

THAT MIGHTY CITY, BURNING

Part II

Subject and Proper Divisions in Rev. 17:1-20:6

By Arlen L. Chitwood

And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down and shall be found no more at all (Rev. 18:21; cf. vv. 1-3, 5, 7-10).

There is only *one possible way* that a person could expect the Tribulation to draw to a close and end in the Book of Revelation. And that would be *exactly the same way it is seen drawing to a close and ending time after time in Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets*.

Whether in the Old Testament or in the New Testament, Israel in the end time is seen enmeshed within and committing harlotry with the most corrupt form of Gentile world power man has ever known or ever will know.

This will then be followed by Israel's repentance, the nation being cleansed of her harlotry (as presented in Rev. 17-19a, synonymous with the harlot being burned, destroyed by fire), the destruction of Gentile world power, and the ushering in of the Messianic Kingdom.

Though the nation will have paid a *heavy price, one beyond human comprehension*, Israel's harlotry will be a thing of the past. Israel's sins will have been "as scarlet," "red like crimson"; but, with these sins having been completely removed — "as far as the east is from the west" — where *scarlet* and *crimson* once existed, conditions will then be "as white as snow," "as wool" (Isa. 1:18; cf. vv. 21-26; Ps. 103:12-22).

And a *cleansed nation* in that day will realize the rights of the firstborn, fulfilling the purpose for the

nation's existence (cf. Rev. 17:16, 17; 18:8-21; 19:2, 3).

Material Wealth, Spiritual Wealth

The heavy price paid by Israel over centuries of time has been both to her detriment and the detriment of the nations. Israel has been removed from her land, scattered among the nations, and has suffered immeasurably at the hands of the Gentiles. And, at the same time, the nations have suffered as well, *having been cut off from the spiritual blessings which could have been theirs through Israel*.

But, though the nations throughout this time have found themselves *separated from spiritual blessings*, they have, at the same time, found themselves in a *position of power* and *involved with materialism, becoming wealthy* (18:3, 9-19). And Israel, having left her spiritual heritage and found herself scattered among the nations, has become inseparably involved with the world's *materialism and wealth* as well (17:4; 18:16).

During the Times of the Gentiles (over 2,600 years), *the nations have held the sceptre and have become wealthy at the expense of Israel* (17:2; 18:19b). And, as long as the Times of the Gentiles continues, *the nations will continue to hold power and accumulate this wealth at Israel's expense*.

Or, viewing the matter from another perspective, as long as Israel remains in the nation's present condition — a harlot, co-mingling with and having illicit, forbidden relationships with the nations — the nations will continue to accumulate their wealth at Israel's expense, with Israel involved in and sharing in this wealth.

But once Israel is brought to the place of repentance, followed by Israel's harlotry being done away with (burned with fire [17:16, 17; 18:8ff]), *it will all be over for the nations*.

The Times of the Gentiles will end, the sceptre will change hands, and the wealth of the Gentiles will be given to Israel (Isa. 60:5, 11 [the word "forces," KJV, should be translated "wealth"; ref. NASB, NIV]; cf. Ex. 12:35, 36).

The preceding is what a large part of Revelation chapter eighteen is about (through the use of the type language specified in the opening verse of the book, in Rev. 1:1).

(When seeking to understand the book of Revelation, a major problem results from not understanding and interpreting material in the book after the manner in which God has structured this material — again, something stated in the opening verse of the book, though largely ignored [ref. the author's pamphlets, "Understanding Revelation," Parts I, II].

Thus, when individuals attempt to understand things in this book from a western mindset, or through any other means different than the way that it was set forth in this opening verse, is it any wonder that they have trouble?)

Note particularly verses nine through nineteen in this eighteenth chapter. The nations will have become *rich*, and these nations will be *quite distraught* when all of this is suddenly taken from them. And it will all be taken from them *through the loss of the harlot in their midst* (again, note the symbolism and type language being used).

The nations can continue in their present fashion *only as long as the harlot remains in their midst*, for, the fact that Israel is playing the harlot is what allows them to live in this manner — accumulating material wealth, etc. But once the harlot is no longer present, once Israel is no longer playing the harlot, *things will change completely*.

God will use the Beast to do *exactly the opposite* of that which the Beast will set out to accomplish.

The Beast will set out to accomplish something wherein *utter failure* has always marked the path of any and all who have tried — *the destruction of and doing away with the nation of Israel*.

And, in line with that which has happened to all of his predecessors as well, the Beast himself will suffer that which he will set about to inflict upon the Jewish people — *his own utter destruction instead*. Because of God's unchanging promises to and regarding Israel, matters of the preceding nature *must always work out in this manner* [cf. Gen. 12:1-3; Ex. 3:1-7;

Esther 5:14; 6:6-13; 7:8-10; 9:10-14].

God, turning matters around, will use the Beast to destroy the harlot [exactly as he used the Pharaoh of Egypt during Moses' day to bring about His plans and purposes regarding Israel], with the nation of Israel subsequently *existing apart from her harlotry and God's complete purpose for calling this nation into existence then being realized* [cf. Ex. 9:15, 16; Rev. 17:16, 17].)

In that day, Gentile headship will be over, their wealth will be gone, but they will find that they will possess something far greater. *Spiritual blessings/spiritual wealth, which will be theirs through restored Israel, will far exceed anything which they will have possessed throughout the Times of the Gentiles* (cf. Isa. 65:19; Zech. 8:20-23).

The Harlot Destroyed, The Nation Cleansed

"The great whore" in Revelation chapter seventeen through the first part of chapter nineteen is seen being *burned with fire* (17:16; 18:8, 9, 17-21; 19:2, 3). This is the picture which Scripture provides of *Israel's harlotry being done away with*. God is seen using the Beast and his kingdom to do away with Israel's harlotry through a persecution of such an intense nature that "except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved" (cf. Matt. 24:22). And this will occur after 2,600 years of Gentile dominance and control.

Israel will be brought to the place where the nation will have nowhere to turn other than to the God of their fathers. (Rev. 17:16, 17; cf. Ex. 3:23ff). *Repentance and cleansing will then occur* (Isa. 1:16-21), *Israel's harlotry will be a thing of the past* (Rev. 18:8-10), and *it will never again be an issue* (Rev. 19:3).

Note how Rev. 19:1-3 is worded:

"After these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia, Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God:

For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.

And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up forever and ever."

(The words, "forever and ever," in v. 3 are a translation of the Greek words, *eis tous aionas ton aionon*, and should literally be rendered, "unto [or, 'with respect to'] the ages of the ages."

The Greek language, as the Hebrew language, does not have a word for "eternal" per se. And this is one of two different ways that the Greek text can express "eternal," apart from textual and contextual considerations.

The other way is through using a plural form of the word *aion*, meaning "age," as the word is used in Heb. 13:8, where Christ is said to be "the same yesterday, and today, and forever [Gk., *eis tous aionas* (a plural, articular use of *aion* preceded by the preposition *eis*, meaning 'into,' 'unto,' or 'with respect to'); lit., 'unto (or, 'with respect to') the ages', i.e., throughout the endless ages, forever]."

The thought set forth in Rev. 19:3 by the smoke of the burned harlot continuing to rise up throughout the endless ages has to do with Israel's harlotry never again being an issue. The nation's harlotry will be completely consumed by the fire, never to rise again [again, note the type pictorial language being used].)

This picture of *the harlot being burned with fire* was introduced in chapter seventeen (v. 16) and is dealt with extensively throughout chapter eighteen. In fact, this entire chapter, one way or another, is taken up with *the harlot's destruction*, with attention called to this destruction occurring through *a burning with fire* several places (vv. 8, 9, 18).

"Fire" is seen in Scripture as *a purifying agent* (Zech. 13:8, 9; Mark 9:49, 50). "Fire" is seen as *a separating agent*, separating that which is of value from that which is worthless — by burning the latter, with the former enduring the fire (Matt. 3:11, 12; I Cor. 3:11-15; I Peter 1:7).

Thus, the picture of the harlot being burned throughout these chapters has to do with the harlot — Israel playing the harlot — passing through a burning fire which purifies in one respect and

destroys in another through separating that which is worthless from that which is of value.

Once this separation occurs, *Israel's harlotry will be completely destroyed by the fire*; but, on the other hand, *the nation itself will remain untouched by the fire*.

Nebuchadnezzar tried to use fire in the latter respect in Daniel chapter three — in relation to three Israelites, foreshadowing the entire nation — and *failed completely*.

With an oven heated seven times hotter than normal and three Israelites thrown into the midst of this fire ("seven," *a complete number, showing the completion of that in view*, probably indicating that the furnace was heated as hot as possible without destroying the furnace), not a single hair on the head of any one of the three was even singed.

Nor could Darius in the succeeding Medo-Perian kingdom get the lions to eat Daniel (Dan. 6).

Israel has a God-given promise that the fire (or anything else) can't hurt them (Isa. 43:1-3). They can remain in the fire (or anywhere else) forever and remain unconsumed (Ex. 3:1-7). And, as seen in the previously referenced passage, the reason is evident. God resides in the midst of the nation, and to destroy the nation, God would have to be destroyed.

But still, Israel is going to have to pass through one more fire, for there is the matter of *Israel's harlotry*, which has to be removed by the fire. And the nation's harlotry has no chance against the fire. The harlot is going to *be made desolate, naked, her flesh will be eaten, and she will be utterly burned with fire* (Rev. 17:16).

That is the picture which Scripture provides of God's dealings with Israel's harlotry. *The harlot will be utterly destroyed — consumed by fire on the one hand, and a nation purified by the fire will live on the other*.

Then, and ONLY then, can God complete His dealings with Israel, then with the nations, Satan and his angels, and usher in the Messianic Kingdom.

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