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REVELATION

SPIRITUALLY UNDERSTOOD

PART 21

REVELATION 16:17 to 17:18

Babylon and Augustine's Tale of Two Cities

BY: CHARLES D. ALEXANDER

REVELATION SPIRITUALLY UNDERSTOOD

PART TWENTY-ONE

BABYLON AND AUGUSTINE'S TALE OF TWO CITIES

Revelation 16:17 -17:18

The story of the harlot Babylon in chapters 17 and 18 of Revelation is the story of the world in its idolatry, its pollution of the soul of man, its pride and boasting, its luxury and shame. The germ of the story of its downfall is seen in the judgment of the Seventh Vial of the wrath of God (Rev. 16:17-21). Chapters 17 and 18 describe the same judgment in greater detail. This extraordinary passage of Scripture illustrates two great facts -

1. The Fact of the Total Inspiration of the Bible;
2. The Nature of the world we live in.

Here we have sprawled across the page of history the apparition of a gigantic fraud, a system wholly dedicated to evil designed to pollute and enslave the human race - a system of pride, cruelty, vice and false religion. It is an apparition which could by no manner of means be forecast by anyone alive at its inception, nor could anyone have guessed its course and fate. There is no more pitiful or degrading object in society than the harlot. She truly represents all that is false, abandoned and depraved in human nature. Man's most noble achievements in art, letters and science have in the end been subverted always by that spirit of evil which genders decay and pollution. Let the ruins of Egypt, the mighty civilisations of Mesopotamia now buried beneath the sands of the manmade desert, the temples of Greece, and the fallen arches of Rome and Carthage, witness to that. What is wrong with the human race? What is the cause of this fateful destiny which dogs the footprints of man's long pilgrimage? The answer lies in the Bible and nowhere else. Our grand civilisations are hollow with shame and guilt. Western civilisation which has brought man to the highest pinnacles of achievement in the discovery of the secrets of creation, is sinking at the same time beneath a tidal wave of violence, crime, and pollution of morals which governments appear to have neither the will nor the power to restrain. Religion has lost its voice. The churches to a deplorable extent have lost their message, and the voice of the gospel is muted and restrained. Theology at this end of the 20th century cannot compare with the light and power

and sanctified scholarship of a century ago. Doubt and denial are written across the face of Christendom. The revolt against God and truth only keeps pace with the false and delusive pretence of piety which can see no difference between Islam and Christianity, between Buddha and Christ. Indeed it is ready to barter the divinity of Christ and make the Cross of non-effect by draping it with a humanistic philosophy. A church without a Christ! Even the educated heathen are amazed at the suicide of the Western Church. Yet the very Bible which these apostate “Christians” deny and abandon, has foretold it all - and God makes the diviners mad! The aged Disciple whom Jesus loved, in his convict prison on Patmos, saw it all and called it MYSTERY BABYLON, using noun as an adjective to denote that what we are dealing with is just the old raddled harlot from Mesopotamia, decked in the fine robes of a specious pretence of religion, the old delusion to which our first mother Eve (God rest her bones!) for a short time fell a victim – “Ye shall be as gods”.

The Bible teaches us to expect a great deal of human history to be dominated by some spirit of evil, some system of deception and degradation, deliberately designed by consummate skill, to delude, deceive or hold in bondage the human soul. Only those who know their Bible hold the key to this monstrous conspiracy. The thing is otherwise incredible. Science finds nowhere in its field of exploration any concrete evidence of such an evil spirit. Historians see their history as a haphazard stream of events without any sensible meaning. Only the Bible tells us that all the world is in the throes of a mighty conspiracy of evil - a war waged in the invisibility against truth. The weapons of this war are deceit and fraud, leading to sin and pollution of the soul of man.

Yet behind it all is a yet greater purpose, so vast, so wise, so almighty that the otherwise invincible power of evil itself, is made to fit into the pattern, and to be the unwilling slave of a purpose which produces at last a greater good than could otherwise have been.

The Bible prophesies all this which is now coming to pass before our eyes. Where else but in an inspired Book could any writer have been so bold as to foretell a future which is so utterly contrary to the expectations, the philosophy and the pride of man?

An all-wise Creator could not make man in His own image unless He made him free. Hence the inevitability of evil both among the inhabitants of heaven and the dwellers on the earth. It is useless to make the point that it would have been better for the Creator not to create than to hazard the inevitability of evil. It does not

become the creature to make himself wiser than the Creator, especially in a field where we see only through a glass darkly and must advance by faith to the mystery of God and the mystery of Being. It is better this way, and that God Himself should prove Himself by the bearing of all evil, and that man, His greatest act of creation, should learn by sorrow and pain, by faith and by penitence to be reunited to His Maker and Redeemer in a love and devotion and joy which knows no ending. There was no other way. All power must be given to the forces of evil to do their worst, nor must God destroy those evil powers by almighty fiat and force. Had He done so the stain of evil would have remained on creation for all eternity. God Himself must become Man and bear the burden of His own creation in a great act of redemption in which, not by strength, but by submissive meekness, He should overcome, bearing in weakness and humility the whole of creation's burden of sorrow and shame, even to the death of the Cross. How else could a holy God vindicate Himself and at the same time redeem that which was lost?

The scoffer may scorn such an unveiling of God as this, but it remains the only key to creation, life, hope, and eternal joy. The measure of Satan's hatred of such a theme is the measure of that evil which he personifies as he excludes himself from any share in the ultimate joy and peace which God has ordained.

We should expect, and so we find, that Satan fabricated a kingdom of evil to thwart the divine plan, and it is the conflict so engendered which lies behind the history of the world, and which is most graphically described in the Book of Revelation, in divine symbolism. As in the first age of man, before the Flood, Satan inspired Cain to build himself a city so as to preserve and advance his power over the world, so in the second age, after the Deluge, he inspired Nimrod to make another foundation so as to centralise the power of evil, but God breathed upon the builders and scattered them. The Assyrian Nineveh was next built in the same vicinity only to meet a similar fate at the hands of the Chaldeans under Nebuchadnezzar. This extraordinary monarch, who strutted in his pride around Babylon the greatest city ever built on the earth by man, was brought low in the days of Daniel, his reason departed from him, and he became in his insanity a beast, until in the mercy of God he was restored, a better man than ever before, humble and wise, a believer in the true God, and wrote his confession that "the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will" (Daniel 4).

Babylon did not long survive his death and the great city was reduced to rubble by Cyrus the Persian, the friend of Daniel and the benefactor of Israel whose return to Jerusalem he benevolently decreed.

But even while Babylon was at the height of its pride, another city was silently forming on the banks of another river, the Tiber, in the continent reserved for Japheth. They called it Rome, a city which in the providence of God was to reduce the whole world to order and was destined to survive for many centuries until she too would crumble before the judgment of God. The fall of Rome has been eloquently described by one of the greatest historians of all time, Edward Gibbon. Its fate rocked the world and nothing has been the same since. The Pax Romana having ended, peace was taken from the earth and the history of the former Roman dominions has been a history of ruinous war, from that day to this.

Yet Rome survived this disaster as a mysterious yet none the less real ecclesiastical empire with its crowned head and proud pretension of being none other than the Bride of Christ, though drunk with the blood of martyrs and righteous men. Our fathers closed the book of history there for they thought the papal empire was the last and would endure to the coming of Christ. But our Book of Revelation tells us otherwise. The Ten Kings of Rev. 17 were to hate the Whore of Babylon and destroy her.

A new thing called democracy arose, the rule of the people. The French Revolution brought down the thrones of Europe and humbled the power of the Popes. Nothing has been the same since. Science has become atheistic and created a psychology which by postulating that man is an accident, an outgrowth of the brute, potentially destroys his moral status. The wheels of time revolve slowly but since Darwin they have turned full circle and paved the way for universal atheism.

Satan has discarded Babylon. No longer can that religious fraud hold the mind of man in bondage, and so, as according to the Seventh Vial, Babylon is overthrown. False religion (in which the dregs of the Protestant Reformation have provided the last drops in the vile goblet which the Whore used to pass around the nations) - false religion, we say, has lost its hold on the mind of man, as Satan moves on to the last phase of his permitted power - open atheism, RATIONALISM, the worship of the human mind and the banishment of God and truth and the Bible. Taking the place of the last great Babylon, is a direct Satanic conspiracy to lead man to his own destruction and pull down on his own head the temple of pure knowledge. Beauty in art and harmony in music has departed - or is departing - from the human soul. Heathen rhythms and debased art forms, jungle melody, the beating of the tom-tom, long-haired men and naked women, shameless and obscene dance movements, foul language, violence, suicide, murder, rape, a rising tide of anarchy and abandonment, are succeeding centuries of enlightenment and culture. Alongside the greatest scientific achievements of the entire history of man

comes an impious abandonment to all the lowest instincts of depravity. There can be little doubt what the end will be.

It is all in chapters 17-20 of Revelation. Babylon is fallen and become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird (Rev. 18:2).

The description in chapter 18 of the Fall of Babylon and the lament raised for her by those who waxed rich by her, is the picture of a great world market trading in the merchandise of gold, silver, precious stones, pearls, linen, purple and silk, thyme [thyme] wood, ivory and all manner of vessels in ivory, wood, brass and iron. What are we seeing? Not an enormous mart of this world's goods and means of wealth, but a religious mart, where the merchants of the earth, popes, priests, moderators, nonconformist dignitaries, gaze with alarm at their rapidly diminishing congregations, the source of their wealth gone or going, their custom being usurped by other interests which deal in vain pleasure, license to sin, the great atheistic tidal wave of 'the liberty of man', the banishment of moral restraint, the cult of pleasure, sport (with the investment of millions upon millions of pounds, dollars, marks, or whatever), industrial unrest as labour overwhelms management and becomes a tyranny on its own account, destroying the very wealth after which it lusts.

The devil discards Babylon because he is approaching his last LITTLE SEASON and has no further use for religion. He puts off his robes of false piety and no longer poses as a religious devil but shows himself to be what he actually is all the way through - an atheistic devil, sworn to destroy the truth. But his doom is written and he knows he has but a short time.

THE CITY OF GOD

At the very time when Rome fell to Alaric and his Goths in the year 410 AD, there was a man at hand, Augustine by name, whom the providence of God raised up from a life of profligacy to one of peerless sanctity. To this man divine wisdom assigned the task of placing on record for all time the meaning of that titanic fall of the world's greatest city. Augustine was a brilliant rhetorician, trained in the schools of the great empire, his accomplishments in law and logic making him a fit instrument to place on record for all time the MEANING of Rome's fall and the divine purpose which runs through all history from the beginning to the end of time.

Augustine saw that history is reducible to one simple principle - the conflict between TWO CITIES - the City of God and the City of this world. The fall of Rome disrupted the ancient world, so that Europe has been a caldron of war and confusion ever since. Though the great city became nominally Christian a century before, under Constantine the Great, Paganism died hard and was in vigorous shape when Alaric (himself an Arian Christian), gave the city up to the sack. The terrible slaughter at the fall of the metropolis did not involve the considerable Christian population which was safe provided the people fled into the churches which at that time were found all over the city. With them fled many of the pagans who thus saved their lives by claiming the protection of the Christian church. Their gratitude was short-lived. When danger passed, they returned to their paganism and alleged that Rome had fallen because she had departed from the old gods and become Christian.

Taking up his pen to refute this slander, Augustine set himself to an even greater achievement - to show that in all history, there were only two cities, the City of God and the City of this world. His purpose in thus reducing all the complexity of history into one simple principle is beautifully presented in his opening sentences (taken from the powerful translation of John Healey first published in the year 1610). Thus writes the noble Augustine:

“That most glorious society and celestial city of God’s faithful, which is partly seated in the course of these declining times (wherein he who liveth by faith is a pilgrim among the wicked), and partly in that solid state of eternity (which as yet the other part doth patiently expect, being then to obtain the last victory and be crowned in perfection of peace), have I undertaken to defend in this work. This city, not being enhanced by human glory but endowed with divine grace, surmounts all earthly loftiness. The King, the builder of this city, hath opened His mind to His people thus, ‘God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble’. Touching the temporal city (i.e., the city of this world) we may not omit to speak whatsoever our subject may require, for out of this city arise the foes against whom God’s city is to be guarded.”

Referring to the ravages and impoverishment which resulted from the frightful destructions perpetrated by the Goths, Augustine observes of the Christian population, “They lost all that they had: what? their faith? their zeal? goods of the inward man which enrich the soul before God? These are the Christian’s riches whereof the apostle said, ‘Godliness is great gain’. Such therefore as lost their goods in that destruction, might truly say with him that was so sore assaulted and

yet never overthrown, 'Naked come I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither again. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord' - Job 1:21".

Augustine traces the history of the two cities, that of this world and the other of God, from Cain and Seth, the sons of Adam. Of Cain it is recorded (Gen. 9:17) that he built a city and named it after his son Enoch (not the Enoch that was born into the family of Seth). The city named after the Cainitic Enoch was the first establishment on earth of the city of this world in contrast with the City of God which exists not as an earthly city but only in the faith and the piety of those who look for redemption. "Cain and Seth" writes Augustine, "became the heads of the two parties, in whose sons the two cities began to show themselves upon earth." In Abel who was cruelly slain, and in Seth who in a sense typified Christ risen again, Augustine sees the gospel promise in the death and resurrection of the Redeemer.

THE TWO CITIES

"Thus' Augustine proceeds to say, "the two cities are described, the one in earthly possession, the other in heavenly hope, both coming out of the common gate of mortality, which was opened in Adam, out of whose condemned race as out of a putrefied lump. God elected some vessels of mercy and some of wrath that the citizens of God upon earth may take this lesson from those vessels of wrath, never to rely on their own election, but hope to call upon the name of the Lord: because the natural will (of man) which God made (the Unchangeable made it not changeless) may both decline from that which is good, and from all good, to do evil, and that by freedom of will: and from evil also to do good, but that not without God's assistance." Augustine will be seen in this quotation to be able (as few men before or since) to say much in little.

Again, says this master of pure reason sanctified by faith, "The best and briefest definition of virtue is this, it is an order of love, for which Christ's spouse, the City of God, says in the holy Canticles (i.e., the Song of Solomon, chap 7, verse 10) 'He hath ordered his love in me' (Note: Our translation, 'His desire is toward me'); This order of love did the sons of God break, neglecting Him and running after the daughters of men, in which names both the cities are fully distinguished. For they were the sons of men by nature, but grace had given them a new style. For in the same scripture where it is said, 'The sons of God loved the daughters of men' they are also called 'the angels of God' - whereupon some thought them to be angels and not men that did this".

We certainly side entirely with Augustine in his interpretation of Genesis 6, and reject as a dangerous absurdity the idea that angels came down from heaven (or up from hell) to become husbands to the women. Angels cannot assume a human nature. Only God ever did that, and so we regard the incarnation (God becoming Man), as the supreme fact of the Universe. Angels cannot create or incarnate themselves, which they would have to do if they assumed human nature. And certainly devils cannot do so either.

Augustine proceeds to show the establishment of the Two Cities after the Flood. It was then that the city of this world first received its name of Babylon or Babel (“Confusion”). See Genesis 10:11. Nimrod, the grandson of the apostate Ham, the second son of Noah, sought to dominate and rule over the rapidly increasing families of mankind, by the building of the city and tower, later to be known as Babel when God confused the language of mankind in order to scatter the tribes across the face of the earth. The holy God will not permit a monopoly of human power on the earth, and quickly acts to confuse and scatter every attempt in history to set up a universal tyranny. Every such combination is an attempt to set up what God destroyed at Babel, and the Book of Revelation pictorialises the last attempt of Satan to establish Babylon on the earth and thus to rule over a universal kingdom of darkness and death. “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh. The Lord shall have them in derision” (Psalm 2). The sceptre of this world is held by One only - the Eternal Son - and He holds it by right not only of Sonship as the inheritor of the Father’s name and dominion, but because He has proved Himself worthy to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory and blessing (Rev. 5:12). The light must ever prevail against the darkness, as it did in the first day of creation.

Augustine clearly perceived the spirituality of the prophecies, and knew how to distinguish between the earthly and the heavenly, as when he quotes Jeremiah 31:31, where the Lord promises to make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not according to the old covenant made with the fathers of the nation at Sinai, “which my covenant they brake, saith the Lord” -but a new covenant in which He puts His law in the heart and writes it in the mind. “This beyond all doubt” says Augustine, “is a prophecy of the celestial Jerusalem to whom God Himself stands as a reward, and unto whom the enjoying of Him is the perfection of good.”

He continues, “Yet the prophecy belongs to them both in that the earthly Jerusalem was called God’s city, and His house (the Temple) promised to be therein, which seemed to be fulfilled in Solomon’s building of that magnificent temple. These

things were both relations of things acted on earth, and figures of things concerning the heavens, which kind of prophecy is of great efficacy in the scriptures of the Old Testament, and does exercise the readers of Scripture very laudably in seeking how the things spoken of Abraham's carnal seed are allegorically fulfilled in his seed by faith".

THE CITY OF THIS WORLD

Likewise is the city of this world perpetuated. The overthrow of the earthly Babylon did not mean the overthrow of that kingdom of darkness which found its earthly expression in the city of Nimrod. A yet more formidable earthly city arose in due time, powerful, and more extensive in its earthly ramifications than any that went before - the city of Rome. Babylon wrapped herself in the purple of the Caesars, and dominated the world for many centuries. Even after its fall at the hands of the Goths and Vandals, there arose a new Babylon in an apostate Church which arrogated to itself all the sovereignty of Pagan Rome, expressing itself in terms of arrogant claims to dominion over all kings and countries, attracting to itself the wealth of the world, claiming to be the very Bride of Christ. In its gigantic masquerade as the Bride of Christ, the new Rome rising as a ghost on the grave of the old Paganism, perpetuated for a thousand years the antichristian reign, until in our own day we are seeing its eclipse, along with its daughters - the remnants of a once pure but now largely apostate Protestantism. As Jerusalem in her apostasy in the days of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, tottering on the verge of ruin, was denounced as a harlot ("Wherefore O harlot, hear the word of the Lord" - Ezek. 16:35) so in the course of history various churches have gradually turned away from the Word of God and adopted the character of the world about them, so that in the end they become worse than the heathenism they supplanted, as in the case of Judah and Jerusalem:

"Thine elder sister is Samaria, she and her daughters that dwell at thy left hand; and thy younger sister, that dwelleth at thy right hand is Sodom and her daughters." The prophet continues to denounce the apostasy of Judah as being worse in its condition than either Sodom or Samaria:

"As if that were a very little thing, thou wast corrupted more than they in all their ways" (see Ezek. 16, verses 48-63).

We may not be surprised therefore if the once Reformed Churches pollute themselves more shamefully than the mother from whom 400 years ago they parted. Even Rome has never denied the Incarnation of our Lord, nor has it

officially condoned the vileness of the sin of Sodom. We are witnessing today, a situation which is startlingly like the description of the last days of the ecclesiastical Babylon (chapters 17-19 of Revelation). We see in the description of the judgment of the last or seventh vial (Rev. 16:17-21) the fall of ‘great Babylon’ and we now see in chapters 17 - 19 following, a detailed account of this awful calamity.

In chapter 17, Babylon, the City of this world, is first pictured as a harlot riding upon the back of a scarlet coloured beast and the last verse of chapter 17 tells us who the woman is: “The woman which thou sawest is that great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth.” Her name is given in verse 5: “Upon her forehead a name written - MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH”. This is the same old Babylon which has often been destroyed, and which perpetually rides to fame and fortune by her adultery with the powers of this world. Adultery, in prophetic language means false religion, deceitful, carnal, ambitious, oppressive, always opposed to spiritual religion though often masquerading as the true Church. When paganism fell before the messengers of the Cross, the old Babel moved into the vacancy and became Christian in name, but still a heathen at heart.

By its scarlet colour, its seven heads and ten horns, the beast plainly acknowledges itself to be the old historic satanic beast which from the beginning of the world has opposed the City of God and slain its people.

THE SEVENTH VIAL

The pouring out of the Seventh Vial signals the climax of the Book of Revelation. Hengstenberg writes, “It is the one event which belongs to the future” - and we are encouraged therein to look forward with confidence.

Chapter 16, verse 17: “And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done.”

The events symbolised in the Last Vial have principally to do with the end of a great and mysterious feature of Satan’s revolt against God. We are seeing the judgment of God righteously executed against the earthly establishment of Satan’s kingdom on earth –the judgment of the Great Whore, the false bride, Babylon, the symbol throughout all human history of that city of this world by which Satan has for so long deceived and ruled the nations. What we have in the Last Vial is a

picture of the overthrow of this great and oppressive and delusive system by which Satan has perpetuated his long reign. In the next chapter (17) we have in much fuller detail the nature of that overthrow. There is an apparent contradiction which must be resolved. The outpoured Vial is a divine judgment upon a wicked and vile system. In chapter 17 this same judgment appears to be on the initiative of “the kings of this world” mobilised by Satan for the purpose. We have here a principle of the holy and sovereign wisdom of God. The judgment is from God. The executioners are the agents of the Devil. There is no contradiction. We are told in chap. 17, verse 17 that it is God who has “put in their hearts to fulfill His will, and to agree and give their kingdom to Satan until the words of God” (His decrees and righteous purposes), “are fulfilled”.

It is a feature of God’s holy rule of the nations, to compel evil to destroy evil. There is no region of absolute sovereignty to challenge the sovereignty of the Most High God. God is the Ruler of the nations, though they know Him not. He is the final Disposer of all events, as He patiently and ceaselessly works out His great plan of redemption. The only region of absolute power lies in the throne of God. Nebuchadnezzar is made to acknowledge this – “He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand or say unto him, What doest thou?” (Daniel 4:35)

Satan boasts that all the kingdoms of the earth are delivered into his hand, and in the Mount of the Temptation he offers all the power and rule of the world to Christ in return for the acknowledgment of his claim. Was Satan doubtful of the identity of Christ to whom he made the offer? Whether or not, it was Christ’s purpose to rule all things by His proven worthiness as He obeyed the Father’s will in the death of the Cross. Satan learns in a new way that his boasted liberty in creation is but an empty boast. He is overthrown not by almighty strength, but by weakness unto death. Christ was crucified through weakness, but liveth by the power of God (2 Cor. 13:4).

Our lesson therefore must be that God reigns, nor has ever abdicated His rule over the nations, even though His sceptre often is a Rod of Iron with which He dashes in pieces the pride of nations (see Psalm 2).

How often in history has God turned the nations against each other in order that His Church should be delivered?

John tells us that the great voice comes from the temple in heaven and from the throne (of God) proclaiming “It is done”. We have heard this cry before - the cry of

the Lonely Victim on the Cross, sounding through the mysterious darkness which enfolded that awful scene- “IT IS FINISHED”. Perhaps too, in the beginning of the world- “Thus the heavens and the earth were FINISHED and God ended his work ... and rested on the seventh day” (Genesis 2:1-3). When the work of creation was finished, an eternal sabbath was proclaimed – “He rested from all his work ...” Paul uses these words to exhort us to be diligent “to enter into His rest”. (Hebrews 4)

Only John records in his gospel that word of the Saviour on the cross – “It is finished” - and this appears to invest with special significance these similar words, IT IS DONE. Yet inasmuch as John uses a different word, it would not be proper to accept these words in Revelation as carrying precisely the same significance. We are reminded also that in the day of creation, when the Almighty God completed His creative task, it is recorded, “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished...” (Genesis 2:1). There is, however, an accord between these significant utterances. He who made heaven and earth, is He who completed that work by redeeming our souls by the way of the cross. It is His prerogative likewise to declare, when all is complete which the Lord ever set out to do, “It is done”. That this saying has to do with the consummation of all things cannot surely be denied; yet, as we have pointed out, the full accomplishment is further delayed, and this delay is the subject of the next four chapters of Revelation (17, 18, 19 and 20). These succeeding chapters show a succession of climaxes, a fact which imposes caution on all who seek the true meaning of these last events.

The Seventh Vial is poured “Into the air.” (chap. 16:17). Satan is elsewhere described as ‘the prince of the power of the air’. This does not mean that the habitat of the Evil One is somewhere in the atmosphere above our heads (as the deplorable teaching of some of our friends has it). When Paul tells us that Satan is “the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2 verse 2) he is describing the invisible and superior power of the Evil One over the world. He is an invisible spirit-power having access to the lives and the thoughts of mankind. In the same epistle, Ephesians chapter 6, verse 12, Paul tells us that our wrestling is not against ‘flesh and blood’ but against principalities and powers which are invisible and incorporeal, the rulers of the darkness of this world, even ‘spiritual wickedness in high places’ (margin, wicked spirits in the heavenlies). His meaning is clear. Paul is using the words AIR and HEAVEN as the scene of Satanic activity to show that our foes are invisible (as the air), incorporeal, superior in power and wisdom, so that the church’s conflict is not with earthly powers, but against dark spirit powers which hate the light and which animate those earthly powers and systems which war against the truth and act as the visible agents of hell. The vial poured into the

air therefore denotes that the end of Satan's kingdom has arrived. The Almighty Voice sounds from the throne of heaven – "IT IS DONE".

THE OVERWHELMING JUDGMENT

"And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great". (v. 18)

"Voices, thunderings, lightnings and earthquake" are symbols of the righteous judgment and anger of God. The fundamental reference is Exodus 19: 16: "And it came to pass on the third day, in the morning that there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud, so that all the people that was in the camp trembled." The occasion was the promulgation of the divine law on Sinai. "An indication" writes Hengstenberg, 'of the awful judgment of God that was sure to overtake the transgressors of the law.' The psalmist writes, "The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world, the earth trembled and shook". (Ps. 77:18). "The earth shook and trembled; the foundations of the hills also moved and were shaken because he was wroth". (Ps. 18:7). Everywhere these manifestations of the divine power in nature are used in figure to denote the righteous judgment of God against all ungodliness of men who defy His righteous Law. In Rev. 9:5 "Lightnings, voices and thunders" proceed from the throne in heaven, denoting the oncoming of judgment. The Rider on the White Horse (Christ as He leads the armies of heaven against the wicked) is introduced with 'the noise of thunder' (Rev. 6:1). See also 10: 3, and 19: 2.

There is no difficulty therefore in perceiving the significance of these great manifestations in verse 18 of our chapter. The scene is set for the holy wrath of God to be visited upon Satan's false kingdom of Babylon. The great earthquake, exceeding anything of the kind ever previously seen on the earth, indicates the last great judgment in its preliminary form as it strikes and overwhelms the pride and security of this world system which sets itself against the divine and holy Law of God.

John 12:28-32 may also be considered in this connection, where "the judgment of this world" is signified in the words of the Eternal Father from heaven, which the people who stood by heard as thunder, but which John interprets as the reply to the Saviour's cry, "Father, glorify thy name". The Father's voice, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again", was both a promise and a warning. Believers

hear God's voice as a promise of deliverance. The wicked hear His voice only as terrifying thunder. The state of the conscience determines whether the voice of the Almighty is heard in peace or in terror.

Cruden points out, "Great alterations and changes are expressed in scripture by a shaking of the earth. The delivering of the Israelites out of Egypt is called a moving or shaking of the earth (Psalm 68:8). An extraordinary and unexpected alteration in the state of affairs, civil or ecclesiastical, is represented by a great earthquake".

Paul reminds us in Hebrews 12:28 that we have received in Christ, a kingdom which 'cannot be moved'.

All earthly kingdoms and powers, all Satanic kingdoms and tyrannies, are subject to change and decay, to ruin and destruction. But "the City of God remaineth" writes Luther, in that hymn we are never tired of repeating.

The earthquake in Rev. 16 therefore is that judgment of God by which He limits or otherwise destroys those systems which Satan uses to prolong his evil reign. The earthquake of v.18 is to be the greatest that there has ever been since God created man upon the earth (see text). It can only mean here that Satan's kingdom has reached the limit of his permitted liberty and all his systems of rule to oppress man and to frustrate the kingdom of Christ, have fallen before the gospel word. These systems throughout history have been systems of heathenism, or as in the case of the western world, a new form of heathenism acting under the mask of the Christian name, using Christian terms, but deadly in its deceitfulness - as the papal system, the Arian doctrines, and the false sanctity of outward religion without inward grace. This is the city of Babylon down the ages, masquerading as the City of God and oppressing those who are the true citizens of the Holy City, the Church.

THE DIVIDED CITY

"And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath". (v. 19)

The Great City is Babylon. The cities of the nations are her daughters in apostasy and opposition to God and truth, and pollution of heart and mind which always accompany the spirit of rebellion against God. See Ezekiel 16:53-59, where Jerusalem is cast off by reason of her apostasy from God, and with her daughters

becomes associated prophetically with Samaria and Sodom as her elder and younger sisters. In the same chapter Jerusalem in her apostate condition ceases to be the daughter of Abraham. Henceforth her 'father' is an Amorite and her mother a Hittite. (Ezek. 16:45).

The division of Babylon into three parts corresponds with the fate of the original Babylon built by Nimrod, grandson of Noah after the Flood. The Confusion of Tongues created fear and anarchy, and the prophecy of Noah began to be fulfilled as the earth was divided between the descendants of Shem, Ham and Japheth. It is our opinion that the curse on language originally gave to each of the three families a separate tongue, and there is reason to believe that there are three fundamental languages to be traced today in the Semitic, the Hamitic, and the Japhetic groupings. The curse made all language unstable. In savage regions, where language was not reduced to writing, speech degenerated rapidly into the multiplicity of tongues which almost obliterated any association with the original. The Hebrew Bible stabilised the tongue of the descendants of Shem and Abraham (Semitic) and to this day it has close association with the ancient Chaldean deciphered from the monuments. Likewise most of the European tongues have affinities with the Greek and Latin, Greek probably being the original tongue of Japheth. Latin is only a modified form of Greek. Elsewhere the tongues of Europe were unstable until reduced to writing. Probably Egyptian was the original language of the Hamitic tribes, the only tongue for many ages to be reduced to writing on the African continent.

Satan's strategy has always been to establish a universal empire on earth, but God's holy providence will not suffer it to be so. Hence the incredible fall of Rome, brought on by decay of integrity and nobility among the rulers. Satan cannot make a righteous man or a righteous nation. Most of the world's conquerors have been conquered at last by sin.

We regard therefore the Fall of Babylon recorded in the Apocalypse, as the consequence of its own iniquity and pride. "I sit a queen" she said, "and am no widow, and shall not see sorrow. Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death and mourning and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: and strong is the Lord God who judgeth her" (Rev. 18:7-8). Babylon is the generic name for Satan's system of rule on earth. It endures many changes, and reappears under many names, but is always the same old harlot who from the beginning has made the nations of earth drunk with the wine of her spiritual adulteries (see chap. 17:9) - that is, her false worship.

As the Lord scattered the tribes of mankind abroad when Nimrod plotted his universal empire, and as the city which he built became known as Babel ("Confusion") in consequence of the curse which rested on language, so "Mystery, Babylon the Great ..." (chap. 17:5) suffers the same fate. She is divided by the same judgment which befell her prototype on the banks of the Euphrates. She is divided into three parts which, because they cannot combine, bring the empire to an end.

The Lord declared to the Pharisees, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand". (Matthew 12:25)

The sovereign hand of God is upon all history and upon all nations, and He will not tolerate or permit a universal tyranny. The division of Satan's city into three parts therefore, means that God's holy providence brings about such a conflict of interest and such a confusion of purpose that Satan's city disintegrates, as did Babel of old. The Lord has never abdicated His rule over the whole of mankind, and His providential dispensations prevent any ultimate monopoly of power. This will be the order to the end of the world.

By the hand of Japheth the gospel was carried unto the uttermost part of the earth - but in our time, the sceptre of divine privilege has fallen from the nerveless hand of Japheth. Western science has banished faith in our time. The roots of faith have been destroyed by the denial of the Word of God. The world has fallen under the divine judgment, and great Babylon, which so long has reigned alongside the City of God in the pretence that she is that city, is in process of being dissolved. Satan no longer can masquerade as a Christian Devil and he is now rehabilitating himself as precisely what he is - a pagan devil, or rather, a rationalistic devil, openly denying the existence of God and persuading mankind that there is neither God, nor devil, nor immortality: that creation is an accident, and death ends all. This is rationalism - the worship of the human mind, or man setting up himself as the only god and the master of his own fate. We shall have much more to say about this when we come to chapter 20 of our Book of Revelation.

Hence we see that the fall of Babylon is the fall of the Satanic system of false religion, and the inauguration of the last phase of Satan's reign, his 'little season' of unloosing to deceive the nations by a new and terrible deception, for the last phase of his power. Satan becomes an atheist.

The fall of the cities of the nations (v.19) refers to those daughters (or churches) of Babylon who borrow from their mother and the book of her deceptions and religious adulteries. All comes to an end as man moves from the era of faith into the final era of satanic unbelief. The advance of science is not being followed (as it ought to be followed) by the peace and prosperity of the nations. Instead, we have witnessed the decline of the west. Britain has thrown away an empire (and with it her former benign influence for peace and the amelioration of savage and heathen regions), for the status of a secondary power - all in half a normal lifetime. Europe has lost its voice and its purpose. America - the New World -from which all men had hoped so much, has been turning in upon herself, and is beginning to feel the strange pinch of moral blight and economic stress, because she, along with the rest of western civilisation, has abandoned her God-given calling and opened her gates to modern doubt, and the inordinate quest for worldly possession. With her eye upon the goodly Babylonish garment, she is beginning to pay the penalty of denying her God-given destiny. The cup of the wine of the fierceness of the divine wrath against sin is being passed around the nations of the west.

THE FLIGHT OF THE ISLANDS AND MOUNTAINS

“And every island fled away and the mountains were not found”. (v. 20)

Islands in the Bible are symbolic of kingdoms and nations, and mountains are symbols of worldly power. The kingdom of God, the Church, similarly is described in Isaiah 2:2 as “The mountain of the Lord’s house”, established above all other mountain heights, and exalted above the hills.

Here in verse 20 we see the fall of all earthly power as the nations yield their sceptres to the power of darkness. We are coming into a world situation where civilised society is being overwhelmed by violence and anarchy, which governments appear to be either unwilling or unable to control. The end of this road is obvious to all. The nations lose their identity, and orderly rule is abolished by unchecked wickedness. Disorder and anarchy break out on a scale far beyond the power (and indeed the will) of human government to suppress or control.

COLOSSAL TEMPEST OF HAIL

“And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the hail: for the plague thereof was exceeding great”. (v. 21)

Here again we have notice of the comprehensive nature of this last vial. Though the consummation of all things lies clearly within the scope of this verse, the repetitive nature of the judgment allows for time lapse, else, if the judgment were immediate and final, there would be no time element permitting the duration of the storm of hail and the subsequent blasphemy of those who suffered.

CHAPTER 17

THE JUDGMENT OF THE BABYLONIAN HARLOT

Chapter 17 of Revelation is the only section of this mysterious Book which is self-interpreting. The first seven verses are a description of “The Great Whore” who sits upon many waters, and who engages in illicit traffic with the kings of the earth, and makes earth's inhabitants drunk with “the wine of her fornication”, which means the inebriating liquor of false religion.

The vision is monitored by one of the Vial angels of the preceding chapter, who explains to the Seer, John, the meaning of the vision. “Come hither” says the angel, “and I will show thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters”. (Verse 1)

The angel carries John in vision to the wilderness where he sees a woman, gloriously arrayed in purple and scarlet, decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup “full of the abominations and filthiness of her fornication”. She is enthroned on the back of a scarlet coloured beast, “full of the names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns”. On the harlot's forehead her name is written, “MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH”. She is drunken with the blood of the saints and martyrs of Jesus and at the sight of her, John “wonders with great admiration”.

This vision the angel of the vials interprets to John, beginning with the symbolism of the scarlet beast upon whom the woman sits. This beast is none other than Satan in person, as is proven by his scarlet colour, corresponding with that of the ‘great red dragon’ of chapter 12 whom we have proved before to be Satan.

Mysteriously the angel tells John that this beast “was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit and go into perdition”. See verses 7 and 8. The dwellers on the earth (meaning the earthly minded who reject the faith of Christ and live only for time) will be deceived by this beast (they shall “wonder”, says the angel),

for their names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world. Hence, being darkened by their own sin and unbelief, they are dazzled and deceived by the Evil One just as our first parents were deceived and dazzled by the same dragon in the Garden of Eden. The mystery of the dragon is completed by the concluding clause of verse 8 – “when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is”. This clause is explained by the previous description, that Satan “was, and is not, and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit”. In other words, Satan acts through the medium of the agencies which he creates, so that by hiding his identity the nations are deceived by the appearance or the disguise of the kingdom which proves attractive to those of worldly mind. It is also descriptive of Satan’s history as the great deceiver. “He was” - as he appeared to our first parents in the Garden and spoke with them, dazzling them by his serpentine form and deceptive promises.

“He is not” does not denote the non-existence of Satan but the delegation of his powers to a world system of great empires through which he acts, directing operations as it were from a place of concealment. “He was, and is not, and yet is”.

In chapter 12 we saw him coming forth as a great red dragon standing before the woman who represents the Church, waiting to destroy her Child (originally promised to mother Eve as the Bruiser of Satan’s head). The Child was born at Bethlehem but survived the massacre of the Innocents by Herod, having been taken away to Egypt. Thwarted of his purpose to “devour the Child”, and defeated later at the Cross when the Child, now Man, by dying destroyed him that exercised the power (the fear) of death, the Dragon began his agelong warfare against the woman who bore the Manchild - the Church. Eve and Mary were the instruments, and they represented the Church through whom Christ came and which it was Satan’s agelong purpose to destroy. The death, resurrection and ascension of Christ was a mortal blow to Satan’s dominion and it was as though he was not, in the limitation of his power to deceive the nations, and yet though restrained in the abyss from exercising all his old power over the nations, he nevertheless perpetuated his activity by the delegation of his powers to a masquerade of the Christian Church claiming to be the true Spouse of Christ but which in fact was the old Babel kingdom, the Whore of Babylon appearing in the clothes of the Christian Church and claiming to be in fact that Church.

MANY WATERS

The Whore is denoted variously as seated upon many waters (verse 1) and also being located ‘in the wilderness’. There is no complication. The monitoring angel

explains in verse 15 that the ‘many waters’ are “peoples and multitudes, and nations and tongues”. In the Bible a wilderness usually denotes wild, uncultivated country, and spiritually means a place devoid of the Word of God, where the springs and fountains of the living water of the Word do not flow. David’s soul longed for fellowship with the Lord “as in a dry and thirsty land where no water is”. Where there is faith, the desert blossoms as the rose. The Church, where the Word of God is truly preached, and where Christ is held forth as the very fountain of life, blossoms abundantly and rejoices with joy and singing. God gives to such regions, “the glory of Lebanon and the excellency of Carmel and Sharon”, and there the people see ‘the glory of the Lord and the excellency of our God’.
(Isaiah 35:1-2)

Where false religion, personified in the Babylonian Whore, has her habitation, there is only shelterless desert, hunger, thirst and death. For the returning sinner the aspect changes to glory. The lame man leaps as an hart, the tongue of the dumb breaks forth into song, waters break out, and streams in the desert (Isaiah 35: 6). It has a well marked highway to blessedness - it is called, “The Way of Holiness” (v.8). On that way the ransomed of the Lord “shall return and come to Zion with songs, and with everlasting joy upon their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (v.10).

John sees the Harlot drunk with the blood of saints and martyrs. The Beast on which she sits, which to the wonder of mankind, “was and is not and yet is” (so often does the Devil change his form and his aspect) will, in a day yet future to the time when John wrote, “ascend out of the bottomless pit” and then “go into perdition”. This becomes clear in Rev. 20 where we see that the dragon is the Devil and Satan, at present bound (as touching his liberty to hinder the spread of the Gospel) but due to be ‘loosed’ from his place of confinement in the ‘bottomless pit’ so that once more, as the devil that he is, he might openly and for the last time be set loose to deceive the nations, and seek by open Satanism, to destroy the testimony of the Lord’s people. All in vain. When the victory seems to be within his grasp he falls a victim to his own devilish pride, and seals his last and final doom (see chapter 20).

So we must understand this word in chapter 17, verse 8: “He shall ascend out of the bottomless pit....”

The monitoring angel next introduces John to the symbolism of the seven heads of the Beast and his ten horns. We are cautioned against ready-made theories by the immediate words of the angel – “Here is the mind which has wisdom”. It will not

be in the world's history books that we shall find the answer, though most writers have sought there for the solution of the 'mystery'. The number of guesses and enumerations of nations of old and nations now, is to say the least embarrassing. Some have seen Turks and Saracens, Goths and Vandals, or, latest of all, the nations incorporated in the European Common Market. Alas for poor America (USA) without whom few if any of them can act - America left out in the cold: No! We must have none of this guesswork. The numbers seven and ten are numbers of completeness. Seven is the duration of the Harlot Babylon on the earth throughout the earth's seven ages. The angel says, "The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, and there are seven kings", five of whom had already fallen, one was then reigning, and there was one yet to come, who, when he arrived would continue for only a short space (verses 9-10). "The Beast himself (who was and is not) even he is the eighth, and is also of the seven, and he goeth into perdition". (v. 11)

The meaning is that Satan's kingdom from the start of human history has been a kingdom of heathenism. That phase of Satan's reign was coming to an end. Five-sevenths of the allotted time had already gone by, since Cain first set up his idolatrous kingdom of darkness. The seventh and last heathen cycle of the devil's kingdom was about to distinguish itself in unremitting opposition to the rising Kingdom of God. That phase would be of short duration, and then the whole edifice of open paganism would fall, as fall it did before the Messengers of the Cross. The Satanic Beast then entered a new and more subtle phase. He became a Christian Beast. "He is not and yet is." Unable to maintain his Pagan kingdom, as land after land, and continent after continent heard the gospel message, Satan devised with consummate subtlety, a fraudulent gospel, an empty facade of Christianity, calling itself the Bride of Christ, but exercising all the powers of the first beast which preceded (see chapter 13, verses 11 and 12). False Christianity models itself on the genuine article, and uses the sacred names and offices, and manufactures 'saints' and false Christs. But Satan cannot make a saint though he is well able to make many martyrs. Only God can make a saint. In the Bible use of the word a saint is not a person of unique or superior sanctity but any humble believer in the sinner's Saviour. Paul wrote to 'the saints which are at Ephesus' meaning the whole Church, for every true believer is sanctified. Jude writes generally to the whole Church when he inscribes his letter "to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called".

The root meaning of the word is 'separated' - separated unto God out of a world of sin and shame.

That the era known as that of the Ten Kings (verses 12-18) cannot come into being until way is made for it by the ending of the period appointed for the Seven Heads, must be clear from the context. That they act simultaneously and not in sequence is also quite plain. Their role in the historic scheme is to destroy the Whore of Babylon. They have “one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the Beast”. What is this but the power of this world uniting to further the Satanic interest in an age rapidly running down to judgment?

First, they ‘make war with the Lamb’. That is, they oppose the interest of Christ in the world, but in vain. The Lamb shall overcome them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and they that are with Him, who fight under His banner, are ‘called, chosen and faithful’. Again, that is another description of the Church.

The era of the Ten Kings is one of developing hatred of religion in any shape or form. “These shall hate the whore, and make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh and burn her with fire” (verse 16). The language is figurative. One cannot set fire to a parable which is an abstract picture of something represented. We have seen that the Babylonish Whore is the false Church, whether seated in Rome with gold crown and gorgeous array, or in more modest garb elsewhere. The Papal claim to the title was proudly made over a thousand years - a period which Luther described as “The Babylonish Captivity of the Church”. The Pope now finds himself in goodly company. He has been joined by the remnants of an apostate Protestantism which has relinquished practically all the distinctive doctrines of the 16th century. Rationalism has united itself with superstition (incredible though that may sound). Adversity makes strange bedfellows, and we are witnessing the eagerness of the Bible-denying dregs of Protestantism to unite with the medieval superstition of Rome. It is highly significant that the only religion known to man which is despised and hated is that blessed evangelicalism which believes the Bible to be true and incorruptible. Islam and Buddha are in high favour likewise, while those who hold fast to the evangelical faith and Bible infallibility are regarded with contempt, if not with hate.

But the hour is coming, if it is not already begun, when Satan will have no further use for religion of any sort. The Babylonian Harlot is doomed to desolation and nakedness, to shame and repudiation, for the ten horns of the Satanic Beast are set to overthrow all religion and reign in an anarchy of the human mind which denies all good and repudiates the very name of Christ.

Yet as we have earlier observed, divine sovereignty is in it. “God hath put in their heart to fulfill his will, and give their kingdom to the beast until the words of God

shall be fulfilled” (v.17). God permits evil to destroy evil. Satan is reaching the point where he has no further use for the aid of false religion which he has already wellnigh destroyed from within by inspiring theologians and ‘scholars’ to take down the temple of divine inspiration, destroy the evangelical faith and crown as king over all, the human mind, in a foul conspiracy to banish God from His own creation by denying the very fact of creation itself. “The Creation Story” is described as a myth which the modern mind must reject. “Creation made itself”, or it just “happened”. Darwin is crowned; Christ, and Moses and King David and Paul are either mythological themselves or repudiated with contempt. Even the Pope sings small, and Canterbury and York have lost their credit. Divine sovereignty has given permission to the devil to move into the centre of the picture and reach the height of his foul ambition. The Holy Lord God gives free rein to evil only that evil may destroy itself. Satan must be his own executioner.

So our chapter ends with the words, “And the woman which thou sawest is that great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth”. Rome? Babylon? Nineveh? Is this the city? No, none of them. All have had their day, but none have right to the exclusive title. The City of the World has its foundations in the dark underworld of hell. It takes many forms and names, and successively discards them as occasion serves. She survives the wreck of all of them until her time comes; when she herself will be the devil’s cast-off and he will ascend from his bottomless pit to reign in person without disguise or intermediary. He is the only real antichrist.