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Is Iraq Mystery Babylon?

The Revelation of John links the Battle of Armageddon with the destruction of Mystery Babylon. John's account describes seven angels pouring out seven bowls of God's wrath on the Earth (Rev. 16). When the sixth angel pours out the sixth bowl of wrath, the kings of the whole world gather together at Armageddon, "for the war of the great day of God" (Rev. 16:14).

After the kings have gathered, the seventh angel pours out the seventh bowl

of God's wrath, and "Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath" (Rev. 16:19b). Immediately following this is John's vision of the "Harlot" sitting on a scarlet beast with the name "Mystery Babylon, the great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth" (Rev. 17:5).

Many Christians and Jews believe the current situation in the Persian Gulf may be the inaugural event in the final

conflict between good and evil before the coming of Messiah. The Jews await His first appearance; Christians are looking for His second. Some Christians also believe the battle of Armageddon may grow out of the confrontation between Iraq and the nations of the world. This leads us to the question: Is Iraq Mystery Babylon?

In light of current expectations concerning the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, the existence of various and conflicting interpretations is a given. To this we add our own, realizing the insignificance of one more voice crying in a wilderness of confusion.

Although the Revelation of John contains the only Scriptural reference to Armageddon, different commentators have linked the event to other passages, primarily the battle of Israel against Gog and Magog in Ezekiel 39. Our only caution to the reader in this matter is that one must start with the Revelation of John, not elsewhere, for only there is Armageddon mentioned.

Apocalyptic Literature

It is important to note that one does not read non-fiction and poetry with the same expectations. That is, the type of literature a work is determines how it should be read. In the case before us, the Revelation of John is Jewish apocalyptic literature.

Apocalyptic writing flourished for over two hundred years, from 165 B.C. to

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The Mystery of Scripture

Jesus Talks About the Mystery

Scholars have studied the Hebrew Scriptures for centuries, but no two have agreed on their *meaning*. Each one has come away with his own interpretation. And individual interpretations have given birth to various doctrines which, in turn, have become foundations for different religious faiths.

Doesn't it seem logical that when the One True God spoke, His Words had one true *meaning*? If that be so, then why all the confusion concerning the *meaning* of Scripture? Could it be that the true *meaning* of Scripture was somehow hidden in a mystery, "the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past" (Rom. 16:25) as the Apostles and Early Church Fathers claimed?

Jesus Christ stood in the Temple one day and declared Himself to be the source of living water:

"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. The one who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'Rivers of living water will flow from his inner being.'" (John 7:37b-38) —my translation

His remarks spurred a debate:

Therefore when some of the crowd heard this word they said, "This one is surely the prophet!" Others said, "This one is the Anointed One!" Yet others said, "The Anointed One doesn't come from Galilee! Hasn't the Scripture

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Mystery Babylon?

A.D. 90. It derives its name from the Greek word *apokalypsis* (occurring in Rev. 1:1), which means “uncovered” or “revelation.” That is because the fundamental characteristics of apocalyptic literature are twofold:

“The apocalyptic writers, like the Apostles and the Early Church Fathers, believed the Old Testament contained a message that would be revealed only to righteous Believers.”

- 1) It claims to contain God’s revelation of divine secrets to one individual.
- 2) It uses symbolism to conceal these truths—especially those pertaining to the final days of history—from the ungodly, while revealing them to the righteous.

The pattern for all apocalyptic literature is the Old Testament Book of Daniel. The fact that it is apocalyptic literature has led many scholars to the conclusion that it must have been written during the era of apocalyptic literature—sometime after 165 B.C.—instead of during the Babylo-

nian Captivity (around 540 B.C.) as the book claims. What these scholars have failed to recognize is that Jewish apocalyptic literature arose as a conscious imitation of the Book of Daniel. It did so because the apocalyptic writers felt that the “end time” spoken of in Daniel 12 had arrived and that they had the “insight” necessary to attain the resurrection.

The authors of apocalyptic literature, like the Apostles and Early Church Fathers, believed the Old Testament contained a message that would be revealed only to righteous Believers. (See “The Mystery of Scripture.”) They understood from the Book of Daniel that his message had been “sealed up until the end time” (Dan. 12:4, 9) when it would then be revealed. Believing that “end time” had arrived, the apocalyptic writers wrote to explain their understanding of the mystery of Scripture to the righteous Believers.

When John wrote his Revelation, he continued in the well-established tradition of Jewish apocalyptic writers before him. In so doing, he implicitly agreed with their belief that the Old Testament message had been “sealed.”

The *meaning* of some apocalyptic writings was supposedly “hidden” or “sealed” like the Old Testament message so that it could only be understood by a chosen few. Other apocalyptic books were open for all to understand. The Revelation of John was not “sealed,” as John writes in the final chapter of his treatise. The angel who revealed the secrets to him said to him:

“Don’t seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near! Let the unrighteous one still be unrighteous; let the foul one still be made foul. Let the righteous one still do righteousness; let the holy one still be made holy.”

(Revelation 22:10b–11) —my translation

Does this *mean* John intended those who read his Revelation to understand it? Yes, and no. To one who had been initi-

ated into the secrets and symbolism of an apocalyptic writing, the work was open to be read and understood; if one had not been so initiated, the writing remained closed. As Jesus told His disciples when they asked Him why He spoke in parables, the one who understands the secrets will gain even more understanding. The one who doesn’t understand will lose the understanding he has:

“To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. For whoever has, to him shall be given, and he shall have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.”
(Matthew 13:11b–13)

Old Testament Prophecy

John wrote the Book of Revelation in the style of Jewish apocalyptic literature because he agreed with the apocalyptic belief that the Old Testament message was “hidden.” His work goes far beyond any other apocalyptic work, however, in that it summarizes, in apocalyptic symbolism, the entire Old Testament prophetic message concerning “the Day of the Lord.” Its use of symbolism accounts for commentators’ widely differing interpretations of the work.

“Apocalyptic writing is something even cryptographers consider undecipherable.”

While the Revelation of John is grist for the commentators’ mill, their approach to his work varies. Most provide pertinent background information to help us better understand the Greek text. But most also ignore the implications of the work’s apocalyptic characteristics, and



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some even seem oblivious to the fact that it summarizes the message of the Old Testament Prophets.

Any valid exegetical approach to the Book of Revelation cannot ignore the

“The Truth concerning what the Apostle John wrote is exactly where all the Apostles said it could be found—in the Old Testament.”

issue of its use of symbolism. Using language to convey meaning is one thing; but the use of symbols to conceal meaning is something entirely different, especially when the meaning attached to those symbols is thousands of years old. Apocalyptic symbolism is something even cryptographers consider undecipherable.

John intentionally used symbols, in true apocalyptic form, to conceal his message from outsiders. So no amount of linguistic certitude and contextual interpretation is going to achieve any greater understanding of the Revelation of John. Its symbols have secret meaning and the One Who gave them that meaning is the One Who must explain them. That is why the New Testament authors stress the importance of revelation to their ministry:

But I make known to you, brothers, (as to the Good News proclaimed by me) that it isn't in accordance with men, because I didn't receive it from a man; nor was I taught, except through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

(Galatians 1:11-12) —my translation

The Truth concerning what the Apostle John wrote is exactly where all the Apostles said it could be found—in the Old Testament. That should not surprise us. The Revelation of John is, after all, a compendium of quotes from and allusions to the prophetic literature of the Old Testament. So to understand the Revelation one must first understand the Prophets. (See “Parables and Prophecy” in this issue.)

Trying to explain the message of the Prophets is, however, an even more daunting task than unraveling its many strands. A complete explanation of the Scriptures' use of the images and idioms associated with just the message concerning Mystery Babylon would take several hundred pages. That is much more space than we have here. The essential outlines of the message are as follows.

The Prophets took the *parabolic image* that became John's “Mystery Babylon” from Moses' account of the ancients building the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11)—*Babel* is Hebrew for “Babylon.” Moses says this ancient people sought to:

- 1) build a city,
- 2) erect a tower,

- 3) “make a name” for themselves,
- 4) avoid being scattered over the face of the Earth.

What Moses does not say is that God thwarted their efforts not because He took issue with *what* they were doing but because He despised the reason *why* they were doing it.

The ancients built the Tower of Babel because they intended to use it in their worship of gods other than the *Living Word of God*. That is, they were going to reestablish at that site the ancient cultic “sacred marriage” ritual mankind had practiced before the Flood.

The Prophets knew this ancient ritual had provoked God's wrath enough to destroy the world with the Flood. They also knew a variant form of the ritual was

Parables and Prophecy

The Parabolic Pantomimes of Jesus Christ

Parabolic pantomime was a common activity of the Prophets in the Old Testament. The *parabolic pantomime* of a Prophet could be something as simple as Baruch throwing a stone into the Euphrates River (Jer. 51:63), as time-consuming and monotonous as Ezekiel lying on his side for nearly a year and a half (Ez. 4), or as emotionally draining as Hosea's marriage to an adulterous “harlot” (Hos. 1:2). These men left written records that plainly tell us their actions were *parabolic pantomime*. But Jesus left no such record; therefore His actions can be interpreted only in light of the Old Testament Prophets' statements concerning Him.

During His ministry, Jesus spoke in parables all the time (Matt. 13:34; Mark 4:34). That is to some extent generally accepted; but the fact that He used the *parabolic imagery* of the Old Testament Prophets in conducting *parabolic pantomime* is no longer recognized. Most, if not all of His actions, were intended to point back to statements made by the Prophets concerning Him. For example, His demonstration of His ability to walk on the “Sea” (Matt. 14:22-33; Mark 6:45-52; John 6:16-21) and control it with a word to the winds (Matt. 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25) are clearly non-verbal *parabolic statements*. The fact that He did so on two separate occasions only enhances the certainty that the *parabolic imagery* of the Prophets prompted His actions.

The *parabolic imagery* of the Messiah walking on the “Sea” and calming the winds with a word are typical of the Prophets' statements concerning Jesus Christ. The sons of Israel to whom these ancient men of God spoke had long since given up belief in the *Living Word of God* and had begun to worship the gods of the Canaanites. They believed the “Sea” to be a mythological being in conflict with the Canaanite god, Baal, the god of the resurrection; and the monster who inhabited the “Sea” was none other than their equivalent of Satan. The “Sea” and

See Parables/Prophecy on Page 15

still practiced by the Canaanites during the time of their own ministry. This one cultic ritual angered God continually throughout the entire history of Israel down to the time of the exile in 587 B.C.

But knowing *what* the ancients were intending when they built the Tower of Babel is not the same as knowing *why* they were doing it. According to the Tower of Babel account, they wanted to “make a name” for themselves. This Hebrew idiom is usually accepted as *meaning* “to become famous.” That is not the case. If the whole world was “one people” as the account says, with whom did they intend to become famous?

The Hebrew idiom “make a name” refers to the conception and successful delivery of a newborn son (an heir) conceived by a widow through levirate marriage in the legitimate Israelite practice and by a “harlot” through cultic prostitu-

tion in the Canaanite practice. The newborn male child (a “name”) continued the lineage and “carried the name” of a man who had died without a son.

The ancients had various reasons

“The Prophets took the parabolic image that became John’s ‘Mystery Babylon’ from Moses’ account of the ancients building the Tower of Babel.”

for engaging in cultic prostitution, but the driving force behind the cultic ritual was a complex mythology in which cultic prostitution, along with other cultic rituals, was believed to attain eternal life for the faithful. (See “Parables and Prophecy” on page 3.)

An accurate understanding of God’s condemnation of the sons of Israel depends on the knowledge that the “prostitution,” or “harlotry,” mentioned in the Old Testament was a cultic prostitution practiced as part of the Canaanite “sacred marriage” ritual. Individual Israelites en-

gaged in the Canaanite practice (Num. 25), and God condemned them for it by saying they had “played the harlot.”

John’s designation of Mystery Babylon as “the mother of harlots” (Rev. 17:5)

is a direct indictment of the ancients who constructed the Tower of Babel to continue

this practice of “harlotry.” But the Tower of Babel account provides only the initial *parabolic image* of Mystery Babylon.

The Prophets elaborated on the *parabolic image* related to “Mystery Babylon” in many of their *parabolic statements*. A superficial reading of these passages provides a general idea as to their *meaning*, but the casual reader can miss the point entirely. For example, Isaiah vehemently attacked the folly of the ancients for trying to “make a name” for themselves at the Tower of Babel in the following text:

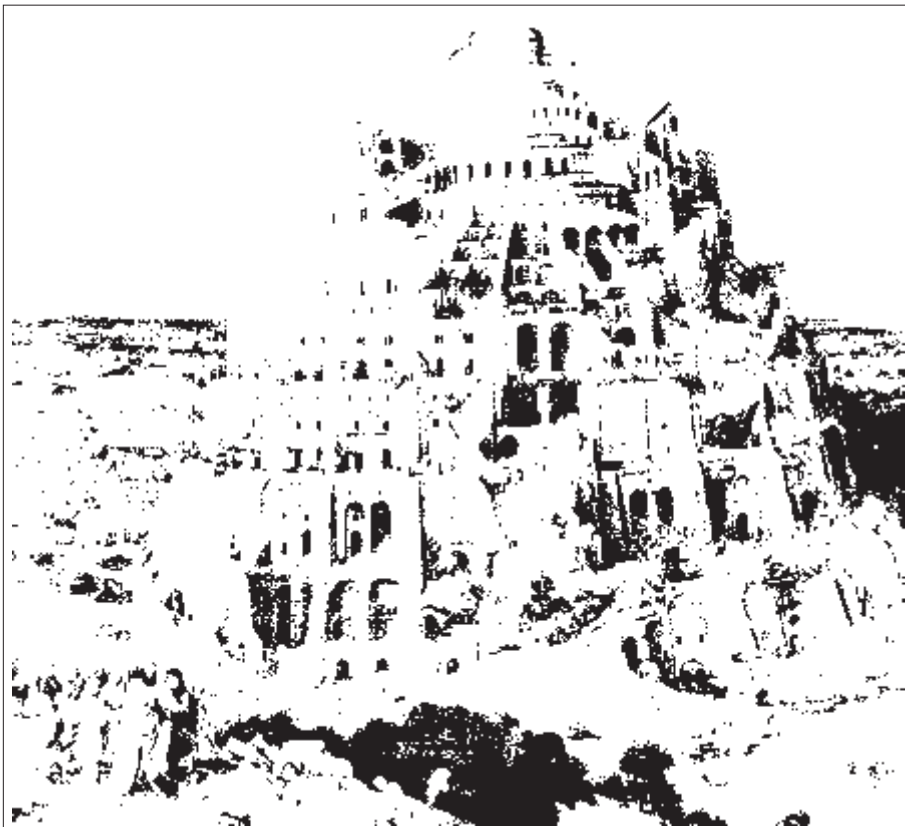
*“Go down!
Sit down on the dust, **Virgin** daughter of Babylon!
Sit down on the dirt without a throne, daughter of Chaldeans,
Because you won’t have them calling you ‘delicate’ or ‘dainty’ anymore!*

*Take two millstones and grind meal!
Uncover your veil;
strip off (your) robe;
uncover (your) thigh;
cross over rivers!*

***Your nakedness will be uncovered;**
your reproach will also be seen!
I’ll take vengeance and I won’t confront mankind in kindness!*

*(Our Redeemer is
His Supreme Majesty;
His Name is
the Holy One of Israel.)*

*Sit down in silence;
go into darkness, daughter of Chaldeans, because
you won’t have them calling you
‘Queen of Kingdoms’ anymore ...*



“The Tower of Babel” as conceived by artist Pieter Bruegel the Elder (c. 1525–1569). Bruegel’s conception is much more romantic than the reality of ancient life (see page opposite).



The ziggurat at Uruk (above) is typical of the “towers” built by the people of the Mesopotamian region. Having built it to represent the original cosmic mountain on which the god lived, these people thought the god came down and inhabited a

sanctuary at the top of the ziggurat. As indicated by the term “Babylon”, the tower was the “gate of god”—in Hebrew, “bab”-“el”, in Babylonian, “bab”-“ili”—where the god came out of Heaven (a city) to visit Earth (a field).

*You said, ‘I’ll be **Queen** forever!’
You didn’t take these things to heart.
You didn’t remember its conclusion.*

“The prophecies against Mystery Babylon are not against one specific nation; they are against all mankind, against planet Earth.”

*So now, listen to this, “Sensuous,”
—who lives in security,
—who says in her heart:*

*“I am! There’s nothing else!
I’ll not live a **widow!**
I’ll not know **bereavement!**”*

Yet these two things have come to you suddenly, in one day:

Bereavement and widowhood.
*They’ve come on you to their fullest extent;
—in the greatness of your **sorceries;**
—in the power of your **spells.**
(Isaiah 47:1–9) —my translation*

The Prophet’s ridicule of the “sacred marriage” ritual isn’t obvious unless the reader is aware that:

- 1) The female participant in the sacred marriage ritual was called a “virgin” (v. 1) even though she was a widow and may have already had other children.

- 2) The expression “uncover nakedness” (v. 3) is a Hebrew idiom that, when used idiomatically, means “to have sexual intercourse.”

- 3) The sacred marriage ritual, as practiced at the Tower of Babel, was intended to solve the “bereavement” (v. 8) of the widowed “queen” (v. 7).

- 4) Sorceries and incantations (v. 9) were used to ensure fertility during the consummation of the sacred marriage.

But even with the knowledge that Isaiah is assailing the sacred marriage concept, one can still overlook his reason for ridiculing Babylon:

*Our Redeemer is His Supreme Majesty; His Name is **the Holy One** of Israel!
(Isaiah 47:4) —my translation*

In the Canaanite sacred marriage ritual, the “redeemer” impregnated the “virgin” who bore the “name.” In the legitimate Israelite custom authorized by

God (Deut. 25:5–10; Ruth 4) there was no need for the legal fiction of the “virgin” since that fiction had to do entirely with the Canaanite goddess Anat.

But Isaiah, using the images and idioms related to this ancient Canaanite ritual, has here stated specifically some 700 years before the event: “My God, the true Redeemer, will impregnate a virgin. The son born of that union, the ‘Name’, will be **‘the Holy One** of Israel.’” Just as Luke records the words of Gabriel to Mary when announcing the conception of Jesus:

*And Mary said to the messenger, “How can this be, since I know no man?” And the messenger responded and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason **the Holy One** begotten will be called the Son of God.”
(Luke 1:34–35) —my translation*

One could accuse me of reading too much into this passage of Isaiah. They would be wrong. In a biblical text nearly three hundred years older than this passage from Isaiah, God used the same image combined with different idioms to state the exact manner and purpose of the birth of Jesus Christ (see future volumes in The Resurrection Theology Series). Isaiah and the other Prophets knew it. Isaiah mentions it here only in passing. But that is another strand of the Old Testament message; here we are concerned

“In the Canaanite sacred marriage ritual, the ‘redeemer’ impregnated the ‘virgin’ who bore the ‘name.’”

with Mystery Babylon.

Is Iraq Mystery Babylon? No. We are *all* Mystery Babylon. The Prophets used the *parabolic image* of Babylon to indict the ancients for building the Tower of Babel at a time when all mankind was

“one.” Therefore the prophecies against Mystery Babylon are not against one specific nation; they are against all mankind, against planet Earth.

At the Tower of Babel this civilization was “one,” united under one leader, speaking one language, preparing to swear allegiance to gods other than the *Living God*. It shall be so again (except for the “Elect”) under the soon-coming reign of the Antichrist.

The Tower of Babel was the death knell for our civilization, for it was there that all mankind together rejected the God

Who is and formally turned to other gods, seeking eternal life. History has continued since that time to provide sufficient evidence that, given opportunity, men are unwilling to serve the *Living God*.

Contrary to what mankind believes about its own righteousness, the evidence is almost in. It provides sufficient proof to condemn us all. Devastation will soon follow. We have only to await a world united under one leader. At that time, genetic engineers will be working to reverse the effects of the genetic code that causes the human cell to

die rather than nourish and rebuild itself. They will be seeking eternal life in the flesh. Before they find it, God will de-

***“The Tower of Babel
was the death knell
for our civilization”***

stroy this civilization that sits so self-centeredly atop the seven mountains (Rev. 17:9) that rise from the bottom of the seas to become seven continents. And only the Remnant will be saved. ■

Awaiting God’s Glory

When Iraq attacks the nation of Israel, that strike will include the use of chemical, biological, and/or nuclear weapons—Iraq’s “weapons of mass destruction.”

Scripture indicates the Israeli response will be the immediate and decisive use of its own “weapons of mass destruction”—tactical nuclear weapons.

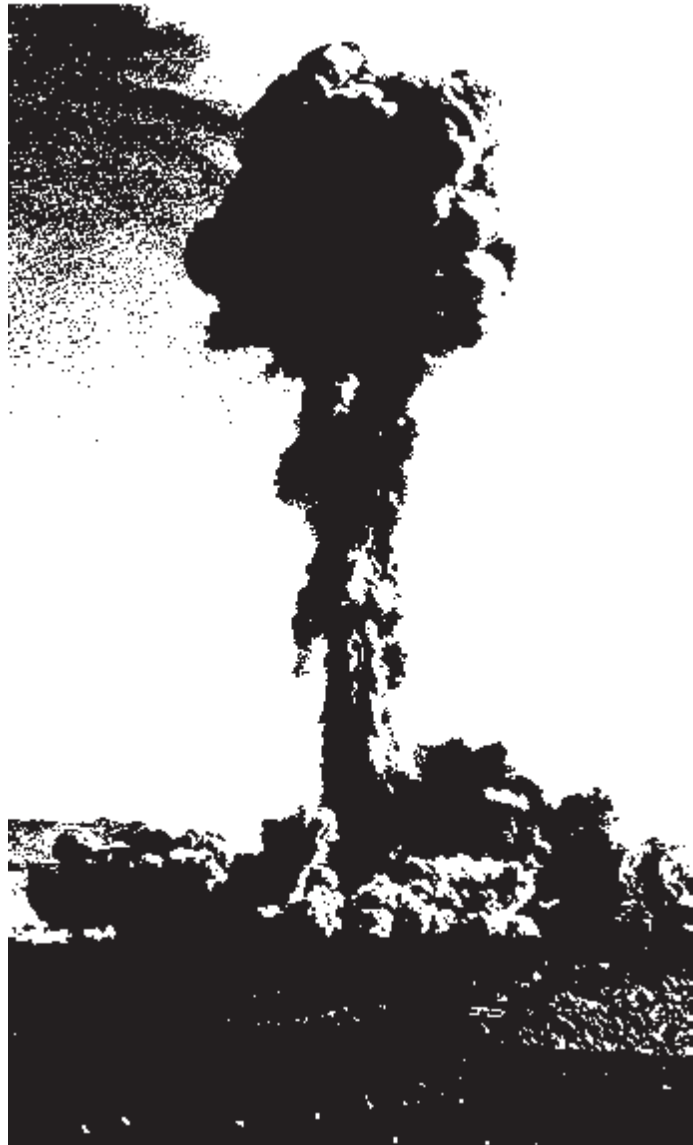
Israeli use of nuclear weapons is apparent from several statements in the Prophets that “Israel” is the purveyor of God’s wrath on Babylon.

The *parabolic image* that depicts God’s “Glory”—the cloud and pillar of fire that the sons of Israel followed in the wilderness—is also the *parabolic image* of His wrath.

From this cloud and pillar of fire God often lashed out in wrath (whence comes the *parabolic image* of the fires of hell). The image depicts the reality of the fire emanating from the “cloud and pillar” of a nuclear detonation.

The reality to which these images point is the soon-coming nuclear holocaust under the reign of the Antichrist, when Babylon will be, as John says, “burned up in a fire” (Rev. 18:8).

Then Jesus will return in these clouds, as the gospel writers say, “with power and great glory.” (Matt. 24:30; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27). Stay tuned. ■



Mystery of Scripture

said that the Anointed One is 'from David's seed' and 'from Bethlehem,' the village that David was from?" Because of this, dissention

arose in the crowd because of Him. (John 7:40-43) —my translation

These were Jews who thought they were knowledgeable in the Scriptures and plan of God. They read in Psalm 89 that the Messiah would be the "Seed" of David:

I've sworn to My servant David, I will establish your Seed forever. (Psalm 89:3b-4a) —my translation

The Jews understood the birthplace of the Messiah would be in the city of Bethlehem:

From you (Bethlehem) One will go forth to be My ruler in Israel. (Micah 5:2) —my translation

But because they did not understand the mystery of the Scriptures, they could not recognize Jesus as their Messiah.

Could history possibly be repeating itself? Are important Scriptural truths still unknown in the 20th Century? Protestant Christianity believes it has happened before. Protestants believe the most fundamental of all Protestant doctrines—salvation by faith—had been lost for centuries until a young Catholic monk named Martin Luther publicly declared it to be true in 1517, thereby sparking the Protestant Reformation. (See "The Authority of Scripture" on page 8.)

If such was the case with salvation by faith, what else in Scripture remains obscure? We know that Jesus of Nazareth was born the "Seed" of David in the town of Bethlehem only because the New Testament plainly presents those details for us. The Church drew its doctrine from

clearly stated New Testament passages like these. But what about New Testament doctrine that was not so plainly stated?

One passage from the Gospel of Matthew shows how completely deficient the Pharisees' understanding of the Scriptures actually was:

When the Pharisees had gathered, Jesus questioned them, saying, "What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is He?" They said to Him, "David's." He said to them, "Then how does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying, 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I PUT YOUR ENEMIES UNDER YOUR FEET"'? If David calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his son?" Nobody could answer Him a word; neither did anyone dare ask Him another question from that day on. (Matthew 22:41-46) —my translation

Jesus' question quickly silenced the Pharisees, yet it remains completely unanswered today—twenty centuries

argue that God could not possibly let so many people live without that knowledge. If the information were so vital, God would make it known. Since it is not known, it must not be important. But that attitude implies full knowledge of the plan and purpose of God. What if God has other plans?

The religious leaders of Jesus' day made the mistake of assuming they knew God's plan, and that plan included them. Yet Jesus warned them of the dangers of such an erroneous assumption early in His ministry:

"Not all who say to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but the one who does the will of My Father Who is in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in Your name, and cast out demons in Your name, and do many miracles in Your name?' I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" (Matthew 7:21-23) —my translation

"People incorrectly assume God intended the message of the Hebrew Scriptures to be easily understood. Careful study reveals that is not the case."

later. We know that Jesus is the Son of David only because we accept the statements of the New Testament; but "how is He his son?" Jesus knew the answer or He wouldn't have asked the question. Yet careful search of the New Testament will yield no insight at all because the issue is never addressed there. The answer was so basic to the Early Church's understanding of the Old Testament message that it went without saying. (See "Parables and Prophecy," *The Voice of Elijah*, April 1991.)

Most "Christians" will have great difficulty accepting the notion that an accurate understanding of the Old Testament message is lacking today. They will

These were people who were completely secure in what they believed. Yet for all their religious zeal they did not know "*the will of My Father Who is in heaven.*"

People incorrectly assume God intended the message of the Hebrew Scriptures to be easily understood. Careful study reveals that is not the case. The Jewish apocalyptic writers before the birth of Jesus Christ didn't believe it; Jesus didn't believe it, and neither did the Apostles after He died.

Some of the earliest Church Fathers argued that their beliefs were an *oral tradition* that had been *handed down* to them by the Apostles—to whom Jesus



Martin Luther: c. 1483–1546. His discovery that a vital truth in Scripture had been lost led to the Protestant Reformation.

Christ had revealed an accurate understanding of the Old Testament message. But by the time theological discussion became acceptable, the Church had already lost much of the Apostles' understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures. (See article in this issue, "The Mystery of Scripture.") The Protestant Reformers claimed that Church leaders eventually lost even the most basic concept—that of salvation by faith.

The Mystery of the Kingdom

The parables of Jesus are some of the most misunderstood passages in the Scriptures. The interpretations being bandied about are nearly as numerous as the number of scholars interpreting them. Scholars can't agree on the *meaning* of His parables because they were never meant to be understood some without additional explanation. Even Jesus' disci-

ples, who were with Him every day, were as puzzled by His parables as everyone else. So they asked Him one day why He spoke in parables:

And He answered and said to them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but to them it has not been granted. For whoever has, to him shall {more} be given, and he shall have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him."
(Matthew 13:11–12)

Note two things about what Jesus said to His disciples:

- 1) Jesus referred to His *Teaching* as a "mystery"—as something that had been kept secret and obscure.
- 2) Knowledge of the "mystery" had to be "granted;" it was not given to everyone.

The Authority of Scripture

Martin Luther entered the world nearly fifteen centuries after the death of Jesus Christ—a world dominated by the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church. The Church was the state, and baptism into the Church made one a citizen of the state. As a child, Luther learned about the authority of the Pope, the need for good works, and the mediation of the priesthood between God and man. But as a young law student he found that those beliefs did not provide him a totally confident peace with God. So, after a fearful experience in a thunderstorm, he dedicated his life to God and became a monk.

Upon completing his theological education, Luther obtained a position as a professor of theology, but still did not have true peace with God. While studying the writings of the Church Father Augustine, however, Luther learned that the peace he sought came by faith alone (Rom. 1:17). After that, Martin Luther viewed the Church differently.

He saw a church that demanded the Believer adhere to doctrines and practices of questionable value to gain favor with God and entrance to Heaven. If a person sinned, he had to confess his sin to a priest of the Church who would assign a penance appropriate to his sin. Completion of penance was required for forgiveness. Before entering Heaven, however, he must still suffer in purgatory for cleansing of sins. But if he paid a fee to the clergy, they could grant an indulgence guar-

anteed to shorten one's stay in purgatory. The Pope, who was infallible—with unquestioned authority—endorsed these beliefs and practices.

Martin Luther knew the Truth in Scripture contradicted what the Church taught. So on October 31, 1517, he posted his Ninety-Five Theses on the door of the local church in Wittenburg, Germany. In this document he condemned the practices of the Roman Catholic Church, hoping the Pope would institute reforms. Instead, the Pope rejected Luther's arguments and excommunicated him from the Church. By that time, however, Luther had attracted so many followers that the Protestant Reformation was already well underway.

The three main doctrines of the Reformation were:

- 1) Salvation by faith alone. Good works were not necessary to attain salvation, they were the result of it.
- 2) The priesthood of the Believer. The Believer need not confess his sin to a priest; he could confess it directly to God.
- 3) The authority of Scripture. The Believer could determine the will of God from the Scriptures and did not need to rely on the authority of the Church.

Luther emphasized the authority of Scripture because the Church claimed the Pope was infallible. Luther's claim was simple. Scripture was a higher authority than the Pope.

The rest of Jesus' answer indicates He was merely following the tradition of the Prophets before Him:

"Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, 'YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; AND YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, AND WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES LEST THEY SHOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I SHOULD HEAL THEM.'"
(Matthew 13:13–15)

It is clear from what the Prophet Isaiah said that he did not intend to persuade the multitudes in his day to repent; he expected his message to be completely misunderstood and rejected. But Isaiah was not unique in this regard. In quoting Isaiah, Jesus reveals He understood His ministry would carry that same trademark. He also knew that He had to speak in parables to fulfill what the Prophets had said about Him:

All these things Jesus spoke to the multitudes in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable, so that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying,

"I WILL OPEN MY MOUTH IN PARABLES; I WILL UTTER THINGS HIDDEN SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD."
(Matthew 13:34–35)

Although Jesus spoke in parables, His understanding of the "mystery" the Prophets concealed in the Hebrew Scriptures was complete. He often referred to them as having spoken of Him, of His purpose and ministry; yet the religious leaders of His day did not share His insight. So Jesus rebuked them:

"Isn't this why you're wrong—because you don't understand the Scriptures, or the power of God?"
(Mark 12:24) —my translation

How Are These Things Possible?

Jesus confounded the arguments of the Pharisees with His *parabolic* answers to their questions. If they had understood the Scriptures, they would never have argued with Him; they would have recognized Him as the Messiah.

But, given the proposition that Scripture was a higher authority, who was to interpret it? Martin Luther's answer: everyone. It was the only way he could oppose the teaching of the Church. But it paved the way for Protestantism to diverge into the various denominations of today. As individuals sought the will of God in Scripture, their different interpretations formed the basis for various denominations. These individuals believed Scripture spoke authoritatively to them, but they did not believe it should speak differently to someone else. They still believed it contained only one truth.

No other doctrine has influenced the Protestant Church as deeply as Luther's belief in the authority of Scripture. Because of it, lay Believers now assume they can read a translation of the Old Testament and understand the plainly revealed will of God even while scholars openly admit the obscurity of the original text and debate its *meaning*. As the Second Coming of Jesus Christ rapidly approaches, however, the message of the Old Testament is becoming vitally important to True Believers. It is a message that, until now, has remained a "mystery," completely hidden until the time when:

"Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever."
(Daniel 12:3)

Martin Luther's legacy has been a marvelous blessing to those True Believers who have sought God since the time

of the Reformation. But now is the time for True Believers to once again examine the teaching of the Church as they did in Luther's day. To those who are seeking to know the Truth, a word of caution: The authority of Scripture only applies when Scripture has been "*accurately handled*" (2 Tim. 2:15).

There is but One Truth, just as the Apostle Peter said:

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is {a matter} of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.
(2 Peter 1:20–21)

"The mystery" that lies hidden in the Old Testament Scriptures has but one *meaning*. The God who hid it there is now making it known for His Own purpose. Let the reader understand.

Martin Luther was inspired by the writings of St. Augustine, a theologian who lived around A.D. 400. But Luther apparently did not understand the Church Fathers before Augustine when they *talked about* the Apostles' understanding of "the mystery" hidden in Scripture. Nor does he mention the Church Fathers who claimed their understanding of the message was something they obtained through *The Teaching* of the Apostles. Although Luther found salvation by faith alone clearly presented in Paul's epistle to the Romans, he was also unaware the Old Testament message remained hidden in a "mystery." ■

But they recognized Him only as a teacher, “*come from God*” (John 3:2).

John records the conversation of Jesus with the Pharisee, Nicodemus, in which Jesus declared the need for rebirth (John 3:3). Nicodemus asked,

“How are these things possible?” Jesus, answering, said to him, “You’re a teacher of Israel, and you don’t know these things? There’s no doubt, I tell you! What we know, we speak; of what we’ve seen, we’re witnesses. But you haven’t accepted the witness. If you haven’t believed what I told you about things on the earth, how could you believe if I told you about heavenly things?”
(John 3:9b–12) —my translation

Jesus chided this “teacher of Israel” because he did not understand the basics of salvation. Nicodemus was a Pharisee; and Pharisees were concerned with the finer points of the Law. But they were ignorant of the rudiments of being “born again.” They read the same Scripture that Jesus read; all the necessary information was available to them in the Old Testament; but they could not understand because the message was hidden.

Today, some Evangelists in the Church still correctly proclaim the Gospel that is necessary to the new-birth experience. But where do they find its basis in Scripture? They find it in John 3 and related New Testament passages. Yet in that very passage, Jesus told Nicodemus it

“Eventually the understanding the Apostles had given the Church was lost.”

could be found in the Old Testament. He even encouraged the Pharisees to “*search the Scriptures*” (John 5:39) because He knew the message concerning His ministry was written there.

The Pharisees studied “the Law” of Moses and “the Prophets,” but they drew the wrong conclusions from what they read—just as most “Christians” do today. So Jesus told them:

“Don’t think that I’ll bring suit against you before the Father. The one who brings suit against you is Moses, in whom you’ve hoped. Because if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, because he wrote about Me! But if you won’t believe

set Israel free.”
(Luke 24:18–21a) —my translation

After all the time spent listening to *The Teaching* of Jesus, these disciples still did not understand who He was. They did not know how the Old Testament proclaimed His coming.

“All the necessary information was available to them in the Old Testament; but they could not understand because the message was hidden.”

what he wrote, how could you believe My statements?”
(John 5:45–47) —my translation

The Pharisees studied the Scriptures constantly, but they couldn’t find the message concerning Jesus written there because study alone can never bring insight.

Understanding the Mystery

Jesus’ disciples listened to Him teach the multitudes and, although He explained His parables to them, they still did not understand the “mystery” that lies hidden in the Hebrew Scriptures. Even after His resurrection, His disciples still lacked insight.

Jesus approached two of the disciples on their way to Emmaus and asked them about the recent events in Jerusalem they had been discussing:

Then one of them, named Cleopas, responding, said to Him, “Are You only passing through Jerusalem and not familiar with the things that have happened in her in these days?” And He said to them, “What things?” So they said to Him, “The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, Who became a man, a Prophet, mighty in work and word in the sight of the {Living} God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers handed Him over to a verdict of death, and they crucified Him. Yet we were hoping that He was the One Who is going to

And He said to them, “You fools and slow of heart to believe in all that the Prophets spoke! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?” And beginning from Moses and from all the Prophets, He interpreted for them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.
(Luke 24:25–27) —my translation

After His resurrection, Jesus revealed Himself to all of His disciples. But before telling them about the time when “*repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations*” (Luke 24:47a), He gave them an ability to understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:44–45). This event was central to the revelation of the “mystery” that these men *received* from Him.

These Early Church Fathers took the information they gained by revelation on this occasion and taught others as God had intended. But after they died, controversy arose as to who taught the legitimate message the Apostles had *handed down*. This dispute grew into a general theological discussion concerning how the Old Testament should be interpreted.

Theological discussion soon made it impossible to determine what *The Apostolic Teaching* had been. Eventually the understanding the Apostles had given the Church was lost except for the few writings the Church preserved and canonized as the New Testament. Subsequent generations have been oblivious to the fact that it had ever been revealed to the Apostles in the first place. (See “The Mystery of Scripture,” this issue.) ■

(To be continued next issue.)

Questions & Answers

The Voice of Elijah publishes articles based on the findings of *The Elijah Project*, a private research group headed by Larry D. Harper. In this column we try to answer general-interest questions concerning the findings, purpose, and philosophy of this project.

Editor: You often talk about understanding the Old Testament “on its own terms.” What do you mean?

Elijah: The Old Testament was written *for* us, not *to* us. That is, it was written to present an example for our instruction, as Paul said in First Corinthians 10:11. That does not *mean* it was *written* to us or, in the case of the Prophets, *spoken* to us.

That distinction is crucial. The authors of the Scriptures wrote *for* our instruction but they wrote, as Paul said, “*in a mystery.*” They wrote and spoke *to* the sons of Israel. That’s partly how the message was hidden. It’s unrealistic for anyone to expect to understand the Old Testament Scriptures without a basic understanding of the mind-set of the ancient people to whom they were *delivered*.

I have found that biblical scholars have given short shrift to the idioms and images that were important to the ancients. To be fair, however, it’s not just Scripture that gets that treatment. Scholars have had the Ugaritic texts from Ras Shamra since the thirties. Yet in the past fifty or so years nobody has gotten much past the superficial linguistics. Nobody. Nobody has understood that the most discussed corpus of texts—the Baal and Anat cycle—is playing with the Semitic idiom, “build a house,” which is a fundamental idiom in the Old Testament message as well. That one idiom is so fundamental, in fact, that Jesus’ use of it in His *parabolic statements* provides the basis for the only charge against Him that could be corroborated. I say “Semitic idiom” rather than “Hebrew idiom” because the idiom wasn’t used just in the western



Semitic languages—that is, in Hebrew and Ugaritic. A variant form, *ibni zera*, also occurs in the eastern Semitic languages, in some of the Babylonian and Assyrian cuneiform texts excavated in Mesopotamia. That idiom, “build a seed,” actually confirms our understanding of the two west Semitic idioms, “build a house” and “raise up a seed.” It is a combination of these two idioms and clearly *means*, “engender a son.”

Another corpus of the Ugaritic texts has its basis in the Hebrew idiom “cut off,” which we treat in the first volume of *The Resurrection Theology Series*. And my research will eventually turn up even more examples like these because it was a common, but now little understood, literary technique of the ancients to take an important religious idiom and write a mythological text that illustrated the concept behind the idiom. In the wisdom of God, it makes my task of explaining the idioms of the Old Testament much easier. It’s almost as though the Canaanite texts have come to light now to provide the additional background information necessary to understand what God has done in hiding His message of salvation in the Old Testament.

Editor: You mentioned the charges against Jesus that stem from His use of the idiom “build a house” in His parables. Can you give references?

Elijah: His most obvious use of the image behind the idiom is in John 2:19 where He says, “*Destroy this sanctuary and I’ll raise it up in three days.*” John goes on to explain His *parabolic* use of the idiom by telling us He was speaking of the sanctuary of His Body. But His use of the “build a house” idiom is obvious only if you already know that in the Old Testament message the two idioms “build a house” and “raise up a seed” are used interchangeably and that both are linked prophetically to the building of the Temple.

In John 2:19, Jesus was playing with the *parabolic image* of the “house/temple” by combining it with the “raise up a seed” idiom. I’ve found it’s almost a given that the Prophets will mix and match idioms and images like that. They did it to entertain themselves. Nobody understood what they were saying anyway.

My reference to the charges against Jesus being based on His use of the idiom “build a house” are in Matthew 27, I think [Editor—Matthew 26:61]. Mark gives a similar account but from a different perspective. Matthew says the Jews were looking for witnesses against Jesus and couldn’t find any until two came forward saying the same thing. Their charge was He had said He could destroy the sanctuary of God and build it in three days. Their phrasing is too similar to John 2:19 to be a coincidence. Yet according to Matthew, the witnesses claimed He used the “build a house” idiom instead of “raise up a seed” as recorded in John 2:19.

Jesus used the *parabolic image* of *The House* all the time. It was, and still is, the most fundamental *parabolic image* in the Old Testament message concerning Him. When He made statements similar to John 2:19, He probably played with “build a house” one time, “raise up a seed” the next. I’m not aware of Him using the idiom “make a name” in such statements, but then I have not looked for it specifically.

Editor: *A question concerning the last issue of this newsletter: You stated the purpose of The Elijah Project had to do with providing “insight” to the righteous now at “the End Time” as mentioned in Daniel 12. Why do you consider that your purpose?*

Elijah: My beliefs in this regard are an essential part of my message, but not the most important. I want to point Believers to the One Who is and show what He has done in hiding the Old Testament message concerning the work of Jesus Christ. If I cannot show the reader convincing evidence that the Old Testament contains a coherent hidden message concerning God’s purpose in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, my other beliefs are irrelevant.

By the same token, however, if anyone accepts any part of my explanation of the message, they should know from the outset that I believe it has been given for the purpose of preparing the Elect of God for the deception Jesus warned would come in Matthew 24:24. It was not given so that someone could gratify his or her ego by teaching it to others as though it had no other purpose.

Along the same lines, The Elijah Project is a private research endeavor and it will stay that way. I have no need for a cult following; Christianity is too personality oriented already. I simply want to inform True Believers that the End of the Age is near and that I have information they need to consider. I am convinced True Believers don’t have their heads in the clouds; they have their feet on the ground. Like the Psalmist

who wrote Psalm 119, their first love is and always has been the Word of God. They believe strongly in God and are not easily swayed by emotionalism or the charismatic appeal of any individual. If God is in what I am doing, His people will recognize it by my explanation of the hidden message of the Old Testament. If not, they will ignore it as simply another End-Time fanaticism. But whether I am right or not, what Jesus said still applies, “the sheep follow Him because they know His voice” (John 10:4).

Editor: *That’s simple enough. Different subject: In the article “Is Iraq Mystery Babylon?” you mention a passage in the Old Testament where a Prophet used the parabolic image of levirate marriage to describe the circumstances of the birth of Jesus Christ nearly a thousand years before it happened. Yet you didn’t include the reference. Why?*

Elijah: A primary motivation was to pique the reader’s curiosity a bit. There wasn’t enough space to explain the Hebrew idioms involved, since that explanation would take pages, not a paragraph. And without an understanding of the idioms, the traditional interpretation of the passage is just as valid as any other.

That’s the major obstacle I have to overcome in presenting what I see in the Scriptures—only by working step by step through the Hebrew idioms and *parabolic images* one by one can anyone gain a true appreciation of what God has done. I am hoping to do that in The Resurrection Theology Series and other publications. While *The Voice of Elijah* newsletter may be able to challenge the smug assumptions of traditional systematic theology, it can’t provide an adequate replacement. The Old Testament message is too multifaceted. I was going to say “complex,” but that’s a bad choice of terms.

Editor: *You say, “smug assumptions of systematic theology.” How does “Resurrection Theology” differ?*

Elijah: “Resurrection Theology” is a “biblical theology.” For years scholars have debated the merits of “Old Testament theology” or “biblical theology” over traditional “systematic theology.” Biblical theology tries to understand the message of the Scriptures; systematic theology puts a particular understanding of the Scriptures into systematic categories: God, Man, Christ, Sin and Salvation, Eschatology, etc.

Only after the biblical theologian has completed his work can the systematic theologian organize the infor-

mation into logical categories. If you stop to think about it, it doesn't make any difference whether you systematize or not if you don't understand the message. My contention is, the Church started to systematize theology after it lost understanding of most of *The Apostolic Teaching*.

Let me read you a quote made by a prominent scholar and proponent of biblical theology. Nearly twenty years ago Gerhard Hasel wrote the following concerning biblical theology:

If there is behind the experience of those who left us the OT Scriptures a unique divine reality, then it would seem that behind all variegation and diversity of theological reflection there is a hidden inner unity which has also drawn together the OT writings. The ultimate object of a theology is then to draw the hidden inner unity out of its concealment as much as possible and to make it transparent. (Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate, Grand Rapids, 1972, p. 93)

That is exactly what I am doing. There is "a hidden inner unity" that binds the Old Testament Scriptures together. In God's wisdom, the Prophets hid it there over the span of thirty-nine books and a thousand years. In God's wisdom, Jesus Christ revealed it to the Early Church through the Apostles. But the Church fell into theological argumentation and failed to pass its heritage on to subsequent generations. Eventually, even the most basic tenet of salvation by faith was lost to Church leaders—for nearly a thousand years.

Until now, all that remained of the message available to the Early Church has been the basic Gospel message of salvation preached by Evangelists. But in His wisdom and grace, God has once again chosen to make the hidden message of the Old Testament known now—at the End of the Age. I have been called so that True Believers who hear and understand the Truth will believe even more firmly in the God of their salvation and prepare themselves for the delusion of the Antichrist.

Editor: *I know that this is an advanced topic and that you only discussed it in this issue because the image of Babylon relates to what is happening in the Middle East; but tell us more about parabolic pantomime. How extensive was Jesus' use of this technique?*

Elijah: That's hard to say right now; I'm only beginning to understand some of the images. Jesus' feeding the five thousand has images that I already understand; but it's not clear how He used them. On the other hand, baptism is a *parabolic image* of death

and resurrection coming right out of *the Law of Moses*. Jesus blatantly used His baptism in the Jordan as the initial event for His "exodus," wilderness temptation, and entry into the Land of Israel as the "true Israel." Commentators have, for years, remarked on Matthew's treatment of Jesus' use of these images. They understand Matthew was presenting Jesus as the "new" Israel, but they haven't understood the Old Testament message or Jesus' use of the prophetic technique of *parabolic pantomime*.

Obviously, in this *parabolic pantomime*, Jesus' baptism corresponds to the crossing of the Reed Sea by Israel, but you have to understand why God led the entire nation of Israel through the original *parabolic pantomime* beginning on Passover night before you can understand the message concerning the death of Jesus Christ on Passover followed by His resurrection three days later.

Paul briefly alludes to the *parabolic image* in Romans 6, but he makes a direct reference to God's original message to Moses in First Corinthians 10:2 when he says the Israelites were all "*baptized into Moses in the cloud and the sea.*" These images are all part of the message concerning the "house" that I'm currently trying to put in a form one can use to progress into the more intricate images of kingship, priesthood, sacrifice, etc.

Editor: *I know you are currently working in several areas of biblical study. Can you give us some idea of future topics for the newsletter?*

Elijah: At some point, I need to address the topic of faith. Is the issue *that* you believe or *what* you believe? If it is only important *that* you believe, then what about Buddhists and Muslims? Will they be saved? If *what* we believe is more important, then the content of faith is definitely the most important issue. That's where my message enters the mix. What I say may well have content that is essential to the salvation message in these Last Days. I say "may well," not "does," because God's purpose is obscure at this point. My understanding is that those who hear and believe will be prepared. What that ultimately *means* is in God's plan, not mine.

I also need to deal with current events that indicate the world is moving toward the reign of the Antichrist. The breakdown of law and order in the United States, Eastern Europe, and the Soviet Union is one example. By the time the Antichrist comes to power, it will be too late for anyone to prepare for the delusion.

Editor: *Speaking of current events, in the last issue you explained the meaning of Old Testament passages that you say foretell the outcome of the situation in the Persian Gulf. It appears more and more likely you may be right. What are your expectations in that regard?*

Elijah: We are headed into the most incredibly violent war the world has ever seen. Saddam Hussein is a dead man in a straitjacket. That was clear last August; it's even more clear now. He could no more change course than he could sprout wings and fly. Like Pharaoh of old, God has already "hardened his heart." George Bush and other world leaders are in somewhat the same predicament in that they too are being held on course.

God worked with Pharaoh at the Exodus to obtain the *parabolic imagery* of the Passover provided by that event. That *parabolic imagery* is central to Jesus' *parabolic pantomime* of the prophetic message concerning His death on the Passover.

God is now at it again for the same reason. The *parabolic image* of Babylon's destruction is the focal image of these Last Days. The prophetic word is virtually riddled with that *parabolic image*. Those who understand what God has done and is doing with *parabolic imagery* can only stand in awe as they see the hand of God in these events. He is manipulating world leaders like a master puppeteer. In these events at least, they are in no way masters of their own fate.

Iraq is destroyed. The nation of Israel suffered—and retaliated. It's all there. I find the prospect of war abhorrent but it's like so many other things down here—it's just part of the territory. There is a better way, but men are too depraved to find it.

There are other aspects of the coming war that I could have mentioned in the articles in the last issue but they aren't essential. The disruption of Iraqi communications is one; it plays a vital role in the war: "*Runner runs to meet runner*," or something like that, *meaning* the Iraqis are reduced to sending messengers because communications can't get through any other way.

Editor: *What other events can we expect to see occur in the near future?*

Elijah: The developments in Russia and Eastern Europe are ominous. At some point in the future, the instability in that region will provide the catalyst. Right now we just wait and see. Civil war there is inevitable. There's no real basis in Scripture for that other than, "*wars and rumors of wars*." But other

than that, that region doesn't become crucial until the End.

South Africa is another area where I see ominous signs. I don't see Nelson Mandela on the scene much longer. With his death, the tide will turn. When that happens, I expect an exodus of Jews from that area into other parts of the world. The ones with foresight have already made plans. The nation of Israel is the hole card for many of them. That will only provide more fuel for the Arab/Israeli conflict.

Editor: *But you don't find these things mentioned in Scripture?*

Elijah: No.

Editor: *Do you see anything specific in Scripture that people could watch for?*

Elijah: Right now, the major upcoming development the world faces is an increasing shortage of farm produce. It started in the spring of 1988, and will become more evident by this fall when the harvest shortfall has been documented. We are going to see a dramatic rise in the price of all types of agricultural commodities in the next three to five years. The slaughter of thousands of sheep now underway in Australia and the slaughter of cattle in Britain may be part of the trend; but for the most part, I'm *talking about* the weather. The recent freeze in Southern California and the drought there and in other parts of the country and world are typical of what we can expect as a common phenomenon.

These developments may or may not be linked to the "greenhouse effect" or the burning of the rain forests, but unpredictable weather patterns are going to reduce crop production throughout the world for the next few years. I don't see famine as the central issue, although it is certainly there in many parts of the world already. For the most part, I'm *talking about* a shortage of produce that results in increased food costs. That probably means increased inflation and whatever else might be involved in the economic ripple effect.

Editor: *How so? What Scripture is the source of your information?*

Elijah: "*A measure of wheat for a price; three measures of barley for a price; don't spoil the oil or the wine.*" (*Revelation 6:6b*)—*my translation*

Editor: *What does that mean?*

Elijah: Let your reader understand. ■

Parables/Prophecy

the monster were determined to see to it that Baal did not enter the resurrection. The winds were messengers of the gods.

The Prophets took up the imagery of the Canaanite mythology, using it in their parables to mock the ignorance of such beliefs. They told instead of how the God of Israel was the true God of the resurrection and that the coming Messiah was the One Who, unlike the non-existent Canaanite god Baal, would arise in the resurrection from the dead after triumphing over the “Sea” and its monster. Jesus used the same *parabolic imagery* in



A gold figurine representing the Canaanite god Baal. Like the Babylonian god Tammuz, the Sumerian god Dumuzi, the Egyptian Osiris, and the Greek Adonis, Baal was a god thought to have died and been resurrected. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was a *parabolic pantomime* of the mocking prophetic statements against such mythology.

His *parabolic pantomime* to demonstrate His understanding of the Old Testament message and to confirm its fulfillment in Him.

The *parabolic* message of the Prophets clearly states the Messiah to come will vanquish the “Sea” and declare

“The Prophets took up the imagery of the Canaanite mythology, using it in their parables to mock the ignorance of such beliefs.”

His victory over it by His resurrection from the dead. But only after the resurrection (Lk. 24:44–45) did Jesus open the minds of His disciples to understand the Scriptures. (See article, *The Mystery of Scripture* on page 1.) Only then could they see the *significance* of His *parabolic pantomimes*.

Other New Testament writers use the same *parabolic images* to evoke a deeper understanding in the enlightened reader. Such *meaning* goes far beyond that understood by anyone who takes the *parabolic images* as simple metaphors:

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask from the God who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But, let him ask in belief, without doubting, because the one who doubts is like ocean surf driven by the wind and tossed here and there.

(James 1:5–6) —my translation

These men are ... clouds without water, carried along by winds; ... wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam ...

(Jude 12–13)

One could mistakenly assume James and Jude were merely using the *parabolic images* as metaphors. That may be the case with James; but Jude uses several other *parabolic images* along with the *parabolic image* of the “Sea” and the “winds,” *parabolic images* that are likewise found in the Prophets—images like *clouds*, *trees*, and *stars*. He obviously knew the *significance* that the Prophets attached to the images because he uses them all appropriately.

Even without an understanding of the prophetic message, however, the basic *meaning* of the above quotations is clear. But the reader of the Revelation of John will miss the point entirely if he does not understand the Prophets’ use of the *parabolic image* of the “Sea”:

And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns ten diadems, and on his heads blasphemous names.

(Revelation 13:1b)—my translation

John recorded his revelation just as he had seen it, using the *parabolic images* just as he found them in the Prophets. Accordingly, the *parabolic image* of the “Sea” has a distinct symbolism. The “Sea” has been the abode of Satan. The “beast” is the mythological creature of the “Sea” over whom the Prophets said the Messiah of Israel would triumph; it is Satan. Thus John has recorded for us, in symbolic language, an account of Satan’s manifestation on Earth.

John later described the new Creation this way:

And I saw a new Heaven and a new Earth; for the first Heaven and the first Earth passed away, and there is no longer a Sea.

(Revelation 21:1) —my translation

The *significance* of John’s reference to the “Sea” is fairly easy to understand: Satan, the adversary, no longer exists; neither does his abode. John wrote down what he saw using a literary technique common to the New Testament and other Early Church writings as well. He included a brief mention of a well-known *parabolic image* in a passage containing other images the enlightened reader would recognize as obviously *parabolic*, intending both to be taken as *parabolic*. In this case, the obvious *parabolic image* is that of the New Jerusalem.

Jesus' Use of Parables

Jesus used the *parabolic image* of the Sea in subtle *parabolic pantomime*; but His pantomime of other *parabolic imagery* is not always so obscure. On at least one occasion He points directly at

"Can you drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"
(Mark 10:38a)—my translation

Here the reader could easily pass over the *parabolic image* of "the cup" as

metaphor had He not used it again while praying to the Father:

"My Father, if possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will."
(Matthew 26:39b)—my translation

A second time He prayed using the *parabolic image*:

"My Father, if this can't pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done."
(Matthew 26:42b)—my translation

Again a third time, according to Matthew, He used exactly the same *parabolic image*:

Again He left them, and went away and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more.
(Matthew 26:44)—my translation

By now the alert student of Scripture should have deduced Jesus obviously had a specific "cup" in mind; the question is, "What 'cup,' and what was its purpose?"

"Most often, Jesus used parabolic imagery in a brief but potent reference to His ongoing parabolic pantomime"

the source of His *parabolic imagery* by quoting the Prophet's parable (Matt. 13:32). (See "Parables and Prophecy," *The Voice of Elijah*, April 1991.)

Most often, Jesus used *parabolic imagery* in a brief but potent reference to His ongoing *parabolic pantomime* of the Prophets' statements concerning Him as Corporate Israel. (See *Not All Israel Is Israel*.) For example, referring to His death, Jesus asked James and John:

nothing more than a metaphor because Jesus is clearly referring to His death. Yet He used it again in talking to Peter when He was arrested:

"Put the sword into the sheath; shall I not drink the cup the Father has given Me?"
(John 18:11)—my translation

Perhaps the *parabolic image* of "the cup" could still be passed over as a

Parabolic Imagery

Idiom	Meaning	Image	Key Terms	Parable	Significance
Build a House	Engender a son/attain resurrection	Sacred Marriage, House, Temple, House of Israel	Virgin Redeemer House	Wise man who built a house	Incarnation Resurrection End of the Age
Raise up a Seed	Engender a son/attain resurrection	Sacred Marriage, Tree, Vine, Wheat, Barley, etc.	Virgin Redeemer Seed	The sower	Incarnation Resurrection End of the Age
Make a Name	Engender a son/attain resurrection	Sacred Marriage, Kingship	Virgin Redeemer Seed Name	"Baptized in the Name of . . ."	Incarnation Resurrection End of the Age
Cut off	Disinherit	Tree, Vine, Branch, Root, Tribe, Shoot	Root Shoot Branch	The olive tree	Resurrection End of the Age
Uncover Nakedness	Have sexual intercourse	Sacred Marriage	Virgin Drunkenness Nakedness Clothing	Ten Virgins, Wedding Feast, Marriage Supper of the Lamb	Resurrection End of the Age

The search for answers takes us into the imagery surrounding the ancient Canaanite ritual of cultic prostitution. (See "Is Iraq Mystery Babylon?" on page 1.) No other practice of the ancient Canaanites did God view with such utter contempt. It drew repeated and scathing condemnation from the Prophets; yet for that very reason it forms the basis for the

guaranteed the "harlot" and her "redeemer" a new life in the resurrection. The newborn son—a "name"—would carry their "name," which they considered an essential part of their being, after their death. (See "Is Iraq Mystery Babylon?" on page 1.)

The *parabolic imagery* of the cup as the Prophets applied it to the circum-

"He was acting out their sacred drama in a mocking parabolic pantomime, paying final tribute to the ignorance of human religiosity."

stances concerning the Messiah. The first Prophet to use the *parabolic imagery* was Moses. (See future volumes in The Resurrection Theology Series.) In presenting their contribution to the salvation message, therefore, the Prophets were merely adding to a message that, at its very core, mocks the religiosity of man. It does so even today.

The "cup" to which Jesus and the Prophets referred was a cup that was used during the cultic covenantal "banquet" that accompanied the "sacred marriage" of a woman—the "harlot"—and a man—her "redeemer," "lover," or "Baal." The cup contained a mixture of wine and a sleep-inducing narcotic. Its purpose was to produce in the two a ritual intoxication and deep sleep *meant* to symbolize the sleep of death.

By eating the covenant meal and having sexual intercourse together, the "harlot" woman and her "redeemer" became "one." After drinking from the cup to induce a deep sleep, they then (symbolically) passed through the sleep of death and awoke in the resurrection.

What the Israelites/Canaanites did symbolically in sacred drama, Jesus Christ did in fact. He drank the "cup" and slept the sleep of death. He also passed through death and arose in the resurrection. But He was acting out their sacred drama in a mocking *parabolic pantomime*, paying final tribute to the ignorance of human religiosity.

The Canaanite sacred ritual was essentially magical in nature, intended to aid in the conception of a male child. They believed successful conception

stance of Jesus' death and resurrection is intertwined with several other threads of the Old Testament message. To understand how the Prophets used the *parabolic imagery* to speak of the coming Messiah, the reader must first be aware that:

- 1) At His death, Jesus Christ was the sole remaining member of the "House" of Israel because all of the others had been "cut off from" *Corporate* Israel. Therefore, Jesus Christ was *Corporate* Israel. (See *Not All Israel Is Israel*).
- 2) The Prophet Hosea, using both *parabolic pantomime* and *parabolic imagery*, described *Corporate* Israel as a "harlot" woman whom God intends to "take" for Himself and through whom He will engender children (Hos. 2).
- 3) The Last Supper was a covenant meal as declared by Jesus:

And while they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." And He took a cup and gave

Who is Israel?

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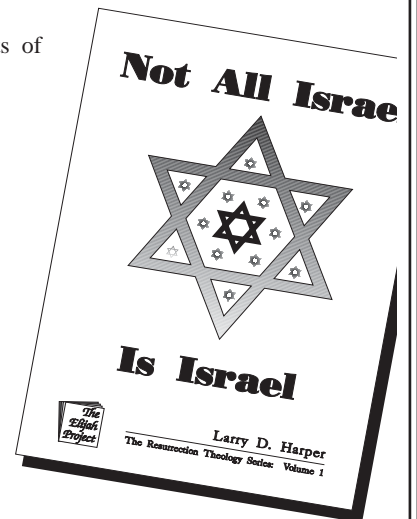
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A “cup” from the time of the Prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah.

thanks, and gave to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is shed on behalf of many for forgiveness of sins.”

(Matthew 26:26–28)—my translation

By this declaration of intent, Jesus became “one” with His disciples—who were representatives of all mankind. Through this symbolic act, He not only took upon Himself the sins of mankind (1 Pet. 2:24), He also acted out in mocking *parabolic pantomime* the actions of a Canaanite “harlot” woman who was uniting herself with the nations to gain children for her god.

With this informational background, you can perhaps better understand how the *parabolic* “cup” that Jesus drank was the “cup” of a “harlot” woman who had become “one” with yet another “lover”—sinful man—at the Last Supper. In His reference to the “cup,” Jesus was pointing to the common cup of the covenant meal from which all drank at the Last Supper as well as to the *para-*

bolic image of the “cup” that the Prophets used to depict His death and resurrection.

The “Cup” That Jesus Drank

Using Jerusalem and Samaria of his own day as *parabolic images* of “historical Israel,” Ezekiel prophesied concerning the True Israel—Jesus Christ (Ez. 23). Having assailed Jerusalem and

“The Prophet allows us to see God’s ultimate mockery of the Canaanite ritual of cultic prostitution.”

Samaria for their “harlotry” under the *parabolic image* of two sisters (Ez. 23:1–30), Ezekiel then focuses on the *parabolic image* of the “cup” that Jerusalem must drink:

“You have walked in the way of your sister; so I will put her cup in Your hand.” This is what my Master, His Majesty, has said: “You will drink your sister’s cup. It is deep and wide. You will be laughed at and mocked—enduring much. You will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow; the cup of Your sister Samaria is a cup of waste and devastation. You will drink it; You will drain it. But You will break its sherds and tear your breasts; because I have spoken,” declares my Master, His Majesty.

(Ezekiel 23:31–34)—my translation

“The parabolic ‘cup’ that Jesus drank was the ‘cup’ of a ‘harlot’”

In the final chapters of his prophecies (49–66), Isaiah mentions the same *parabolic* “cup.” Like Ezekiel, he uses the *parabolic image* of Jerusalem as the “harlot” to portray the purpose of the Messiah’s death and resurrection—the engendering of heirs. He first raises the “sacred marriage” image (see “Is Iraq

Mystery Babylon” on page 1) to offer hope to Jerusalem, the widow woman who has been “bereaved” of sons and needs a “redeemer” to engender offspring:

“The sons of your bereavement will again say in your ears, ‘The place is too cramped for me! Give me (some) elbow room so that I can live!’ You’ll say in your heart, ‘Who bore these for me! I was bereaved,

barren, an exile and divorced! Yet who raised these? Look! I was left by myself; where did these come from?’”

(Isaiah 49:20–21)—my translation

Next, Isaiah exhorts the Messiah to awaken from the symbolic sleep of death and arise on Resurrection Morning. He used the *parabolic image* of the “harlot” woman, Jerusalem, sleeping off the effects of the intoxication brought on by drinking the cup. He even refers to the mythology behind the practice of “sacred marriage” by referring to the Messiah’s defeat of “Sea” and the monster who lives there. He gives this victory as the reason why the Messiah is qualified to enter into the resurrection:

Wake up! Wake up! Clothe Yourself with a strong one, the Arm of His Majesty! Wake up! Because the waters of antiquity are the generations of Eternity! Aren’t You the One Who cuts up Rahab?

... the One Who pierces the monster?

Aren’t You the One Who dries up the Sea?

... the waters of the void?

... the One Who’s made the lowlands of the Sea a way for those who are redeemed to cross over?

(Isaiah 51:9–10)—my translation

In this section of his prophecies, the Prophet Isaiah clearly states the “sleep” resulted from the “cup” the Messiah has

been made to “drink.” Again he mentions *The Woman’s* lack of sons as the reason why she had to endure the ritual:

image of *The Woman Jerusalem* as the One who has endured the ritual of cultic prostitution in an effort to engender an

labor, because the sons of the desolate are more numerous than the sons of the married ...”
(Isaiah 54:1a) —my translation

“He also acted out in mocking parabolic pantomime the actions of a Canaanite ‘harlot’ woman who was uniting herself with the nations to gain children for her god.”

Wake Yourself up! Wake Yourself up! Rise up, Jerusalem! You who have drunk the cup of His wrath from His hand! You drank the goblet of reeling! You drained it! She has had nobody to lead her (out of all the sons she’s borne); she has had nobody to hold her hand (out of all the sons she has raised)!
(Isaiah 51:17–18) —my translation

One final time the Prophet Isaiah issues his call to the Messiah to shake off the effects of the “drink” that was in the “cup” He has drunk:

Wake up! Wake up! Clothe Yourself with a strong One, Zion! Clothe Yourself in the clothing of Your beauty, Jerusalem, Holy City! Because the uncircumcised and unclean must never enter You!
(Isaiah 52:1) —my translation

Then, in Chapter 53, the Prophet abruptly drops the *parabolic image* of *The Woman Jerusalem* and speaks more openly concerning the death and resurrection of the Messiah using the more easily understood *parabolic image* in which the Messiah is depicted as *Corporate Israel*, the “Suffering Servant.” Yet even in this he maintains that the reason why the Messiah died and was resurrected was to produce sons:

And His Majesty was pleased to crush Him—to sicken Him. If His soul would make itself a reparation offering, He would see offspring (seed); He would lengthen days, and the pleasure of His Majesty would succeed in His hand!
(Isaiah 53:10) —my translation

Finally, in Chapter 54, Isaiah concluded his *parabolic statements* concerning the death and resurrection of the Messiah. Again picking up the *parabolic*

heir and attain the resurrection, the Prophet allows us to see God’s ultimate mockery of the Canaanite ritual of cultic prostitution:

“Shout, Barren One who has not given birth! Break out with shouts and yell, One who has not endured

“Don’t be afraid, because You won’t be ashamed! Don’t be embarrassed, because You won’t be disappointed; because You’ll forget the shame of Your youth, and You won’t remember the reproach of Your widowhood again; because Your Baal is Your Maker! His Supreme Majesty is His Name! Your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel!”
(Isaiah 54:4–5a) —my translation



“The Wise and Foolish Virgins” by artist William Blake (1757–1827). The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (Matt. 25) is typical of the parables of Jesus that use the imagery of the “sacred marriage.” Associated with this particular parable and its imagery is the End-Time “Marriage Supper of the Lamb.” As John wrote, “Let’s rejoice, exult, and give Him glory, because the Marriage of the Lamb has come and the bride prepared herself” (Rev. 19:7).

The Prophet declares that God Himself will be the “Baal”—that is, the “Redeemer”—who provides the “Name” for the “harlot,” Jerusalem. He will, in the *parabolic image*, function as the “Redeemer” who provides a “Seed” for *The Woman* under the *parabolic image* of the legitimate Israelite practice of levirate marriage.

stroyed. She will have endured the ritual, but conceived no son. Therefore she will not enter the realm of the living:

And Babylon, the Great, was remembered before God, to give her the “cup” of the “wine” of the rage of His anger.
(Revelation 16:19b)—my translation

Flee from the midst of Babylon; each one escape for his life. Don’t be silenced by her iniquity, because the time of vengeance belongs to His Majesty. He is going to repay her with reprisal. Babylon is a gold cup in the hand of His Majesty, intoxicating all the Earth. Nations have drunk her wine, therefore na-

“Babylon the Great is an apocalyptic symbol for our entire civilization. The time has now come for her destruction.”

Jerusalem, the “harlot” who sought many “lovers” throughout the nations, has drunk wine from the cup at the “sacred marriage banquet” for the last time. On waking from Her stupor She will find the ritual has indeed been effective, but only because God made it so.

Not surprisingly, the Apostle Paul quotes the last mentioned passage from Isaiah as part of his argument that Gentile Believers are the legitimate “heirs” of *the promise* God affirmed to Abraham (Gal. 4:27). He understood the specific func-

“Jeremiah promised a time would come when all the nations of the Earth would drink from the same cup.”

tion of the “sacred marriage” ceremony was to produce an heir and that, through this *parabolic imagery*, God revealed how the Gentiles who are not sons of Israel become sons of Abraham and sons of God.

The “Harlot” Babylon

The Prophets tell us that Jesus Christ *parabolically* “drank” the “cup” of death containing God’s wrath because He made a covenant with mankind at the Last Supper. So also they tell us the “Harlot,” Mystery Babylon, will be made to “drink” it in these Last Days. But unlike Jesus Christ, she will awaken from the sleep of death to find her children de-

Babylon the Great is an apocalyptic symbol for our entire civilization. (See “Is Iraq Mystery Babylon?” on page 1.) The time has now come for her destruction, but as John said, the call must first go out to the Elect to withdraw from her:

“Come out of her, My People, so that you don’t participate in her sins; so that you don’t receive her plagues! Because her sins have been joined together up to Heaven, and God has remembered her misdeeds.

Render to her just as she has rendered! Make (it) double—in accordance with her works! Mix her a double in the cup that she mixed.”

Exactly as she glorified herself and lived sensually, just so, give her torment and weeping. Because she said in her heart, ‘I SITA QUEEN. I’M NOT A WIDOW. I’ll not see weeping.’

Because of this her plagues will come in one day—death, weeping, and famine. She’ll be burned up in a fire, because His Majesty (the God who judges her) is strong.”

(Revelation 18:4b–8)—my translation

Here the voice John heard was quoting Jeremiah:

tions are boasting. Suddenly Babylon has fallen; she has been broken.
(Jeremiah 51:6–8a)—my translation

Jeremiah promised a time would come when all the nations of the Earth would drink from the same cup (Jer. 25:15–29). That day is almost here. The Elect will avoid it only by fleeing the immorality of the “harlot” woman, but:

“If anyone worships the beast and his image and accepts a brand on his forehead or on his hand, he’ll also drink from the wine of God’s wrath which has been stirred undiluted in the cup of His anger. And he’ll be tortured in fire and molten rock in the presence of Holy Messengers and the Lamb.”

(Revelation 14:9–10)—my translation

*Surely God is Judge;
This one He abases;
But the other He exalts,
Because a cup is in
the hand of His Majesty.
The wine is foaming;
It is a full mixture.
He has poured from it:
All the wicked of the Earth
will surely drain its dregs.*
(Psalm 75:7–8)—my translation ■

*At Horeb,
the Mountain of God,
the Lord said,*

*“Elijah,
what are you
doing here?”*

