

Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

Volume 13, Number 6

July 2004



What Is
Christian
Balance?

July 2004 Contents

Volume 13, Number 6

- 3 PERSONAL FROM JOHN W. RITENBAUGH
*The Beast and Babylon (Part Four):
Where Is the Woman of Revelation 17?*
- 8 **Will You Marry Me? (Part Two)**
—Staff
- 11 A READY ANSWER:
Striving for Balance
—Rod Keesee
- 12 PROPHECY WATCH:
*The Four Horsemen (Part Four):
The Black Horse*
—Richard T. Ritenbaugh
- 14 **Searching for Israel (Part Four):
The Kingdom and the Key**
—Charles Whitaker
- 23 WORLD WATCH
—Charles Whitaker
- 24 BIBLE STUDY
The Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man (Part One)
—Martin G. Collins

About Our Cover



For years, we have been taught to strive for balance in our lives. Frankly, however, most of us struggle to define what balance really is. What seems "balanced" to one may be "extreme" to another! What is the blueprint for a balanced way of life?
Corbis

Forerunner Magazine

Editor-in-Chief
JOHN W. RITENBAUGH

Associate Editor
MARTIN G. COLLINS

News Editor
DAVID C. GRABBE

Contributing Writers
MARK BAKER, TED E. BOWLING, JOHN F. BULHAROWSKI, MIKE FORD,
RONNY H. GRAHAM, WILLIAM GRAY, PAT HIGGINS, BILL KEESEE, ROD KEESEE,
WARREN LEE, DAVID F. MAAS, BRYAN NELSON, JOHN PLUNKETT, JOHN REID,
MARK SCHINDLER, CHARLES WHITAKER, BRIAN WULF

Managing Editor
RICHARD T. RITENBAUGH

Graphic and Layout Editor
KRISTEN M. COLLINS

Circulation
DIANE R. McIVER

Forerunner is published ten times a year as a free educational and religious service in the public interest. Articles, illustrations, and photographs will not be returned unless specifically requested, and if used, become the property of the Church of the Great God. Comments, suggestions, requests, and changes of address should be sent to the nearest address listed at left.

This free publication is made possible through the voluntary tithes and offerings of its subscribers and members of the Church of the Great God. All American and Canadian donations are tax-deductible.

Contact Church of the Great God

PO Box 471846
Charlotte, NC 28247-1846
U.S.A.

No. 13 Mt. Daho
Amityville
Rodriquez, Rizal 1860
PHILIPPINES

Box 30188
Saanich Centre Postal Outlet
Victoria, BC V8X 5E1
CANADA

(803) 802-7075 / (803) 802-7811 fax
<http://www.cgg.org> or <http://www.sabbath.org>
or <http://www.bibletools.org> or <http://www.theberean.org>

© Copyright 2004
Church of the Great God
All Rights Reserved
Printed in the U.S.A.

The Beast and Babylon

Part Four: Where Is the Woman of Revelation 17?

The previous three articles have laid a foundation showing a number of good reasons exist for exploring the possibility that some of what we have been taught about end-time events is not completely accurate. Significant events through the centuries and in the immediate past need to be factored into our analysis of what is happening today. Undoubtedly, the general conditions that define the end time are occurring. We are indeed “in the season,” as one might say.

However, in some cases precise events are not falling into place as we thought they would. In particular, Europe is not developing into the political, economic, and military powerhouse that Revelation 13 describes as an entity everyone fears. It may still do so, but if so, it is happening very slowly. In addition to the slow development of Europe into a superpower, we must also consider modern Israel’s tremendous, collective dominance in areas most deem important to recognition as the most influential people on earth today.

Yet, even though we are in the period when end-time conditions exist, we still have only vague ideas about the precise amount of time left until all the prophesied end-time events occur. Therefore, speculation must be a part of everybody’s end-time interpretations. Unfortunately, some are so caught up in interpreting prophecy that it garners most of their biblical study and meditation. It is certainly not

wrong to have a healthy curiosity regarding prophecy, but we must be careful to maintain a balance by not allowing it to consume all our study time.

1Corinthians 13:2 cautions us regarding prophecy’s importance relative to a vital virtue: “And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, . . . but have not love, I am nothing.” We need to grasp this true principle. We must understand that whether or not we know every detail of prophecy has little impact on salvation. Other knowledge is far more important to salvation than even a true, complete knowledge of prophecy.

Of supreme importance is the subject of this chapter—love. Coming to know God, growing, and overcoming in conduct and attitude are exceedingly more important, as are growing in love for both God and the brethren, fellowshipping in peace and harmony, and strengthening our marriage and child-training practices.

However, as the church entered the end-time season, God revealed the locations of the people of Israel in the last days for our benefit, so that we could better grasp what is happening in the world around us. Israel’s identity is an end-time secret revealed. Therefore, He judged it helpful for us to know, not for purposes of vanity, but so we would be motivated to keep His law more precisely, as Deuteronomy 29:29 instructs. In other words, God reveals pro-

phetic truths to make us pay better attention to our conduct.

God has revealed modern Israel's geographic locations, but where is Israel located in the book of Revelation? Could Revelation, the most important prophetic book dealing with the end time, ignore the most important, powerful, and influential collection of

nations in the last days? Israel is directly named in only three insignificant places. However, as the last article disclosed, it is revealed symbolically in Revelation 12. This article will show that it is just as clearly revealed elsewhere in Revelation. Before that, a quick review of Israel's appearance in Revelation 12 will be helpful.

The Woman of Revelation 12

The nation of Israel is symbolically referred to throughout the chapter. In verse 1, Israel is described as a Woman clothed with the sun and moon and wearing a crown of stars. Tying the symbols to Joseph's dream in Genesis 37 confirms the Woman's identity. In the next verse, Israel is the Woman about to give birth.

In verses 3-4, the Child she is about to bear is the focus of the great red Dragon's—Satan's—murderous intent. Verse 5 identifies her child as the Messiah, Jesus Christ, the One born to rule all nations. In verse 6, the Woman who gave birth to Christ, Israel, flees to a place God prepared for her. That place is, I believe, where the Israelitish nations are located today.

Note that by verses 7-9, time has progressed to the end, when God throws Satan and his demons out of heaven for good. Verses 10-11 allude to the church by mentioning people overcoming the Dragon by the blood of the Lamb. At no time, however, is the Woman of the early verses of this chapter, Israel, indicated to be converted.

But where is the church located? Verse 17 provides a hint, mentioning "the remnant of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." Verse 13, which follows the interlude involving the Dragon being cast to earth, clarifies the object of the prophecy up until verse 17: "Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child." The Woman who gave birth to the Messiah is specifically named. She cannot represent the church because the church did not give birth to the Messiah, but the nation of Israel did. Thus, the people of Israel are the object of the Devil's persecutions.

In verse 14, no break in the narrative occurs to indicate the Devil's focus changes. It is Israel, persecuted by Satan, who is given two wings of a great eagle to fly to her place from the face of the serpent. In the past, we have always applied verse 14 to the church, but there is nothing to indicate any change in subject has taken place! Again in verse 15, the serpent spews a flood from his mouth to destroy the nation of Israel. Likewise, the nation is helped by means of the earth swallowing the flood in verse 16.

It is not until verse 17 that the church comes directly into the picture, identified as "the rest of her [the Woman's] offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ," the Messiah born to the Woman in verse 5. Israel, the nation, does not keep the commandments of God, nor does it have the testimony of Jesus Christ. Even as the Messiah was born of the Woman and definitely kept the commandments of God, so also does the remnant of her offspring, who are now clearly distinguished from her.

Putting verse 17 together with verses 7-12, the church, the Woman's offspring, will undergo some measure of persecution within Israel before the Woman—Israel—flees in verse 15. Otherwise, why would verse 11 say they "overcame . . . by the blood of the Lamb" and "did not love their lives to the death"?

Verse 17 clearly states that the Dragon leaves the Woman who fled and heads toward some other geographical location to persecute those who keep the commandments. In other words, the Woman who fled and her offspring that keep the commandments are, at the time verse 17 occurs, at different locations. This interpretation puts an entirely different cast upon this prophecy.

Characteristics of the Woman of Revelation 17

The apostle John writes in Revelation 17:5-7:

And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman, drunk

with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement. But the angel said to me, "Why did you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns."

It is interesting that God labels this Woman a “mystery.” Is her identity the mystery, or is it her character? Is she a nation or a church of old that resurfaces as an influential power in the end time? We are not left to guess because the angel says, “I will show you the mystery of the woman and of the beast.” Revelation 17 and 18 contain many clues to the identification of the Woman.

Vine’s *Expository Dictionary* defines “mystery” (Strong’s #3466) as that which

denotes, not the mysterious (as with the Eng[lish] word), but that which, being outside the range of unassisted natural apprehension, can be made known only by divine revelation, and is made known in a manner and at a time appointed by God, and to those only who are illumined by His Spirit.

Speaking of the same period as Revelation 17, Daniel 12:10 parallels the need for divine revelation: “Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand.” Elsewhere, the wise are defined as those who keep the commandments, so we trust that we are the wise, and God will make this mystery known to us.

In Revelation 18:7, three of this mystery Woman’s remarkable characteristics are named, which will help to identify her: “In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow; for she says in her heart, ‘I sit as a queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.’”

“She has glorified herself” implies pride, even to the point of arrogance. Jeremiah 51:41 adds an interesting assessment of why Babylon may have this haughty attitude: “Oh, how Sheshach is taken! Oh, how the praise of the whole earth is seized! How Babylon has become desolate among the nations!” Having the admiration of the nations is enough to turn the head of all but the most sound-minded of people, and Babylon is not of this quality.

Revelation 18:7 then says of her, “she lived luxuri-

ously,” or as other translations suggest “extravagantly,” “lustfully,” or “unrestrainedly.” The terms suggest the very apex of luxury, indicating satiety, an overindulgent superabundance, a state of having too much. She indulges herself in a surfeit of things to pamper her flesh and stimulate the vanity of her mind.

Finally, the verse peers into the depths of her thoughts about herself. What she thinks of herself magnifies the other qualities: “I sit as a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.” She sees herself as above the masses of people struggling to get by. She directs her life to avoid suffering. She displays an in-your-face, “let them eat cake,” haughty superiority. We should realize, however, that the avoidance of suffering inevitably produces compromise with law and conscience.

Thus, we have a nation portrayed as proud to the point of arrogance and self-confident in its security, thinking it has produced its power by its own means. It lives extravagantly relative to the levels of the rest of the world, and it seeks immediate gratification. It fails to discipline itself as it compromises with known standards.

Notice how this description parallels one of Jerusalem in Ezekiel 16:48-51:

“As I live,” says the Lord God, “neither your sister Sodom nor her daughters have done as you and your daughters have done. Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty and committed abomination before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw fit. Samaria did not commit half of your sins; but you have multiplied your abominations more than they, and have justified your sisters by all the abominations which you have done.”

Incredible but true because God’s Word is true. Jerusalem, by God’s judgment, was worse than either Sodom or Samaria!

The Woman Rides the Beast

We need to step back before proceeding through the descriptive material concerning the Woman in Revelation 18. Notice Revelation 16:17-19:

Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, “It is done!” And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since

men were on the earth. Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath.

These verses are actually the introduction to chapters 17 and 18, which feature the description of Babylon the Great. They also serve to introduce the term “great.” “Great” has many applications, but in relation to Babylon,

it implies power, wealth, authority, influence, and evil. This adjective should be kept in mind as part of virtually every aspect of its character.

Revelation 17:1-7 displays Babylon on the stage of future events for our consideration:

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, “Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication.” So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. And on her forehead a name was written; MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement. But the angel said to me, “Why did you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.”

Notice that the Beast the Woman rides has seven heads and ten horns just like the Beast in Revelation 13—because it is the same Beast. What is added is the Woman riding the Beast. This is a position of control much like the rider of a horse. Verse 5 clearly identifies the rider as “Mystery, Babylon the Great.”

Is the Woman a Church?

We have, it seems, always accepted that the Woman riding the beast is the Catholic Church. We believed this largely based on the symbolism that a woman symbolizes a church. However, there are good reasons to doubt this conclusion because the Bible itself does not consistently employ the symbol that way. We will see from some examples in the Old Testament that a woman predominantly symbolizes a city, which, in turn, represents a nation.

Ezekiel 16 identifies Jerusalem in this manner:

Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations. . . . I made you thrive like a plant in the field; and you grew, matured, and became very beautiful. Your breasts were formed, your hair

For her to be riding the Beast, some kind of relationship between the two must exist. In fact, each, the Woman and the Beast, is part of the same general, Babylonish system, but in them, God reveals two distinctly different aspects, personalities, or approaches within the system.

Obviously, a human woman would approach life and its events differently than a wild animal. The Beast is depicted in Revelation 13:2 as consisting of the strongest parts of a leopard, bear, and lion. Each of these animals is undeniably a wild beast, and each on its own is an immensely powerful animal that a woman, on her own, would be no match for. Yet Revelation shows the Woman in control, riding the seemingly super-powerful Beast. At this point in the prophecy, she is greater, superior, more powerful, and more influential than the Beast.

Jesus says in Mark 3:24-26, “If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself, and is divided, he cannot stand, but has an end.” This provides a principle that may help us understand Revelation 17. The Woman and the Beast represent political powers with diverse and competing interests and aims within the same general, Babylonish system. Each is competing for world domination. Just as surely as Satan’s house cannot stand when divided, the Babylonish system cannot stand!

Revelation 17:16 confirms this principle: “And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire.” At this point, any cooperation and competition between the two end. Competition may appear on the surface to be good, producing better quality and better value. However, it ultimately divides and destroys because the self-interests of those competing eventually drive them against each other to gain more for the self.

grew, but you were naked and bare. . . . But you trusted in your own beauty, played the harlot because of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by who would have it. . . . You are an adulterous wife, who takes strangers instead of her husband. (verses 2, 7, 15, 32)

Clearly, God uses a woman to symbolize a city and a nation, in this case specifically, Jerusalem, and in the broader sense, Israel.

Notice also Ezekiel 23:2-4:

Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother. They committed harlotry in Egypt,

they committed harlotry in their youth; their breasts were there embraced, their virgin bosom was there pressed. Their names: Oholah the elder and Oholibah her sister; they were Mine, and they bore sons and daughters. As for their names, Samaria is Oholah, and Jerusalem is Oholibah.

It is indisputably plain that Oholah represents the city of Samaria, which in turn stands for the ten northern tribes called “Israel.” In like manner, Oholibah represents Jerusalem, which signifies Judah, the southern two tribes. It also becomes clear from these two chapters that the woman symbolism includes cities and nations of vile character and reputation, even though at times the woman symbol *might* represent the church made pure by Christ’s blood. Certainly, the Woman of Revelation 17 is anything but pure!

In Isaiah 47:1, we find another Old Testament example in which the woman symbol refers to a city: “Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans! For you shall no more be called tender and delicate.” Again, the pattern holds true: We find a woman symbolizing a city and nation, not a church. In this case, though, a woman symbolizes Babylon, a pagan city and nation, not Israel.

Lamentations 1:1-7 presents us with yet another vivid example:

How lonely sits the city that was full of people! How like a widow is she, who was great among the nations! The princess among the provinces has become a slave! She weeps bitterly in the night, her tears are on her cheeks; among all her lovers she has none to comfort her. All her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they have become her enemies. Judah has gone into captivity, under affliction and hard servitude; she dwells among the nations, all her persecutors overtake her in dire straits. The roads to Zion mourn because no one comes to the set feasts. All her gates are desolate; her priests sigh, her virgins are afflicted, and she is in bitterness. Her adversaries have become the master, her enemies prosper; for the LORD has afflicted her because of the multitude of her transgressions. Her children have gone into captivity before the enemy. And from the daughter of Zion all her splendor has departed. Her princes have become like deer that find no pasture, that flee without strength before the pursuer. In the days of her affliction and roaming, Jerusalem remembers all her pleasant things that she had in the days of old. When her people fell into the hand of the enemy with no one to help her, the adversaries saw her and mocked at her downfall.

Here, even before the woman symbol appears, the

city is identified as female by feminine pronouns. It is more specifically designated as a widow, another female figure. Before the verse ends, it reflects back on an earlier time when she was a princess, another female figure, but now she is a slave.

In verse 3, the city morphs into Judah, the nation. Then in verse 4, an alternate name for Jerusalem, Zion, is used, and the female identity continues. In verse 6, the city becomes “the daughter of Zion.” It is not until verse 7 that Jerusalem, the woman described throughout this context, is directly named. If one would read further, we would see that people have seen her nakedness, and her sin was in her skirts, referring to sins of idolatry, which God describes in sexual terms.

The New King James version uses feminine pronouns 28 times in those seven verses in reference to the entity variously called “a city,” “Judah,” “a widow,” “the princess,” “Zion,” “the daughter of Zion,” and “Jerusalem.” Undoubtedly, a woman symbolizes a city, and city, a nation. Each of the female symbols depicts the same thing, Jerusalem and Judah, but from slightly different perspectives. Within this context, it is not depicting a church. Is there a parallel to the church in Lamentations? Yes, but it is indirect, imprecise, and at best secondary.

The Old Testament never refers to Israel as a church. Why? There was no church at that time. Not until the New Testament does the Bible weakly suggest a woman symbolizes a church (Galatians 4:21-31; see also II Corinthians 11:2), and that symbolism is restricted to the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16). However, even in this case, the true church still suggests a city and a nation. Galatians 4:26 refers to the church as “Jerusalem above . . . the mother of us all,” and I Peter 2:9 calls it “a holy nation.”

The woman symbol is not used once for the false church. The idea that the Woman represents the false church is drawn from Galatians 4:21-31 then wrongly combined with Revelation 12:13-16, where the true church is not even the subject. This unsupported conclusion is then erroneously applied to the harlot in Revelation 17.

The English word “church” is derived from the Greek *kuriakon*, which means “belonging to a lord.” Of itself, *kuriakon* has absolutely no religious connotations. It simply means the lord or master of a property, and the Bible never uses it in reference to the body of Christ. Revelation 1:10 translates it as “Lord’s” in the phrase “the Lord’s day,” and it plainly means the day belonging to the Lord.

English-speaking Israelites transformed *kuriakon* into a religious term. It emerged first as the word “kirk” and evolved through the centuries into “church.” Its first usage in English was to identify a building in which religious meetings were held, but eventually, it came to

(continued on page 17)

Part Two

Do we realize to what we have been called? We may glibly answer with the standard phrases about the Kingdom of God, His Family, and eternal life, but do we really understand what this means? For those of us who are changed to spirit at our Savior's return, it means marriage to the King of kings and Lord of lords, Jesus Christ. We have been called to become His Bride.

Not only will we attend the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, we will live and reign with Christ, not just for a thousand years, but for all eternity. We will be His constant companion, His confidante, and His helpmeet. We will have been fully prepared for this endless, joyous responsibility by our lives in the flesh, in which we patterned our lives after Him. We will be just like Him, a fitting Bride!

Boaz and Ruth

Last time, we saw several biblical parallels of Christ's marriage to

the church. The marriage of Boaz and Ruth the Moabitess is also a picture of the scheduled wedding of the King of kings. The story takes place just after Passover, as the barley harvest is beginning, after the wavesheaf offering. This is a type of God calling the church first, in the smaller barley harvest (Ruth 1:22). The book of Ruth is traditionally read during the Feast of Pentecost, so its themes are "meat in due season."

Ruth converts to the true religion after the death of her husband (verses 16-17). Spiritually, she is considered of the seed of Abraham through this act, as are all who are of God's spiritual household. In Ruth's case, she is also related by marriage to the wealthy landowner, Boaz. Recall that Rebekah and the Bride of Christ are also of the same household or kin of the bridegroom.

Boaz, a righteous man in an unrighteous time, obeys God's rules of generosity (Deuteronomy 24:19-21) and leaves the corners of his field unharvested. He even commands his reapers to drop sheaves for Ruth and other poor gleaners. Ruth in turn is looking for a field

owner in whose eyes she may find grace (Ruth 2:1-3), just as the Bride of Christ finds grace. Boaz notices her hard work, and no doubt her beauty, and commands his men to be even more generous with her. He urges her to glean in *his* field, and not another—more obvious lessons (verse 8). He graciously invites this poor woman to eat and drink from his table, to eat his bread, and to dip it in the wine vinegar (verse 14). This should bring to mind what Paul says to the Corinthians (I Corinthians 10:16-17, 21).

Through the laws of levirate marriage, Boaz buys the rights to marry Ruth, redeeming her from a closer kinsman (Deuteronomy 25:5-10; Ruth 4:1-12). Boaz, much older than Ruth, loves her dearly, as Jesus, who has been since the beginning, loves His new Bride dearly. Just as Boaz becomes Ruth's redeemer, we too have a Redeemer. Jesus bought us with the price of His own blood—and now He is our Master and Bridegroom. As such, we become co-heirs of everything promised to Jesus Christ (Romans 8:16-17).

At the end of the barley and early wheat harvest, Boaz marries Ruth, right about the time of Pentecost (Ruth 4:13). Their marriage unites Israelite and Gentile into one, just as Jesus "is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of division between us" (Ephesians 2:14). In the same way, at the end of the small, spiritual barley harvest and the early wheat harvest, which pictures this small, total number that comprise the elect of God, Christ will marry His church. Boaz and Ruth were King David's great-grandparents and ancestors of Christ (Ruth 4:18-21).

Will You Marry Me?

The Proposal

In the New Covenant, the Father still selects the Bride for Jesus (John 6:44). In the days of the apostles, once the bride was selected and the

bride-price agreed upon, the man seeking a bride would go to the young lady in mind and present her with his cup of wine. He would tell her his cup represents his life and proposes marriage by offering his cup to her. He would then voice his desire to have them share their lives together. If she takes his cup and drinks of it, she accepts his marriage proposal and agrees to live by the terms of the new covenant they are making with each other. Sound familiar?

"Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins'" (Matthew 26:27-28). When Jesus uttered this, the disciples were probably taken aback, wondering why He was using words similar to what a young man would say in proposing to a woman.

Every year we drink of the Master's cup, we remind ourselves of the time we accepted our Fiancé's cup and formed a new covenant with Him. We look forward to that time when the King puts on a wedding for His Son (Matthew 22:1-14), when we will be the Bride at that wedding! We will sit at the King's table and participate with our new Husband as He raises His cup again, for the first time since that night in Jerusalem.

Jesus and His Father go a step further and give us a *guarantee* of His promise to marry us. On the Feast of Pentecost (Acts 2), fifty days after Jesus' resurrection, God sent a "deposit," the "earnest" of the Holy Spirit—the guarantee of the full payment to come later (Ephesians 1:13-14), when we are changed from flesh to spirit. There may be more here than some realize.

The Greek word for "earnest" is *arrabon*. When taken in the context of our understanding of a glorious wedding coming, it is a word packed with meaning. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* comments:

Originally, "earnest-money" deposited by the purchaser and forfeited if the purchase was not completed, [*arrabon*] was probably a Phoenician word, introduced into Greece. In general usage it came to denote "a pledge" or "earnest" of any sort; in the NT it is used only of that which is assured by God to believers; it is said of the Holy Spirit as the divine "pledge" of all their future blessedness, . . . particularly of their eternal inheritance.

Then comes this final sentence: "In modern Greek *arrabona* is an 'engagement ring.'" Of course! It makes so much sense. When Jesus asks us to drink of His cup—and we do—He follows by giving us a sign of His pledge: a kind of engagement ring, an earnest of His Holy Spirit! All this happened on the very likely anniversary of God's proposal to Israel, the Day of Pentecost, about the time Boaz and Ruth pledged their troth.

The Wedding

Who will perform the wedding? Matthew 22:2 gives us a huge clue! "The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king, who arranged a wedding for his son." Who is this king? God the Father, of course! Who else would be qualified? Jesus' parable in Matthew 22 goes on to say the King (God the Father) is in attendance, meeting the guests (verse 11). These are clues.

Where will the wedding take place? Psalm 45, called the "song of loves," appears to be describing the same event:

The royal daughter is all glorious within the palace; her clothing is woven with gold. She shall be brought to the King in robes of many colors; the virgins, her companions who follow her, shall be brought to You. With gladness and rejoic-

ing they shall be brought; they shall enter the King's palace. (verses 13-15)

There has been extensive speculation on this point, and we cannot be completely definite about the answer. Some speculate it will take place on the earth, but it seems God the Father performs the wedding. The Father, however, does not come to the earth until the Millennium is over (see Revelation 20 and 21).

We are given another clue in the way weddings were conducted in ancient times. Recall that Rebekah had to leave her home in Nahor and go to where Isaac—who took her into Sarah's tent—lived. Sarah is a type of heavenly Jerusalem (Galatians 4:22-26), and "Jerusalem above . . . is the mother of us all." If Isaac, a type of Jesus Christ, took Rebekah, a type of the church, into Sarah's tent, we may deduce that the wedding will take place in heaven.

Also, remember that in Jesus' day, only the father of the bridegroom knew for sure when the wedding was ready, hence Jesus' words, "But of that day and hour no one knows . . . but my Father only" (Matthew 24:36). When the father gives the word to begin the wedding, the bridegroom goes to get the bride and takes her back to his father's house for the actual wedding.

In addition, the wedding chamber itself was usually in or near the bridegroom's father's house. No wonder Jesus says in John 14:2-3 that His Father's house has many rooms, mansions, abodes! He says, "I go to prepare a place for you. And . . . I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."

Notice that in several places in Revelation, after the seventh—or last—angel has sounded in Revelation 11:15, we find the 144,000, the "firstfruits," standing on Mount Zion with the Lamb, Christ (Revelation 14:1, 3-4). This cannot be earthly Mount Zion, as Christ does not finally return to earth as conquering

King until Revelation 19. This may be a vision of Christ and His Bride after their marriage, and they are standing on a heavenly Mount Zion (see Hebrews 12:22).

In Revelation 14:3, the 144,000 are described as being “redeemed from the earth.” Who are the “redeemed”? God’s church is redeemed. Remember Boaz was the redeemer of Ruth, who was a type of the church. The real Redeemer is Christ (Isaiah 44:6). Thus, the 144,000 are clearly those redeemed by Christ, the Lamb. They follow Him wherever He goes (Revelation 14:4; John 12:26).

Though heaven is clearly not the final reward of the saved, it is exciting to contemplate the distinct possibility that the wedding of Christ and His Bride could take place in the heavenly Temple of God, with God the Father Himself officiating! We cannot be dogmatic about this, but it is exciting to think about. Jesus was able to endure His severe test on the stake by looking to “the joy that was set before Him” (Hebrews 12:1-2). We can—we must—do the same. Looking forward to such a close union with our Savior can help us have a joy that sees us through the many rough spots of daily life.

We pick up the story in Revelation 19:5. The setting is still heaven, with the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures before God:

Then a voice came from the throne, saying, “Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!” And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, “Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.” And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the

fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!’” And he said to me, “These are the true sayings of God.”

After this, we see heaven opened once more (Revelation 19:11-13), revealing a white horse and the Word of God riding it. The armies in heaven follow Him, at which time the assembled enemy forces surrounding Jerusalem and other areas of modern-day Israel are destroyed by the Word and His forces (verses 14-21). Jesus and His Bride land on the Mount of Olives, which splits in two, and they conquer and settle in earthly Jerusalem to reign for a thousand years (Zechariah 13; Revelation 20).

Commitment

Jesus warns in Matthew 20 that many who are invited to the wedding take their calling lightly and spurn this momentous union. They will miss out. Time is short. The Bride of Christ is not yet ready, and we may be caught by surprise when He comes for us. Five of the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3 are commanded to repent, to wake up, to answer the knock at the door, to be ready for Jesus’ coming. Like a loving Husband, He wants us to respond so that we will sit on His throne with Him.

With Pentecost over and the long summer months stretching out ahead of us, we need to remember the marriage proposal from our Master and Fiancé. Jesus asks: “Will you marry Me?” If we raised the Master’s cup to our lips at Passover, we recommitted ourselves to our betrothal.

Our actions since we accepted the engagement ring of His Spirit show if we are serious about the wedding—or not. We have been called to change, to overcome, to put off carnality and put on righteousness—to put on Christ Himself. If

we are committed to this union, we are growing, bearing fruit, and becoming more compatible with our Fiancé. We should be walking as He walked, living as He lived, and we can do this because Christ Himself dwells in us by His Spirit (John 17:23; Romans 8:9-11; II Corinthians 13:5; Galatians 4:19; etc.).

We should be fulfilling what Paul prays for us in Ephesians 3:14-21:

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

When the Bride enters the Palace, we will be presented incorruptible to our King, Jesus Christ; we will be without spot or wrinkle, without fault (Psalms 45:13-15; I Corinthians 15:49-54; Ephesians 5:27; Jude 24). We will be like Him, not just in spirit body, but also in mind and attitude. We will comprise the Wife of the King of Kings, His holy companion, His helper—one body, mind, and Spirit with Him. His Wife will sit on His throne with Him and remain with Him wherever He goes forever. God speed the day!

—Staff

*"A false balance is an
abomination to the Lord,
but a just weight
is His delight."*

Proverbs 11:1

Striving for Balance

A number of years ago, as our children were growing up and the numerous issues affecting families began to become a reality, we, like many people, often felt overwhelmed by life. Earning a living, providing for the needs of the family, striving to train my children properly, as well as being determined to do all required to be a growing Christian all crowded the plate of my life—to the point of regular and frequent overflow. My wife, as our mainstay at home, also felt this pressure because her life was full too. Even our children encountered periods of being overwhelmed as they grew up.

During a conversation with our minister at the time, I posed to him the question, "What is balance in life?" and asked him for a sermon on this perplexing subject. His response surprised me: He told me "to write it up," and he would gladly speak on it! This declaration revealed that he, too, struggled with the entire subject of how to live a "complete" and "balanced" life.

Over the years, I have often posed this same question to people, and I have received many answers. The common denominator in most people's responses deals with the basic differences in human life. The differences between men and women, between various cultures, in education, finances, social position, childrearing beliefs, and even geography are just a few of the factors that affected how people perceived balance for one person versus another. A superficial perusal of the Bible and

commentaries reveals little on the subject of living a godly, balanced life.

The most interesting differences in some church members' perceptions of balance concern God, Christ, and biblical teachings. Most would agree that the Sabbath, holy days, clean and unclean meats, tithing, the Millennium, and God's Kingdom are all basic ideas we believe in, but each individual's conception of them differs based on personal beliefs and past experiences. Even how a person perceives God often derives more from past religious experiences than from actual biblical revelation. Some see God as an almost untouchable, remote Being, while others view Him as a lovable, huggable Teddy bear. Some perceive Him as disinterested and uninvolved, while others see Him as a hip-pocket, good-luck charm.

What can we learn from the pages of the Bible on being balanced as Christians, spouses, children, employees, or any other role we may fill? Is there a one-size-fits-all answer on how to be balanced?

Biblical Definitions

The Bible contains few references to "balance" or similar words. In the Old Testament, "balance" is most often translated from the Hebrew word *mo'zen*, which refers to a pair of scales or balances. In the New Testament, the Greek word *zugos* comes from the root of *zeugnumi*, which

(continued on page 20)

The Four

Part Four: The

*"When He opened the third seal,
I heard the third living creature say,
'Come and see.'
And I looked, and behold,
a black horse, and he who sat on it
had a pair of scales in his hand.
And I heard a voice
in the midst of the four living creatures saying,
'A quart of wheat for a denarius,
and three quarts of barley for a denarius;
and do not harm the oil and the wine.'"*

(Revelation 6:5-6)

Oppression has been a constant factor in human history. The strong have almost always taken advantage of the weak, the poor, and the isolated—and for many different reasons. Whether because of sheer corruption of power or greedy manipulation for personal gain, powerful men and women have made the lives of ordinary, powerless people miserable. If questioned about it, many of the former would simply say with a shrug, "That's the way the world works."

Oppression is part of a cycle of turmoil and strife endemic to humanity. Usually, this cycle begins with a period of justice and relative freedom enjoyed by a majority of a populace. It is soon marred, however, by increasing government intrusion into the personal affairs of the citizenry, oftentimes in the form of rising taxes and severe regulation or restriction of employment, trade, speech, movement, and association. This situation creates a powerful, elite group of rulers who inevitably amass and hoard much of the nation's wealth, leaving pitifully little to be distributed to the squalid masses.

How long this state of affairs exists depends on the character of the people, but usually the result is rebellion and the overthrow of the oligarchy. The victors, promising a new constitution guaranteeing all the freedoms that the old regime had stolen from them, set up a new government. They proclaim, "A new day has dawned! Justice and equity will prevail!"

Our Golden Age lies ahead!"

Yet, the wheel continues to turn. Before long, the new rulers become the new oppressors. Another generation of average Joes and Janes feels the bite of tyranny.

A primary means of repression throughout history has been economic in nature. If a person or a group can be kept at the subsistence level—that is, financially able to afford only the bare necessities of life—he or it can be controlled. For instance, a man who must work from sunup to sundown to make enough to feed himself and his family does not have time to further his education, start a business, travel to see how others live, or collude with neighbors to rebel against his rulers. Essentially, such a person is a slave, a serf, a pauper, and those in authority have little trouble holding his nose to the grindstone day after day after day. Either he plods on, or he and his dependents starve.

Westerners usually think of famine in terms of mass starvation in remote, Third World countries. In our mind's eye, we see stick-thin, little children with distended bellies and bones clearly visible under their skin, flies buzzing around their gaunt, staring faces. We imagine interminable lines of such people, bowl or cup in hand, waiting to receive their daily ration of grain or milk. Others we envision lying in the dirt without the strength even to walk.

But there is another kind of famine, not as severe but ultimately just as calamitous. It is the famine of protracted undernourishment, one that weakens the body, making it sickly and short-lived, and crushes the spirit, causing hopelessness and apathy. Jeremiah writes in Lamentations 4:9, "Those slain by the sword are better off than those who die of hunger; for these pine away, stricken for lack of the fruits of the field."

It is such a long-term hunger that appears in Revelation 6:5-6. No matter if it is the result of war, oppression, drought, or flooding, famine is a terrible scourge, and sadly, has claimed millions of lives over the centuries. This is the work of the third horseman, the rider of the black horse.

H o r s e m e n

the Black Horse

S y m b o l s o f S carcity

The apostle John's description of this third horse and horseman is once again spare, as he provides us only two pertinent details: the black color of the horse and the rider's pair of scales. Both of these details, though, point to an overall interpretation of famine, which verse 8 verifies by saying this rider has power to kill "with hunger." In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus also names this seal as "famine" (Matthew 24:7).

We moderns tend to consider black to be the opposite of white, so to us, black is the color of evil, personified in the almost totally black costume of Darth Vader in *Star Wars*. The ancients made no such symbolic contrast (but see Matthew 5:36), although they did see symbolic opposites in darkness and light. Biblically, black is not the color of sin but simply an object's true color. *Black*, *blackness*, and *blacker* are found 23 times in the Bible, describing the sky, hair, cloth, marble, skin, night, ravens, cumin, and horses. In each occurrence, *blackness* appears to be a synonym for "darkness."

This does not mean, however, that the color black holds no symbolic meaning. It certainly has overtones of foreboding. Specifically, the Israelites used black to signify the mournful and unhealthy mien of those enduring scarcity, want, and famine, particularly as a judgment from God. Notice:

- **Jeremiah 14:2:** Judah mourns, and her gates languish; they mourn [literally, *are black*] for the land, and the cry of Jerusalem has gone up.
- **Lamentations 5:10:** Our skin is hot [literally, *black*] as an oven, because of the fever of famine.
- **Joel 2:6:** Before them the people writhe in pain; all faces are drained of color [literally, *gather blackness*].

- **Nahum 2:10:** She is empty, desolate, and waste! The heart melts, and the knees shake; much pain is in every side, and all their faces are drained of color [literally, *gather blackness*].

To a Hebrew, the black horse of the third seal would picture the illness and dearth of a famine, specifically the dirt and squalor of those who had nothing.

"Pair of scales" translates the Greek word *zugón*, which literally means "yoke," as in a yoke of oxen or the yoke of bondage. The beam of a balance, which resembles a yoke's crossbeam, joins or couples the two pans just as a yoke joins the oxen. Just as it is better if the yoked oxen are evenly matched, so the purpose of the balance is to determine that the contents of the two pans are equal.

Today, we have little experience with pairs of scales or balances, yet until recently, they were the commonly used means of weighing substances. Perhaps we are familiar with a pair of scales from its use in a Western movie to determine the weight of a gold nugget. In addition, most of us are aware that a balance is an international symbol of justice, depicting the supposed equality of all before the law. Elements of both of these common uses appear in the third horseman.

In ancient times, the value or quantity of a thing was determined by weighing it on scales. In fact, people bought and sold items by weight or measure rather than by our currency-based system. For instance, the shekel was not originally a unit of money but of weight according to which the price and quantity of things were determined. As such, scales were common marketplace items, and God demanded they be used justly (Leviticus 19:36; Proverbs 11:1; 16:11; Amos 8:4-10; Matthew 7:2).

Interestingly, because scales are easily manipulated, they can also be a symbol of fraudulent exaction and oppression, as Hosea 12:7 illustrates: "A cunning Canaanite [or *merchant*, referring to

(continued on page 18)

SEARCHING

Part Four: The Kin

*"For thus says the LORD:
'David shall never lack a man
to sit on the throne
of the house of Israel.'"*
(Jeremiah 33:17)

In Isaiah 22:22, the prophet refers to “the key of the house of David.” Alluding to this passage, the New Testament bears witness of the existence of this key in Revelation 3:7, where Christ makes reference to Himself: “He who has the key of David. . . .” What is this key? What does it open? This article will explore the history of the house of David with the aim of answering these questions.

In the early days, the children of Israel benefited from a highly centralized form of government called a theocracy—the rule of God. It was top-down government, pyramidal in structure, with God as the capstone. The famous Pyramid of Gaza, the so-called Great Pyramid, is emblematic of this form of government: It is truncated; its top part, representing the upper echelons of government, is missing. The capstone of God’s government is not on this planet, but in heaven. That is where the capital is.

Israel, in the days of the theocracy, lacked a capital city. There was no need for one, for Israel’s government, unlike every other government in the world, was not based on the earth. In reality, the missing capital city, which testifies of Israel’s lack of *human* government, was in heaven.

This is not to say human beings were totally absent in Israel’s theocratic government. Not at all. God used humans as His agents; He enforced His laws, judgments, and statutes through a human being who served as His

administrator. Moses and Joshua, as well as the judges later, served in this capacity. It is interesting to note that the judges felt no need to build a capital city; they administrated God’s government from his (or her) town of residence. For instance, Samuel judged from his home at Ramah, although he made a yearly circuit from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah (I Samuel 7:16-17).

The people became restive under this form of government when the aging Samuel, who was the last judge, established his corrupt sons as judges. “They turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice” (I Samuel 8:3). Samuel complied with the peoples’ request to give “us a king to judge us like all the nations” (I Samuel 8:5). Therefore, in the course of time, Israel changed from being a theocracy (the rule of God) to a monarchy (the rule of a king, or monarch). Under its first king, the Benjamite Saul, Israel became a political confederation of its twelve tribes.

Over time, Saul’s leadership faltered under the pressures and prestige of power. God replaced him with David, of the tribe of Judah. II Samuel 5:4-5 relates that he ruled for seven and a half years over Judah from Hebron, when, at the death of the last remnants of Saul’s dynasty, “all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD. And they anointed David king over Israel” (verse 3).

David then took two unprecedeted steps. At least no one *in Israel* had ever undertaken them.

1. *He established a capital city.* II Samuel 5:9, 11 relates how he

dwell in the stronghold, and called it the City of David. Then David built all around from the Millo and inward. . . . Then Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, and carpenters and masons. And they built David a house.

FOR ISRAEL

gdom and the Key

Through his relationships with Gentile nations, David established a house for himself in Jerusalem, which became the capital of the Kingdom of Israel. David ruled over all the tribes.

2. Struck by the fact he “dwell[t] in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells inside tent curtains” (II Samuel 7:2), *David proposed building a house for God, a Temple*. God rejected that idea, saying that it was inappropriate for the warrior David, a man who had shed much blood, to construct a Temple (I Chronicles 28:3).

God’s response to David’s proposal to erect a Temple is significant. For, in the midst of that reply, speaking through the prophet Nathan, He makes an extraordinary promise. This response appears in II Samuel 7:5-9, 11-16 (see I Chronicles 17:7-14 as a parallel passage):

Would you build a house for Me to dwell in? For I have not dwelt in a house since the time that I brought the children of Israel up from Egypt, even to this day, but have moved about in a tent and in a tabernacle. In all the places where I have walked with all the children of Israel, have I ever spoken a word to anyone from the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, “Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?” . . . I took you from the sheepfold, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people, over Israel. And I have been with you wherever you have gone, and have cut off all your enemies from before you, and have made you a great name, like the name of the great men who are on the earth. . . . Also, the LORD tells you that He will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will

establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever.

Established Forever

Here is an unconditional promise: “Your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever” (verse 16). Speaking of Solomon, David’s son who was later to build the Temple his father had proposed (verses 12-13), God says that His “mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you” (verse 15).

The prophet Jeremiah reaffirms that David’s throne will rule Israel, and will do so forever: “For thus says the LORD: ‘David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel’” (Jeremiah 33:17). Jeremiah’s prophecy, which in context is part of a prophecy about Israel in the Millennium, emphasizes that there will always be a monarch ruling “the house of Israel.” David’s throne, the authority of his dynasty, is not limited to the tribe of Judah, whence David himself sprang, but extends over the entire house of Israel (see also II Chronicles 5:2). We should not expect, therefore, to find David’s dynasty in a *Gentile* nation; God says it will rule Israel.

The promise of an eternal throne—an everlasting dynasty—is a reaffirmation of what Jacob by faith had come to understand centuries before. Speaking of Judah’s descendants in the “last days,” he prophesied that “the scepter shall not depart from Judah” (Genesis 49:10).

“Timing is everything,” we noted in an earlier article. There would be a period of time when Judah would not bear rule. However, once God placed the scepter in Judah’s hand, we can expect that the house of David would rule ever after. Clearly, God placed the scepter in David’s hand. We can therefore count on David’s dynasty to rule over Israel in perpetuity.

The same faith that worked in Jacob was at work in David when he speaks confidently of God’s steadfast love to his posterity. In Psalm 89:35-37, David says that God has “sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David: His seed shall endure forever, and His throne as the sun before Me; it shall be established forever like the moon, even like the faithful witness in the sky. Selah.”

The Scepter and the Birthright

God’s promise of power to David and His promise of wealth to Joseph are not contradictorily, for there is an important distinction between the *birthright* and the *scepter*. As we saw in the previous issue, God chose Joseph—specifically, Ephraim and Manasseh—to be the recipients of the great *physical* blessings associated with the birthright. We see this specifically in Jacob’s blessing of Joseph’s boys, recorded in Genesis 48:12-20, as well as the blessings listed in Deuteronomy 33:13-17. To use Jacob’s words, the birthright blessing would be “up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills” (Genesis 49:26). This is a promise of great wealth and prosperity.

God chose Judah, however, to serve as the scepter tribe, that is, the tribe that would bear rule over the descendants of Abraham. The psalmist Asaph writes that God “rejected the tent of Joseph, and did not choose the tribe of Ephraim, but chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion which He loved” (Psalm 78:67-68).

Asaph pinpoints David as the first king to come out of Judah: “He also chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the ewes that had young He brought him, to shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance” (verses 70-71).

One Last Point

Perhaps the most remarkable part of the “key of the house of David” is the *ownership* of David’s throne. I Chronicles 29:23 records that, after David’s death, “Solomon sat on the throne of the LORD as king instead of David his father.” David and Solomon sat on God’s throne!

The Queen of Sheba provides a second witness to this incredible truth. This apparently Gentile woman understood an important fact about Solomon’s throne: “Blessed be the LORD your God, who delighted in you, setting you on His throne to be king for the LORD your God!” (II Chronicles 9:8).

Remarkably, God twice refers to David’s throne as *His own*. It is God’s in the sense that Christ will eventually inherit it. Christ, “the Son of David, the Son of Abraham” (Matthew 1:1), will return to earth, claiming His rightful

place as “King over all the earth” (Zechariah 14:9). In Isaiah 9:6-7, the prophet Isaiah writes of the “Prince of Peace” who will eventually sit on David’s throne:

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. . . . Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever.

This Child, this Son, whom we know is Jesus Christ, is the Shiloh of Genesis 49:10. There, Jacob prophesies that “to Him shall be the obedience of the people.” Christ is of the lineage of David (Luke 3:23-31); He will ultimately sit on David’s throne—forever.

Summarizing, David’s throne is

- an everlasting one (II Samuel 7:15-16),
- the throne Christ will claim upon His return (Isaiah 9:6-7), and
- the throne ruling over “the house of Israel” (Jeremiah 33:17).

This knowledge is the key of David. It is clear that it is a vital search criterion to identifying the whereabouts and identity of Israel.

Looking in aggregate at the promises God made to the patriarchs and to David, we begin to grasp their almost unimaginable scope. Israel will have

- an everlasting inheritance of land (Genesis 13:14-15; Genesis 17:8),
- an everlasting dynasty to rule that land (II Samuel 7:15-16; Genesis 49:10), and
- an everlasting King to rule the inhabitants of the land (Isaiah 9:6-7).

Now, here are some *specific* search criteria. In no way can these characteristics be applied to just any kingdom throughout the years, or to just any group of people one might select. We are beginning to zero in on Israel today.

Nevertheless, God has provided us with still more markers to identify Israel. Next month, we will focus on David’s son and heir, Solomon. Speaking of Solomon, God tells David: “If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men” (II Samuel 7:14). Well, Solomon did indeed sin. What were the effects of his sin, and what are the historical consequences of the “blows of the sons of men”?

[TO BE CONTINUED]

—Charles F. Whitaker

(continued from page 7)

mean the people in the building as well.

Kuriakon is not used in Acts 7:38 where the phrase “church in the wilderness” appears. *Ekklesia* is used there, and it means “assembly,” “group,” and even “a mob.” Ancient Israel in the wilderness—and even when it was in its own land—was not a church. The church (*ekklesia*), the Israel of God, did not come into being until that Pentecost when God performed great signs to announce its birth.

Herbert Armstrong taught us that Revelation largely interprets its own symbols. Revelation 17:7, 18 say, “But the angel said to me, ‘Why did you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns. . . . And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth.’” The chapter itself directly identifies the Woman as “that great city,” not a church.

The Mother of Harlots?

What about the statement found in Revelation 17:5 that says the Woman is “the mother of harlots”? “And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.” In the past, we referred to the harlot children as being the Protestant churches that revolted from the Catholic Church. However, there is a weakness in this concept found in the Bible’s use of the terms “daughters,” “sons,” and “harlots.”

Hosea 1:2 and 2:2-4 declare:

When the LORD began to speak by Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea: “Go take yourself a wife of harlotry and the children of harlotry, for the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the LORD. . . . Bring charges against your mother, bring charges; for she is not My wife, nor am I her Husband! Let her put away her harlotries from her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts; lest I strip her naked and expose her, as in the day she was born, and make her like a wilderness, and set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst. I will not have mercy on her children, for they are the children of harlotry.”

Here, Israel is portrayed as a wife who turned to harlotry and bore children. Hosea 4:11-13 carries the story a step further:

Harlotry, wine, and new wine enslave the heart. My people ask counsel from the wooden idols, and their staff informs them. For the spirit of harlotry has caused them to stray, and they have played the harlot against their God. They offer sacrifices on the mountaintops, and burn incense on the hills, under oaks, poplars, and terebinths, therefore your daughters commit harlotry, and your brides commit adultery.

At this point, it becomes clear that their harlotry was a never-ending process; one generation after another continued in the same spiritual excesses.

Hosea 7:4 adds one more, helpful piece: “They are all adulterers. Like an oven heated by a baker—he ceases stirring the fire after kneading the dough, until it is leavened.” Not only was harlotry an ongoing sin, the whole nation, both men and women, was given over to it! These examples make it clear that “wife” symbolizes the entire nation. In addition, the wife and children were actually comprised of both males and females, and the harlots were also of both genders.

Notice elsewhere that this same reality is shown:

“Indeed everyone who quotes proverbs will use this proverb against you: ‘Like mother, like daughter!’ You are your mother’s daughter, loathing husband and children; and you are the sister of your sisters, who loathed their husbands and children; your mother was a Hittite and your father an Amorite. Your elder sister is Samaria, who dwells with her daughters to the north of you; and your younger sister, who dwells to the south of you, is Sodom and her daughters. You did not walk in their ways nor act according to their abominations; but, as if that were too little, you became more corrupt than they in all your ways. As I live,” says the Lord God, “neither your sister Sodom nor her daughters have done as you and your daughters have done. . . . When I bring back their captives, the captives of Sodom and her daughters, and the captives of Samaria and her daughters, then I will also bring back the captives of your captivity among them, that you may bear your own shame and be disgraced by all that you did when you comforted them. When your sisters, Sodom and her daughters, return to their former state, and Samaria and her daughters return to their former state, then you and your daughters will return to your former state.” (Ezekiel 16:44-48, 53-55)

We need to grasp the way “daughter” is used in this prophecy—in a collective sense as “people.” Many times “daughters” includes men as well! Lamentations 3:51 says, “My eyes bring suffering to my soul because

(continued on page 22)

(continued from page 13)

Ephraim, which stands for all Israel]! Deceitful scales are in his hand; he loves to oppress." Micah concurs: "Shall I count pure those with the wicked balances, and with the bag of deceitful weights? For her rich men are full of violence, her inhabitants have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth" (Micah 6:11-12).

When mentioned in terms of foodstuffs, particularly bread, scales become a symbol of scarcity because, normally, bread would be sold by the loaf without much concern for exact weight. However, during a famine when each ounce of flour was valuable, flour would be rationed by weight or measure, and neither buyer or seller would want to be cheated. Notice God's prophetic warning in Leviticus 26:26: "When I have cut off your supply of bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall bring back to you your bread by weight, and you shall eat and not be satisfied." The prophet Ezekiel also mentions rationing by weight as a judgment from God:

And your food which you eat shall be by weight, twenty shekels a day; from time to time you shall eat it. . . . Son of man, surely I will cut off the supply of bread in Jerusalem; they shall eat bread by weight and with anxiety, and shall drink water by measure and with dread.
(Ezekiel 4:10, 16)

God is often depicted in the Old Testament as holding scales. For example, Hannah prays, "For the LORD is the God of knowledge; and by Him actions are weighed" (I Samuel 2:3). Solomon declares, "The LORD weighs the spirits," or the motives and attitudes of people (Proverbs 16:2). Job cries, "Let me be weighed [margin, *Let Him weigh me*] in a just balance, that God may know my integrity" (Job 31:6). Perhaps the best known use of the scales in this sense appears in Daniel 5:25, where God tells Belshazzar through Daniel's interpretation, "You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting."

It is certainly possible that God wants us to understand all these seemingly disparate meanings in the third horseman. His lethal power is a terrible, divine judgment on mankind for its violent oppression and greed, and it takes the form of famine and wasting through malnutrition.

Wheat, Barley, Oil, and Wine

After describing the black horse and its rider, John hears "a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, 'A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do

not harm the oil and the wine'" (Revelation 6:6). Among the Four Horseman, this is an unusual departure; nothing else is said to or about them save in this verse. Being so set apart, the words are doubly significant.

Who speaks these words? John simply says "a voice." Literally, the Greek is "like a voice," which can be stated as "what seemed to be a voice." The only clue we have is that it comes from "in the midst of the four living creatures." Revelation 4:6 provides the answer: "And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures. . . ." (see Ezekiel 1:4-28). The language suggests that the creatures were situated around the throne, one creature in the middle of each of the four sides. The voice coming from the midst of these creatures must have come from the one sitting on the throne! God Himself utters these words!

What He says is a common marketplace call of a merchant shouting out the price of his wares. He is setting relative values for both wheat and barley, with wheat being three times as valuable as barley. However, His price is highly inflated! The "quart" here is *choinx* in Greek, which is roughly equivalent to our quart, the amount of grain that a normal man needs each day to survive. In ancient times, though, a denarius would buy eight to ten quarts of wheat, not one! Obviously, these are disaster prices.

The "denarius" was equal to an ordinary worker's daily wage, as Jesus illustrates in His Parable of the Laborers (Matthew 20:1-16). These prices, then, give a person an unenviable choice. If he is single, he can buy the more expensive, more nutritious wheat, yet have nothing left over, or he can buy the cheaper, less nutritious barley and save the remainder for the next day or so. However, if he is married and has children, he can choose only the barley because he needs more than one quart of grain for his family's subsistence. None of these choices really allows the person either to get ahead or to stay healthy, especially if he has dependents.

God also commands, "Do not harm the oil and the wine," which is a puzzler to scholars. To whom is God speaking—to the horseman or to people in general? It seems to be directed at the horseman, as he is the direct cause of the scarcity. Thus, the staff of life will be in such short supply as to need to be rationed or sold at extortionate prices, but oil and wine will be relatively untouched. Why?

Many commentators consider oil and wine to be luxury items, but this is false. In ancient times, olive oil and wine were staples of the Mediterranean diet along with grain, as Deuteronomy 7:13 and 11:14 indicate (see also II Chronicles 31:5; 32:28; Nehemiah 5:11; Hosea 2:8, 22; Joel 1:10; Haggai 1:11). A person, though, cannot live on oil and wine as he can on grain, yet, as science is just now discovering, they do provide additional and necessary nutrition. These

items are available during the third horseman's rampage, but the average man will not have the means to purchase them, since all his money is being spent on flour for bread!

What is God picturing then? The key is to remember that this "famine" is ongoing just as the wars and rumors of wars of the second horseman and the deceptions of the first horseman are. There are occasional lulls of plenty, but the experience of history is that most of the time, the ordinary individual is just getting by. Just as God predicted in Genesis 3:17-19, he labors and toils to eek out a miserable living only to die, worn out and broken in a few, short years. The third horseman's job is to follow his red brother's devastating wars with oppression, corruption, and scarcity so that men stay weak and poor and many die.

D isaster W ith a H uman F ace

An additional detail remains: This horseman is presented by the third living creature, identified in Revelation 4:7 as having "a face like a man." Symbolically, one could say that God puts a human face on the third seal. Conversely, it could also be seen as ironic that the living creature that looks like a man introduces such inhumanity.

The man's face may also be a reminder of man's role in these devastating judgments. They do not just happen—they are caused. Man's wars not only slay thousands or millions of men, women, and children, but they also destroy valuable farmland and demolish vital industrial, manufacturing, and merchandizing businesses. Armies have one job: to kill people and break things. Thus, bereft of both workers and a viable system of commerce, a war-torn society often experiences shortages of food, water, and other necessities. Famine is a consequence of man's inhumanity.

The same also holds true if the cause of famine is oppression and corruption. One need look no further than the Communist, state-controlled system of the USSR to realize that the regular and sometimes grievous shortages of food the common people faced derived from governmental manipulation, lies, and favoritism. If the State had a "need," the people were expected to sacrifice for it, and if that meant doing without bread, cabbage, vodka, or meat, so be it. There are many stories of former Soviet citizens weeping uncontrollably in the aisles of American supermarkets, not just because of America's plenty, but because they suddenly realized the great difference between a free society and the oppressive, corrupt Communist states. Free people eat well, while slaves—men and women controlled by other human beings—eat only enough to eek out a miserable existence.

Even the so-called natural causes of famine—drought and flooding—often have human elements. The Dust Bowl years in 1930s America prolonged the Depression and forced thousands of poor farmers off their southern plains farms, as portrayed in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. What is often forgotten is that years of poor farming practices—particularly excessive plowing of less-fertile lands, destroying the ground cover that kept the soil in place—contributed greatly to the massive wind erosion that gave the drought its name. Damage from floods also frequently has human causes, such as unwise damming of rivers, unsound levees, unwarranted building or planting in floodplains, and wholesale deforestation.

In many respects, famine is a problem humans have made for themselves. The Creation will produce abundantly for all if people follow the simple rules God has laid out for abundant living. Most important of all, of course, is to obey God's law:

If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them, then I will give you rain in its season, the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. Your threshing [a result of the spring crop] shall last till the time of vintage [the fall crop], and the vintage shall last till the time of sowing [of the spring crop]; you shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in the land safely. . . . You shall eat the old harvest, and clear out the old because of the new. (Leviticus 26:3-5, 10)

On the other hand,

But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: . . . Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. . . . And your heavens which are over your head shall be bronze, and the earth which is under you shall be iron. The LORD will change the rain of your land to powder and dust; from the heaven it shall come down on you until you are destroyed. . . . You shall carry much seed out to the field and gather but little in. (Deuteronomy 28:15, 17, 23-24, 38))

The black horse and its rider are doing their job, cultivating and reaping the seeds sown in war and oppression: scarcity and famine. Hard on its heels comes another reaper, who sweeps up and destroys what his fellows leave behind.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh

"A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is His delight."

(continued from page 11)
means "to join, especially by a yoke." Vine's Expository Dictionary defines *zugos* as

"a yoke," serving to couple two things together, is used (1) metaphorically, . . . of submission to authority [“take My yoke upon you”]; . . . of bondage [“yoke of bondage”]; . . . of bond service to masters [“under the yoke”]; (2) to denote “a balance.”

In biblical times, balances or scales

were not essentially different from the balances now in use. Sometimes they were suspended by a ring, and in other cases the crossbeams turned upon a pin at the summit of an upright pole, each end of the arm terminating in a hook, to which the precious metal to be weighed was attached in small bags. . . . In a figurative sense the balance is employed in Scripture as an emblem of justice and fair dealing. . . . (*New Unger's Bible Dictionary*).

Various scriptures on balances, such as Leviticus 19:36, speak of God's demands in trade: "You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt." Other references speak of measuring a person's character or integrity, as seen in Job 31:6: "Let me be weighed in a just balance, that God may know my integrity." In Job 6:2, Job uses the metaphor of a balance to complain that God has not properly evaluated his dire situation: "Oh, that my grief were fully weighed, and my calamity laid with it in the balances!"

Perhaps Proverbs 16:11 provides a clear idea of the spiritual intent of living and leading a balanced life: "A just weight and balance are the LORD's; all the weights in the bag are His work." The proverb tells us that

all things are God's and that He is and must always be the standard by which we measure everything. He and His character are true balance.

In a figurative balance, God always tips the scales in relation to us; everything about Him outweighs any capability, talent, capacity, or knowledge we have in comparison to Him. Balance is what He determines it to be by the laws and principles He has given to us, which He follows as well. It is a system of justice and fair dealing versus wrong, as seen in Proverbs 11:1: "A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is His delight." As God expects scales and balances to be used with fairness and equity, so too is His way of life.

However, the question remains: What is a balanced way of life? Is there a one-size-fits-all definition of balance, or does God give a certain amount of leeway in how we live as a Christian versus how we live as "normal" human beings? What are His expectations? What should ours be?

A Time for All Things

It seems that the only certainty in life is God. The previous scriptures show God personifies justice, fairness, honesty, and righteousness, just a few traits of his total character. While God is limitless and almighty, He has placed Himself under certain constraints, such as time and His law, so that we can better identify with Him, His way of thinking, and His way of life.

In the words and experiences of man within the pages of the Bible, He has given us a blueprint of how and how not to do things. We see the successes and the failures, the ups and the downs, the heroes and the heathens, all written for our edification and development.

One man, Solomon—a man who lived at both extremes of life—gives us in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes many lessons he learned, both good and

bad. Ecclesiastes 3 begins with the familiar lines, "To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven." Verses 2-8 lists pairs of human experiences that most people face at various times and circumstances:

A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to gain, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

People often have multiple things coming at them at various times and with different intensities. It is for this very reason that God has placed us on this earth, to see how we will deal with the many matters that can befall us throughout a lifetime. This does not mean that He does not give us a great deal of help through prayer, study, fasting, meditating, fellowship, etc. In actuality, He is weighing or measuring us to see how we handle the opportunities and obstacles that we face. In essence, He wants to see how we prioritize and how we will handle circumstances—whether we use godly scales or human ones.

When we examine life from this perspective, the idea of balance becomes clearer. God's way must be our priority versus the worldly approach that minimizes or negates true justice, righteousness, and godliness. There is a time to do most things, but they must always be done by God's standards and not the world's. While God wants us to provide for our

families, being a workaholic and failing as a mate or parent is not being balanced. God wants us to study His Word but not to the exclusion of everything else, especially one's other important responsibilities. There is a time to have fun but not when it affects more important personal, family, or spiritual needs. Balance is an aspect of godly love, as shown in Philippians 2:3-4: "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."

One Size Fits All?

Within certain parameters, there are definitive aspects of balance as it pertains to our lives. This is especially true from lessons we can learn from God's Word. However, there are additional aspects that we should examine about the "total" concept of balance.

The *Webster's New World Dictionary* adds these definitions to the concept of balance: "a state of equilibrium or equipurpose; equality in amount, weight, value or importance, as between two things or the parts of a thing." It is "a mental or emotional stability, a harmonious proportion and a pleasing harmony of various elements in any given situation."

If life consisted of only God and us individually, we could view many things we do from a one-size-fits-all perspective. Of course, this is not the case; life is full of interconnected relationships. We must then take other people, events, and things into account without sacrificing our personal relationship with God.

Consider marriage, for instance. God places two sometimes very different people, who look at life from different perspectives, in a relationship, expecting them to live harmoniously together. From the world's success—or failure—rate, many couples do not find the balance it

takes to make a marriage truly work. Frequently, harmony is lacking. Sometimes, mental or emotional stability just does not exist, even within the marriages of God's people. When this is the case, something or somebody is out of kilter, throwing matters into disarray and disharmony, affecting the marriage and often each mate's relationship with God.

From God's perspective, marriage is a lesson in learning balance. Marriage is combining the godly characteristics of a man with the complementary godly characteristics of a woman to produce one flesh and one spirit (see Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:22-33; I Corinthians 7:2-4). It is combining each spouse's efforts harmoniously, first between themselves and later adding children to the mix. We can perceive it as though God has placed the husband on one side of the balance and the wife on the other, asking them to balance each other, not only alone but also when other factors are added, such as children. God desires us to do this, not just for the good of the marriage and each spouse's relationship with God, but also to display the proper example to the children and others.

We have all heard it said, "We must live in the world without becoming a part of it." This is a real tightrope for us because we naturally desire to belong, to fit in, and not to be different. It requires us balancing our lives. We must live among those God has not called, work for unconverted bosses to provide for our families, send our children to the world's educational facilities without sacrificing our relationship with God and our efforts to build strong marriages and raise godly children, while also remaining unspotted from this world (James 1:27).

God realizes that none of us will ever approach His level as humans. In certain areas, we will fail to reach the spiritual maturity of others in the church. Thus, He exhorts us through the apostle Paul, "We then who are

strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification" (Romans 15:1-2). God uses this formula toward us, as one who is strong and willing to bear our weaknesses. He wants us to learn this too, within our own little worlds, so we will share in the responsibility when the rest of humanity will need to learn about balancing their own lives with God's. He is telling us to take His yoke upon ourselves, learn from Him, experience His way of life, so that we can teach it to others (Matthew 11:28-30).

A Blueprint

Colossians 3 helps us define our priorities, giving us a blueprint to help us in our efforts to gain (or regain) a balanced life. Real balance starts out with our relationship with God and Christ (verses 1-4), and then it is paramount that we put away the old self (verses 3-9), or it will drag us back to our sinful, pre-conversion life. Of course, we must replace it with Christ's righteous character (verse 10-11), and we do this slowly and methodically throughout our remaining time of conversion.

Then Paul delineates the character of this new man:

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual

PROVERBS 11:1

"A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is His delight."

songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (verses 11-17).

He finishes by giving us specific areas to work on:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them. Children, obey your parents in all

things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. . . . Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven. (verses 18-22; 4:1)

None of us is the same. We have different backgrounds, education, and

experiences, but God overcomes these differences. Balance is putting into action those things that are God-centered and God-inspired and refusing to do those that are selfish and unhelpful. We come to balance when we understand, accept, and fulfill our God-given roles in life. When we realize that God is the final, just, and faithful Standard and Arbiter of all things—that His way is *the balanced way of life*—we have found Christian balance, and we will consistently make proper, godly decisions.

—Rod Keesee

PERSONAL ➤

(continued from page 17)

of all the daughters of my city." The subject is still Jerusalem, as we saw earlier, and Jeremiah refers to all its inhabitants, male and female, as "daughters."

Why is this? *The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* explains in its article on "Daughter":

This Hebrew idiom reflects a double metaphor common in the culture of the ancient Near East: a capital city was personified as a woman, and the inhabitants of that city collectively as her "daughter." . . . Jerusalem remained distinct as she whose husband was the one true God, Yahweh. . . . Thus her daughters, the collective inhabitants, depended on her for identity but also shaped her future by their actions. (p. 194)

Thus, the terms "sons," "daughters," "children," and "harlots," as well as other descriptive terms like "thieves," "harlots," "adulterers," or "liars," are used collectively, without regard to specific gender, when the sense of the term is "those showing the characteristics of."

In Revelation 17, then, the city, Babylon, is symbolized as a Woman who is said to be "the mother of harlots." "Harlots" is used in the same way as "daughters," that is, collectively, including males. Thus all her offspring, the inhabitants of Babylon, male and female, are considered as harlots. "Harlots" is not limited to church denominations, as all of Revelation 18 continues the description of the Woman. Specifically, Revelation 18:1-3, 10 describes the same Woman riding the Beast in Revelation 17. Revelation 18 does not describe a church but a city and nation involved in massive, worldwide commerce, manufacturing, entertainment, etc. It is a prophetic picture of global scale.

The Beast and Babylon

Revelation 17 provides precious little information that might tie the Woman riding the Beast to religion. A religious personage whose activities promote the worship of the Beast is mentioned in Revelation 13:11-12, 15, but the Woman in Revelation 17-18 is not doing such a work. She is controlling the Beast, not bringing about its worship, and she is heavily involved in politics, manufacturing, and merchandising. The apostle John makes no mention of religion.

Consider again that the Woman is riding the Beast. Though she has a relationship with the Beast, she is not part of its internal politics, economics, religion, or military. The Woman and the Beast are separate entities, even though both are part of the overall Babylonish system. The Catholic Church has always been part of the Beast; it influences the Beast from within. The Woman is portrayed as an external influence having power over of the Beast.

Remember, Babylon is primarily the *system* portrayed in Revelation 17 and 18, as brought to its very peak of worldwide influence in the end time and personified in the Woman exercising control. The Beast is indeed a major player within that worldly, anti-Christ system, but the Woman is another separate city/nation, a political, economic, and military powerhouse that epitomizes the Babylonish system. At the time depicted in this prophecy, she has enough power and influence to bear mightily on the Beast externally. More is to come.

In Christian love,



Now Playing: Religious Persecution in Canada

The following items from "Thinly Disguised Totalitarianism" by Raymond J. de Souza (*First Things*, April 2004, p. 9.) illustrate the current condition of religious freedom in Canada:

- The British Columbia College of Teachers denied a license to certify teachers to the Trinity Western University, which is affiliated with evangelical groups, because its "code of student conduct prohibited...homosexual relationships." In subsequent adjudication, "lower courts agreed with the College that prohibiting homosexual relationships is unacceptable because it might lead future public school teachers to harbor a discriminatory animus against homosexuals." Upon appeal, the evangelical college prevailed.
- The owner of a print shop cited religious reasons for refusing to print letterheads and cards for the Canadian Gay and Lesbian Archives. The Ontario Human Rights Commissions fined him \$5,000, ruling that his religious beliefs did not entitle him to turn down business from homosexual groups.
- A court ordered a religious high school to admit a male student to the prom, along with his boyfriend. The "boys" attended the prom. The case is still making its way through the appeal process.
- The Canadian House of Commons passed legislation adding "sexual orientation to the list of 'hate speech' categories." In Canada, any language that "promotes hatred toward an identifiable group" has been criminalized. The original intent of the law was to fight discrimination in general and anti-Semitism in particular. If the bill passes the Canadian Senate, "public expression of orthodox moral judgments regarding homosexuality" would be effectively criminalized. Conceivably, ministers could be penalized for preaching God's truth about homosexual relationships to their own churches.
- The Canadian organization charged with regulating pharmacists has ruled that it is "mandatory for all pharmacists to dispense" contraceptives and abortifacents (i.e., the "morning-after" pill). At stake is whether a pharmacist's conscience must "take a back seat to a 'public health' need." Health Canada argues, "Most provinces and territories have adopted a policy that allows pharmacists to have the right to refuse to dispense medication for moral reasons, but they would be expected, as a standard of care, to refer the woman to another pharmacist, a physician, or health facility where the medication could be readily obtained." This makes the pharmacist's conscientious objection of no effect.
- A medical student was penalized "for his statement that he would not do abortions." Medical students, whose professional future rests in the hands of their teachers, are not protected by the Canadian Medical Association's "conscience clause," which gives doctors an out if they do not want to perform any type of procedure that is against their conscience. The case is still under review in the medical college. Should the student not prevail in his cause, medical schools in Canada will be in a place where they can "punish incorrect opinions" concerning abortion and other controversial procedures. Medical ethics will have taken several steps backward.

It looks as if religious liberty in Canada is just hanging on and not much more. ■

NEWS AND TRENDS
Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of Man is coming. (Matthew 25:13)

BIBLE STUDY: THE PARABLE OF LAZARUS AND THE RICH MAN (PART ONE)

In Luke 16:19-31 appears the Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man, which Jesus spoke to those who would not repent. Jesus uses it to help them understand His earlier words: “Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out” (Luke 13:27-28). In the parable, the rich man—representing all workers of iniquity, all sinners—illustrates what is to befall the unrepentant.



1. Where is righteous Lazarus the beggar taken? Luke 16:19-22.
COMMENT: Jesus describes Lazarus as being taken to Abraham’s bosom, which is simply the human breast, with the arms as an enclosure. His words depict a loving embrace, suggesting an intimate relationship. Lazarus, therefore, comes into an intimate relationship with Abraham and receives salvation (Galatians 3:29). Since Lazarus had given himself to Christ, he became one of Abraham’s spiritual children and an heir to the promises of God (Galatians 3:7).

The “bosom” metaphor occurs frequently in Scripture. God will care for His people as a shepherd for his sheep, carrying them “in his bosom” (Isaiah 40:11). Jesus was “in the bosom” of the Father (John 1:18), enjoying His blessings and close relationship. Moses carried the children of Israel in his bosom (Numbers 11:12). Lazarus had gained such intimacy with Abraham, while the Pharisees, who considered themselves to be the recipients of God’s promises to Abraham, had not.

2. What was the promise Abraham received from God? Genesis 12:5-7; 13:15; 15:18; Romans 9:6-8.

COMMENT: God promised Abraham’s descendants *land* on earth—the land of Canaan, and later it was all the land he could see. God even included the actual boundary line of the property in His agreement with Abraham. “Your seed” refers primarily to Christ, the chief of “Abraham’s seed, and heir according to the promise.” Since God’s promise of the land of Canaan was forever, it is an eternal inheritance and includes eternal life (Hebrews 9:15). Because the angels carried Lazarus into Abraham’s bosom, he became one of Abraham’s children and thus an heir to the Promised Land on this earth—not in heaven—and eternal life.

3. When was this beggar to inherit eternal life in this Promised Land? I Corinthians 15:50-53; I Thessalonians 4:16-17; Matthew 25:31-34.

COMMENT: A son who is heir to his father’s property cannot inherit and possess it before his father inherits it. Lazarus could not inherit either eternal life or the land before his father Abraham received the promises. Abraham, however, died without actually inheriting these promises (Acts 7:2-5; Hebrews 11:8-13). He was still dead at the time of Christ’s earthly ministry, and he still is in his grave today (John 8:52). He will inherit the promises at the time of the

The wicked will be raised to physical life in their resurrection, and then, immediately knowing that they are doomed, they will be cast into the Lake of Fire designed by God to consume them. The Lake of Fire will burn them up completely and finally. Jesus pictures the rich man crying out for help because of his mental and physical anguish at this time, but he is not burning eternally in hell fire. He is soon consumed while Lazarus the beggar dwells safely in immortality.

resurrection of the just. Human beings in Christ, living and dead, receive eternal life at Christ’s second coming, Abraham among them (Luke 13:28).

4. What happens to the wicked rich man? Luke 16:22-23.

COMMENT: Jesus does not say the rich man is taken immediately to an eternally burning hell. He says the rich man dies and is buried. People are buried in a grave and covered with earth. *Hades* (verse 23) is the Greek word for “grave.” The King James Version generically translates *hades* into “hell,” as it also does the Greek words *tartarus* (the present condition of darkness and restraint of the fallen angels or demons) and *gehenna* (a place at the bottom of a high ledge at the south end of Jerusalem where garbage and dead bodies were dumped and burned). Other Bible translations correctly distinguish the different meaning in these words. The rich man went to the same kind of place Jesus did when He died—“hell” (KJV) or “Hades” (NKJV)—but the Father did not leave Him there (Acts 2:31-32).

Daniel 12:2 speaks of those who will be resurrected to eternal life (the just) and of those who will be resurrected to damnation or judgment (the unjust). In the parable, Jesus speaks of two different, separate resurrections (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; Revelation 20:4-5, 11-12). Jesus pictures the rich man as wicked and lost, but even he will open his eyes and rise from his grave after the Millennium. Having passed up his opportunity for immortality by choosing this world’s temporary, material riches and pleasures rather than eternal, spiritual riches, he is without hope, doomed to perish in the Lake of Fire.

The Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man shows the resurrection from the dead, not an instantaneous going to heaven or hell. It is a resurrection from death, not from life. It depicts mortals who die and are dead, not immortals who never lose consciousness and live forever under punishment in a fiery hell. Jesus describes bringing back to life one who was dead, who had no conscious realization of the lapse of centuries and millennia since his death.

Part Two will explain how Jesus illustrates the Second Death in the Lake of Fire as an eternal punishment that totally destroys the wicked, who become ashes under the feet of the saved.