conspired to build a mighty tower that “reaches the heavens.” To frustrate man’s presumption and pride the Lord confused the language of humanity and the race was scattered across the face of the earth. The name of that place and the tower that was begun there was called “Babel” to commemorate the



“The Destruction of Harlot Babylon and the Escape of God’s People From Her Downfall” Luther Bible Woodcut by Heinrich Vogtherr

confusion of the languages. (Cf. Genesis 11:1-9) Thus did the city of Babylon come into being. The erection of great towers, called “*ziggurats*,” as places of worship continued to be characteristic of Babylonian religion throughout its history. The Greek verb John uses in this passage “*ekollethesan*” is an unusual word, based on a root which means to glue or mortar together. This allusion is, most probably, to the bricks of Babel’s tower and Babylon’s most ancient pedigree as a center of anti-Christian religion. The image is used to depict the countless sins of Babylon the Great as joining together like bricks in a building so massive that it reaches “*up to heaven*.” The wording may be drawn from Jeremiah 51:9 - “*We would have healed Babylon, but she cannot be healed; let us leave her and each go to his own land, for her judgment reaches to the skies, it rises as high as the clouds.*” (Cf. Genesis 18:20-21)

“*And God has remembered her crimes.*” - God the Righteous Judge is “*the living Rememberer of Iniquities*” (Franzmann, p. 120). His divine justice and holiness cannot allow sin to remain unpunished. To speak of God as remembering sins, is, of course, anthropomorphic language which speaks of God as if He were a man. God

is incapable of forgetfulness and thus to speak of God remembering does not refer to calling something to mind that has been forgotten. In the Old Testament to call upon God's remembrance of sin was to call for the execution of divine judgment. ***"They have sunk deep into corruption, as in the days of Gibeah. God will remember their wickedness and punish them for their sins."*** (Hosea 9:9; cf. also Psalm 109:14)

"Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup. Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart she boasts, 'I sit as queen; I am not a widow, and I will never mourn.' Therefore, in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her." - Having summoned the righteous out of Harlot Babylon that there may be left not even ten righteous to shield her from God's wrath (as in God's promise to Abraham on the day of Sodom's destruction - Genesis 18:32), the Lord's voice from heaven demands that just punishment be rendered upon the sinful city. The judgment of God is never arbitrary or capricious. God's punishment always fits the crime. So shall it be in His judgment upon Babylon. The verb ***"give back"*** (Greek - *"apodidomi"*) specifically refers to requital - appropriate repayment in kind. The NEB effectively translates the word *"pay her back in her own coin."* This is the Old Testament's *"lex talionis,"* an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, which reverberates throughout



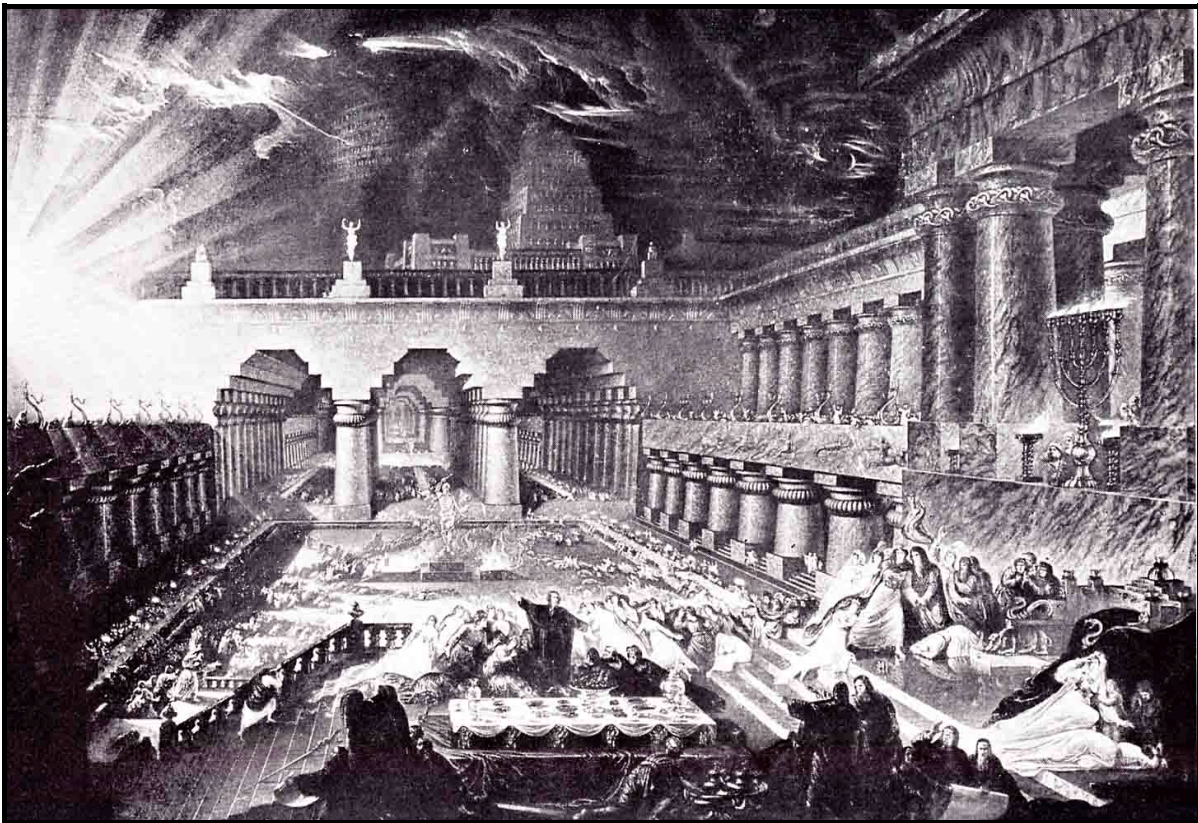
"The Whore of Babylon" by Matthias Gerung

the prophets' denunciations of ancient Babylon.

“O daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us - he who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks.” (Psalm 137:8-9)

“Since this is the vengeance of the Lord, take vengeance on her; do to her as she has done to others... Repay her for her deeds; do to her as she has done. For she has defied the Lord, the Holy One of Israel.” (Jeremiah 50:15, 29)

“Before your eyes I will repay Babylon and all who live in Babylonia for all the wrong they have done in Zion, declares the Lord....A destroyer will come against Babylon; her warriors will be captured, and their bows will be broken. For the Lord is a God of retribution; He will repay in full.” (Jeremiah 51:24,56)



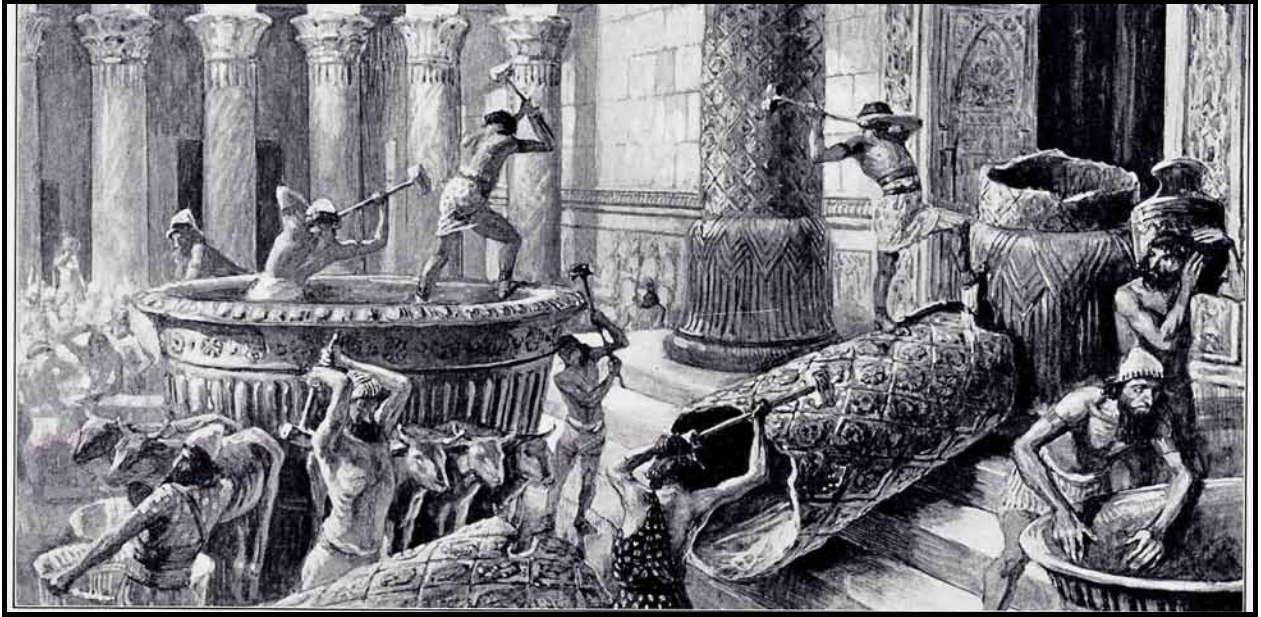
“Belshazzar’s Feast” by John Martin



“The Babylonian Destruction of Jerusalem” by J. James Tissot

The NIV’s translation - ***“pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup”*** - contradicts this concept of punishment which fits the crime - an appropriate repayment in kind. G.K Beale argues that the NIV, along with the majority of other English translations, misunderstood the nature of the Hebrew idiom reflected in the Greek phrase *“diplosate ta dipla”* - literally *“double the double things.”* It does not indicate two for one repayment as the translation suggests. Instead *“to double the double things.”* means *“to produce a duplicate, a matching equivalent.”* The phrase would then be translated - *“give her the exact equivalent of her works; duplicate the same mixture for her in the cup which she has mixed.”* This insight removes the apparent inconsistency in the text.

“Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself.” - The *“punishment fits the crime”* principle is more specifically applied to Babylon in Verse 7. The pseudo-church is condemned first of all for her arrogance and self-indulgence. The ***“torture and grief”*** which is visited upon her will be the exact equivalent (Greek - *“hosa”* - literally *“in as many things”*) of ***“the glory and luxury she gave herself.”*** She who had boasted that her power was limitless and her reign unending will be brought low. The omniscient Lord is fully aware of even the



"The Babylonians Plundering Solomon's Temple" by J. James Tissot

innermost feelings of her heart. The language of the text is drawn from Isaiah 47 where the prophet contemptuously dismisses Babylon's supreme self-confidence and her reliance upon the dark powers of magic and the supernatural:

"You said, 'I will continue forever - the eternal queen!' But you did not consider these things or reflect on what might happen. Now then, listen you wanton creature, lounging in your security and saying to yourself, 'I am, and there is none besides me. I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children.' Both of these will overtake you in a moment, on a single day: the loss of children and widowhood. They will come upon you in full measure in spite of all your sorceries and all your potent spells.'" (Isaiah 47:7-9)

Pride is the mother of all sin, the willingness of the creature to place himself in the position of the Creator. Thus Isaiah's repeated reference to the sacred name of God - ***"I AM"*** (Hebrew - *"Jahweh"*) in his condemnation of Babylon's vain boasting. Ezekiel diagnosed the same idolatrous attitude within the heart of the king of Tyre: ***"In the pride of your heart you say, 'I am a god; I sit on the throne of a god in the heart of the seas. But you are a man and not a god though you think you are as wise as a god.'" (Ezekiel 28:2).***

The first century apocryphal “*Sibylline Oracles*” adapts the same language in its dire prediction of the destruction and downfall of Rome, a contemporary manifestation of Babylon the Great :

“A great star will come from heaven to the wondrous sea and will burn the deep sea and Babylon itself and the land of Italy, because of which many holy faithful Hebrews and a true people perished. You will be among evil mortals suffering evils but you will remain utterly desolate for all ages yet, despising your soil because you desired sorcery. With you were found adulteries and illicit intercourse with boys. Effeminate and unjust, evil city, ill-fated above all. Alas, city of the Latin land, unclean in all things, drunken slut, rejoicing in vipers, as a widow you will sit by the banks, and the river Tiber will weep for you, its consort...But you said, I alone am and no one will ravage me.” But now God who is forever will destroy you.” (SO, 5, 160-175)

“Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine.”

- The judgement of God upon great Babylon will be sudden and complete. John’s reliance upon Isaiah 47 continues - ***“Both of these will overtake you in a moment, on a single day.”*** (Isaiah 47:9). The arrival of judgment will be completely unexpected and therefore all the more abrupt. The harlot’s boastful dreams of eternal existence (***“I am not a widow”***) will be replaced by ***“death.”*** Her confident expectation of permanent happiness (***“I will never mourn”***) will give way to the grim reality of ***“mourning”*** (Greek - *“penthos”* - *“sorrow”*). The opulence her ***“luxury”*** will melt away before the gaunt shadow of ***“famine.”*** The fires of hell will rise up to consume the harlot who has served the power of the devil, and reveled in the empty rewards which Satan bestows upon his own. The totality and the finality of this awful judgment is the expression of the almighty power of the only true God - ***“for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.”***

“When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared in her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry: “Woe! Woe, O great city, O Babylon, city of power! In one hour your doom has come!” - Those who have benefitted the most from the long reign of Harlot Babylon now join in lamenting her downfall. The link between ***“the kings of the earth”*** - that is, those who exercise the power and authority of government - and Harlot Babylon has already been well established (cf. Revelation 17:2,18). These are the men who have manipulated the world’s power system to their own personal advantage. They have grown rich and fat from the corruption and abuse of that system. Having ***“committed adultery with her and***

shared in her luxury,” they lead the opening chorus of her dirge. The paradox is striking! These are the very same people who had viciously turned on the harlot to destroy her in a futile attempt to save themselves (Revelation 17:16-18). Now they weep and wail at her passing. There is no rhyme or reason to the actions of those who have turned their backs on God and His Word. Only unreason and mindless passion prevail here. Consistency should not be expected from such people. Those who have foolishly chosen to bow down before such masters are by their very nature fickle, unstable, and constantly changing. Lenski draws a stark but sadly realistic parallel: *“The lover of a whore strangles her and then weeps beside her corpse like a fool.”* (Lenski, p. 522)



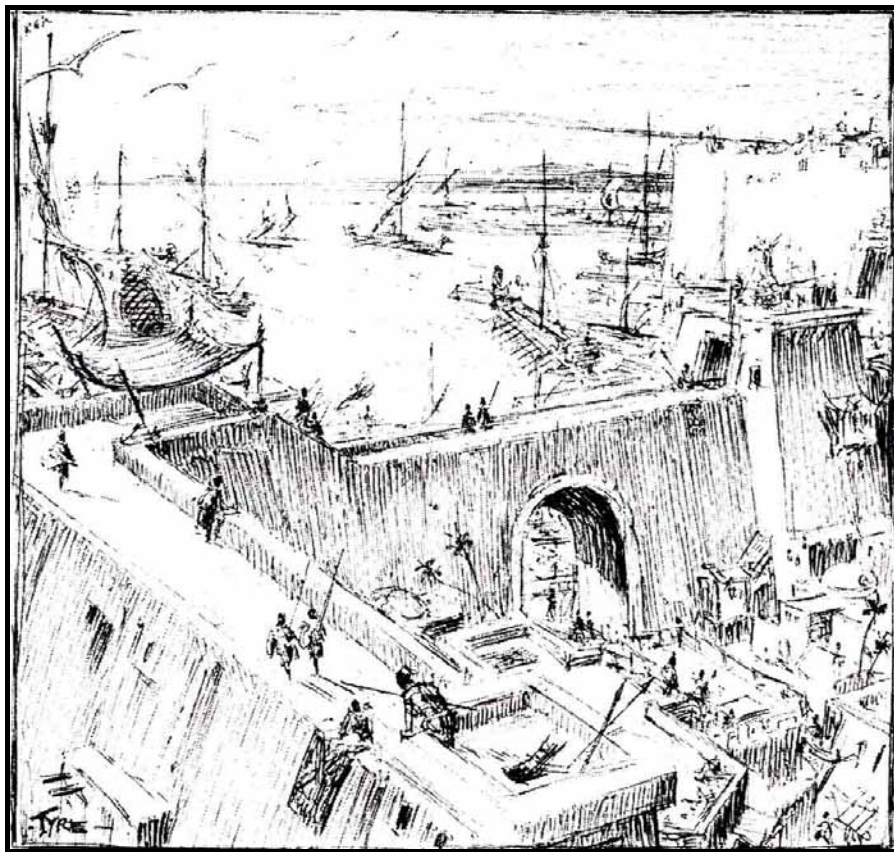
*“The Kings of the Earth Lamenting the Downfall of Babylon”
Detail from a Luther Bible Woodcut by Hans Lufft*

The scene is very similar to that of the world’s re-action to God’s judgment of Tyre in Ezekiel’s funeral song over the monarch of that mighty Phoenician trading city. Ezekiel’s dirge over Tyre is also led by three groups, kings, merchants, and mariners. John reliance on Ezekiel can be observed in the prophet’s description of the king’s lament:

*“Then all the princes of the seacoast will step down from their thrones
and lay aside their robes and take off their embroidered garments.
Clothed with terror, they will sit on the ground, trembling every*

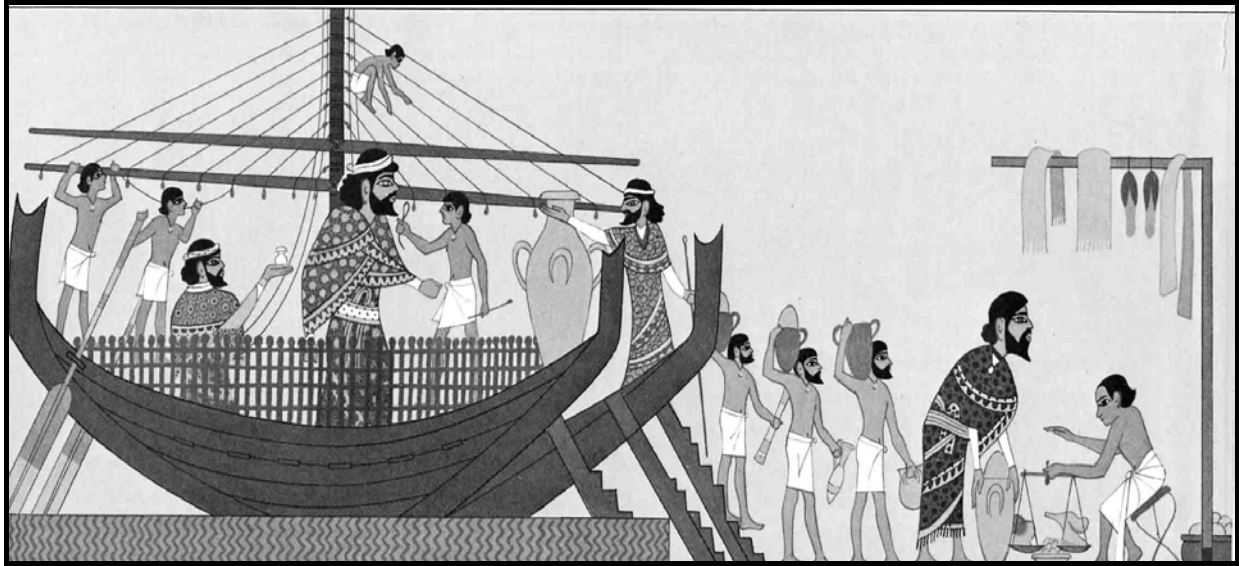
moment, appalled at you. They will take up a lament concerning you and say to you: “How you are destroyed, O city of renown...” All who live in the coast lands are appalled at you; the kings shudder with horror and their faces are distorted with fear.” (Ezekiel 26:16-17; 27:35)

There is nothing altruistic or unselfish in this song of grief. Their horror is intermingled with terror for they now recognize only too well that the same judgment which has devastated the harlot is sweeping inexorably toward them. They watch ***“the smoke of her burning”*** (cf. the destruction of Sodom - Genesis 19:28) with horrified fascination. The fire of judgment rages, and although they may seek to distance themselves from it - ***“they will stand far off”*** - there is no escape. ***“Woe”*** (Greek - *“ouai”*) has appeared before in Revelation’s visions (cf. Revelation 8:13). It is a cry of consternation and despair, uttered in the face of overwhelming catastrophe. All of Great Babylon’s glorious strength - emphasized in the threefold repetition ***“O great city, O Babylon, city of power!”*** - was not able to deliver her



“The Port of Ancient Tyre in the Days of Hiram and Solomon”

from the judgment of the mighty God. The absolute totality of her devastation, completely unexpected, descending upon her suddenly without warning is stressed by the king's lament - ***"In one hour your doom has come!"***



"A Phoenician Trading Vessel from Tyre Unloading Its Cargo"

"The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes any more - cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and bodies and souls of men. They will say, "The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your riches and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered." The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified at her torment. They will weep and mourn and cry out: "Woe! Woe, O great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering gold, precious stones and pearls! In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!" - The second chorus in the global lament over the downfall of Babylon the Great is sung by ***"the merchants of the earth."*** The merchants bitterly decry the market collapse that the destruction of Babylon represents - ***"because no one buys their cargoes any more."*** There is no personal sympathy here but only remorse over the loss of income. This a matter of economics not loyalty. The text continues to follow the pattern of Ezekiel 27 which lists a detailed inventory of the luxury trade which comes to an abrupt end because of the downfall of Tyre (cf. Ezekiel 27:12-24). Ezekiel concludes: ***"The merchants***



“The Rulers of the Earth Lament the Downfall of Babylon the Great” - Luther Bible Woodcut

among the nations hiss at you; you have come to a horrible end and will be no more.” (Ezekiel 27:36) Harlot Babylon is the epitome of hedonism and consumerism. In her power and wealth she lives for the pleasure of the moment and satisfies her sensual needs with all that which money can buy. Lenski argues that given the spiritual nature of Harlot Babylon the application of this segment should not, however, be limited to economics and material wealth:

“When we recall that Babylon equals the whole anti-Christian seductiveness in all the departments of human life for all the earth dwellers we shall not regard these “merchants of the earth” as literal merchants but shall see that they are all those who pander to the anti-Christian seduction and fatten themselves upon this seduction. The world is full of them today, many of them being great, multitudes of them being small. They set up their emporiums everywhere:

thousands of them have big establishments in politics all over the world, hundreds of thousands have them in schools and education with seductive anti-Christian wares. Who will count them in books, magazines, the press! They import and export, ever doing a big selling business, finding delighted buyers everywhere, maintaining vast chain stores all over the world. Anti-Christian display wherever you turn. Babylon, “the Mother of the Whores” (17:5), is well served by her merchants who sell the seductive goods of her whoring. They grow rich through it, for it certainly pays...yet the whole statement is symbolical and should not be reduced to mere monetary riches but should be regarded in the light of what is considered as profit in Babylon the Great...The godless politician and the grafter of the government with his cargo of goods; the conscienceless lawyer in the court with his cargo; the sceptic editor, writer, professor with the cargoes they unload; the pulpiteer and ecclesiastic with the anti-Christian cargoes they unpack; and so forth in the whole anti-Christian world, in every corner of it, down to the peddlers and all that all salesmen of anything in the way of anti-Christian seduction and attraction, offer, and all that in any way they make by it for their own satisfaction, are here referred to.” (Lenski, pp.516,524-525)

Fifteen of the twenty-nine items on Revelation’s cargo manifest also appear in

Ezekiel 27. The trade goods listed are representative of the type of luxury items prevalent in the Biblical world. The list begins with **“gold, silver, precious stones and pearls.”** These are the commodities that have defined material wealth throughout human history. Their ostentatious display in extravagant jewelry was

prominent in the description of the garish appearance of the harlot - **“The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls.”** (Revelation 17:4) Their position at the head of the list signifies their relative value in the eyes of the world.



“Salome - Dressed in the Fine Jewels and Silks of a Courtesan - Dancing for Herod Antipas” by Armand Point

Next come **“fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth.”** **“Fine linen”** was a unique material of the highest quality made from Egyptian flax. It was also produced in Spain and Asia Minor. The cloth was extremely expensive, renowned for its beauty and delicacy. **“Purple”** was a fabric produced from a purple dye extracted from a particular species of snails one drop at a time. It was reported to take 60,000 snails to produce one pound of the dye. A single bolt of purple cloth would cost the modern equivalent of \$28,000. Cloth of purple was produced in Thyatira and Laodicea, two of Revelation’s seven cities. It became the distinctive color of the emperor. Its rarity and costliness

made it synonymous with the most extravagant luxury. Mark Anthony and Cleopatra are reputed to have set a new standard for ostentatiousness when they had the main sail of the great warship colored with Tyrian purple dye. **“Silk”** was imported at great

expense from China and the Orient. The Greek word for silk (*“sirikou”*) is derived from the Greek word for the Chinese people (*“hoi seres”*). Silk had first been introduced into the Mediterranean world in the wake of Alexander the Great’s incursions into India. Initially Rome banned men from wearing silken clothing, viewing it as effeminate and decadent, but those prohibitions had long since disappeared by the height of the empire. ***“Scarlet”*** is the brilliant color produced by the fruit of the *“kermas oaks”* that grew in various parts of Asia Minor. In Revelation, scarlet is the color of the dragon and the beast. John introduces the Great Harlot as ***“a woman dressed in purple and scarlet.”*** (Revelation 17:4)

The next cluster of items deal with furniture and building materials. ***“Every sort of citron wood”*** leads the list. This is the wood of the thyme tree which grows in North Africa. It was highly prized for its beautiful color and varied grain. It was said that the wood of this tree could produce doors and tables which looked like the eyes of a peacock’s tail, the stripes of a tiger, or the spots of a leopard. A table constructed from this rare and precious wood cost more than a large country estate. Furniture made from citron wood was a fashion craze in imperial Rome. Fortunes were spent to buy it as an unmistakable mark of economic status. Ivory was also a popular status symbol among Rome’s economic elite. Prices rose steadily as the depletion of the elephant population in those portions of Africa accessible to Rome forced imports from as far away as India. Other ***“costly wood”*** of the era included ebony from Africa and cypress and cedar from Syria and Palestine. ***“Bronze, iron, and marble”*** were

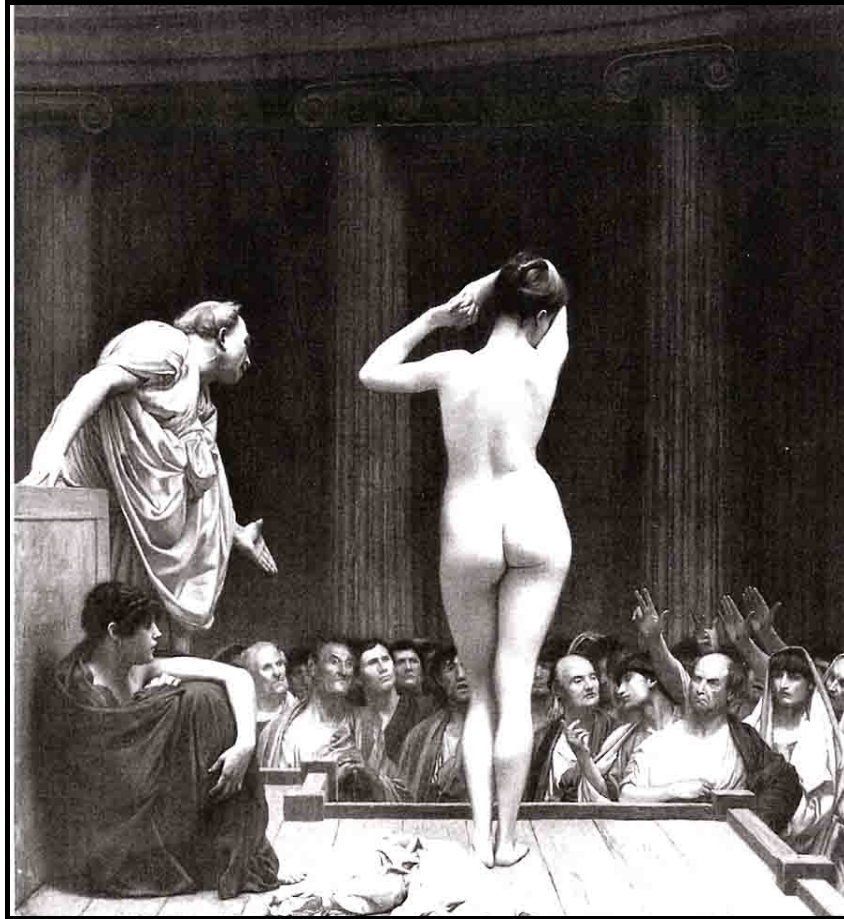


“The Downfall of Babylon the Great”
15th Century Bible Illumination

imported from across the empire to build the great monuments, palaces, and temples of the imperial city. The cargo manifest next turns to spices and food supplies - ***“cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of temples*** of the imperial city. The cargo manifest next turns to spices and food supplies - ***“cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat.”*** Spices in the ancient world were extremely costly. Among the most popular was cinnamon which came from China and East Asia. It was used to flavor food and wine and to scent oils and perfumes. ***“Spice”*** (Greek - *“amomon”*) came from the seeds of a fragrant shrub in India and Africa. It was used in perfume and hair oils. ***“Incense, myrrh, and frankincense”*** recall the precious gifts presented to the Christ child by the wise men (cf. Matthew 2:11). The food items listed - ***“of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat”*** - are of gourmet caliber signifying, along with the rest of the cargo list, self-indulgence and luxury. The extended listing concludes with a variety of livestock, human and otherwise - ***“cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and bodies and souls of men.”*** ***“Cattle”*** in the Roman world were not primarily used as a food source, but as working animals and a source of dairy products. In the same way, ***“sheep”*** were raised primarily for their wool, not their meat. The Roman aristocracy had acquired huge land holdings throughout the provinces on which large herds of cattle and sheep were raised.



“The Babylonian Slave Market” by Edwin Long - 1875



"A Roman Slave Market" by Jean-Leon Gerome -1884

"Horses" were of crucial importance in Roman culture for transportation, sport, and war. The chariot races of the hippodrome in Rome drew tens of thousands of fanatical fans for whom recreation was the most important reality of life. The chariot was originally developed for military use although by this time its significance on the battlefield was diminishing. The **"carriages"** mentioned on John's list are probably the four wheeled chariots favored by Roman noblemen, often plated with gold or silver. The final item on the list - **"and bodies and souls of men"** is a reference to the trade in slaves crucial to the economy of the Roman Empire. The Greek noun **"somaton"** (**"bodies"**) is characteristically used in reference to slave, viewing their bodies as a mere item of trade and merchandise. The Biblical author adds the telling observation that he who trades in human flesh is also guilty of buying and selling **"souls of men."** Martin Franzmann labels this phrase as *"the harshest word spoken on slavery in the New Testament."* (Franzmann, p. 122) It is estimated that there were as many as 60,000,000 slaves in the Roman Empire at the time the Book of

Revelation was written. The entire social structure and economy of Rome was based upon the availability of an endless supply of free labor, both skilled and unskilled. Although slavery in the Biblical world had more to do with economics and politics than race, the reduction of another human being to the level mere property, human livestock, powerfully indicates the brutality and inhumanity of the corrupt and evil system represented by Babylon the Great.

“They will say, ‘The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your riches and splendor have vanished.’ - The wealth and power of Babylon - ‘all your riches and splendor’ - are picturesquely described as sweet autumn fruit that has come to the pinnacle of ripeness (Greek - ‘opora.’) The Greek text designates this fruit as ‘the lust of your soul’ which is somewhat more forceful than the NIV’s translation - ‘you longed for.’ These things are the reason for living in Harlot Babylon but now they are gone forever. The concept that Babylon’s wealth and power are irretrievably lost is repeated three times for particular emphasis - ‘is gone...have vanished...never to be recovered.’ The negative is repeated twice in the third phrase - literally ‘in no way will they be found any longer.’

“The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off...” - The language which described the lament of the kings is repeated as the merchants sing their chorus of woe. Like the kings, the merchants seek to distance themselves from the judgment which has come upon the city - “will stand far off.” But their fate is so closely interwoven with hers that there is no escape for them now. They are “the merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her.” Her downfall is theirs. Thus the bitter intensity of their lament as they “weep, mourn, and cry out.” The words of the lament are also very similar to that of the kings, prefaced by the triple woe and the emphasis on the contrast between her former and her present state - “Woe! Woe, O great city, dressed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones, and pearls. In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin.” However, in keeping with the role of the merchants, the focus is not on power but on wealth. These scoundrels are desperately fearful about what the downfall of Harlot Babylon will mean for them.

“Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim: ‘Was there ever a city like this great city’ They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out: ‘Woe! Woe, O great city,



*"The Destruction of Babylon's Commerce"
Luther Bible Woodcut by Matthias Merian*

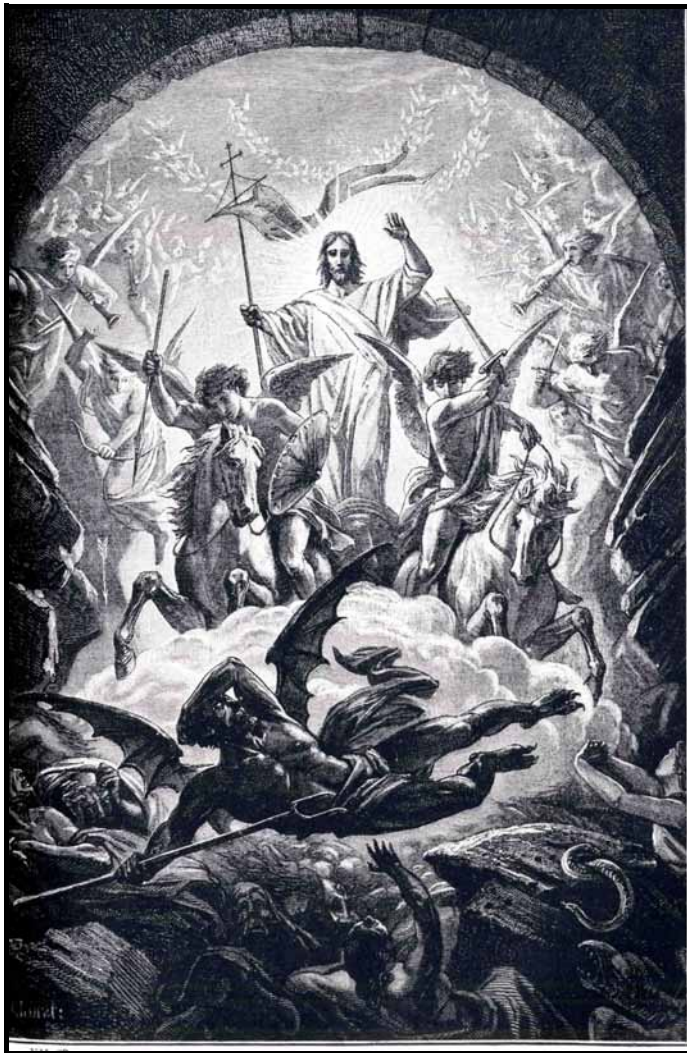
where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she had been brought to ruin!"

"Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship..." - The third chorus of Babylon the Great's funeral dirge is sung by the world's mariners. The prominence of seafarers in the lament is the result of John's reliance upon Ezekiel's lament over the downfall of the city of Tyre. The island city of Tyre was the headquarters of the Phoenician's commercial empire. Phoenician trading ships set sail from Tyre across the Mediterranean and beyond establishing colonies and extending their reach throughout the ancient world. Recognizing this reality, Ezekiel depicts the destruction of Tyre as a catastrophic shipwreck. (Ezekiel 27) In Ezekiel's vision the sailors who reach the shore bewail the city's downfall and cover themselves with the dust and ashes of mourning.

"The shore lands will quake when your seamen cry out. All who handle the oars will abandon their ships; the mariners and all the seamen will stand on the shore. They will raise their voice and cry bitterly over you; they will sprinkle dust on their heads and roll in

ashes. They will shave their heads because of you and will put on sackcloth. They will weep over you with anguish of soul and with bitter mourning. As they wail and mourn over you they will take up a lament concerning you. “Who was ever silenced like Tyre, surrounded by the sea?” (Ezekiel 27:28-32)

The content of the seamen’s song closely resembles that of the kings and the merchants. Like their counterparts, the sailors *“stand far off”* and *“see the smoke of her burning.”* Their song is also motivated by self-interest, sorrowing over the loss of income which Babylon’s destruction represents - *“all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth.”* The mariners’ question - *“Was there ever a city like this great city?”* recalls the question posed in Revelation 13:4 in response to the



“Christ the Conqueror” by Plockhorst

awesome power of the beast - *“Who is like the beast?”* The traditional Old Testament imagery of mourning - *“They will throw dust and their heads and with weeping and mourning cry out”* - is drawn from the mariners’ lament in Ezekiel (cf. Ezekiel 27:30; also Joshua 7:6; 1 Samuel 4:12; 2 Samuel 1:2; 13:19; 15:32; Job 2:12; Lamentations 2:10). For the third time, the chorus ends with the awestruck, almost disbelieving, assertion of the suddenness and the totality of Great Babylon’s destruction - *“In one hour she has been brought to ruin.”*

“Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you!” - The tone of lamentation and gloom abruptly shifts to exultation in verse 20. To the multitudes of those who were allied with her or profited from her work, the destruction of



"The Downfall of Babylon the Great" - Luther Bible Woodcut by Virgil Solis

Harlot Babylon was an unmitigated catastrophe, signaling the coming of their own demise. But for the faithful people of God the news of Babylon the Great's downfall is the sweetest gospel, cause for celebration and rejoicing. Accordingly, Babylon's funeral song concludes with a call from the Lord for His people to break out in celebration. The hymns of jubilation which will follow in chapter 19 are sung in response to this summons. The bitter enemy of the true church has fallen and God's people are encouraged to hold a joyful celebration over her dead body. The Greek verb "*euphrainou*" not only means to be happy, but to hold a celebration in expression of that happiness. Smith suggests the translation - "*Make merry over her.*" This is the same word the was used in Revelation 11:10 to describe the sinful world's celebration over the destruction of the two witnesses. But now it is the people of God who are given cause for celebration. While unrepentant sinners on earth quail in terror before the judgment of God, the redeemed in heaven are invited to the victory party - "***Rejoice over her, O heaven!***" Those who have patiently borne the brunt of the whore's fury - "***saints and apostles and prophets***" - are specified in the celebration invitation. God's judgment upon Babylon is, in a sense, an expression of His love for his own. "***God has judged her for the way she treated***

you!” - The holy ones rejoice in their vindication, not in the sense of personal vengeance, but as a vindication of the justice and the holiness of God.

“The rejoicing does not arise out of a selfish spirit of revenge but out of a fulfilled hope that God has defended the honor of His just name by not leaving sin unpunished and by showing his people to have been in the right and the verdict rendered by the ungodly world against the saints to be wrong.” (Beale, pp. 916-917)



*“The Downfall of Harlot Babylon” - Woodcut from The Strassbourg Bible
1485*

John’s call to celebration recalls the prophecy of Jeremiah who had foretold the day when a song of joy would greet Babylon’s destruction because of all the innocent blood that she had shed (cf. Jeremiah 51:47-49)

“Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea and said, “With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again! The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again. No workman of any

trade will ever be found in you again. The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of the bridegroom and the bride will never be heard in you again. You merchants were the world's great men. By your magic spell all the nations were led astray. In her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who have been killed upon the earth.” - The promise of God's judgement upon Babylon the Great and its dire consequences for her legions of followers are reaffirmed once



“The Mighty Angel and the Great Millstone” by Jean Duvet

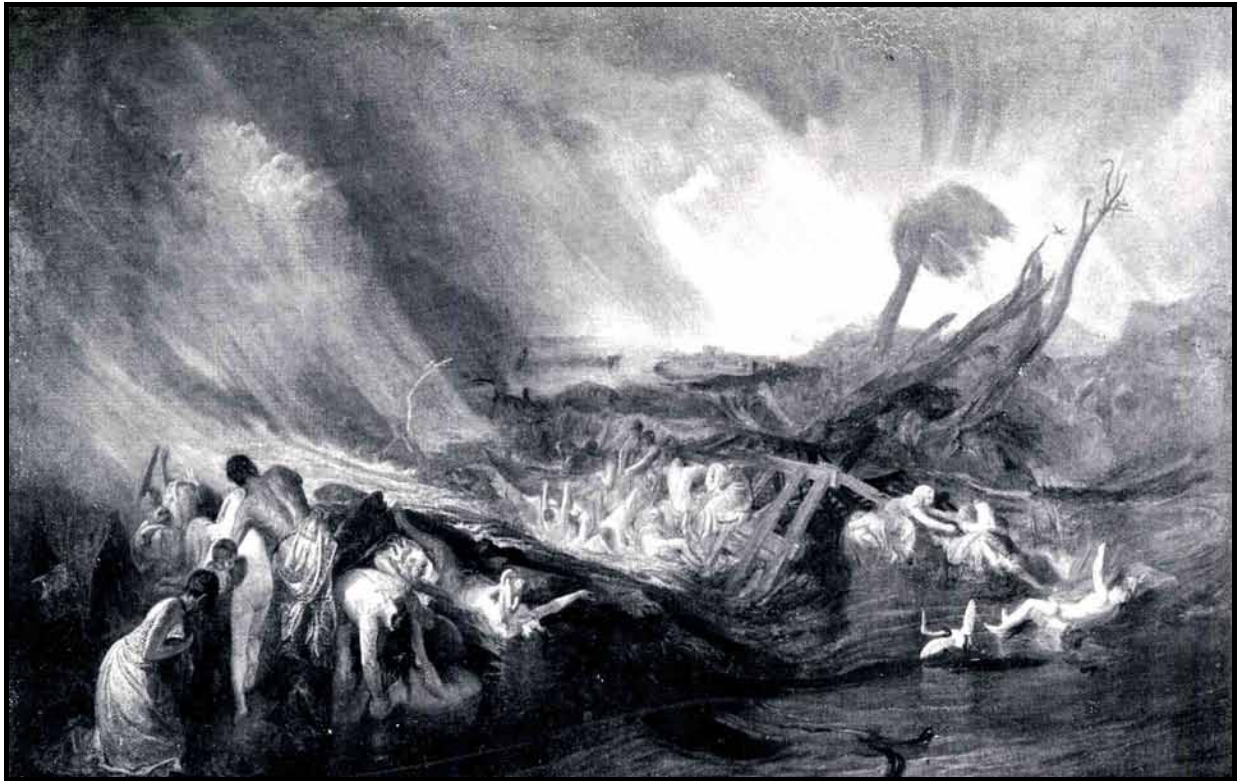
again in symbolic action and dramatic words. At the conclusion of the Book of Jeremiah, we had been informed that the prophet had sent the scroll of his prophecy of Babylon's downfall and destruction to be read in the city of Babylon itself by a military officer named Seraiah. The prophet had further instructed his messenger that when he had finished reading the prophecy of doom he was to wrap the scroll around a stone and hurl it into the River Euphrates (Jeremiah 51:59-64). Jeremiah had explained the symbolic significance of throwing the judgement scroll into the river as follows: ***“So will Babylon sink to rise no more because of the disaster I will bring upon her. And her people will fall.”*** (Jeremiah 51:64) John adapts and extends Jeremiah's symbolism to convey both the suddenness and the permanence of God's judgement upon Harlot Babylon. All of the apostle's adaptations serve to intensify the message of irrevocable destruction.

The scene in the vision changes as John observes the coming of ***“a mighty angel.”*** The Greek adjective *“ischyros”* (*“mighty”*), characteristically applied only to God in heaven, describes this awesome messenger. The same word was used in Revelation 18:2 to describe the voice of the angel who came down from heaven to proclaim God’s judgement upon Babylon, identifying Him as the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Its recurrence here seems to suggest that the figure bearing the millstone of God’s judgement is also Christ. The stone the Lord bears is ***“a boulder the size of a large millstone.”*** Such a stone, typically turned by a yoke of mules or oxen, was four or five feet in diameter and twelve to eighteen inches thick, weighing thousands of pounds. The language here recalls the words of our Lord in Matthew 18:6 - ***“But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”*** Harlot Babylon had existed across the centuries for the sole purpose of leading men to damnation. The use of the millstone plunged into the depths of the sea is therefore a most appropriate image of her destruction.

As Jeremiah had indicated, the image of the stone sinking beneath the water represents destruction that is complete and permanent. The stone slips below the surface of the water into oblivion; down into the depths of a watery grave. Nehemiah had used the same image to describe the utter destruction of Pharaoh and his mighty host in the Red Sea: ***“You divided the sea before them so they passed through it on dry ground, but You hurled their pursuers into the depths like a stone into the mighty waters.”*** (Nehemiah 9:11) Ezekiel explained the meaning of the image in



“Destruction at the Red Sea” by Francis Danby



“The World that Perished in the Flood” by J. M.W. Turner

greater detail as he promised that the great port city of Tyre would be submerged beneath the vast waters of the sea:

“This is what the Sovereign Lord says: ‘When I make you a desolate city, like the cities no longer inhabited, when I bring the ocean depths over you and its vast waters cover you, then I will bring you down with those who go down to the pit, to the people of long ago. I will make you dwell in the earth below, as in ancient ruins, with those who go down to the pit and you will not return or take your place in the land of the living. I will bring you to a horrible end and you will be no more. You will be sought, but you will never again be found.’ declares the Sovereign Lord.” (Ezekiel 26:19-21)

John’s language distinctly echoes that of Ezekiel - **“With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again.”** The Greek text stresses the suddenness of Babylon’s demise - literally: *Thus, with a rush, will be cast down...* The adverb *“hormema”* is typically used of an attacking army which sweeps forward with such force and speed that there is no opportunity for defense. To use our modern idiom, the defenders are swept away *“before they knew what hit*

‘em.” With the Sovereign Lord’s judgement finally comes upon Harlot Babylon it will be suddenly and irrevocably - ***“a horrible end and you will be no more.”***

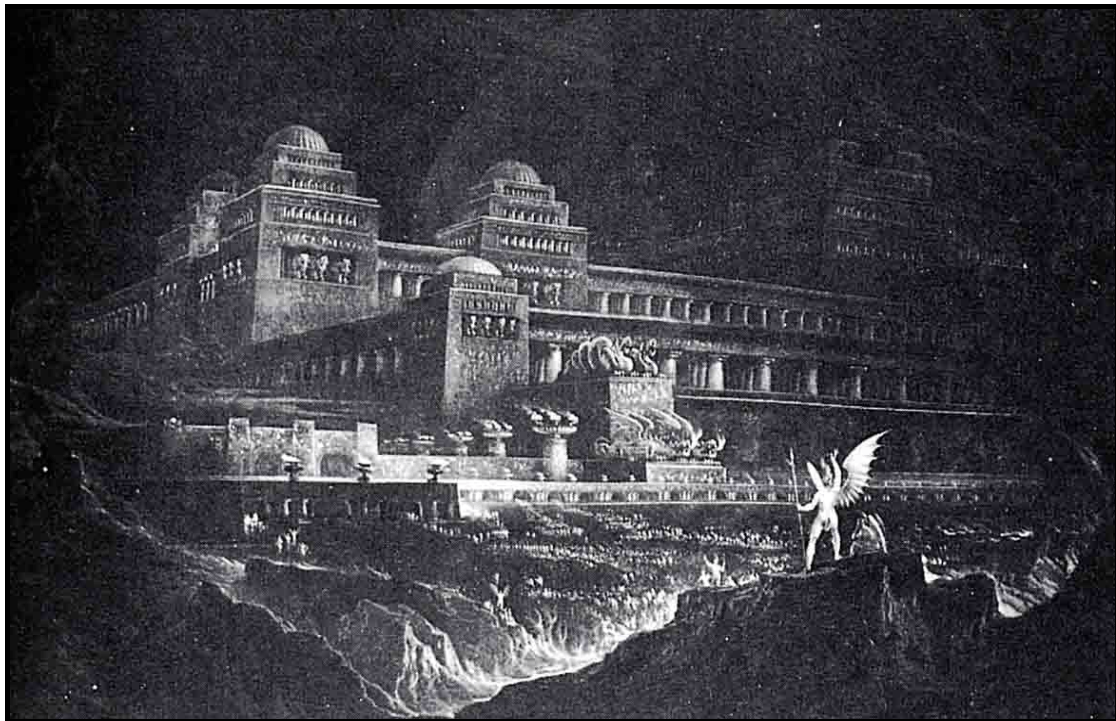


“The Death of Sardanapalis” by Eugene Delacroix

“The music of harpists and musicians...” - In the wake of the Lord’s judgement, the city will be desolate and empty, a ghost town devoid of the sounds of life. Where once the hustle and bustle of human activity abounded, now the chilling silence of death will prevail. In the utter darkness, demons will scurry through the shadows of a derelict ruin that now belongs to them alone. In fallen Babylon the Great the utter stillness of the grave prevails. Jeremiah had foretold such a devastation of Jerusalem by the hosts of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar: ***“I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp.”*** (Jeremiah 25:10) Now John foretells the time when the destroyer will himself be destroyed: ***“O great city! O Babylon, city of power! In one hour your doom has come!”*** 19th Century French artist Eugene Delacroix captures the despair of the moment of destruction in his magnificent painting “The Death of Sardanapalis.” As his enemies surrounded his palace and closed in for the kill, Sardanapalis, one of the last rulers of the Assyrian empire,

reclined on his golden bed atop a huge funeral pyre. His treasures heaped around him, he ordered the slaughter of his wives and servants, the last of whom lit the fire and hurled himself upon it, so that no one might survive the king's defeat. Such is the hopeless or utter despair. Babylon the Great is not one city but every city. Dr. Martin Franzmann correctly describes the grim message of the vision as *"a dirge upon human culture:"*

"In times of disaster, men comfort themselves with dreams of a time to come when 'things will be normal again' and old dear familiarities can be resumed. The angel bids Babylon to forego that dream; there will be for her no normal times again. The old songs will not be sung again and the old sweet music will not be made anymore. The longed for hum of human industry is banished; the busy sounds of craftsmen hammering and thumping are gone and gone the steady hum of millstones grinding grain for daily bread. The streets of darkened Babylon will never know again the snug hour when the evening lamps are lit. The ever-new rapturous voice of bride and bridegroom will not be heard again. The time of weddings is past. The mournful words of the mighty angel sound like a dirge upon human culture - what lovely gifts of God are lost when men use them against the God who gave them!" (Franzmann, p. 124)



"The Demon City of the Damned" - 19th Century Engraving

"Your merchants were the world's great men..." - The justification and basis for such a horrendous judgment are now adduced again. First, Harlot Babylon deserves

to be utterly destroyed because she has gloried in wealth and power, sanctioning a worldly religion that is based upon such things. The text recalls the words of Isaiah's condemnation of mighty Tyre:

“Who planned this against Tyre, whose merchants are princes, whose traders are the renowned of the earth? The Lord Almighty planned it to bring low the pride of all glory and to humble those who are renowned on the earth.” (Isaiah 23:8-9)

God's harsh judgment upon Babylon shatters the arrogant pride of men who have trusted in their own riches and power and have live by sensual and luxurious self-indulgence.



“A Babylonian Magus” -by Jean Jacques Boissard

“By your magic spell, all the nations were led astray.” - Ancient Babylon was renown for its astrology, occult wisdom, and magic. Isaiah had denounced the great city for its involvement in sorcery and magic: ***“They will come upon you in full measure in spite of your many sorceries and all of your potent spells...Disaster will come upon you and you will not be able to conjure it away...Keep on then with your magic spells and with your many sorceries which you have labored at since childhood...Let your astrologers come forward, those star gazers who make predictions month by month, let them save you from what is coming upon you.”*** (Isaiah 47:9-13) Harlot Babylon is condemned because of the ***“magic spell”*** (Greek - *“pharmakia”*) by which she has misled and deceived the nations.



"Babylonians Magi at Work" - Medieval Woodcut

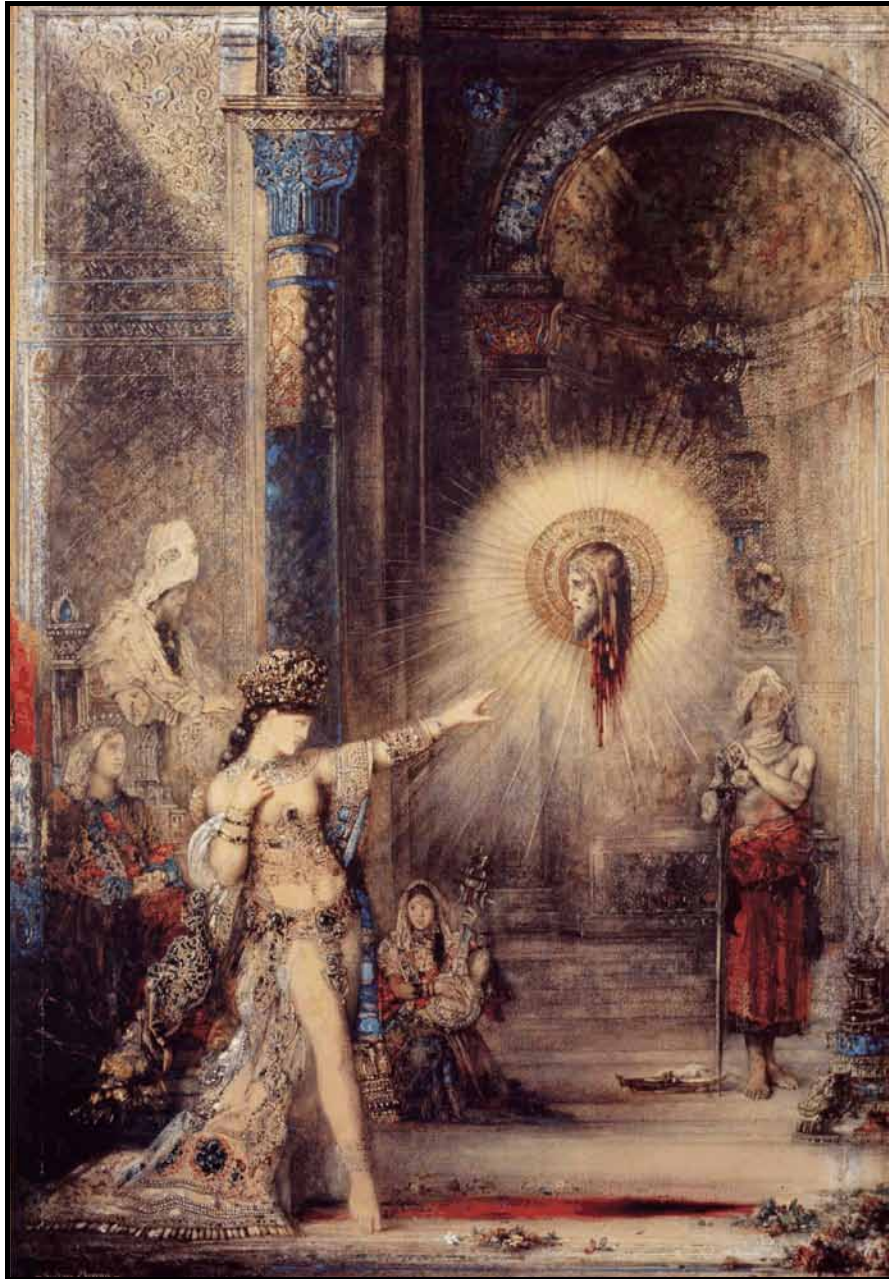
Behind the harlot lurks the dragon who empowers her to work supernatural wonders on behalf of her falsehood.

"Sorcery is here understood in its broadest sense as a reference to the harlot's false spirituality, wonder-working signs, and apparent miracles (cf. Revelation 13:13-14; Matthew 24:24; 2 Thessalonians 2:9) by which she deceived and led astray people to believe that they had security through their trust in her." ((Brighton, p. 480)

"In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints..." - Finally, Harlot Babylon must be utterly destroyed because she is guilty of murder most foul. Her streets are pooled with the blood of saints and martyrs. The blood of the innocent cries out to God for vengeance from the soil of the earth (cf. Genesis 4:10; Hebrew 12:24; Revelation 6:9-10) and justice demands that God hear that cry. Throughout history, harlot Babylon has been characterized by the bloody persecution and slaughter of the faithful. Her bitter opposition to the Gospel has been consistently expressed by the brutal murder of the Gospel's faithful witnesses. When she was unable to destroy them herself, she has seduced the powers of secular government to act as her executioner. Harlot Babylon is covered with the stains of martyr's blood.

The combination of supernatural seduction and the blood of the martyrs is powerfully

expressed in *"The Apparition,"* a painting by 19th Century French symbolist Gustav Moreau. Moreau depicts Salome, dressed in the fine jewels and silks of a courtesan as she dances before King Herod Antipas. Her intent is to use the King's lustful desire for her to obtain the execution of John the Baptist whose truthful condemnation had offended her mother. The painter presents the seductive young dancer with the apparition of the Baptist's severed head suspended over a pool of blood on the floor.



"The Apparition" by Gustav Moreau - 1875



“The Marriage Feast of the Lamb” from the Brussels Tapestry

The Marriage Feast of the Lamb

Revelation 19:1-10

After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are His judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of His servants.” And again they shouted: “Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever.” The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried: “Amen, Hallelujah!” Then a voice came from the throne saying: “Praise our God, all you His servants, who fear Him, both small and great!” Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of

thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God." At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and

with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."



"The Messianic Bridegroom" by E. M. Lilien

"After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are His judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of His servants." - This grand celebration comes in response to the summons of Revelation 18:20. "After these things" (Greek - "meta tauta") The characteristic phrase signals the change of scene. Harlot Babylon has been judged. Just

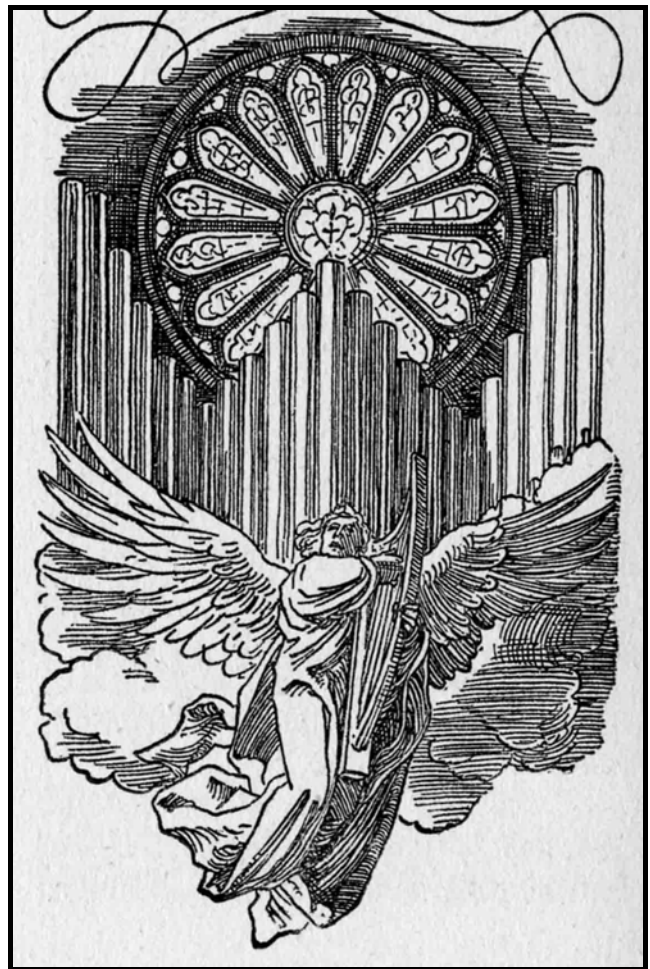
punishment has been meted out to her. In stark contrast to the deathly silence that reigns over the ruins of fallen Babylon the people of God break forth in jubilant song. The sound which falls upon John's ear transcends his descriptive ability - "what sounded like the roar of a great multitude." But this sound goes far beyond anything that has ever been heard on earth.

“Prior to receiving the revelation, John had never before heard such a harmonic and melodic voice. So beautiful was the voice of this heavenly choir that, though John could understand the words, the euphonious sound was beyond the ability of the natural human voice.” (Brighton, p. 487)

The **“great multitude”** whom John hears are all the people of God, the saints of every place and time assembled before the throne, joined by the majestic host of angels, praising God for the culmination of history and the victorious consummation of the plan of salvation. This is the triumph song of the universal church, the *“una sancta.”*

While the doleful sounds of the world’s lament over the downfall of Harlot Babylon still linger in the air, a mighty chorus of jubilation and praise arises from the people of God. The verses of the great hymn of praise are structured around the transliterated Hebrew composite **“Hallelujah”** which means *“Praise the Lord!”* The word is closely linked to the worship of the Old Testament church in the temple to express intense rejoicing and praise. It was evidently a prominent component of praise anthems of the priestly choirs who preformed the liturgical services of the sanctuary. Thus in the Old Testament, it appears exclusively in the so-called *“Hallel Psalms”* of the latter part of the hymn book of ancient Israel (cf. Psalms 104-106, 111-113, 115-117, 135, 146-150). Its New Testament usage is confined to the church’s great hymn of praise in Revelation 19 (cf. Revelation 19: 1,3,4,6).

“Salvation and glory and power belong to our God....” - The opening verse of the hymn celebrates God’s judgment of the harlot. Note that God is addressed as **“our God”** signifying the intimate bond of faith which unites this great host with the Creator. **“Salvation and glory and power”** are ascribed to God alone. **“Salvation”** (Greek - *“soteria”*)



“Hallelujah!” By Rudolf Schäfer



"The Great Dragon" by Barry Moser

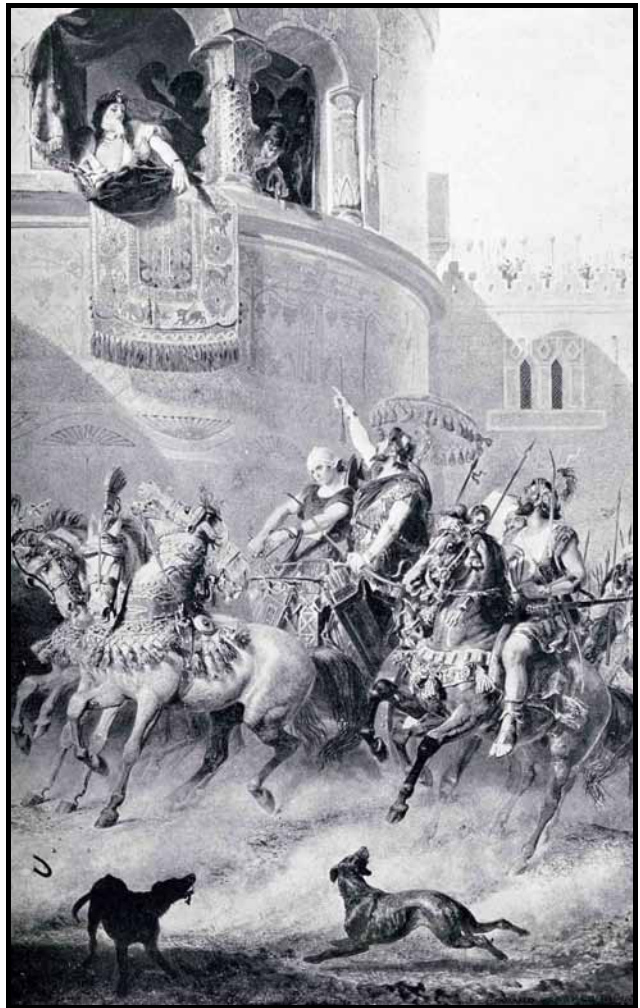
refers to all that which God has done through the sacrificial death of His Son to deliver fallen mankind from sin and its curse. The hymn acknowledges that this salvation, now fully accomplished, is God's doing, not man's, totally by grace through the blood of Jesus. **"Glory"** (Greek - *"doxa"*) is the awesome totality of all that which God has revealed about Himself in the salvation which He has graciously bestowed upon His people. **"Power"** (Greek - *"dynamis"*) is the divine omnipotence by which He has perfectly accomplished His purpose. The awful price of sin has been paid in full. Christ has taken our place and suffered our punishment. Therefore, **"true and just are His judgments."** The victorious salvation which He bestows upon His people fully complies with the demands of His holiness and righteousness. The verdicts of His judgment are perfectly accurate and

completely fair both in salvation and in condemnation.

"He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of His servants." The **"true and just"** judgment of God is irrefutably demonstrated by the condemnation and destruction of Harlot Babylon. In John's imagery Harlot Babylon personifies the great Antichrist and the legion of lesser anti-Christ's who have populated human history. The title written on her forehead had identified her as ***"THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."*** (Revelation 17:5) Her pivotal role as the poisoned spring from which the pollution of sin has fouled the whole world is affirmed once again as evidence of the justice of God's judgment upon her - ***"who corrupted the earth by her adulteries."*** As has been amply demonstrated in the

preceding chapters, adultery is to be understood in a figurative sense in reference to idolatry and all false religion, particularly the pseudo-Christianity of the Harlot. Furthermore, the justice of God's judgment upon Babylon the Great is evident as appropriate punishment for her bloodthirsty persecution and opposition of the saints throughout history - ***"He has avenged on her the blood of His servants."*** The identification of Babylon as the vicious murderess of saints and prophets was emphasized earlier in Chapter 18: ***"In her was found the blood of the prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth."*** (Revelation 18:24) The language of the text here reflects that of God's command to Jehu to destroy the house of Ahab and Jezebel: ***"You are to destroy the house of Ahab your master, and I will avenge the blood of My servants the prophets and the blood of all the Lord's servants shed by Jezebel."*** (2 Kings 9:7). The saints beneath the altar in the vision of the seven seals had prayed: ***"How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until You judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"*** (Revelation 6:10) Now the church triumphant celebrates God's response to that prayer as a vindication of His holiness and truth. It is significant to note that this celebration is not mere *"Schadenfreude"* - bitter delight in the downfall of a foe. The Church celebrates because her Lord has been conclusively vindicated. Harlot Babylon has received exactly the judgment which she deserved.

"And again they shouted: "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever." - The second "Hallelujah!" exclamation emphasizes the theme of divine judgment as the evidence of Babylon's total destruction for all of eternity is seen - ***"The smoke from her goes up forever and ever."*** Mounce calls this dramatic repetition a *"heavenly encore."* (Mounce, p. 338) It



"Jehu Commands the Death of Jezebel"
by E.H. Corbould

strengthens and reinforces the first. In pronouncing God's judgment upon Sodom and later the heathen nation of Edom, the Old Testament had declared the irreversible finality of their utter destruction in similar language: ***"He looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, toward all the land of the plain. And he saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace."*** (Genesis 19:28) ***"Edom's streams will be turned into pitch, her dust into burning sulfur; her land will become blazing pitch! It will not be quenched night and day; its smoke will rise forever."*** (Isaiah 34:9-10)



"The Adoration of the Lamb" by Hans Holbein

"The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried: "Amen, Hallelujah!" - The antiphonal nature of the anthems before the throne reasserts itself as *"choirmasters of the heavenly singers"* (Brighton, p. 489) now take up the triumph song (cf. Revelation 4:8,11; 5:9-12,14; 7:11; 11:17-18). Those who stand in the immediate presence of the Lord - ***"the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures"*** - fall down upon the ground in adoration and awe. Their simple two word response - ***"Amen, Hallelujah!"*** - endorses and reiterates the praise of God's justice which has already been expressed.

“One might imagine that even the rafters of God’s heavenly sanctuary shook and reverberated with this holy chorus and the shouts of hallelujahs and amens, just as the temple quaked when the prophet Isaiah heard the “Holy, Holy, Holy” of the winged creatures before God in his majestic vision.” (Brighton, p. 489)

“Then came a voice from the throne, saying: “Praise our God, all you His servants, you who fear Him, both great and small.”

- An unidentified voice from the throne, perhaps one of the four living creatures, invites the entire community of heaven to join in the worship and praise of the Lord. The imperative verb ***“Praise”*** (Greek - *“aineite”*) is in the present tense indicated continuous ongoing action. The words echo the command of Psalm 135:1-2 - ***“Praise the Lord! Praise the Name of the Lord; Praise Him you servants of the Lord who minister in the house of***

the Lord, in the courts of the house of our God.” The Psalm then proceeds for twenty-one verses to define that which is praiseworthy about God and His mighty deeds. The command is addressed to ***“all you His servants, you who fear Him both great and small.”*** This language is also drawn from the great Hallel psalm - ***“praise Him you servants of the Lord,”*** (Psalm 135:1) ***“you who fear Him, praise the Lord”*** (Psalm 135:20). The invitation is universal. It brushes aside all human distinctions or class or rank. *“It seems here to embrace Christians of all intellectual capacities and social grades, and of all stages of progress in the life of Christ...all are included in the summons to thanksgiving and are capable of bearing a part in it.”* (Swete, pp. 244,245) The breathtaking scope of the invitation recalls the majestic words of the opening verses of the great *“Te Deum”* of Saint Ambrose, considered by many to be



“The Great Hallelujah” by Rudolf Schäfer

the most magnificent canticle of the church.

*“We praise Thee, O God; we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord.
All the earth doth worship Thee, the Father everlasting.
To Thee all angels cry aloud, the heavens and all the powers therein.
To Thee cherubim and seraphim continually do cry;
Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Sabaoth;
Heaven and earth are full of the majesty of Thy glory.
The glorious company of the apostles praise Thee.
The goodly fellowship of the prophets praise Thee.
The noble army of martyrs praise Thee.
The holy church throughout all the world doth acknowledge Thee;
The Father of an infinite majesty;
Thine honorable, true and only Son; also the Holy Ghost, the Comforter.
Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ. Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father
. When Thou tookest upon Thee to deliver man,
Thou didst humble Thyself to be born of a virgin.
When Thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death,
Thou didst open the kingdom of heaven to all believers.
Thou sittest at the right hand of God in the glory of the Father.
We believe that Thou shalt come, to be our Judge.
We therefore pray Thee, help Thy servants,
Whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy precious blood.
Make them to be numbered with Thy saints in glory everlasting.
O Lord, save Thy people and bless Thy heritage.
Govern them, and lift them up forever.
Day by day we magnify Thee; and we worship Thy name ever, world without end.
Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this day without sin.
O Lord, have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us.
O Lord, let Thy mercy be upon us, as our trust is in Thee
O Lord in Thee have I trusted, let me never be confounded.”*

“Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: “Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

“Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters...” - The response of the church and the angelic hosts - ***a great multitude***” - to the invitation from the throne is immediate and overwhelming. The sound crashes



"We Praise Thee, O Lord" by Rudolf Schäfer



"An Angel Choir" by Jan van Eyck

down upon the Revelator - ***"like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder."***

These similes are drawn from the Old Testament prophets and have been used before in Revelation to describe the loudest and most impressive sounds (cf. Ezekiel 1:24; 43:2; Daniel 10:6; Revelation 1:15; 14:2).

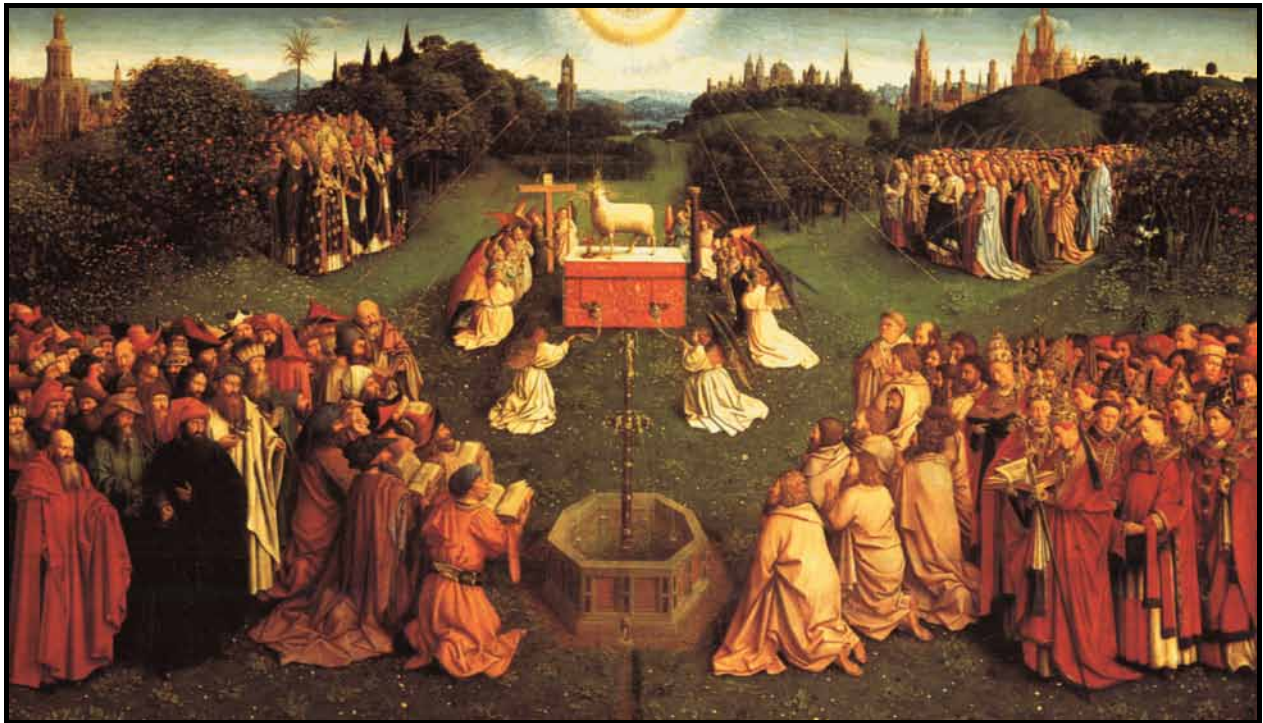
This is the last of Revelation's songs, the final *"Hallelujah Chorus"* in the magnificent ongoing *"Te Deum"* which is interwoven throughout the visions of Revelation. (Cf. Brighton, pp.527-532) The song began in chapter 4 with the eternal *"tris-hagion"* of the four living creatures around the throne of God, and has been amplified and elaborated by choirs of men and angels, the church militant on earth and the

church triumphant in heaven, throughout the remainder of the book. It now achieves its breathtaking crescendo in the awesome *"Hallelujah Chorus."* George Friedrich Handel composed the *"Hallelujah Chorus"* in his oratorio *"Messiah"* based upon this text. It is said that a friend found him at his writing desk, after a night of feverish composition, with his music scattered in every direction. Handel's face was covered with tears as he explained: *"I did think that I saw all of heaven spread out before me and the great God Himself."*

"Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns." - The time of waiting is over. The dramatic vision judgment of Harlot Babylon had depicted the second coming of Christ from the perspective of the unbelieving world. Now the imagery of the marriage feast of the Lamb presents the meaning of Christ's glorious return for the

people of God. Gone are the laments of doom and destruction. In their place we hear majestic anthems of celebration and praise. The universal reign of God has begun. The fourth and final ***“Hallelujah!”*** introduces the announcement of the marriage of the Lamb. The title used for God in this phrase - ***“our Lord God Almighty”*** (Greek - *“kyrios o theos o pantokrator”*) occurs frequently in Revelation (cf. Revelation 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 21:22). It affirms the sovereign omnipotence of the Creator. Domitian, the current emperor of Rome, had bestowed upon himself the title *“our Lord and God.”* Accordingly, John’s repeated use of this title may well be an allusion to the emperor’s blasphemous presumption. *“In the historical context of a proud and powerful Roman Empire, for John to call God “the Almighty” is an act of extreme confidence...Literally the word means one who holds all things in his control.”* (Mounce, p. 339) The personal pronoun ***“our”*** expresses the bold assurance of the believer. We enjoy an individual relationship of personal trust and love with God by faith. The all powerful deity who now begins his unchallenged reign is ***“our Lord God.”***

“Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come...” - The inauguration of God’s glorious rule is the cause for rejoicing and gladness among the people of God - ***“Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him***



“The Marriage Feast of the Lamb” by Jan van Eyck



***“The Wise and the Foolish Virgins”
by Rudolf Schäfer***

glory.” The combination of these two concepts expresses the unique intensity of this celebration. The only other text in the New Testament where they are combined is in the Sermon on the Mount where Christ urges His people to savor the persecution of men because of the richness of the reward that awaits us in heaven - ***“Rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven.”*** (Matthew 5:12) God’s people freely acknowledge that these wondrous events are God’s doing, not theirs - ***“give Him glory!”*** There is no pretense here that man has done anything whatsoever to contribute to the coming of God’s kingdom.

“For the wedding of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself...” - John depicts the significance of the coming of God’s reign for believers with the classic image of a wedding celebration. The

wedding in question here is the marriage feast of the Lamb and His holy bride, the church. The relationship between God and His people is often depicted as a marriage in the Old Testament. The rabbis understood the entire book of Song of Songs as an allegory of God’s love for Israel depicted as the passion of a husband for his bride. The prophets also made consistent use of the marriage as an image of the relationship between God and His people as the following selection of passages demonstrates.

“For your Maker is your husband - the Lord Almighty is His name - the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; He is called the God of all the earth.” (Isaiah 54:5)

“As a young man married a maiden, so will your sons marry you; as

a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.” (Isaiah 62:5)

“Return, faithless people,” declares the Lord, “for I am your husband.” (Jeremiah 3:14)

“I will betroth you to Me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion... I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the Lord.” (Hosea 2:19-20)

“I spread the corner of My garment over you and covered your nakedness. I gave you My solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign Lord, and you became mine... You adulterous wife! You prefer strangers to your own husband.” (Ezekiel 16:8,32)

The imagery shifts as it is carried over into the New Testament in that of an engagement which will be consummated upon the Lord’s return. The husband and wife of the Old Testament become the bride and groom of the New. Jesus is the bridegroom - the church is the bride. Jesus refers to Himself as the Bridegroom in Matthew 9:15 - *“How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.”* In the parable of the marriage feast (Matthew 22: 2-14) *“the kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son.”* John the Baptist describes his role in the plan of salvation to that of the best man at a wedding: *“I am not the Christ, but am sent ahead of Him. The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine and it is now complete.”* (John 3:28-29). The



*“The Arrival of the Bride”
by Herbert Schmalz*

parable of the Ten Virgins presents the second coming of Christ as the arrival of the bridegroom at his wedding feast (cf. Matthew 25:1-13).



“The Wise and Foolish Virgins” by J. M. Strudwick

St. Paul also makes effective use of the image of the Bridegroom and the bride. To the Corinthians he writes: ***“I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to Him.”*** (2 Corinthians 11:2). In his counsel to Christian husbands Paul writes:

“Husbands love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the Word, and to present her to Himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, holy and blameless.” (Ephesians 5: 25-27)

This imagery reflects the marriage/engagement practices of the ancient Near East. Biblical marriage customs revolved around two central events the betrothal, or engagement, and the wedding. In the Biblical world marriage was regarded as a covenant entered into by two families through their representatives the bridegroom and the bride. The plans for a marriage were typically initiated by the father of the groom on behalf of his son. The father of the bride was contacted and negotiations took place between the two families. While parental control of the process was

generally assumed, the possibility that these family negotiations would be instigated by the prospective bridegroom and the bride themselves is not ruled out. The betrothal was sealed with the payment of a “*bride price*” (i.e. Genesis 34:12) by the groom’s family and was celebrated by a feast. Betrothal was the legal equivalent of marriage although the bride and groom remained in the homes of their respective families and did not live together as husband and wife during the betrothal. Sexual activity by either partner during this period was regarded as adultery and punished accordingly. A legal divorce was required to terminate a betrothal. Betrothal culminated in the wedding ceremony itself. Both bride and groom were arrayed in special festive garments and jewelry, including a beautiful veil worn by the bride. On the day of the wedding, the groom, accompanied by his companions, proceeded to the bride’s home to formally escort her and her companions to the wedding feast, usually held at the home of the groom. This procession was surrounded by music and festive celebration as it moved through the streets toward the groom’s home. The wedding feast characteristically lasted from seven to fourteen days.

In the imagery of Revelation, the bride price has already been paid in full - “*not with perishable things such as silver or gold...but with precious blood of Christ, a Lamb without spot or defect.*” (1 Peter 1:18-19). Christ now returns to claim His bride and



“The Wise Virgins” by J. James Tissot

joyfully lead her to the wedding feast. The betrothal period of waiting is over. The bridegroom has finally come. Hence, this great anthem is technically referred to as an “*epithalamium*,” that is a song for rejoicing composed for a wedding.

The bride whom the Lamb purchased with His blood and to whom he was promised is fully prepared - ready and eager to meet her bridegroom - “***His bride has made herself ready.***” She is arrayed in the beautiful wedding gown which her groom has provided - the pure white robe of Christ’s righteousness - “***fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.***” The passive verb - “***was given***” - emphasizes the monergistic divine grace which is operative here. The bride did not provide her own dress; her dress was provided for her by God through the bridegroom. Dr. Brighton describes the Biblical context of the imagery:



*“The Parable of the Ten Virgins”
19th Century Bible Engraving*

“It is not her own preparation to be received by her husband in marriage that made her the bride of Christ. The Lord Christ Himself, when He chose her to be His wife, made her worthy of such an honor by paying the betrothal price. Ezekiel (16:8-10) had prophesied that God covered His chosen one with His garments when He betrothed Himself to her. And so Jesus Christ clothed His chosen one with the garments of righteousness, washing her in His blood and thus making her pure and holy (see Rev. 5:9-10; 7:14-15). Isaiah also described how Yahweh prepared His betrothed. God clothed His chosen people with the “garments of salvation” and adorned them with a “robe of righteousness” “as a bridegroom dresses his head...and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.” (Isaiah 61:10).” (Brighton, pp. 496-497)

In striking contrast to the gaudy self-indulgent extravagance of the harlot (cf. Revelation 17:4) the bride is modestly dressed in “***fine linen***,

bright and clean.” John adds the parenthetical note - “***Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.***” This emphasis on human deeds seems to sound an

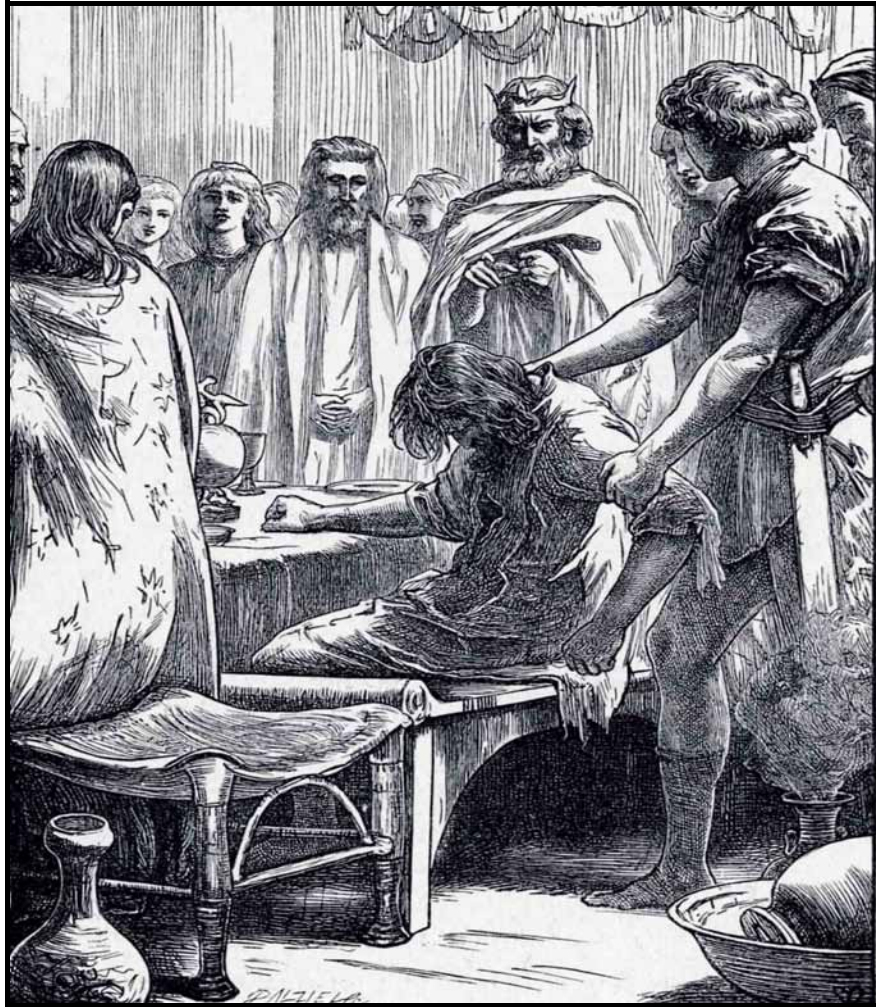


“The Foolish Virgins” by J. James Tissot

oddly dissonant note in the midst of the wedding celebration. It is certainly possible to properly understand *“the righteous acts of the saints”* in this context as the deeds of faith and love which are the inevitable result of God’s decree of justification in Christ. Thus Brighton explains:

“The righteous deeds of the saints are the saintly acts of the members of Christ, wrought in them by His Holy Spirit. These good works of Christian piety and sanctification are as much a gift of God’s grace in Christ as is the saving status of righteousness merited by His sacrificial work.” (Brighton, p. 497)

It is not unusual in Biblical texts which speak of the final judgment to refer to human works as the external evidence of justification by faith (i.e. Matthew 25:31-40). However, in the imagery of Revelation, the pure white robes of the saints consistently represent the righteousness which is the result of God’s action in declaring the sinner to be not guilty for Christ’s sake (cf. Revelation 6:11; 7:9,13-14; 22:14; cf also Zechariah 3:3-4). Accordingly in this context it may be preferable to translate the phrase - *“Fine linen stands for the not guilty verdicts pronounced upon the saints.”* In this translation, the Greek word *“dikaïomata”* is rendered as *“the not guilty verdicts pronounced upon the saints”* rather than *“the righteous acts of the saints.”*



*“The Parable of the Wedding Feast”
19th Century Bible Engraving*

This translation is consistent with the basic meaning of the noun *“dikaionomata”* and the grammar of the phrase, taking the genitive noun *“ton hagion”* as objective - *“upon the saints”* - instead of subjective - *“of the saints.”* To understand the phrase as a direct reference to that which God has done also serves to maintain the text’s consistent emphasis on God’s action for the salvation of His people (cf. Ephesians 5:26-27). A close parallel to this imagery can be found in Christ’s parable of the Wedding Feast (Matthew 22:1-14) in which the guest who spurns the wedding garment graciously provided by the King is cast ***“outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*** (Matthew 22:13). Those who obstinately refuse the free offer of God’s grace in Christ in favor of their own self-righteousness and pride will be excluded from the wedding celebration of the Lamb.

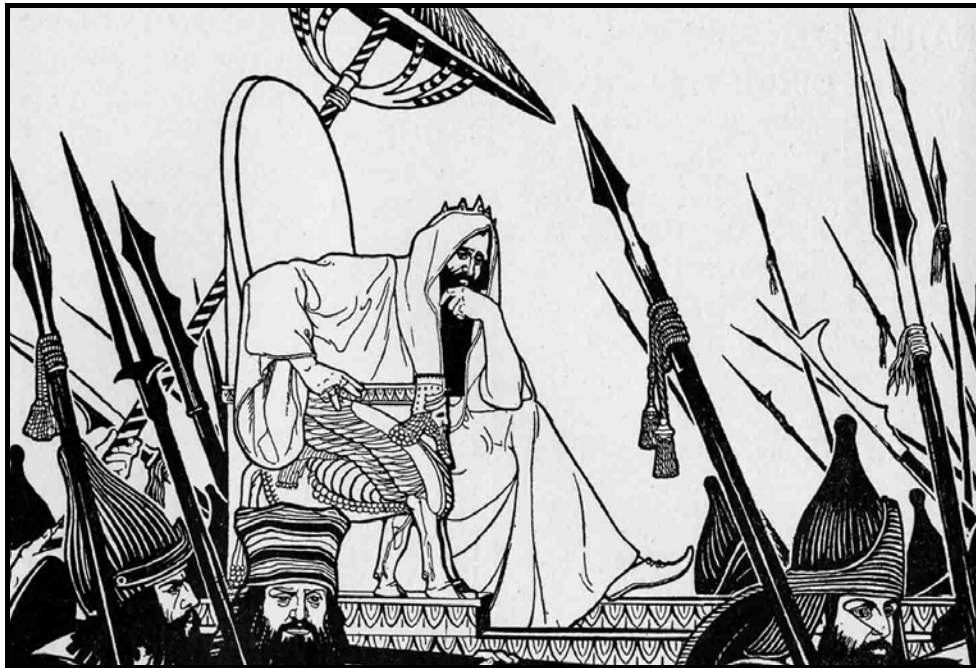
“Then the angel said to me, “Write: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!” And he added, “These are the true words of God.” - This is the fourth of Revelation’s seven beatitudes (cf. Revelation 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7,14). Each is introduced with the same word ***“Blessed”*** (Greek - *“makarios”*) used by our Lord in the opening segment of the Sermon on the Mount (*“The Beatitudes”* - Matthew 5:1-12 -***“Blessed are the poor in spirit...”***) The angel who pronounces this word of blessing is in all probability the same interpreter and guide who introduced and explained the vision of Harlot Babylon in Chapter 17. The urgency and importance of the message is indicated by the command to immediately ***“Write!”*** In this instance, the word of blessing is pronounced upon ***“those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.”*** The verb ***“are invited”*** is the Greek word *“keklamenoi,”* the perfect participle form of *“kaleo,”* which means *“to call.”* Here, as throughout Revelation, *“kaleo”* refers to *“the effective Gospel call, the call through which God makes us believers and saints.”* (Lenski, p. 544). The vast majority of those who receive this invitation spurn and reject it, as in Christ’s parable of the Wedding Feast (cf. Matthew 22:1-14).



“Guests at the Wedding Supper of the Lamb” by Jan van Eyck

The invitation has been issued to all of humanity. There is no blessing, however, for those who scorn and reject God's gracious offer of salvation. Our Lord Jesus had warned:

"I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 8:11-12)

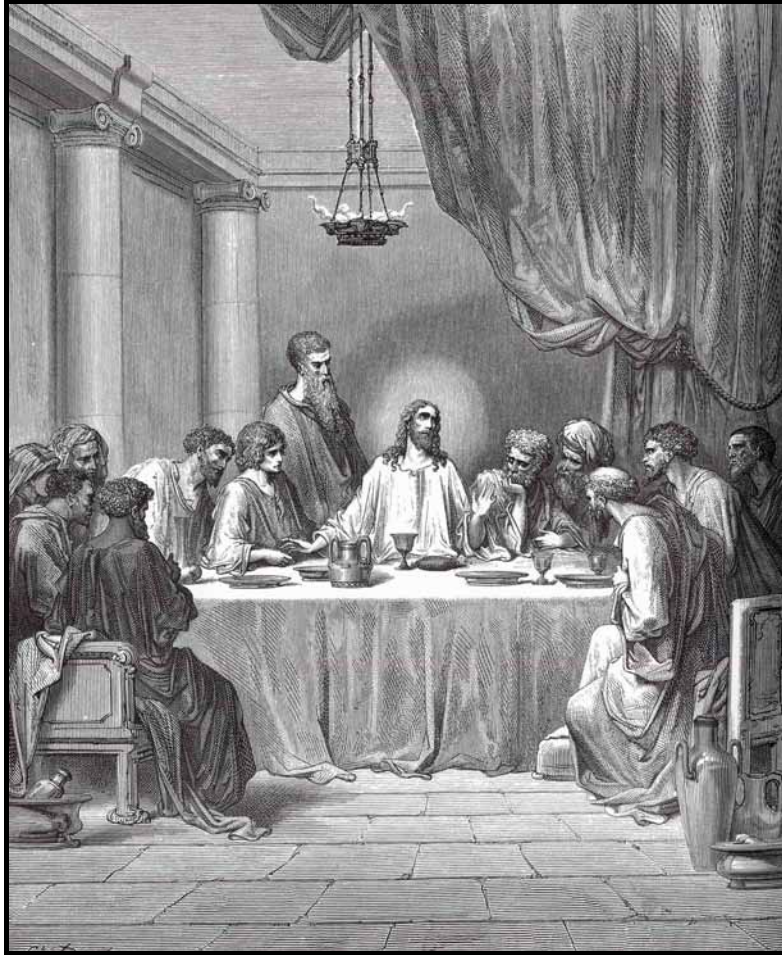


"The Coming of the Royal Bridegroom/Messiah" by E. M. Lilien

The image of eternal salvation as a rich banquet prepared by God and spread out before His people comes from the Old Testament. The Psalmist rejoiced: ***"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies. Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over; surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."*** (Psalm 23:5-6) The prophet Isaiah utilized the same feast imagery in one of the most powerful portrayals of the blessedness of the saints in heaven anywhere in the Old Testament:

"On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine - the best of meats and the

finest of wines. On this mountain He will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all the nations; He will swallow up death forever. The sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; He will remove the disgrace of His people from all the earth. The Lord has spoken.” (Isaiah 25:6-8; cf. also Isaiah 55:1-2)



“The Last Supper” by Gustav Dore

The apocryphal Fourth Book of Ezra, written around 100 A.D., may reflect a familiarity with Revelation as it tells of a similar banquet scene with the guests arrayed in white robes: *“Rise and stand and see at the feast of the Lord the number of those who have been sealed. Those who have departed from the shadow of this age have received glorious garments from the Lord...who are clothed in white.”* (4 Ezra 2:38-40).

The banquet imagery of Scripture conveys a sacramental connotation as it reminds



"The Church as the Bride of Christ"
by C. Von Spanyol

the church of the Eucharistic feast of our Lord's Body and Blood as a foretaste of the intimate communion of God and His holy people in heaven. In the midst of the Last Supper, as Christ instituted the Sacrament, He observed: ***"I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink of it anew with you in the kingdom of My Father."*** (Matthew 26:29). The divine service demonstrates this awareness both in the canticle - *"This is the Feast of Victory for our God"* - based on the visions of Revelation, and in the words of the Offertory - *"Grace our table with Your presence and give us a foretaste of the feast to come."* Phillip Nicolai, one of the greatest hymnists of the Lutheran reformation, expresses the profound Scriptural insight that the Holy Eucharist is an earthly preview of heavenly communion in the second verse of his magnificent chorale *"Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying."* The hymn is based on the parable of the wise and foolish virgins who await the coming of the bridegroom.

*"Zion hears the watchword sounding, with bridal joy her heart is bounding,
She wakes , and breaks the spell of sleep.
For her Lord comes forth in splendor, all rich in grace, truth's strong Defender!
Her Star grows bright mid darkness deep.
Now come, O precious Crown. Lord Jesus, God's own Son.
Hail, Hosanna!
We enter all, the marriage hall, to eat the Supper at Your call."* (ELH #544)

That sacramental connotation can be clearly seen, not only here in the vision of the wedding feast, but also in the earlier depiction of Harlot Babylon, the mimic and counterpart of the true bride. The prostitute holds in her hand a golden chalice, filled to the brim with the poisonous and putrid brew of her corruption (Revelation 17:4). Here too is an allusion to the true church's *"cup of blessing which we bless."* (1 Corinthians 10:16). In the golden goblet, the harlot administers her own anti-sacrament, offering her followers death and damnation in fatal parody of the life and salvation which Christ presents to His own in His sacred body and blood. Martin Franzmann suggests: *"Is it far-fetched to see in the golden cup which she (the harlot) extends, a 'cup full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication,' the abominable counterpart to the 'cup of blessing' which the church extends as her own?"* (Franzmann, p. 115).

"And he added, 'These are the true words of God.'" - The beatitude is followed by a powerful affirmation of authenticity. The affirmation applies directly to the promise of blessing itself but should not be limited to it. The blessing rests upon the visions of judgment and salvation which have been presented in chapters 17-19. For it to be true, they must also be true. God's promise to judge the wicked and redeem His own will most surely be fulfilled. "These words" are the beatitude, but this beatitude as illumined by the whole vision, which shows us the entire Una Sancta as the wedding is about to begin." (Lenski, p. 545)

"At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, 'Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship



"One of the Foolish Virgins Excluded from the Feast" by Valentine Princep

God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” -John’s response to the awesome vision of the marriage celebration of the Lamb is to fall down in worship before the angelic messenger. No doubt he is simply overwhelmed by that which he has seen and heard. The angel’s response is immediate and emphatic - ***“Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!”*** Worship belongs to God and to God alone. Not the most magnificent or glorious of His servants, neither His angels nor His saints may be accorded that which is the unique right and possession of the one God. The command ***“Worship God!”*** recalls Christ’s assertion during His temptation in the wilderness - ***“Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.”*** (Matthew 4:10) An ongoing fascination with angels and their worship permeated Judaism during this period and occasionally became something of a problem in the Christian congregations of the first generation. Paul writes: ***“Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize.”*** (Colossians 2:18; cf. also Hebrews 1-2). The angel humbly identifies himself ***“a fellow servant with you and with your brothers.”*** That which characterizes every true servant of God is a willingness to ***“hold to the testimony of Jesus.”*** The noun ***“testimony”*** is the Greek word ***“martyria”*** which emphasizes the risk and responsibility of faithful witness in a sinful world. Brighton defines the nature of that witness in this way:

“It is the witness which Jesus gave concerning Himself in His ministry on earth, and which He now continues to give by the Spirit through the witness of God’s people on earth...that message about Jesus’ saving work...which He gave to the church to hold and proclaim to others, namely that Christ is the Savior of the world.” (Brighton, pp. 502-503)

This faithful testimony about Jesus as the Savior of the world is identified as ***“the spirit of prophecy.”*** With these words John asserts that the Gospel of Jesus is also the core message of the Old Testament, the heart and essence of all true prophecy. If it does not witness to Jesus as Savior and Lord, then it is not of God.



*“The Vision of the Rider Upon the White Horse” by
Lucas Cranach*

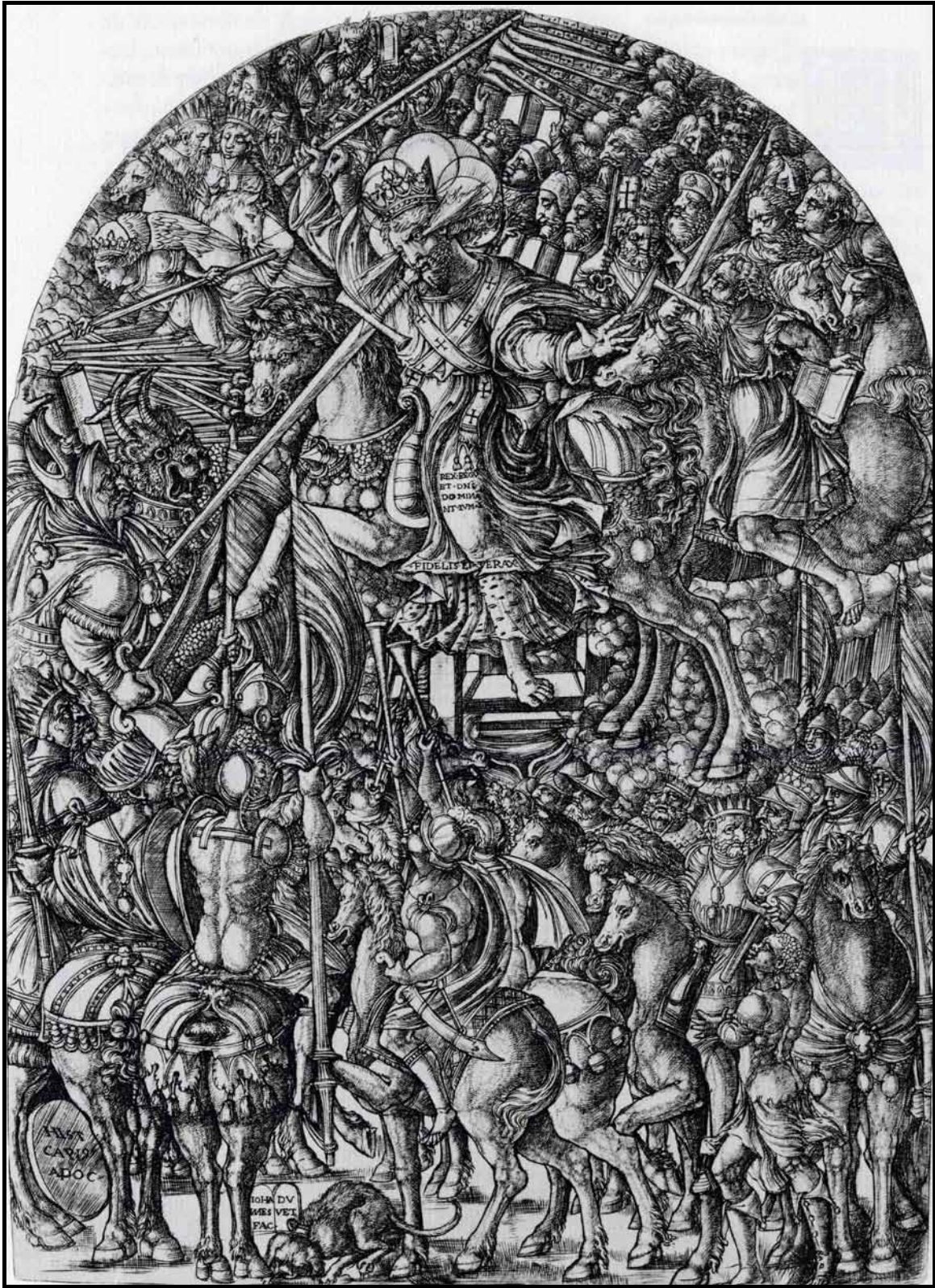
The Rider on the White Horse

Revelation 19:11-21

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose Rider is called Faithful and True. With justice He judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on His head are many crowns. He has a name written on Him that no one but He Himself knows. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and His name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following Him, riding one white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with an iron scepter.” He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.

On His robe and on His thigh He has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great." Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the Rider on the horse and His army. But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the Rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

"I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice He judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on His head are many crowns. He has a name written on Him that no one but He Himself knows. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and His name is the Word of God.." - The shift to the new scene is abrupt, without any transition or introduction. The magnificent chorus of angelic praise is over and heaven is opened before the enthralled eyes of the Revelator. The characteristic phrase *"I saw"* (Greek - *"kai eidon"*) indicates the beginning of the new scene. In the vision of the seven bowls John had introduced the concept of *"Armageddon"* as a symbol for the final culmination of the age-old conflict between God and Satan at the end of time (cf. Revelation 16:16). The victorious judgment of God upon the wicked was then presented in the imagery of the downfall and destruction of Harlot Babylon. John now returns to the Armageddon theme and expands the image in considerable detail. It is important to recognize that the content of these scenes is not historically sequential - first the fall of Babylon, next the marriage feast of the Lamb, and then finally Armageddon. Instead, these recurring scenes portray the same reality from different perspectives to enable us to fully understand all of its implications. The battle about to be presented depicts the same events portrayed in the vision of the fall of harlot Babylon, that is, the ultimate and total victory of God over sin, death, and the power of the devil. The phrase *"heaven standing open"* (Greek - *"eneogmenon"*) is a perfect participle which serves to strongly express the truth that the heavens stand completely open and revealed before John. God is about to act decisively upon the earth. A similar phrase occurred in Revelation 4:1.



"The Rider on the White Horse" by Jean Duvet



“The Vision of the Warrior Champion” - Tinted Luther Bible Woodcut

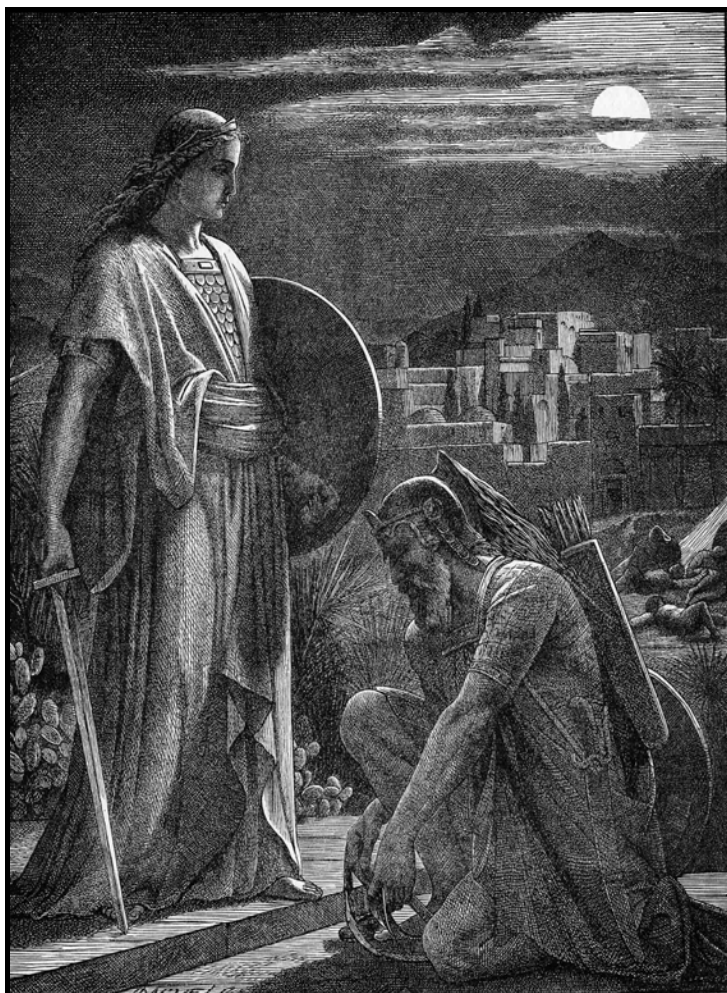
The battle scene opens dramatically with the introduction of the Warrior Champion of the hosts of heaven - ***“There before me was a white horse, whose Rider is called Faithful and True.”*** There is no doubt as to the identity of this mighty and majestic figure. He is our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. The depiction of the Messiah as a mighty warrior who will defeat and destroy the enemies of God and His people was not unusual in the prophecies of the Old Testament. Isaiah foretold the coming of God’s judgment in these words: ***“The Lord will march out like a mighty man, like a warrior He will stir up His zeal; with a shout He will raise the battle cry and will triumph over His enemies.”*** (Isaiah 42:13). In the closing verses of his book of prophecy, Isaiah anticipated the glorious vindication of God’s judgment:

“The hand of the Lord will be made known to His servants, but His fury will be shown to His foes. See, the Lord is coming with fire, and His chariots are like a whirlwind; He will bring down His anger and fury and His rebuke with flames of fire. For with fire and with His sword, the Lord will execute judgment upon all men, and many will be those slain by the Lord.” (Isaiah 66:14-16)

Zechariah promised that God will fight on behalf of His people: ***“Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations as He fights in the day of battle...Then the Lord my God will come and all the holy ones with Him.”*** So also the messianic angel of the Lord had appeared to Joshua as a mighty warrior: ***“Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in His hand. Joshua went up to Him and asked, “Are you for us or for our enemies?” (Joshua 5:13)***

Once before the visions of Revelation had presented the image of a conquering warrior upon a white horse. He was the first of the four horsemen of the apocalypse in the vision of the seven seals - ***“I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest.”*** (Revelation 6:2). In that instance, the rider was not the Christ, but the Anti-Christ, his appearance a deliberate imitation of the mighty Champion of the host of God (cf. Notes, p. 146ff.) ***“This victorious rider is the antithesis of the rider he had seen before (6:2). This is not the Antichrist, that imitator and opponent of the Christ who was permitted to go forth conquering and to conquer a world in love with the lie.”*** (Franzmann, p. 126)

John provides considerable detail in his description of the Lord’s Champion. The war horse which the Champion rides is ***“white.”*** Throughout the Book of Revelation, white is the color of holiness and righteousness. We are



“The Angel of the Lord Appears to Joshua as a Mighty Warrior” by E. Armytage



*“Jesus as the Warrior-Champion of the Hosts of Heaven
Our Savior Lutheran Church*

told that this Warrior ***“is called Faithful and True.”*** At the beginning of the seventh letter, addressed to the lukewarm church in Laodicea, Jesus identifies Himself as ***“the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the Ruler of God’s creation.”*** (Revelation 3:14) The combination emphasizes God’s reliability. He invariably fulfills His promises - in this context His promise of judgment upon the wicked and vindication for the saints in His glorious return.



“He Who Has the Double Edged Sword”
Detail from a Woodcut by Albrecht Dürer

“With justice He judges and makes war.” As previously noted, the image of God’s judgment upon the wicked as warfare is well established in the Old Testament. In the letter to the church at Pergamum, Christ uses the same language as he warns: ***“These are the words of Him who has the sharp double-edged sword...Repent therefore! Otherwise I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of My***



*"His Eyes Were Like Blazing Fire"
Tinted Luther Bible Woodcut - 16th Century*

mouth." (Revelation 2:12,15). The judgment that He renders is absolutely righteous and fair - **"with justice"** (Greek - *"en dikaiosyne"*). This most important term refers to God's act of justification. It is courtroom language which describes the man who has been acquitted, that is, declared to be *"Not Guilty!"* by the judge. This verdict is rendered on the basis of the substitutionary atonement of Christ and is therefore completely just and fair. In this context the Greek might best be translated *"He judges righteously"* and thereby vindicates His persecuted and afflicted people. Furthermore, the judgement which He brings upon the sinful world - **"He judges and makes war"** is fully warranted and just. The warfare in question here is not literal military action upon an actual battlefield. Christ will not physically appear to lead a cavalry charge. Consistency would require that such a battle literally be fought on horseback with swords. This is

figurative language which graphically describes God's condemnation and judgment of His foes.

"His eyes are like blazing fire , and on His head are many crowns." - The simile eyes **"like blazing fire"** is drawn from the image of Christ amid the golden lampstands - **"His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes were like blazing fire."** (Revelation 1:14), and the letter to the church in Thyatira. **"These are the words of the Son of God whose eyes are like blazing fire..."** (Revelation 2:18). These references, in turn, are based upon the image of the Son of Man who stood before Daniel the prophet: **"His body was like chrysolite, his**

face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches.” (Daniel 10:6) The burning eyes of the Judge indicate the penetrating gaze from which nothing can be concealed. It is impossible to deceive Him. *“Such eyes indicate a penetrating look of holy purification before which no human can stand unless covered and cleansed by the forgiveness and righteousness of God. Nothing is unknown or hidden from such searching, searing eyes.”* (Brighton, p. 509)

His head is adorned with **“many crowns”** (Greek - *“diademata polla”*). These are not the victor’s crowns (Greek - *“stephanos”*) which have appeared elsewhere in Revelation (i.e. Revelation 14:14) but the royal headgear of a king, signifying the might and majesty of the monarch. He wears not one crown but many and in this way is designated not a one king among many but as He who alone is **“KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.”** (Revelation 19:16). As the hymn rejoices: *“Crown Him with many crowns as thrones before Him fall; crown Him, ye kings, with many crowns, for He is Lord of all!”* (ELH # 55 - Appropriately this classic hymn’s melody is entitled *“Diademata.”*) The deliberate contrast between the **“many crowns”** of the Savior King on the one hand, and the seven crowns of the dragon (Revelation 12:3) and ten crowns of the beast (Revelation 13:1) reveals the blasphemous claims of those who would usurp the authority of the true King. *“The undefined multiplicity of diadems shows Christ to be the only true king, on a grander*



*“The Champion of the Host of Heaven” by
Albrecht Dürer*

scale than the dragon and the beast whose small number of crowns implies kingship of limited in time.” (Beale, p. 952)

“He has a name written on Him that no one but He Himself knows.” - The prerogative of withholding one’s name is indicative of superior rank and power. In the Biblical world the knowing of a name was significant of having some degree of control over the one named. Thus, for instance, when Jacob wrestled the Angel of the Lord at the ford of the Jabbok the patriarch’s request to know the angel’s name went unanswered while he not only revealed his own name to the angel but received a new name from Him (Genesis 32:22-30). The nature of this exchange reveals the status of each participant relative to the other. God’s remarkable condescension in revealing His sacred name “JHWH” to Moses at the burning bush signaled the unique covenant relationship into which God was prepared to enter with His people (Exodus 3). The fact that the warrior champion of God’s host

“Has a name written on Him that no one knows but He Himself” is indicative of His unique rank and stature. He has no peer and none may consider themselves His equal. *“The confidential nature of the name here...alludes to Christ being absolutely sovereign over humanity’s experiential access to His character.”* (Beale, p. 955) Put more simply, we have no independent knowledge of Christ. He is Creator; we are creatures. All that we know of Christ is that which He chooses to reveal of Himself to us. To imagine that it could possibly be otherwise is presumptuous and arrogant.



“The Champion Faithful and True”
by Hans Burgkmair

“He is dressed in a robe dipped



“The Marriage Feast of the Lamb and the Champion of the Host of Heaven” - 15th Century Bible Illumination

in blood and His Name is the Word of God.” - As previously noted (cf. p.333-334), the picture of the Messiah as a warrior returning in triumph from the battlefield, his robes stained with the blood of his fallen enemies, is drawn from Isaiah’s prophecy of doom upon the heathen nation of Edom (cf. Isaiah 63:1-6). Here, John depicts the blood of God’s enemies shed before the battle has begun, and in this way signals the certainty of God’s victory in this struggle.

In the magnificent Prologue to his Gospel, John identifies Jesus as the **“Word”** (Greek - *“logos”*) of God through whom all things were made in the beginning. (Cf.

John 1:1-14). As John's final contribution to the New Testament draws to its triumphant conclusion, the apostle is inspired once again to designate Jesus as ***"the Word of God."*** Jesus is God's once for all, decisive revelation of God to humanity (cf. Hebrews 1:1-14). As the universe of time and space which He called into being in the beginning now comes to its conclusion in victorious judgment, Jesus will once again speak for God and execute His judgment. He is the prophet *"par excellence,"* the fulfillment of all God's promises. The Word of God is not mere lifeless sound. It causes that which it speaks to be. Dr. Brighton adds the intriguing insight that John's use of the title in this context hints *"that after His second coming at the End, the Christ is going to do something more than judge - something positive by the grace of God, something creative and new."* (Brighton, p. 513)



"The Champion of the Hosts of Heaven" - 16th Century Bible Engraving

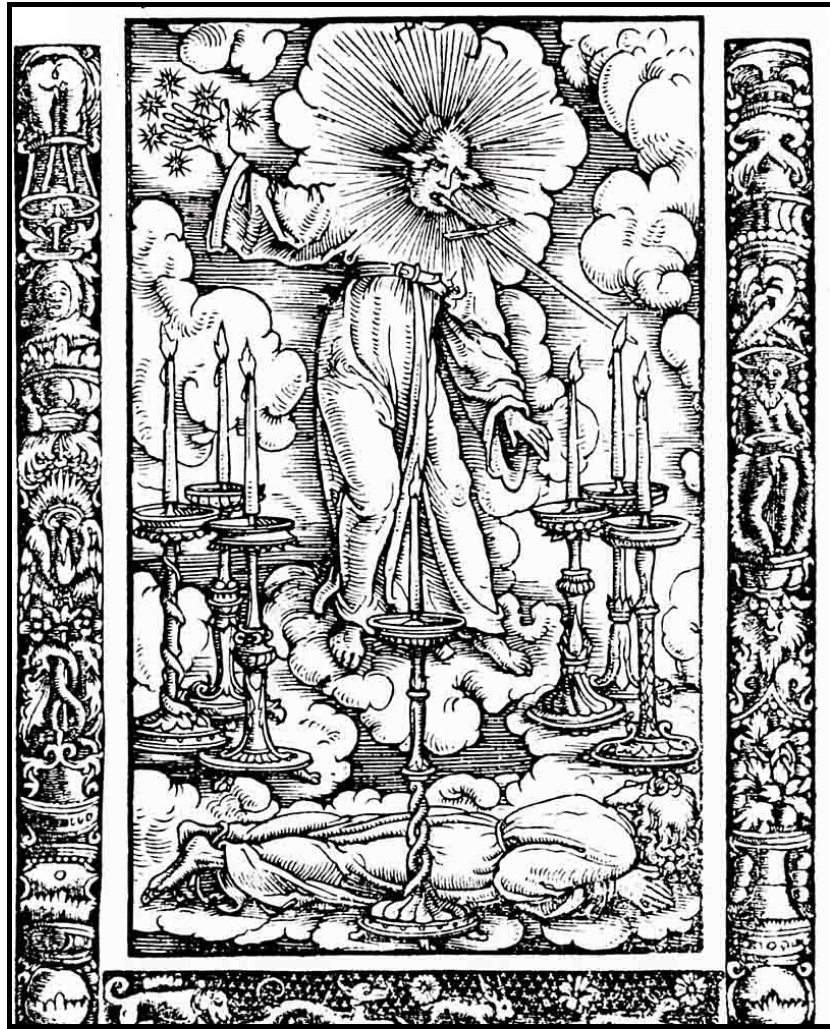
"The armies of heaven were following Him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of God Almighty. On His robe and on His thigh He has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS." - The armies of heaven



*“Out of His Mouth Came a Sharp Double-edged Sword”
Tinted Luther Bible Woodcut*

which follow the Messiah King into battle are the people of God, justified and made righteous in the blood of Christ. This identification is clearly indicated in Revelation 17:14 which foretells the coming of this great conflict: ***“They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because He is Lord of Lords and King of Kings - and with Him will be His called, chosen, and faithful followers.”*** It is significant to note that although the Greek text uses the noun *“strateumata”* which means *“an army of armed troops,”* this army plays no role in the battle itself. It is the King of Kings alone who crushes and destroys His enemies. Hence this army is not arrayed in battle armor but ***“in fine linen, white and clean.”*** These are the garments of purity and holiness signifying the justification of those whom God has declared righteous in Christ. They are the same festive robes in which the church was depicted as the Bride.

“This heavenly army, unlike their leader, has no swords or spears. They take no part in the action. They wear no armor because, being immortal, they are immune to injury. They are non-combatant supporters of the Messiah as He wages war single-handedly.” (Thomas, p. 387)



“Out of His Mouth Came A Sharp Double-Edged Sword”

“Out of His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations.” - As previously noted (cf. Notes p. 605), this image also appeared in the prologue’s description of the Son of Man amid the golden lampstands: *“In His right hand He held seven stars and of His mouth came a sharp double-edged sword.”* (Revelation 1:16). In the letter to the church at Pergamum, Christ had introduced Himself as *“Him who has the sharp double-edged sword”* and warned that He would shortly come to wage war against the Nicolaitan heretics: *“I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.”* (Revelation 2:12,16). The imagery is drawn from Isaiah 49 where the prophet uses this figure of speech to describe the Messiah’s ability to accomplish His purpose for the salvation of Israel and the nations by means of His word: *“He has made My mouth like a sharpened sword.”* (Isaiah 49:2). The image conveys the sense of the piercing and

penetrating power of the Word of God. In the apocryphal *“Wisdom of Solomon”* the same metaphor serves to describe God’s awful pronouncement of judgment upon His foes:

“For while gentle silence enveloped all things and night in its swift course was now half gone. Thy all powerful word leaped from heaven, from the royal throne, into the midst of the land that was doomed, a stern warrior carrying the sword of thy authentic command, and stood and filled all things with death, and touched heaven while standing on earth.” (Wisdom of Solomon, 18:14-16)

God describes the effect of His law upon the people of Israel through the prophet Hosea: ***“Therefore I cut you in pieces with My prophets, I killed you with the words of My mouth, My judgments flashed like lightning upon you.”*** (Hosea 6:5). In the New Testament, the writer to the Hebrews declares: ***“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”*** (Hebrews 4:12). Accordingly the sword which here proceeds from the mouth of the champion with which He will ***“strike down the nations”*** does not describe physical combat or destruction but the declaration of God’s inescapable judgment upon the sinful world.

“He will rule them with an iron scepter.” - The allusion is to Psalm 2:9 - ***“You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery.”*** Isaiah utilizes similar language to describe the Messiah’s role as Judge of the nations: ***“He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth; with the breath of His lips He will slay the***



“King of Kings and Lord of Lords” by Jean Duvet

wicked.” (Isaiah 11:4) John had referred to this passage previously in the letter to the church at Thyatira (cf. Revelation 2:27) and in the vision of the lady and the dragon (cf. Revelation 12:5). The **“iron scepter”** (Greek - *“hrabdo sidera”*) is the symbol of royal power and might. The fact that it is iron, rather than the customary gold or silver signifies the destructiveness of the Messiah King’s judgment upon the nations.

“He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God.” - John returns to Isaiah’s powerful depiction of the Messiah as a victorious warrior returning from battle with his clothes stained by the blood of his vanquished enemies (cf. Isaiah 63:2-6). This theme had first been introduced in the vision of the judgment harvest (cf. Revelation 14:17-20). It was also alluded to earlier in this scene when John describes the Savior’s **“robe dipped in blood.”** (Revelation 19:13). The image is one of absolute victory.



“Jacob Wrestling With the Angel” by G. Abbey

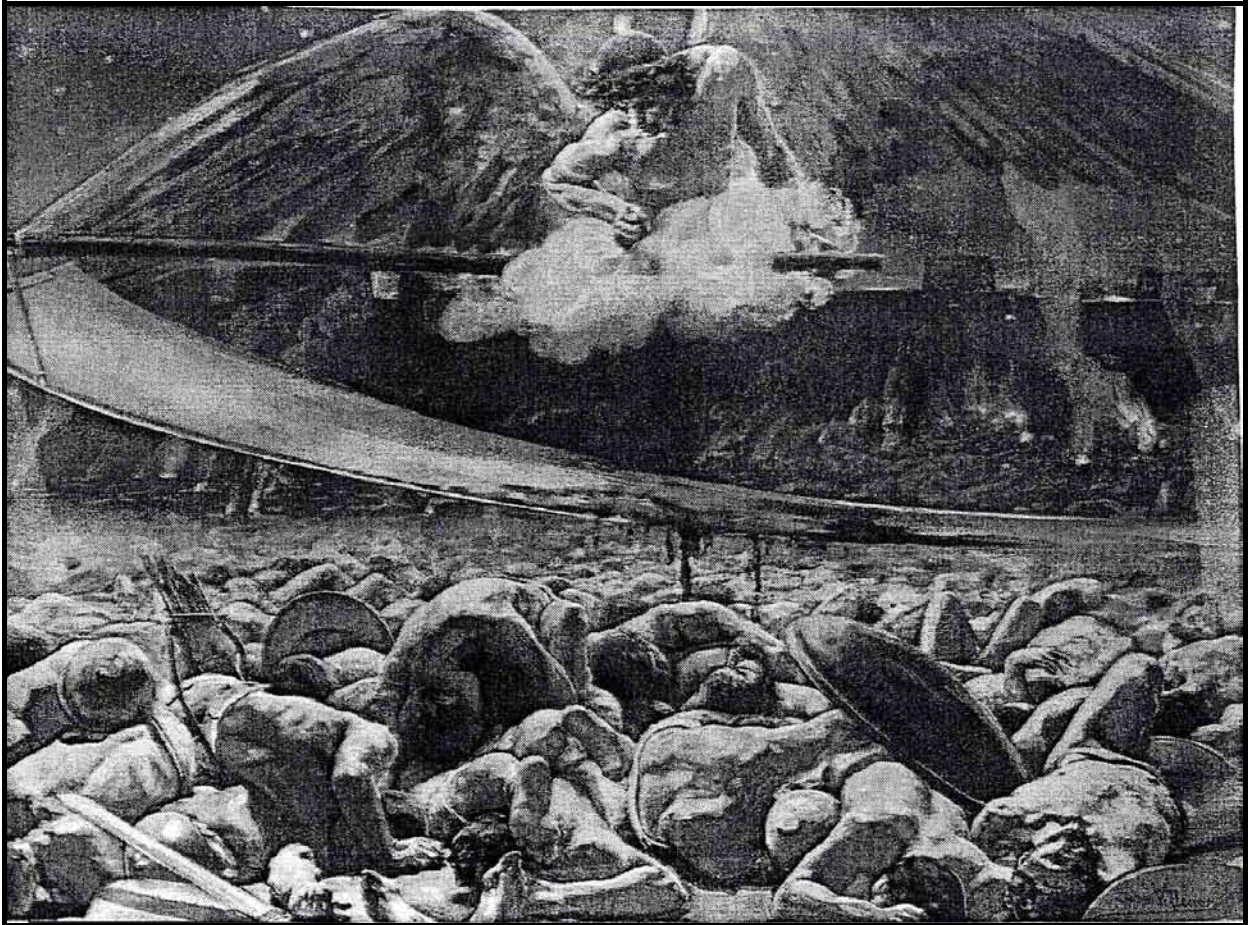
“On His robe and on His thigh He has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.” - For the fourth time in this scene the Warrior Messiah is named. First He was called **“Faithful and True.”** (19:11). Then we were told that He has another name **“written on Him that no one but He Himself knows.”** (19:12) Next he was designated as **“the Word of God.”** (19:13) Finally, the revelator describes the name that is written **“on His robe and on His thigh.”** (19:16) Each of these names and titles provides insight into the nature and the identity of the Warrior Messiah. The phrase **“on His robe and on His thigh”** is somewhat ambiguous. It may refer to two different inscriptions, one upon the champion’s garment and the second upon his leg itself.

It could, however, also refer to a single inscription on that portion of the Warrior's robe which covered His thigh. In that case, the conjunction would be epexegetical, and should be translated *"on His robe, that is upon His thigh."* If the dual reference to both the robe and the thigh is intended, its purpose may be an allusion to Jacob who became Israel after contending with the angel. At the conclusion of their contest, the angel touched Jacob's thigh, causing its dislocation (Genesis 32:25). As a result, Jacob, now Israel, walked with a limp for the rest of his life to remind him of God's merciful condescension and love. The name upon His thigh serves to identify the Warrior Messiah as the new Israel, the fulfillment of all God's promises to the descendants of Jacob. The title itself, **"KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS"** was previously applied to Christ in Revelation 17:14 (in reverse order). It expresses the sovereign supremacy of Christ over all earthly kings and rulers.



"Jacob Wrestling With the Angel" by Jacques Patisou

"And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders,



"The Angel of the Lord Destroys the Host of Assyria Before the Walls of Jerusalem"
by Jose Villegas

and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great." - The angel's summons of the scavengers and birds of prey to feast upon the bodies of the slain expresses both the certainty and the totality of the Messiah's victory over His enemies. Although the battle itself has not yet occurred, its outcome is a foregone conclusion. *"With the Messiah and His armies poised and ready for battle, the insertion of this brief vision adds to the suspense of this dramatic moment."* (Thomas, p. 393) The angelic messenger is *"standing in the sun,"* the position of God's glorious majesty as he proclaims the downfall of all of God's enemies. The angel is well placed to effectively deliver his message to *"all the birds flying in midair."* The angel's gruesome invitation to *"great supper of God"* forms a grim counterpart to joyful invitation to the marriage feast of the Lamb which had been issued earlier in the chapter (cf. Revelation 19:6-9). The imagery is drawn from the similarly grotesque words of Ezekiel's summons of the scavengers and birds of prey to feast upon the

sacrifice of the hordes of Gog (cf. Ezekiel 39:17-20). In both instances God is the host (***“At My table you will eat your fill...”*** Ezekiel 39:20) for He has planned this feast and supplied its provisions - the corpses of the fallen hosts of His enemies, those who have persecuted and oppressed the church. The language of the text leaves no doubt that the bodies of the slain will be drawn from every class and category of men - ***“kings, generals and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great.”*** The only survivors of this conflagration will be those who follow the Champion and are loyal to Christ. In the Biblical world to remain unburied, torn apart and devoured by scavengers and birds of prey, was the ultimate disgrace, the most ignominious and shameful form of death.



“The Destruction of the Beast and the False Prophet” by B. West

“Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the Rider on the horse and His army. But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the Rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.” - The hosts of the foe marshal for war. This is ***“Armageddon”*** (Revelation 16:16) the ultimate culmination of the ancient warfare. The beast comes

forth surrounded by the worldly powers - *“the kings of the earth and their armies”* - which have prostituted their authority in his service. The language closely parallels that of Revelation 16:14 - *“they go out to the kings of the whole world to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty”* - and Revelation 20:8 - *“and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth - Gog and Magog - to gather them for battle”* both of which describe the same scene. The imagery of the culmination of Satan’s age old conflict with Christ and His church and God’s judgment upon the nations as a great battle is drawn from Ezekiel 38 and 39 (cf. also Zechariah 12:3; 14:2, 13-14). The language of Psalm 2:2 - *“The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against His Anointed One”* - also “rings in the background.” (Beale, p. 968) The focus of their opposition is *“the Rider on the horse and His army.”*



*“The Destruction of the Beast”
Luther Bible Woodcut*

John’s description of the battle itself is remarkably restrained, no doubt reflecting the symbolic nature of these events.

“Interestingly enough, there is no description of the actual warfare. This should remind the reader that the Apocalypse is dominated by metaphor and symbol. While the events portrayed in apocalyptic language are to be taken with all seriousness, they are not to be taken literally. Armageddon portrays the eschatological defeat of Antichrist (an event which takes place in time and brings to a close this age as we know it) but does not require that we accept in a literal fashion the specific imagery with which the event is described.” (Mounce, p. 349)

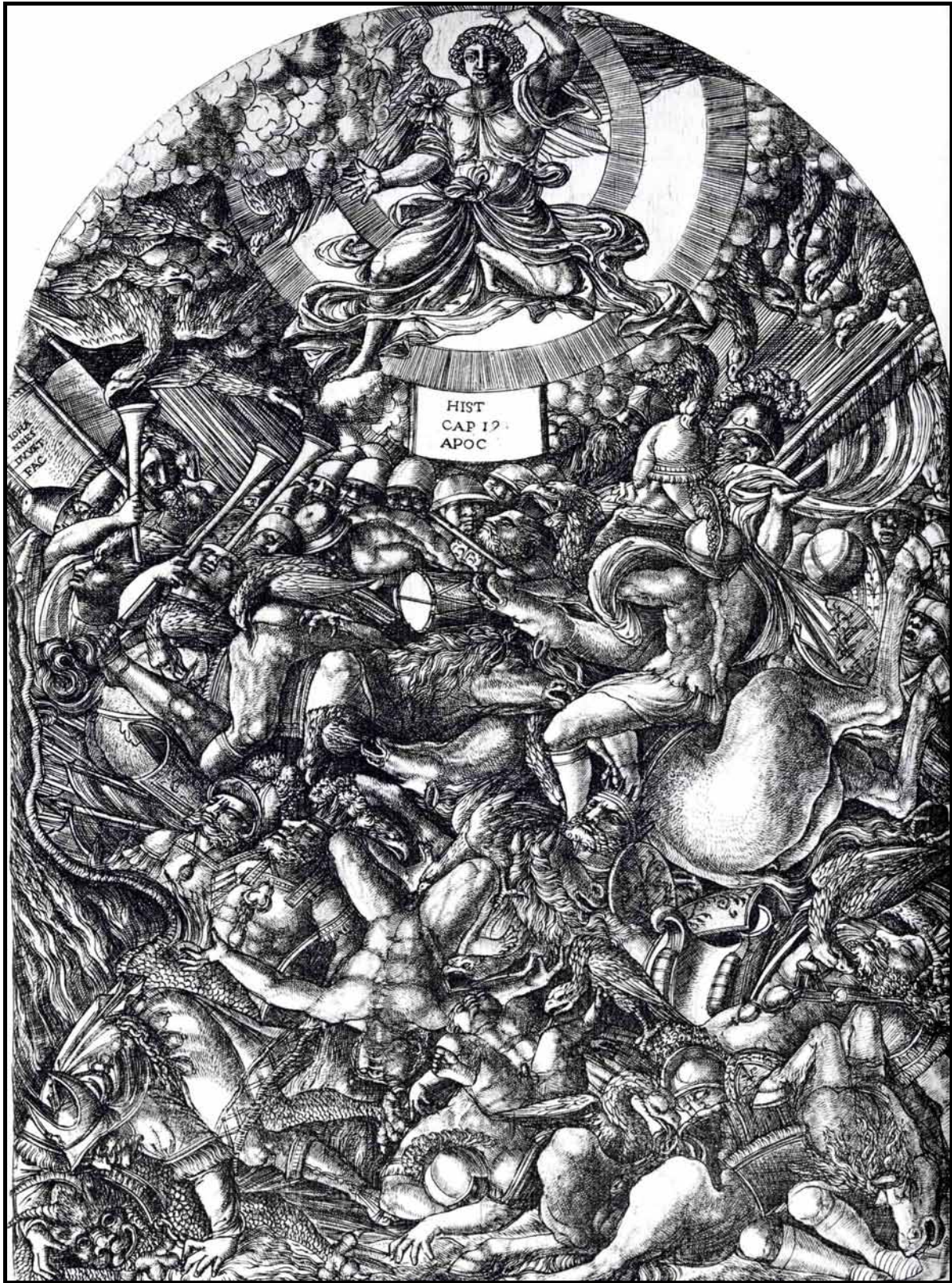
“But the beast was captured and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf...” - The



"The Beast and the Dragon" - Luther Bible Woodcut

text proceeds directly from the battle's prelude to its conclusion. The outcome of this conflict was never in doubt, although it may have often seemed so to the saints in the heat of the struggle. The resistance of Satan and those who are his slaves has been futile from the beginning. The two dimensions of Antichrist's realm, his coercive power ("*the beast*") and his deceptive power ("*the false prophet*"), are reunited in this image of defeat and destruction. The pair have reverted to the relationship described in chapter 13, depicting the land beast as the servant and agent of the beast from the sea - "*the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf.*" This is the reversal of their role in chapters 17-18 where the land beast - harlot Babylon - was the mistress, astride the sea beast who served her evil will. This interchangeability continues to reflect the nature of the two beasts as contrasting aspects of the same reality. The dual role of this agent of Satan, the dragon, is the basis for the judgment which now overtakes them - "*With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image.*"

"But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet...The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur." - The defeat of the beast and the



"The Destruction of the Beast and the False Prophet" by Jean Duvet

false prophet is utter and abject. The verb *“was captured”* (Greek - *“epiasthe”*) means to seize or lay hold of with hostile intent. Even the cold comfort of an honorable death upon the battlefield is denied to the beast and the false prophet. Instead, theirs is the ignominy of falling helplessly into the hands of their enemy. They are taken alive so that they may be appropriately punished. That just punishment is immediately forthcoming - *“The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.”* To be cast into the fire while still living indicates the ongoing, eternal torment of hell. This is conscious punishment that will endure throughout eternity as stated in the parallel text which describes the dragon’s consignment to the same fate - *“They will be tormented day and night forever and*



*“Thrown Alive Into the Fiery Lake of Burning Sulfur”
Detail from a Woodcut by Lucas Cranach*

ever.” (Revelation 20:10). This is Scripture’s first reference to **“the fiery lake of burning sulfur”** as a fearsome image of eternal damnation in hell. It appears a total of six times in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 19:20; 20:10, 14-15; 21:8). Revelation 20:14 explains: **“The lake of fire is the second death.”** The link between fire and the torments of the damned is well established in the Bible. Jesus warns: **“But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.”** (Matthew 5:22) Christ uses the Hebrew contraction *“Gehenna”* (the valley of the son of Hinnon) in this text. *“Gehenna”* is the term used most often in the New Testament for the fiery torment of hell (cf. Matthew 5:29-30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15,33; Mark 9:43,45,47; Luke 12:5; James 3:6). The word originally referred to a ravine outside of Jerusalem where grotesque idolatry, including sacrifice of living children in the fires of Molech (cf. 2 Kings 23:10; 2 Chronicles 28:3; 33:6; Jeremiah 7:31; 32:35). The prophets denounced Gehenna as a place of wickedness and corruption, drenched **“in the blood of the innocent”** over which the terrible judgment of God impended (Jeremiah 19:2-10). By New Testament times the notorious area had become the town dump where fires burned perpetually. Thus the use of Gehenna for the fires of hell was a natural development. The term is also widely used in the Apocrypha. 2 Esdras indicates that *“Gehenna - the furnace of hell”* will be located opposite the paradise of heaven (2 Esdras 7:36). Apocryphal 1 Enoch speaks of the *“accursed valley”* of those who are damned eternally (1 Enoch 27:2-3) and warns that *“the kings and potentates of the earth”* will be cast down into this valley *“deep and burning with fire”* to be bound in iron chains for eternity (1 Enoch 54:1-3). 2 Enoch expands the dreadful scene further:

“a very frightful place; and all kinds of torture and torment are in that place, cruel darkness and lightless gloom. And there is no light there, and a black fire blazes up perpetually with a river of fire that comes out over the whole place, fire here, freezing ice there, and it dries up and it freezes.” (2 Enoch 10:1-2)

John also mentions **“burning sulfur.”** This is the infamous *“brimstone”* of classical English, a yellow sulfurous substance which burns with great heat sending acrid fumes into the air. It is traditionally associated with the fires of hell.

“The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the Rider...” - The remainder of the hosts of the enemy is slain by the judgment sword that proceeds from the mouth of the Warrior Messiah. The reference is obviously not to literal physical death but to the condemnation of the impenitent by the stern word of God’s holy law. The grisly image is completed as the carrion eaters gorge themselves on the bodies of the fallen.