

# *Forerunner*

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

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*and*  
*Worship*

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Music has been called humanity's "universal language." Some churches however, believe God should not be publicly worshipped through it—despite Scripture containing many examples of praise through music. The Bible shows that music is a gift and blessing from God.

**Corbis**

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# The Beast and Babylon

## Part Five: The Great Harlot

**A**n element critical to interpreting prophecy is whether or not we are living in the end time. This is not to say that I do not believe we are in the end time, but timing certainly affects how one interprets prophecy because prophetic interpretation is the combination of what the Bible describes in its symbols plus what is currently happening in the world. The interpreter attempts to match them accurately—not always an easy task—which is why all interpretations, including mine, are speculative by their very nature.

Over time, a different understanding of the Bible's symbols may arise, or changes in the world scene may alter our understanding. This is precisely why this series of articles is necessary: Things have changed, especially in the world, since most of us were first taught, and it is time for a fresh look at some of the prophecies in Revelation.

Above all people on earth, we members of the church of God should more accurately understand the tense relationships of the world's nations, their institutions, and where events are headed. Jesus commands us in His Olivet sermon to be alert and aware of our spiritual well being during these tumultuous times (Matthew 24:43-44). Being aware of what is happening in prophecy can aid this endeavor greatly.

Herbert Armstrong said, "The keys to biblical prophecy are found within the pages of the Bible, not

by reading extra-biblical interpretations." Thus, we are taking a hard look at the symbols used in Revelation and comparing them with their use in other locations in the Bible.

In the last article in this series, we saw clear evidence that Israel is not ignored in the book of Revelation. Besides being mentioned in Revelation 2:14; 7:4; and 21:12, it appears symbolically in most of chapter 12. Looking beyond these references, we began to explore the characteristics of the Woman named "Mystery, Babylon the Great" of chapters 17 and 18.

In the past, we have been taught that this refers to the Roman Catholic Church. Yet, does this truly refer only to a church, or is it something more politically, economically, and militarily powerful and influential? Notice her identification contains the name "Mystery."

I Corinthians 2:7-9 also uses this term:

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew, for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

A biblical mystery is something that God must reveal for one to understand. It is not something right on the surface that anybody looking into Revelation can stumble across and quickly understand. This Woman's identification is not something easily seen. Of "mystery," William Barclay's *The Letters to the Corinthians* says: "The Greek word *musterion* means something whose meaning is hidden from those who have not been initiated, but crystal clear to those who have" (p. 26). Thus, commentaries are of virtually no help in identifying the Woman of these chapters.

Protestant biblical commentators pay little or no attention to the end-time twelve tribes of Israel. To them, that Israel does not exist! Conversely, evangelical writers and a few mainstream groups focus exclusively on the tiny nation of Israel in the Middle East. However, the Mystery Woman of Revelation 17 and 18 is much more than what that nation displays.

Commentators wholly disregard God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to make Israel into a popu-

lous, powerhouse nation both physically and spiritually—promises that affect both race and grace. Ignoring the race aspect altogether, they teach that the promises of grace were fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

However, God, as a blessing to His church, revealed the knowledge of the end-time location of Israel to Herbert Armstrong through other men who were seeking to find the "lost ten tribes." God did this so the church can make better sense of what is happening regarding the fulfillment of prophecy as the return of Christ approaches. In Daniel 12:10, God promises that the wise would understand, and the wise are those who keep the ways of the Lord (Hosea 14:9).

Only one Protestant source proved helpful in this, and it was not because it pointed me toward end-time Israel. Almost all Protestants claim, as Herbert Armstrong did, that the Woman is the Roman Catholic Church, against which they have a prejudice. But Revelation 17 and 18 are a continued revelation of the same Woman, Israel, who appears in chapter 12!

## A Review

Before proceeding into new material that helps identify the Woman, a review of what has been covered previously is in order. Is it really wild, unjust, and perhaps outright wrong that God could refer to Israel as a great prostitute, Mystery, Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots? Notice, however, Revelation 11:8: "And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified." In the same book, He calls Jerusalem "Sodom and Egypt"! Both were despicable places. God is providing evidence to solve the identity of the prostitute by comparing Jerusalem—representing all Israel—to Sodom, noted in history for its sexual sins, and Egypt, known to biblical students for its harsh slavery of the Israelites and as a type of the anti-God world we must come out of.

These are two stunning and dramatic comparisons of Israel's immoral characteristics! Why should God not also compare her to Babylon? God reserves His harshest judgments for those who should know better but waste their gifts on prideful self-indulgence. Jesus says, "For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:48; see Amos 3:1-2).

In Ezekiel 16:46-51, 56, God not only compares Jerusalem to both Samaria and Sodom, but He judges it to be more immorally vile than even those two well-publicized examples of ancient sin run wild! God portrays them as sisters under the skin! We all know the perversity of Sodom's sins. God goes so far as to say that Samaria

had not committed half the sins that Jerusalem had. These verses put Israel's conduct into a perspective that we find difficult to accept, but it is true nonetheless—it is God's own judgment and testimony! That God calls Israel "Babylon" gives evidence of the magnitude of Israel's unfaithfulness to her Husband and Benefactor, God.

In Revelation 11:8, Jerusalem is referred to as "the great city." At first thought, Jerusalem is not a great city as New York City is great; it does not occupy as much territory nor does it have the population base. It is not of that sort of magnitude. However, we must not forget that Jerusalem, as a capital city, represents the entire nation of Israel and its greatness lies in what was given to it and what was expected of it considering those gifts.

The apostle John writes in Revelation 14:8, "And another angel followed, saying, 'Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.'" He adds in Revelation 16:19, "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."

Babylon is great too. When "great" is so used in this kind of context, it is not complimentary. "Great" is *megálee* in Greek, and it literally means "big." It can mean big or great in size, magnitude, and intensity or rank in a good or bad sense. How it is to be understood depends on what is being compared.

When God symbolically dwelt in the Holy of Holies, Jerusalem was known by its citizens as “the holy city.” Tradition tells us that God departed His residence in the Temple shortly before AD 70. Jerusalem’s title as “the holy city” does not come back into the story flow until Revelation 21:2, when New Jerusalem comes down from God out of heaven—long after the time covered in these prophecies. Revelation 21:3 specifically says that God again dwells there. However, at the time of the prophecies in Revelation 14 and 16, Revelation calls both Jerusalem and Babylon “great.” This is not a positive comparison. Israel is great as Babylon is great, and at that time, neither of them is great in holiness.

Babylon is great in its anti-God, sinful influence and in economic, political, and military power, but it is most certainly not great in righteousness. Israel’s conduct places it next to Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon in great defiance of God, His message, and His servants, and thus it loses its identification as “the holy city.”

Revelation 18:7 provides us with three of Babylon’s important characteristics: that she glorified herself; that she lived extravagantly; and that she proclaimed herself a queen, not a widow, and would see no sorrow. We are looking for an end-time city/nation that is exceedingly wealthy, influential, disdainful, contemptuous, and mocking. She is portrayed as proud to the point of arrogance, self-confident in her security, thinking she has produced the power by her own means. She lives extravagantly relative to the levels of other nations, seeking further gratification while simultaneously compromising with known standards.

We see three remarkable characteristics: arrogant pride; satiety (“fullness of bread,” as God calls it elsewhere, a super-abundance of all the good things in life); and avoidance of suffering, a compromising, self-absorbed, self-indulgence.

The previous article also explored whether the Woman of Revelation 17 and 18 is a church and found evidence that it is not. Old Testament evidence shows overwhelmingly that God uses a woman to symbolize a city/nation, not a church. Most of the time, that city is Jerusalem, which, in turn, represents the entire nation of Israel. Having a nation’s capital represent the nation is not uncommon even in today’s world. Media personnel often use Washington, DC, the American city that is the

seat of government, to represent the entire United States (or London for Britain, Paris for France, Moscow for Russia, etc.).

Though the female imagery in Lamentations 1 shifts from widow to princess to wife to daughter or to harlot, the imagery for a city or nation is always female. This is partly because there was no church in Old Covenant times. Only briefly in the New Testament does a woman symbolize a church, and in that one case, it is the true church, not a harlot church represented as such. Even so, the symbolism does not lose its sense of city/nation because “Jerusalem above,” a city, is the mother of us all (Galatians 4:26), and the church is becoming a holy nation (I Peter 2:9).

We also saw that the phrase “mother of harlots” in Revelation 17:5 might be misleading and therefore misinterpreted because of the Bible’s peculiar practice of frequently using terms such as daughters, sons, harlots, thieves, adulterers, and idolaters collectively, fully intending both genders. In other words, sin is not limited to one gender.

In collective usage, the term “daughters” includes males; the word “sons” includes females; and words like “harlots,” “adulterers,” “idolaters,” and “thieves” include both males and females. This practice is what the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* calls a “double metaphor”: one word, which may have a specific gender because the context demands it take that gender, but which actually includes both genders. Thus in Revelation 17:5, “harlots” is to be understood as including men involved in what the Bible specifies as harlotry.

Therefore, “mother of harlots,” in Revelation 17:5 specifically refers to unfaithfulness within a covenant relationship with God, not a specific, human, sexual sin. The Protestant churches that revolted from the Catholic Church were certainly not unfaithful to God as His churches. They never made the Old Covenant with God, entering into a figurative marriage; they, as an entire nation, had never vowed to keep His laws. Nor were the Protestant and Catholic churches unfaithful to God as a church because neither ever had a New Covenant relationship with God as churches. However, the citizens of the nations of Israel were certainly unfaithful to God within a covenant relationship. Revelation 17 and 18 are describing a city/nation, not a church.

## Revelation 18 Symbols Examined

Revelation 18 is a continuing description of the Woman who is shown riding the Beast in Revelation 17:

After these things I saw another angel coming

down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a

habitation of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury.” . . . “And the kings of the earth . . . standing at a distance for fear of her torment, [say], ‘Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.’ And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore: merchandise of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble; and cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and bodies and souls of men. . . . The merchants of these things, who became rich by her, will stand at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, and saying, ‘Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls! For in one hour such great riches came to nothing.’ Every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, ‘What is like this great city?’” (verses 1-3, 9-13, 15-18)

Revelation 18 is not describing a church, but a city/nation involved in massive, worldwide merchandising, shipping, and manufacturing. It is a prophetic picture of globalism. What church has sufficient economic power that, when it ceases to exist, worldwide trade quickly comes to a grinding halt, throwing hardheaded businessmen into a panic? Except possibly as an investor, the Catholic Church has never been involved in manufacturing. Revelation 18 provides no information whatsoever tying the Woman riding the Beast to religion.

A male religious personage is, however, mentioned in Revelation 13:11-13, 15:

Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight

of men. . . . He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.

This male (not female) religious personage actively promotes worship of the Beast and does miracles in the context of religion to deceive people. Nothing in Revelation 17 and 18 shows the Woman doing miracles of any kind. In fact, these chapters contain no religious context at all, with the exception that she is revealed to be responsible for killing the saints.

In Revelation 17, the Woman is controlling the Beast, not bringing about its worship. She and the Beast are, in fact, antagonists competing against each other. Furthermore, she is heavily involved in politics (influencing kings), manufacturing, shipping, craftsmanship, and merchandising. There is no mention of anything similar in reference to the two-horned lamb.

The Woman indeed has a relationship with the Beast, but she is not part of the politics, economics, religion, or military of the Beast. She 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, influencing it from *within*. Conversely, the Woman is portrayed as an external influence, competing with, riding, and at some point exercising control of the Beast.

The ancient Babylonian Empire, whose beginning Genesis 10 and 11 records, is the foundational model for what appears in Revelation 17-18. Babylon was anciently both a city and a nation brought to the peak of its power under Nebuchadnezzar. “Babylon” became the biblical code name and model for the *cosmos*, the world John warns us not to love (I John 2:15-17). All nations on earth have adapted this anti-God, Satan-ruled system of government, religion, politics, business, and education into their peculiar ethnic cultures.

Babylon is this system, portrayed in Revelation 17 and 18, brought to its very peak of worldwide influence in the end time and personified in the Woman, a city/nation of exceeding great power, and in the Beast, a group of strong nations. Both are competing, vying for control of the entire system.

The Beast is a major player within that worldly, anti-Christ system. Everybody agrees that the Beast is a political, military, and economic powerhouse, but some insist on the Woman being a church. However, the internal evidence even within Revelation 17 and 18 reveals that the Woman is a separate city/nation—a political, economic, religious, and military unit—that exemplifies the epitome of the Babylonish system in all its worldwide influence. At the time of this prophecy, she is powerful and influential enough to control and direct the Beast externally.

## What Nation Is the Harlot?

What one nation fits the biblical description of this harlot? In Ezekiel 16:8, God is speaking:

“When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine,” says the Lord God.

God is describing His relationship with a specific woman, Jerusalem, which stands for all Israel. In this context, “You became mine” is the language of marriage, a covenant relationship to One to whom she was to be faithful.

Verses 13-14 reveals things He did for her as her figurative Husband:

“Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate pastry of fine flour, honey, and oil. You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty. Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you,” says the Lord God.

Notice that, though described as a woman, she is in reality a nation that other nations admire. Israel’s marriage to God bound her to keep His laws (Exodus 19:8), but she was not faithful. Harlotry entered the relationship. From this point on in the relationship, her harlotry—the fornication and adultery of the woman—is either implied or directly stated in virtually every remaining verse in Ezekiel 16.

The liberal *Interpreter’s Bible Commentary* says that Israel is portrayed as a wife who became a pagan temple-prostitute. That is a possibility, but the conservative commentaries seem to be more correct. She is portrayed as an unfaithful wife whose faithlessness is displayed in a far wider range of activities than just worship. Israel, the nation and wife, is unfaithful in every area and activity of life in which a faithful wife/nation would normally be involved.

Her sins are described in sexual terms because sexual sins are the most common way infidelity in marriage is shown to the public. Everybody can relate to it. Despite the commands of her Husband, Israel simply did whatever she wanted to do, when she wanted to do it, and how she wanted to do it. Amidst the business of daily life, she simply ignored or completely forgot the vows of faithfulness given in former years to God.

The harlotry implied is clearly the breaking of the terms of the marriage covenant. Her harlotry is unfaithfulness, disloyalty, and is primarily spiritual in nature. The most ruinous spiritual sin behind these sexual terms is gross idolatry, but all other sins are included. Israel was unfaithful in managing God’s green earth and in conducting business both domestically and internationally. She revealed her infidelity in the wreckage of millions of her citizen’s marriages and child-training practices. She showed herself faithless when her people lied to, stole from, lusted after, and murdered each other. She proved herself to be disloyal and ungrateful by forgetting from whom came her great blessings and worshipping things made rather than the Creator who made them.

What God proposed to Israel—and to us in the New Covenant—is an entire way of life. Deuteronomy 7:2-11 states the circumstances of their marriage and God’s requirements:

You shall make no covenant with [the people of the land] nor show mercy to them. Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the LORD will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly. But thus you shall deal with them: you shall destroy their altars, and break down their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images, and burn their carved images with fire. For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face. Therefore you shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them.

(continued on page 17)

# Abraham's

In the first commandment (Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 5:7), God tells us, “You shall have no other gods before Me.” I used to think that this meant simply that I was to make sure God was my first priority. Put God first, then family, job, etc. I have come to see, however, that God is a jealous God (Deuteronomy 5:9) and that what He means, I believe, is that nothing—absolutely nothing—can be worshipped in our lives except Him. God will not abide us placing family, work, or possessions in competition with Him.

*The Amplified Bible* words verse 7, “You shall have no other gods before or besides Me.” In my opinion, the Moffatt translation has it best: “You shall have no gods *but Me*.” How clear that is! None, *nada*, zip, zilch! One God and one God only. Anything that we put ahead of God is “another god.” Anything that competes with God for the time that belongs to Him is “another god.”

It is imperative that we examine our lives and rid ourselves of any other gods. This does not mean we should leave our families and renounce all material possessions, but we should determine if anything competes with God in our minds and begin to make the changes that will bring matters back into balance. God has a plan for each of us, and for that plan to come to fruition in our lives, He must be first. His overall plan will

be completed with or without us. Our continued participation in it is due to His mercy and grace and our humble, yielded obedience.

Through the example of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22, God shows clearly that He has a plan, that He will provide, and most importantly for us, that our participation in that plan is contingent upon where God is in our lives.

## God Tests Abraham

“Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am’ (Genesis 22:1). After what things had passed? What had passed was the whole, interesting story of his life up to this point. It has been said that to follow God Abraham gave up more than any other man. Now, at age 133, he is looking back on a lifetime of trials. Perhaps he thought that he had proved his faith and could relax a bit and enjoy his old age. God, however, had another test for him, the biggest yet. Though God does not tempt us (James 1:13), He does test us. Nevertheless, Abraham eagerly responds when God calls his name: “Here I am!” What tremendous humility this shows.

Then God reveals the test: “And He said, ‘Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering

on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you’” (Genesis 22:2). Notice how God phrases this: “your *only* son [the only legitimate son] . . . whom you love.” It is not that Abraham does not love Ishmael, but Isaac is the son of promise, the son of his old age, a very special son. God is tender in His phrasing, for what he commands Abraham to do foreshadows Christ’s own sacrifice later and so has special meaning to God.

There was absolutely nothing wrong in Abraham loving Isaac deeply, as long as his love did not become worship. We often say we “adore” those whom we love. The first definition of *adore* is “to worship with divine honors,” while the second is “to love deeply,” which is perfectly acceptable to do. It is important to understand the distinction.

God tells Abraham, “Go to the land of Moriah,” and He promises to tell him exactly which peak he should ascend. “Moriah” refers to an area of land in what is now Jerusalem that contains several mountains or small peaks. Abraham lived in Beersheba, more than 40 miles from Moriah.

God also tells him to sacrifice Isaac “as a burnt offering.” We can only imagine the thoughts that must have raced through Abraham’s mind! How can the promises be fulfilled if Isaac is dead? Is this not human sacrifice, such as was prac-

# One God

ticed by the heathen nations? Would this not be murder? How will it look to Sarah, his servants, the Egyptians, and others? Even so, his obedience was absolute.

“So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him” (verse 3). Abraham shows no hesitation in obeying God’s order. He does not try to stall, but instead, he “rose early in the morning”! This is mind-boggling! Here was a man who understood his position relative to God. Though Abraham was a great man, he was just a man. He fully appreciated who and what God is: He is **GOD!**

Abraham then splits the wood for the sacrifice himself, no doubt his mind whirling the whole time. If we were in Abraham’s position, what would our state of mind be like?

“Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off” (verse 4). For three days, as far as Abraham was concerned, Isaac was dead. They walked for over 40 miles, each undoubtedly lost in his own thoughts.

## Ironclad Certainty

“And Abraham said to his young men, ‘Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and

worship, and we will come back to you” (verse 5). The word *lad* means “a boy, a young man.” How old was Isaac at this time? The Hebrew word translated “young men,” although plural, is the same as the word for “lad.” The Jewish historian Josephus gives his age as 25, while rabbinic tradition says he was 36. Other commentators suggest he was 33. Because Isaac’s life parallels the life of Christ to such an extent, that he was 33 years old at this time feels right.

Abraham tells his servants, “We will come back to you.” Was he lying to them so as not to let Isaac know what was happening? It seems unlikely. Abraham is known as the “father of the faithful,” and he had had the time to think the whole situation over. He knew that for God to deliver on His promises, Isaac would have to live. Hebrews 11:19 says Abraham acted as he did, “accounting that God was able to raise him [Isaac] up, even from the dead.” He knew with ironclad certainty that God would resurrect his son. This in no way diminishes what Abraham had to do, for *he still had to kill his own son!* How many of us have that kind of faith?

“So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together” (Genesis 22:6). The wood, previously transported by a donkey, was now carried by

Isaac, confirming that he was not a child at this time. It is also a mirror image of Christ carrying the stake on which He would be crucified.

“But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, ‘My father!’ And he said, ‘Here I am, my son.’ And he said, ‘Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?’” (verse 7). Notice the affection in this interplay between them. Does Isaac suspect anything? Had they begun to discuss things by this point? We do not know. But Isaac is no simpleton. He might well have figured things out and was seeking confirmation. Abraham is a type of God the Father, and Isaac, as a type of Christ, has complete faith in him. Just as Jesus would rather have not gone through the agonies of crucifixion but did so, trusting His Father completely, Isaac appears to respond similarly.

“And Abraham said, ‘My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.’ And the two of them went together” (verse 8). Abraham, speaking of “the lamb,” probably means Isaac. Abraham knows that, however events transpire, God will take care of things. Of course, God does later provide a ram for the offering. Later still, Christ Himself is offered as the Lamb of God.

“Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and

placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood” (verse 9). This is an amazing verse—the pivotal point of the narrative. We read that Abraham built the altar. Imagine what must have gone through his mind as he piled up rock for a base then laid the wood upon it, knowing all the while he would soon be sacrificing his beloved son on it. Surely by now, Isaac understands what was going to happen; he knows that *he* will be the sacrifice. His total submission throughout the entire story is impressive. He may have even helped build the altar he was to be sacrificed on!

Scripture says that Abraham bound his son and laid him on the altar. How does a 133-year-old man tie up a strapping 33-year-old, unless the younger man consents? Isaac, like Jesus, went willingly to the slaughter. He certainly was not eager to die, but he submitted to Abraham’s will and thus to God’s will. He had complete confidence in Abraham and in his relationship with God. This verse shows a template of prophecy to be fulfilled in Christ.

“And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son” (verse 10). In Abraham, we see the very pinnacle of human obedience, humility, and faith. He exhibits very clearly that God is first in his life; Abraham has no other gods.

### “Now I Know”

“But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, ‘Abraham, Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am’” (verse 11). This is the One who became Jesus Christ calling out to him. Note the exclamation point. He is not calling to Abraham softly, but excitedly and urgently! Abraham had proved his loyalty and needed to go no further. What was Christ thinking here, as he watched this scene unfold? Could He have been imagining His own sacrifice to come?

“And He [the Angel of the LORD]

said, ‘Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me’” (verse 12). God is assured that He has first place in the heart of his servant Abraham. Again, notice the tenderness in the words. He calls Isaac “your son, your only son,” thinking no doubt of His own relationship with His Father.

“Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son” (verse 13). The ram, a type of Christ, was behind Abraham, so he had not seen it previously. It was offered for Isaac, just as Christ was offered for us.

“And Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, ‘In the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided’” (verse 14). The literal Hebrew for this place name is “the LORD will see,” which commentator Adam Clarke expounds as, “God will take care that everything shall be done that is necessary for the comfort and support of them who trust in Him.” God will provide to those who obey, who have yielded to Him completely. Yielding and trusting in God are just different ways of saying, “Put God first.” Notice the proverbial saying that sprang from this: “In the Mount of the LORD *it* shall be provided.” Clarke comments: “From this it appears that the sacrifice offered by Abraham was understood to be a representative one, and a tradition was kept up that Jehovah (Yahweh) should be seen in a sacrificial way on this mount.” The “it” that will be provided was Jesus’ sacrifice for us.

Then the Angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said: “By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not

withheld your son, your only son, in blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying, I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.” (verses 15-18)

God’s promise to Abraham becomes unconditional here because Abraham obeyed Him. That we live today in peace and prosperity in the most blessed land of man’s 6,000-year history is due to God’s fulfillment of His promises. Once Abraham proved to God that he had no other gods, these promises were guaranteed.

What an incredible story!

As well as any example in the Bible, these few verses prove that God is working out His plan and that He will provide for us. For this to happen, however, God must be our only God. Yet, without the sacrifice of Christ, this would not be possible, for without His atoning blood we could have no relationship with God. For God’s plan to work, sacrifices had to be made.

If Isaac had been sacrificed on that altar, the physical side of the plan could not have happened. If Christ had not been sacrificed, the spiritual side could not have taken place. And for both of these events to happen, Abraham and Isaac could serve only one God, which they did. Their examples set an incredibly high standard for us to follow.

We cannot afford to let anything ever come between God and us. Abraham and Isaac had wealth, prestige, and power far beyond what most of us will ever have in this physical life. Yet, despite all that they owned and all that they had within their power, they practiced a way of life that teaches us a very important lesson: There is room for only one God in our lives.

—Mike Ford

“Then David and all the house of Israel  
played music before the LORD  
on all kinds of instruments.”

II Samuel 6:5

# The Godly Purpose for Music

Few subjects have generated more conflicts than the kinds of music one should listen to or the kind of music best suited for church music. One church member even thought that no music would be the best kind for church services. A former faculty member and I were discussing the potential universal unifying power of music. I had quoted the poet Longfellow who proclaimed, “Music is the universal language of mankind.”

“Universal—hah!” he said. “Music has caused more friction and hard feelings between people than has anything else.” He added, “The most heated quarrels I have had with church members revolved around music matters.”

Because of music’s intense, emotion-arousing characteristics, some religions have dispensed with music altogether. The Friends (or the Quaker religion), the church that Herbert Armstrong came out of, prohibit both choral and instrumental music. One of my former professors, who also had been a Quaker most of his younger life, did not hear a symphonic work until he was 18. The Russian Orthodox Church as well as the Orthodox and Conservative Synagogue absolutely prohibit orchestral music.

Since music can be such a bone of contention, it behooves us as members of God’s begotten Family to understand what His Word says about the subject.

## Music’s Biblical Role

Music plays a huge role in both the New and Old Testaments. The Bible’s first reference to music is found in Genesis 4:21: “His [Jabal’s] brother’s name was Jubal. He was the father of all those who play the harp and flute.” Of course, the real beginning is described in the book of Job, “. . . when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:7).

Throughout Scripture, music has been explicitly and implicitly demonstrated to be a gift or blessing from God Almighty. It is through this gift that man can render praise and thanksgiving to Him, as well as give expression to his emotions—from the most profound sorrow to the most exhilarating joy. Music has proven to be a powerful, mood-altering agent intended to be used with responsibility and care. It can stir the emotions, charging the hearer with a vitality and strength which, in some cases, were previously lacking.

The brave Finns were stirred to action by the strains of *Finlandia* and the *Karelia Suite*. In Russian-occupied Finland, Sibelius’ *Finlandia* was banned because it stirred up too much patriotism and fighting spirit. Hitler charged his emotional batteries by listening to recordings of Wagner’s music (particularly rousing overtures and preludes

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# The Four

## Part Five: T

*“When He opened the fourth seal,  
I heard the fourth living creature say,  
‘Come and see.’  
And I looked, and behold, a pale horse.  
And the name of him who sat on it was Death,  
and Hades followed with him.  
And power was given to them  
over a fourth of the earth,  
to kill with sword, with hunger, with death  
and by the beasts of the earth”  
(Revelation 6:7-8)*

**T**he Office of Statistics and Programming at the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, part of the Centers for Disease Control, supplies an interesting list of the ten leading causes of death in the United States. The data includes all ages and races and both sexes for the year 2001, the latest year for which such figures are available. The number beside the cause of death is how many Americans are known to have died of that particular affliction that year:

1. Heart disease (700,142)
2. Malignant neoplasms (cancerous tumors) (553,768)
3. Cerebrovascular diseases (strokes) (163,538)
4. Chronic lower respiratory diseases (bronchitis, emphysema, asthma) (123,013)
5. Unintentional injury (101,537)
6. Diabetes mellitus (71,372)
7. Influenza and pneumonia (62,034)
8. Alzheimer’s Disease (53,852)
9. Nephritis (kidney disease) (39,480)
10. Septicemia (blood poisoning) (32,238)

Though the media make a great deal of noise about terrorism, accidents, murder, and suicide—all terrible tragedies—the far greater killer is disease. Only one cause of death in this top-ten list is something other than disease, *i.e.*, unintentional injury. Of the total deaths among the ten leading causes—over 1.9 million—94.66% (just under 1.8 million) are caused by disease!

In addition, most of these diseases are in many respects self-inflicted, caused by years of abuse through overeating or poor nutrition, smoking, drinking, or dealing with known carcinogens. The number-one killer, heart disease, usually occurs after years of poor diet, lack of exercise, and the fatigue and stress of everyday living. On the other hand, diseases that erupt and spread after war and famine—plague, dysentery, tuberculosis, smallpox, cholera, typhus, and the like—do not even make the list!

Other than in times of war—and sometimes even during them, as now—disease kills far more than violence or its aftermath. The pestilential plagues of today, the years leading up to Christ’s return, are cancers, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and long-term, organ-abuse diseases like heart, kidney, liver, and lung diseases. These occur by the millions in our so-called “advanced” societies with our cutting-edge medical technology, superior pharmaceuticals, and highly trained and experienced specialists and surgeons. As far as medical science has come—and frankly, at no time in man’s history has it come farther—it is still a long way from solving the mystery of disease and death.

The final actor of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse bears the name of “Death” and rides on a horse the color of “deathly ghastliness,” as one commentator aptly describes it. He efficiently sweeps up and disposes of what his fellows leave behind, in the final tally ending the lives of up to a quarter of the earth’s population. To use a sports analogy, he is the anchor, the strongest, most lethal member, of the Fearsome Foursome relay team, and he is off and running!

### **P**estilential **S**ymbols

The fourth seal is introduced by the fourth living creature, identified in Revelation 4:7 as “like a flying

# Horsemen

## the Pale Horse

eagle.” In the United States, we think of eagles as noble and majestic creatures, sharp-eyed and sharp-taloned, fierce and swift in striking their prey, mating for life, and caring tenderly for their young. The Bible’s view includes these characteristics but adds one more: They are carrion eaters.

Leviticus 11:13 refers to eagles as being forbidden to the Israelites as food: “These you shall regard as an abomination among the birds” (see also Deuteronomy 14:12). Eagles are listed first and in the company of vultures and buzzards. Proverbs 30:17 speaks of “the young eagles” eating the eye of one who mocks and scorns his parents. Perhaps the best-known biblical reference to this aspect of eagles appears in Matthew 24:28 (also Luke 17:37), in which Jesus says, “For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together.”

The flying eagle, then, needs to be seen in both lights: as a swift and deadly hunter, spying out its prey from afar, as well as a detestable eater of putrefying flesh. The first reflects God’s position as the divine and sovereign Judge on high, and the second, the grisly and dreadful effects of His judgments for sin. It is a picture of a noble and righteous God obliged by His own holiness to execute the proscribed penalty for human transgression.

Characteristically, the apostle John describes the fourth horse and rider using a paucity of verbiage: The horse is “pale,” the rider’s name is “Death,” and “Hades” follows him. This is the extent of the biblical description, yet even so, these provide us with sufficient clues to deduce a cogent interpretation.

First, the horse’s coat is a unique and otherworldly pale. The Greek word is *chlooros*, which we recognize as the origin of such English words as “chlorine,” “chloroform,” and “chlorophyll.” It technically refers to a greenish-yellow color found in nature in the pale green of just-sprouted grass or new leaves (see Mark 6:39; Revelation 8:7; 9:4; these are *chlooros*’ only other occurrences in the New Testament).

Secular Greek writers, however, did not confine *chlooros* just to sprouting plants. In *The Iliad*, Homer describes fearful men’s faces with this term, suggesting a pallid, ashen color, and in other instances, it is the pale golden color of honey or the

gray bark of an olive tree. Sophocles writes that it is the color of sand, while Thucydides applies it to the skin color of those suffering from plague.

It is this last description that is probably John’s intended meaning; the color of the horse reminded him of the pale, greenish-gray color of a corpse or decaying flesh. The Phillips translation renders *chlooros* as “sickly green in color”; the New English and the Revised English Bibles, as “sickly pale”; the New Jerusalem Bible, as “deathly pale”; and the New Living Translation, as “pale green like a corpse.” The fourth horse sports a coat only producers of horror movies would love!

Upon the back of this gruesome beast sits one whose name is “Death.” This is another unique feature of this horseman, as none of the others receives a name. The Greek word is the normal word for “death,” *thánatos*, suggesting on the surface a generic application of the term. However, this would be jumping to a conclusion, for the term is probably meant to be understood more specifically as “pestilence” or “disease.”

The evidence for this meaning here derives primarily from the Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint. In several places, the Septuagint translators rendered the Hebrew word *deber*, meaning “pestilence” or “disease,” as *thánatos*. For instance, in Exodus 5:3, Moses and Aaron tell Pharaoh, “Please let us go three days’ journey into the desert and sacrifice to the LORD our God, lest He fall upon us with pestilence [Hebrew *deber*; Greek *thánatos*] or with the sword.” This combination of translations also occurs in the fifth plague, that of the murrain or cattle disease: God tells Moses to inform Pharaoh, “There will be a very severe pestilence” (Exodus 9:3; see also verse 15). In a later instance, God warns Judah through Jeremiah, “I will send . . . pestilence among them, till they are consumed from the land that I gave to them and their fathers” (Jeremiah 24:10).

The most convincing piece of evidence for *thánatos* meaning “pestilence” in this passage comes from the mouth of our Savior in the Olivet Prophecy, as He describes the events leading up to His return. He

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# SEARCHING

## Part Five: Solomon and

*"I will take the kingdom  
out of his son's hand  
and give it to you—ten tribes."  
(I Kings 11:35)*

I Kings 11:6-10 records God's appraisal of Solomon's performance as King of Israel.

Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not fully follow the LORD, as did his father David. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the hill that is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the people of Ammon. And he did likewise for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods. So the LORD became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the LORD God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not keep what the LORD had commanded.

God was not well pleased with Solomon. Influenced by his many foreign wives and concubines, Solomon became enmeshed in pagan worship. Failing to heed God's warning of the "snare" which foreign wives would become (Exodus 34:11-16), he allowed his wives to turn him to false gods. I Kings 11:4 sums up the matter of his turpitude: Solomon's "heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David."

The same chapter tersely tells us what was God's reaction to Solomon's apostasy:

Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, "Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant. Nevertheless I will not do it in your days, for the sake of your father David; but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However I will not tear away the whole kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of my servant David. . . ." (verses 11-13)

God tells Solomon that his descendants would not inherit a throne over *all* Israel. God says He would maintain Solomon's dynasty, however, out of respect for His promise to David that his throne would be established forever (II Samuel 7:16). Under David, the scepter had come to Judah. It was not to depart from Judah, as Genesis 49:10 declares.

### The Chastening

When God promised David He would establish his throne forever, He also stipulated that, if his son sinned, He would "chasten him with the rod of men" (II Samuel 7:14). The word *son* refers not only to Solomon but also to any of David's descendants who would become king over Israel. Around 975 BC, Solomon died, having ruled Israel in unparalleled splendor for forty years (I Kings 11:42). "And Rehoboam his son reigned in his place" (I Kings 11:43).

Now was the time for chastening. God, having responded to Solomon's apostasy by committing Himself to ripping a *part* of his kingdom from his descendants, looked about for a suitable ruler of the remaining tribes. He found Jeroboam, a talented and ambitious Ephraimite whom Solomon had years before placed in charge of Joseph's labor force (I Kings 11:28). God, apparently recognizing potential in Jeroboam, made him two promises through the prophet Ahijah:

# FOR ISRAEL

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## d the Divided Kingdom

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I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand and give it to you—ten tribes. And to his son I will give one tribe, that My servant David may always have a lamp before Me in Jerusalem. . . . So I will take you, and you shall reign over all your heart desires, and you shall be king over Israel. Then it shall be, if you heed all that I command you, walk in My ways, and do what is right in My sight, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as My servant David did, then I will be with you and build for you an enduring house, as I built for David, and will give Israel to you. And I will afflict the descendants of David because of this, but not forever. (I Kings 11:35-39)

One of these promises is conditional, while the other is unconditional.

- **Unconditional promise:** “I will tear the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon and will give ten tribes to you” (verse 31). God goes on to explain that He will leave one tribe, Judah, under the Davidic monarchy in order “that My servant David may always have a lamp before Me in Jerusalem” (verse 36). God did this to honor His promise to David that He would “establish the throne of [Solomon's] kingdom forever” (II Samuel 7:12-13). Christ, the last King, descended from Judah and will sit on that throne forever.
- **Conditional promise:** “. . . if you heed all that I command you, walk in My ways, and do what is right in My sight, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as My servant David did, then I will be with you and build for you an enduring house, as I built for David, and will give Israel to you” (I Kings 11:38). This is a remarkable promise. God says He will establish in Jeroboam a

permanent dynasty over ten tribes *if* he keeps His covenant.

### A Kingdom Divided

As Solomon undertook more and more grandiose building projects—all those temples for pagan gods!—the taxation and forced-labor system grew more and more burdensome to “Joe Israelite.” Samuel's prophecy concerning the “cost” of supporting a monarchy, recorded in I Samuel 8:10-17, was fulfilled. Upon Solomon's death, Jeroboam seized upon the people's unrest to his own advantage. Just before the coronation of Solomon's son, Rehoboam, he hurled at him the following challenge: “Your father [Solomon] made our yoke heavy; now therefore, lighten the burdensome service of your father, and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you” (I Kings 12:4). After consulting with his advisors, Rehoboam countered, “My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke . . .” (I Kings 12:14). Rehoboam apparently did not inherit an *iota* of his father's famed wisdom!

With no relief in sight, certain of the tribes rebelled against the house of David, that is, against the ruling authority of the tribe of Judah. I Kings 12:16 records the parting sentiments of the rebelling tribes: “What portion have we in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Now, see to your own house, O David!”

Rehoboam's kingdom took its name from its leading tribe, Judah: The Kingdom of Judah. Because it lay south of most of the other tribes, historians often refer to it as the *southern kingdom*. Far smaller in size and population than Solomon's consolidated kingdom, it consisted of only three tribes:

- **Judah:** Rehoboam retained control, as God said

he would (I Kings 11:13), over his own tribe in order that His prophecy through Jacob would stand: “The scepter shall not depart from Judah” (Genesis 49:10).

- **Benjamin:** The tribe of Benjamin, situated geographically near Judah’s inheritance, voluntarily allied itself with Rehoboam.
- **Levi:** Forced to vacate their priestly positions

under Jeroboam (I Kings 12:31), the Levites drifted south to Judah. Since Rehoboam’s capital remained Jerusalem, they naturally attached themselves to the Temple service there.

Jeroboam’s kingdom, properly called the Kingdom of Israel, consisted of the remaining tribes, of which there were ten. Because it lay to the north of Judah, historians often speak of the Kingdom of the Israel as the *northern kingdom*.

## Has God Already Fulfilled His Promises

Some people have erroneously interpreted I Kings 4:20-34—a description of Israel’s prosperity under Solomon—along with related scriptures, as a fulfillment of God’s promises to the patriarchs. They argue that, since God fulfilled them, they have no further meaning today or in prophecy. Is that so?

Now, it is true that the children of Israel experienced God’s blessing during Solomon’s reign. Specifically, they enjoyed

- *Population growth:* “Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking and rejoicing” (I Kings 4:20).
- *Peace:* Solomon “had peace on every side all around him” (I Kings 4:24).
- *Vast territories:* “Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the [Euphrates] River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt” (I Kings 4:21).
- *Wealth:* Solomon “made silver and gold as common in Jerusalem as stones, and he made cedars as abundant as the sycamores” (II Chronicles 1:15).

There can be no doubt about it: Israel’s stature under Solomon certainly represents a *typical* fulfillment of God’s promises to the patriarchs. However, these blessings were not the final fulfillment. Notice specifically what promises were *not* fulfilled during Solomon’s time:

- Unfulfilled remained God’s promise to Abraham that his descendants would *possess* the land between the Euphrates and Nile Rivers (Genesis 15:18-21). God specifically listed the inhabitants who would ultimately be dispossessed of their territory: the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, *the Amorites, the Canaanites*, the Gergashites and the Jebusites. Shortly before they

entered Canaan, God instructed Israel, through Moses, concerning the conquering of these territories, as related in Deuteronomy 20:16-18:

... Of the cities of these peoples which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance, you shall let nothing that breathes remain alive, but you shall utterly destroy them: the Hittite and *the Amorite and the Canaanite* and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite . . . lest they teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods, and you sin against the LORD your God.

Following these instructions, Joshua totally destroyed certain peoples: “Joshua took and struck [the cities] with the edge of the sword. He *utterly* destroyed them, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded” (Joshua 11:12). These cities, as enumerated in Joshua chapters 11 and 12, do *not* include those of at least two peoples listed in Genesis 15:18-21 and Deuteronomy 20:16-18: *the Canaanites and the Amorites*.

Israel under Joshua and his immediate successors did *not* totally possess the land God had promised the patriarchs. Some peoples eluded destruction. Indeed, much outlying territory remained to be conquered after his death (Joshua 13:1-6). The unconquered territories, as listed in Judges 1:27-36, include those of *the Amorites and the Canaanites*. Joshua’s conquests were as limited as they were thorough.

Early on, Israel had “put [the cities between the Euphrates and Nile Rivers] under tribute” (Judges 1:35). Solomon, after the military exploits of David, extended Israel’s hegemony—its sphere of influence—to the point where he could exact tribute from all the nations situated between these rivers (I Kings 4:21). However, Israel never fully *dispossessed* the inhabitants of their land, *never* dis-

So, add to the list of search criteria this point: Someone of the tribe of Judah will always rule Israel, but only a part of Israel. There remains another part, under different leadership. The history of this other part, the Kingdom of Israel, took a totally different path from that of the Kingdom of Judah. Next month, we will look at the changes Jeroboam wrought in the northern kingdom—the Ten Tribes of Israel—and see what the ultimate result of those changes was.

—Charles Whitaker

## to the Patriarchs?

lodged them from it. *The indigenous folk still occupied the land in Solomon's time.* God had not yet fulfilled His promise to Abraham that his descendants would possess the land between the rivers.

- Unfulfilled, as well, was the promise that Israel would be a “company of nations” (Genesis 35:11). Solomon’s Israel was a great nation, but *not* a “company of nations.” The individual twelve tribes that Solomon ruled were *not* sovereign nations in their own right, constituting a company of twelve nations. Not at all. The tribes were just that—tribes, not distinct nations—for at least two reasons:

- a) Each tribe, separately, did not have its own king. Solomon appointed “twelve governors over all Israel” (I Kings 4:7). The tribes had little political autonomy.
- b) Each tribe did not have its own unique body of law. Instead, the tribes shared a common heritage of law, that given by God through Moses at Mount Sinai (see Exodus 19:20ff).

Solomon did not have political or military hegemony over a company of nations. His “empire” was based more on its economic strength than on any military adventurism to which his “forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen” (I Kings 4:26) might have tempted him. In fact, his international liaisons found their roots in his romantic liaisons, of which he had not a few (I Kings 11:3). He dealt with surrounding nations on a give-and-take basis. For instance, he *traded* twenty Galilean cities for the gold and lumber provided by Tyre (I Kings 9:11). He was not in a position to *take* the gold and lumber.

We will see, in future articles, when and where the promises to the patriarchs were actually fulfilled.

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This is a sample of what Israel was to do in being faithful to the covenant. The terms of the covenant to which Israel was not faithful consisted of the laws of God, which contain principles that cover every important aspect of life.

Now notice God’s record of Israel’s conduct before He sent them into captivity:

Yet the LORD testified against Israel and against Judah, by all of His prophets, namely every seer, saying, “Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants the prophets.” Nevertheless they would not hear, but stiffened their necks, like the necks of their fathers, who did not believe in the LORD their God. And they rejected His statutes and His covenant that He had made with their fathers, and His testimonies which He had testified against them; they followed idols, became idolaters, and went after the nations who were all around them, concerning whom the LORD had charged them that they should not do like them.” (II Kings 17:13-15)

Jesus Himself adds in Matthew 17:17, “O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you?” Right into Jesus’ day and on to ours, the faithlessness continues.

Showing how exclusive God’s relationship with Israel is intensifies Israel’s faithlessness:

Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying: “You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.” Can two walk together, unless they are agreed? (Amos 3:1-3)

God entered into no similar relationship with any other nation in all the history of mankind. A person may have many friends, many family members, many business, fraternal, and professional relationships, but the biblical standard for marriage is one spouse until death. For His part, God shows that He perceived His and Israel’s relationship as involving an intimacy normally associated only within marriage. Yes, God had relationships with other nations, but none were even close to what He covenanted with Israel. Because of that intimacy, He favored her with gifts greater than any other nation. Perhaps the greatest gift of all was the revelation of Himself, knowledge of His purpose, and

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prophecies to His disciples, “And there will be famines [third seal or horseman], pestilences [fourth seal or horseman], and earthquakes in various places” (Matthew 24:7). He does not use *thánatos* but *loimós*, which literally means “pestilence” or “disease.” Once Jesus Himself weighs in, there is no argument. The pale rider brings death by disease.

## Constant Companions

The final descriptive item regarding the fourth seal is “Hades followed with him.” Obviously, “Hades” has been left untranslated in the New King James; it is “Hell” in the Authorized Version. *Strong’s Concordance* defines this simply as “the place (state) of departed souls,” although this is in itself an interpretive definition. A more complete definition would include that it is a proper name of the Greek god of the lower regions, known as Pluto by the Romans, who gave his name to the realm of the dead (*Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*).

However, this barely scratches the surface of the subject. *The Complete Word Study New Testament* adds, “In Homer and Hesiod the word is spelled *Haidês* meaning obscure, dark, invisible,” suggesting that it is a place or condition about which mortal man understands little. The same reference work mentions that it equates to the Hebrew word *Sheol*, and that in all the New Testament passages in which it occurs, Hades is associated with death (with the possible exceptions of Matthew 11:23 and Luke 10:15).

Cutting through all the scholarly speculation, much of which is based on either Jewish or Greek—not necessarily biblical—conceptions of *Sheol* or *Hades*, the basic idea is the grave, the place where the dead go after death. As Solomon writes so plainly, “But the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward. . . . [F]or there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going” (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10).

Many scriptures show that God will resurrect or redeem us from the grave, not from some shadowy netherworld of spirits. For instance, the psalmist writes, “But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave” (Psalm 49:15; see 30:3), and God prophesies through Ezekiel, “Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves” (Ezekiel 37:13). Jesus Himself says, “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:28-29).

The Old Testament instruction, carried into the New, is that death and the grave are parallel if not synonymous ideas. Notice these passages:

- For in *death* there is no remembrance of You; in the *grave* who will give You thanks? (Psalm 6:5)
- Like sheep they are laid in the *grave*; *death* shall feed on them. . . . (Psalm 49:14)
- [I am] adrift among the *dead*, like the slain who lie in the *grave*, whom You remember no more, and who are cut off from Your hand. (Psalm 88:5)
- What man can live and not see *death*? Can he deliver his life from the power of the *grave*? (Psalm 89:48)
- For love is as strong as *death*, jealousy as cruel as the *grave*. . . . (Song of Songs 8:6)
- I will ransom them from the power of the *grave*; I will redeem them from *death*. O *Death*, I will be your plagues! O *Grave*, I will be your destruction! (Hosea 13:14; see I Corinthians 15:55)
- And they made His *grave* with the wicked—but with the rich at His *death*. . . . (Isaiah 53:9)

These verses accent the common-sense truth of Revelation 6:8: “And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades [the grave] followed with him.” Death, in this case by pestilence, and the grave—Hades or Sheol, the abode of the dead—are inseparable companions; where one goes the other must follow because they are essentially the same. One can argue that they are technically different—that death is the cessation of life, and the grave is the repository of a person’s earthly remains—but the difference is purely semantic. In the end, they both describe a state of lifelessness and corruption, of being cut off from the living and from God.

## Wild Beasts

A minor controversy exists concerning the last half of verse 8: “And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth.” The argument deals with whether this sentence applies to the fourth horseman alone or summarizes the depredations of all four. The latter seems preferable.

Jesus appears to treat the first four seals as a subgroup in His Olivet prophecy, saying of them, “All these are the beginning of sorrows” (Matthew 24:8). His intent is clear: These four judgments are a distinct set of calamities that acts as a kind of warm-up for the exceedingly more terrible judgments of the time of the end. As He warns, “See that

you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet” (verse 6). It is entirely logical to believe that the same Revelator would likewise separate the Four Horsemen from the last three seals with a short summary of their work as well as the limits of their authority.

Another proof involves the fact that the sentence restates the missions of the red (“to kill with sword”), black (“with hunger”), and pale (“with death [as above, *thánatos*, meaning disease]”) horsemen. Applying these means of destruction to the fourth horseman alone would make the other two redundant and significantly diminish their roles. In addition, lumping pestilence in with hunger, war, and beasts as activities of the fourth horseman would obscure the role of disease as a judgment of God.

Commentators argue that the plural pronoun “them” in Revelation 6:8 has “Death” and “Hades” as its antecedents. They are certainly the *closest* antecedents, but the Greek does not demand them to be the pronoun’s true antecedents. Besides, the real subject of the previous sentence is not really “Death” and “Hades” but the singular “name” of the fourth horseman. If God intended it to be a summary statement of the whole passage, we can easily recognize “them” to refer to the entire subject’s active characters—the Four Horsemen—the ones to whom the Lamb gave authority to execute His judgment.

A final, curious factor is the inclusion of “by the beasts of the earth” in the powers of the horsemen; it seems to come out of the blue. However, it follows naturally in the progression of catastrophes. In times of severe war, famine, and disease, depopulation occurs, which upsets the precarious balance between human civilization and wildlife. Suddenly, with hunting and developing of wilderness areas reduced or eliminated, the population of predatory creatures expands, increasing the chances of animal attacks on humans.

The Bible provides an example of this in Genesis 10:8-9. It is thought that Nimrod’s rise to power over the post-Flood world began with his skills in hunting and killing predators, which had the upper hand over the miniscule human population at the time. Another example appears in Exodus 23:29, in which God promises Israel, “I will not drive [the Canaanites] out from before you in one year, lest the land become too desolate and the beasts of the field become too numerous for you” (see also Deuteronomy 7:22; Ezekiel 34:25, 28). Incursions of lions actually killed some Samaritans after Assyria took the bulk of the Israelites into captivity (II Kings 17:25).

Wild beasts are included in the curses for disobedience of Leviticus 26: “I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, destroy your livestock, and make you few in number; and your highways shall be desolate” (verse 22; see Deuteronomy 32:24; Jeremiah 15:3; Ezekiel 14:15). Through Ezekiel, God prophesies that disasters such

as the Four Horsemen bring happen together with the scourge of wild beasts: “So I will send against you famine and wild beasts, and they will bereave you. Pestilence and blood shall pass through you, and I will bring the sword against you. I, the LORD, have spoken” (Ezekiel 5:17; see 14:21; 33:27). Though death by wild beasts is included in the text of Revelation 6:8 without warning, it fits nonetheless.

## Reminders of God’s Judgment

It is clear that the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse—the first four seals—parallel Jesus’ prophecy in Matthew 24:4-8, which ends with the words, “All these are the beginning of sorrows.” Our Savior is letting us know that deception, violence, scarcity, and disease are only preludes to the catastrophic events of the last days. We could paraphrase His remark as, “These calamities are par for the course under man’s civilization—far worse is yet to come.”

The progression of disasters—of false ideas leading to war, war to famine, famine to pestilence, pestilence to wild beasts—is vital to understanding the spiritual teaching underlying the Four Horsemen. Through a kind of parable, Jesus is instructing us in the principle of cause and effect. If people believe the message of the father of murder (John 8:44) rather than the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6), they will eventually turn to murder and war to resolve their differences. Like the law of gravity, war causes shortages of food, producing malnutrition and opening the door to disease.

God is showing us that these sorrows trace their roots back to disobedience and rejection of Him. Mankind has built his civilization on a foundation of sand (Matthew 7:24-27), and it is no wonder that disasters ensue upon mankind with terrifying regularity. Because God is just, it cannot be otherwise. He has said, “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23), and “The soul who sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4). In addition, He has given us two sets of blessings and cursings (Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28) to provide us frightening and vivid depictions of what happens when we disobey Him. The Four Horsemen are similar warnings or reminders that He is still on His throne, judging mankind for his sins.

See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven. . . . Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire. (Hebrews 12:25, 28-29)

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh

"David and all the house of Israel played music before the LORD on all kinds of instruments."

(continued from page 11)

from works such as *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*). During the Korean War, the Communist Chinese and the North Koreans experimented with producing states of confusion and distress through dissonant music.

Truly, music has the capacity to mirror or duplicate our emotions. Perhaps the most productive kind of mood altering is recorded in I Samuel 16:18-23. King Saul had a severe emotional problem. Saul's servants say, "Surely, a distressing spirit from God is troubling you" (I Samuel 16:15). The account suggests that Saul was a moody man (perhaps what we would call "bi-polar" today) who frequently cycled into depression, especially when negatively influenced.

Saul's servants suggest a remedy in I Samuel 16:16: "... seek out a man who is a skillful player on the harp; and it shall be that he will play it with his hand when the distressing spirit from God is upon you, and you shall be well." The results occur in verse 23. "And so it was, whenever the spirit from God was upon Saul, that David would take a harp and play it with his hand. Then Saul would become refreshed and well, and the distressing spirit would depart from him."

We cannot conclude from this account that David was singing some knee-slapping rendition of "She'll Be Comin' 'Round the Mountain" or "When the Saints Go Marchin' In." David's son, Solomon, was inspired to write, "Like one who takes away a garment in cold weather, and like vinegar on soda, is one who sings songs to a heavy heart" (Proverbs 25:20). Solomon does not contradict his father at all but merely qualifies the kinds of songs used.

A major reason for the powerful, mood-altering properties of music consists of the massive network of auditory nerves in the human ear. In the words of psychiatrist Edward Podolsky,

The auditory nerves—the nerves of the ear—are more widely distributed and have more extensive connections than those of any other nerves of the body. There is scarcely a function of the human body which may not be affected by musical tones.

Even so, in order for a song or melody to be effective, it must match the mood of the individual. Music therapists call this mood-matching the isomodic principle. Saul's mood was sad or distressed. David played melodious, melancholy songs on the harp. When the mood was matched, Saul's negative spirit was neutralized. David could then direct Saul's moods to more cheerful strains.

I know this from personal experience. When I find myself in an unhappy mood, knee-slapping, hoedown music is initially painful to endure. On the other hand, listening to a melancholy work like Artur Gelbrun's *Lament For the Victims of the Warsaw Ghetto* or Brahms' *A German Requiem* actually has a stabilizing, soothing effect.

The true majesty of the Psalms stems from the variety of moods, ranging from deep despair (Psalm 69) to the heights of exhilaration and praise (Psalm 150). Realizing the importance of music in directing people's emotions, King David, a man after God's heart who composed many of the Psalms, commissioned a special troupe of musicians. It is significant and instructive to note that those in the music service were relieved from other duties: "These are the singers, heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites, who lodged in the chambers, and were free from other duties; for they were employed in that work day and night" (I Chronicles 9:33).

We should not read into this scripture that David was creating a kind of snobbish, elite sub-culture. We can see, however, the importance God places on the musical activities.

## Heavy Emphasis

Unfortunately, in the church's scattered state today, musical activities receive either a low priority or they are non-existent. In contrast to the lack of emphasis that a good share of the brethren place on music, the Levites certainly spared no expense and effort:

... and the Levites who were the singers, all those of Asaph and Heman and Jeduthun, with their sons and their brethren, stood at the east end of the altar, clothed in white linen, having cymbals, stringed instruments and harps, and with them one hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets. . . . (II Chronicles 5:12)

Those religious institutions that ban instrumental music must purposely overlook the last portion of this verse.

Likewise those religious institutions, particularly of the evangelical or Pentecostal variety, overlook the next portion of this passage, which suggests that music designed to honor God should be dignified and free of dissonance and cacophony:

... indeed it came to pass, when the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD, and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the LORD, saying "For He is good, for His mercy endures forever," that the house, the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud. . . . (verse 13)

Notice what happened as a result of this superb musical offering: "... so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God" (verse 14). The music actually created the atmosphere for God's Spirit to fill the Temple.

We read about a similar incident involving a request by Elisha: “‘But now [he said] bring me a musician.’ And it happened, when the musician played, that the hand of the LORD came upon him” (II Kings 3:15). In both cases, music set or surcharged the atmosphere, enhancing the efficacy of God’s Spirit.

Music could be considered a variety of sacrifice, serving the same function as incense or the sweet savor of animal sacrifice. The Scriptures give ample evidence of the sacrificial property of music. Notice in Revelation 5:8-11 that music is rendered to God in much the same way as incense or prayers:

Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying:

“You are worthy to take the scroll,  
And to open its seals;  
For You were slain,  
And have redeemed us to God by Your blood  
Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,  
And have made us kings and priests to our God;

And we shall reign on the earth.”

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.

Notice the number of this assembly in verse 11: “ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.” One thousand times one thousand is a mere million. The Mormon Tabernacle Choir would disappear into nothingness swallowed into this multitude! Music constitutes a standard fixture in God’s throne room:

And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. And they sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures and their elders. . . .  
(Revelation 14:2-3)

These verses go against the pet theory of one man in the Minneapolis Spokesmen Club who mistakenly believed and said, “Everybody knows that symphonic music is of Satan the Devil. In the World Tomorrow there will just be the man

and his guitar.” I think his mind short-circuited when Herbert Armstrong constructed one of the finest symphony halls on the face of the earth, featuring the Vienna Philharmonic, the Berlin Philharmonic, the Royal Concertgebauw Orchestra, and even the Ambassador Chorus and Symphony.

God’s Word has shown us the following things about music:

1. Music is a gift and blessing from God.
2. Music is a powerful, mood-altering agent.
3. Music is used to praise God and to create an atmosphere to receive God’s Spirit.
4. Music involves sacrifice.

Those who have committed themselves to the music program at the Feast of Tabernacles must realize that sacrifice is required. The sacrifice involves time, energy, and work—in some cases, hard work. Some of us have grumbled over the years about the sacrifice to get to rehearsals on time, realizing how much time it takes to learn the music. Though music requires sacrifice, the exhilaration and joy from an acceptable musical sacrifice well makes up for the effort.

—David F. Maas

**P E R S O N A L   ➤**

**The Beast and Babylon**

*(continued from page 17)*

how to live life to its fullest. However, because of these gifts, Israel’s responsibility and ultimately her deviance were also the greatest on earth. In fact, the extent of her departure from God is clearly stated in I Samuel 8:7-8:

And the LORD said to Samuel, “Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. Accord-

ing to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even to this day—with which they have forsaken Me and served other gods—so they are doing to you also.”

We all know that shortly after the marriage, even while still in the wilderness, Israel was already deviating from faithfulness. Recorded here is an especially significant event following the marriage: Israel formally rejects God as her Ruler, thus making plain what was

in fact already taking place in her conduct. It constitutes a major step in affirming Israel's desire to be a worldly nation.

This occurred between 1100 and 1000 BC, roughly 350 years after the original making of the covenant. Except for brief periods when Israel had a judge or king who did right in the eyes of God, the spiritual harlotry continued unabated until God divorced her and sent Israel and Judah into captivity.

Jeremiah 3:1-5 confirms that Israel's whoredoms persisted after rejecting God as King, yet He still mercifully desired to take her back:

“They say, ‘If a man divorces his wife, and she goes from him and becomes another man's, may he return to her again?’ Would not that land be greatly polluted? But you have played the harlot with many lovers; yet return to Me,” says the LORD. “Lift up your eyes to the desolate heights and see: Where have you not lain with men? By

the road you have sat for them like an Arabian in the wilderness; and you have polluted the land with your harlotries and your wickedness. Therefore the showers have been withheld, and there has been no latter rain. You have had a harlot's forehead; you refuse to be ashamed. Will you not from this time cry to Me, ‘My Father, You are the guide of my youth? Will He remain angry forever? Will He keep it to the end?’ Behold, you have spoken and done evil things, as you were able.”

Jeremiah wrote about another 350 years after her rejection of God as King. God divorced the great harlot Israel, but He continued to have a fractious relationship with her so as to continue the outworking of His purpose and to fulfill His promises to Abraham, as well as all the end-time prophecies. Can anyone deny that Israel is the preeminent harlot of all the Bible?

## The Great Harlot

Recall from the previous article God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to make their descendants great in number and powerful economically, greater than any other nation or group of nations ever on earth. As a group, the Israelitish people, the descendants of the patriarchs, control around 65% of the world's wealth! No one else on earth is in the position to influence, persuade, and guide as Israel is. It was through the misuse of God's gifts that Israel rose to worldly greatness.

God acknowledges that Jerusalem, representing all Israel, is great. She is truly great in political, economic, and military power. So great is her influence that in all the world only she is able to hold the Beast in check and make it pretty much do her bidding—until God's time comes for Israel to be humbled. Israel, primarily represented by the Joseph tribes, has brushed the world aside in recent history. Unfortunately, her power is not pure because she is also great in whoredoms, in religious confusion, and in deviance from her responsibility to God.

Revelation 17:1, 3, 9, 15 contain a final thought:

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. . . .” 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. . . . “Here is the mind

which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits.” . . . And he said to me, “The waters which you saw, where the harlots sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.”

These verses show the Woman, the harlot, sitting upon many waters, the Beast, and seven mountains (a mountain is a biblical symbol of a nation), and in verse 15 the waters of which the Beast consists are defined as peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues. In such a context, sitting is the Bible's symbol of authority, having power over. It is as though she gives orders and is served.

This description conveys two characteristics: First, the scope of her influence is wide-ranging, over many nations. Second, the Beast consists of peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues. The Woman, however, is not described in that manner; she is depicted as one unit. Therefore, a distinct possibility is that God sees the Woman in this end-time prophecy as one powerful and influential people, as contrasted to the Beast, which consists of many diverse peoples who cannot combine and coordinate their strengths to counterbalance and perhaps overcome the more united Woman.

In Christian love,



## Racial Hinduism

The 9/11 attacks have made *Al-Qaeda*, *Jihad*, and *Islamist* household words in America, whose citizens recognize them as the terms of terrorism. Few Americans, however, would be able to pronounce, much less define, *Sangh Parivar*, *Hindutva*, or *BJP*. Yet, these are terms of terrorism that could change their lives in the near future, says Paul Marshall in his article, "Hinduism and Terror" (*First Things*, June/July 2004, p. 10; all quotations his).

Sangh Parivar represents a strong reaction against the more secular independence movements that grew up as India's colonial days were ending. Dating back to the 1920s, Sangh Parivar is a political movement whose platform is built of essentially two planks: Indian nationalism and Hindu fundamentalism. It uses terror and violence to advance its ideology of Hindutva, the "India-first" doctrine that Hindus descended from the "Aryans," an ancient people who built India around a common religion, culture, and race. Hindutva teaches that Muslims and Christians, who make up about 17% of the Indian population, must be "subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges."

The racist component of Hindutva is unmistakable. In fact, it is tarred with the same brush as Nazism, as these quotes from the 1930's indicate:

- Concerning the future of non-Hindus in India: "If we Hindus grow stronger, in time Muslim friends . . . will have to play the part of German Jews." "The non-Hindu . . . must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn respect and revere Hindu religion. . . . Or [they] may stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation."
- Regarding Nazism itself: "Germany's solemn idea of the revival of the Aryan culture, the glorification of the swastika, her patronage of Vedic learning, and the ardent championship of Indo-Germanic civilization are welcomed by the religious and sensible Hindus of India with jubilant hope."

The Sangh Parivar movement's racism and jingoism brought it into conflict with more moderate Indian independence movements and organizations. For example, Mahatma Gandhi called Sangh Parivar's primary organization of his day, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), "a communal body with a totalitarian outlook." The RSS in turn viewed the pacifist Gandhi as weak, accusing him of pampering Muslims—and weakening Hinduism—through the 1947 partitioning of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan. Gandhi was later assassinated by an RSS member. Refusing to be marginalized, Sangh Parivar early on showed its proclivity for violence.

Today, Sangh Parivar is everything but marginalized. Under different guises, it has grown to become the dominant political force in India. The RSS is now a large paramilitary organization with millions of members. Its educational component is comprised of about 20,000 schools, 100,000 teachers, and two million students. To ensure complete cultural coverage, the RSS has

separate organizations for tribal peoples, intellectuals, teachers, slum dwellers, leprosy pa-

tients, cooperatives, consumers, newspapers, industrialists, Sikhs, ex-servicemen, overseas Indians, and an organization for religion and proselytization, as well as trade unions, student and economic organizations, and a women's chapter.

Another powerful Sangh Parivar organization is the Vishnu Hindu Parishad (VHP, or World Hindu Council), formed in 1946. This is an unabashedly India-first organization, exploiting as it does the fears many rank-and-file Hindus have of losing their cultural dominance in the face of the "exploding" Muslim population. The VHP's stock-in-trade is the propaganda of virulent hatred. The Hindu mobs that destroyed the Ayodhya mosque in 1992 did so under the aegis of the VHP.

More than all that, India's ruling party since 1998, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), is closely aligned with both the RSS and the VHP. The Prime Minister, as well as many high-ranking government officials, are members of one or both of these groups.

Not unexpectedly, the ascendancy of the BJP in the Indian political world has brought with it an increase in attacks on non-Hindus. A number of Indian states report a "surge" in attacks on Christian missionaries and converts. These attacks, which now number "several hundred" each year, do not stop with sexual assaults, church vandalism, cemetery desecration, and Bible burnings. They include gruesome murders, such as the 1999 immolation of an Australian missionary who had worked with India's leprosy population for 30 years. Burned alive with him were his two young boys.

The far more numerous Muslim population remains the primary target of Hindutva chauvinism. The most publicized violence took place in February 2002 in the State of Gujarat. Around 2,000 Muslims died in what the Indian press, largely under BJP control, called a "riot," a gross misnomer. Independent evidence indicates that this massacre was no spontaneous "riot," but a well-planned act of terrorism. Gujarat's state legal system only "impeded" the subsequent investigation of the massacre. Charges against defendants were regularly dismissed. Hindu witnesses (and their families) were intimidated by BJP sympathizers.

The president of the VHP called the riot a "successful experiment," warning that it would be repeated throughout India. The words of the VHP's General Secretary strike at the heart of the matter:

All Hindutva opponents will get the death sentence, and we will leave this to the people to carry out. The process of forming a Hindu rule in the country has begun with Gujarat, and VHP will take the Gujarat experiment to every nook and corner of the country.

Here is state-sponsored terrorism, pure and simple! The battle for cultural and religious (not to mention economic and military) control of the Indian subcontinent, including (if the VHP has its way) the nations of Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, and Tibet, is under way. As it heats up, nuclear war between India and Pakistan may become all but inevitable.

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 TWO)

In the Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man (Luke 16:19-31), Jesus illustrates death—total unconsciousness—as being followed by a resurrection from the dead and a restoration to consciousness. Secondly, Jesus describes the second death, eternal death, in the Lake of Fire that will totally destroy the wicked. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), not endless torment.

Jesus shows that the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear the voice of God and come forth—those who have lived righteously to the resurrection of life, and those who have lived wickedly (including the rich man) to the resurrection condemnation (John 5:28-29). We need to understand how vital it is to hear and submit to God's voice now.



1. Is the rich man conscious of a great lapse of time? Luke 16:22-23, 27-30.

**COMMENT:** Lazarus, who represents those who are Abraham's spiritual children, is resurrected at Christ's return with all the firstfruits (1 Corinthians 15:23). These saints will live through the Millennium (Revelation 20:4), but the rest of the dead will not live until the thousand years have past (verse 5). The rich man, then, will not return to life until a thousand years after Lazarus and all the saints have been made alive. All human beings know they will die (Hebrews 9:27), but the dead have no thought or knowledge—they know nothing and can do nothing (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10). They are totally unconscious (Job 14:21). David writes: "His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day, his plans perish" (Psalm 146:4). The rich man, at the time of his resurrection after the Millennium, will come to consciousness, knowing absolutely nothing of the centuries that have passed since his death. To him, it will seem that only a fraction of a second has passed.

2. What is the flame in which the rich man is tormented? Luke 16:23-25.

**COMMENT:** The flame he sees and feels upon his resurrection is the ultimate fate of the wicked: being burned up—destroyed—in Gehenna fire, the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:14-15). The Lake of Fire represents the second death from which there is no return to life. This death is final and permanent; it is the absence of life for all eternity. It is eternal punishment, not eternal punishing.

When the rich man opens his eyes in the resurrection, he sees the flame of fire that is about to destroy him permanently, and it paralyzes him with terror, making his mouth go dry. He complains that the flame is tormenting him. In these verses, the Greek word translated "tormented," *odunomai*, means "to cause pain; to pain, distress; pain of body, but also pain of mind, grief, distress." This rich man, resurrected to *physical* life, sees this Lake of Fire and realizes the terrible doom he is about to face. Sobbing, he suffers mental anguish and despair and begs for a little water from the tip of Lazarus' finger to cool his tongue. Nevertheless, he must reap what he sowed—death!

3. What is the "great gulf fixed" between Lazarus and the rich man? Luke 16:26.

**COMMENT:** Abraham and Lazarus were separated from the rich man suffering for his sins. The latter had received his reward in the material things he had sought, craved, and acquired during his mortal lifetime. The gulf Abraham mentions that prevents the wicked from escaping death in the Lake of Fire—and that also keeps the righteous from being burned—is

immortality. Those who are immortal will never die because they are born of God (Revelation 20:6). Only the saved possess immortality as the gift of God (Romans 2:7).

Conversely, human beings who have not been born of the Spirit are still physical and subject to corruption and death. They can be consumed by fire because they are composed of flesh and blood. The wicked will reap anguish and wrath, the fiery indignation that will devour the adversary (Hebrews 10:27). For such people, there will be a time of anguish before they die when the fire consumes their bodies. The parable ends with Abraham's words ringing in the rich man's mind and flames of judgment engulfing his body.

4. What was the significance of the rich man's final, anguished thought? Luke 16:27-31.

**COMMENT:** The rich man's last thought flashes to concern for the fate of his five brothers. He utters a final cry to Abraham, begging him to send Lazarus to plead with his brothers to heed his warning testimony. Abraham replies that they had the writings of Moses and the prophets. The rich man, however, thinks his brothers would listen to one from the dead, indicating that he realizes that Lazarus had been resurrected. Abraham replies that, if they would not follow the Scriptures, they would certainly not be persuaded even by one raised from the dead. These final verses show that Jesus' purpose in giving the parable was to reveal the truth of the resurrection.

Other scriptures tell us what happens where this parable leaves off. Matthew 13:30 speaks symbolically of the wicked being gathered into bundles to be burned. Matthew 3:12 records John's warning to the Pharisees that they would be burned up as chaff if they did not repent. They are to be burned in a fire so hot that no amount of water could put it out because the flames would turn the water to steam. When God punishes the wicked, the fire will be unquenchable. This does not mean, however, that it will not burn itself out when it has no more combustible materials to burn. An unquenchable fire cannot be put out, but it can burn itself out when it has consumed everything. Malachi 4:1, 3 also speaks of this fire, reporting the end of the wicked: They will be ashes and smoke (see Psalm 37:20).

In this, Jesus is preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God, revealing salvation, the resurrection to eternal life as the gift of God, and inheritance of the Kingdom of God on this earth. Jesus teaches that if we refuse to hear Moses and the prophets—if we refuse to believe the inspired, written Word of God—we have no hope of salvation. All Scripture, the whole Bible containing both the Old and New Testaments, is profitable for doctrine and instruction in receiving the gift of salvation.